

Uk architecture in general cultural studies essay



In assessing the nature of the use of architects in small residential projects, it is necessary also to consider the case of UK architecture in general. Within the literature, there is much information pertaining to the subject, and this is something that shows not only that UK architecture is distinct from architecture elsewhere in the world, but also that it is regularly changing. This takes place in terms not only of architectural styles, but also in terms of governmental policy. Increasingly, since the Second World War, the rise of the welfare state has brought housing under the aegis of the government, and this leads to an enmeshment of politics and architecture, both of which are critical for the nature of this work. The post-1945 housing boom was precipitated by both widespread destruction as well as governmental desires to create cheap housing as part of its welfare provisions. As Bullock (2002) writes, this is something that was met with a great deal of enthusiasm by the architectural community: " The new phase of [postwar] reconstruction offered unprecedented opportunities for architects and, potentially, for the development of modern architecture. The rebuilding of city centres and the return to commercial building meant the design and construction of a range of building types that had not been built since the beginning of the war." (Bullock, 2002: 245) This provides much of the groundwork, therefore, for the link between architecture, social housing, and governmental policy-making, all of which will be discussed in further detail throughout the course of this work.

2. 1. 1 Home Zones

One of the most recent developments in the nature of social housing has been the emergence of ' home zones' (Biddulph, 2003). Home zones are an

improvement on the traditional housing estate, and aim to cut the links between roads and cars, by replacing them with paved areas suitable for children to play on, and to share as communal spaces. As Biddulph (2002) writes, " Imagine a street where vehicles travel at about walking pace and where pedestrians using the street can share the carriageway with vehicle users. Imagine a street where paving replaces the grey tarmac and where space has been created for more trees, flowers and shrubs. Imagine a street where people can use seating to sit out and chat to neighbours... Such an environment would be called a home zone." (Biddulph, 2002: 1) This shows the extent to which it is possible for architects to shape an environment, and where in the planning stage, there can be major gains on behalf of those who are planning to live in an environment. Home zones are increasingly representative of a move away from utilitarian principles of social housing. What this shows is that the nature of governmental architecture is changing. No longer is it the case that architects are being commissioned to produce a number of cheap houses, but instead, there is a sense that the idea of being able to live in a particular space is crucial in shaping the way that architects design residential projects such as this. Naturally, there is a distinction between urban planning of this nature and commissioning an architect on a private project, although this shows that what is conceived of by architects and town planners is fundamentally changing.

2. 1. 2 Class

Within the UK, there is a strong element of class that is strongly linked with the idea of social housing. Much regeneration that has taken place in various areas has centred upon the idea of the gentrification of communities (Boddy,

2007). This refers to a distancing from a working-class past, and instead, a move towards a more upwardly mobile future. This is particularly evident in city centres, where there has been a shift from working-class housing to regeneration that has priced many urban poor out of the housing market. Much of the literature focuses on the different social aspects of housing. Indeed, Atkinson and Flint (2004) argue that the rise of the gated community in the UK is the best example of a social and physical stratification of individuals: " In contrast to the view that gated communities provide an extreme example of residential segregation we go further and argue that the time-space trajectories of residents suggest a dynamic pattern of separation that goes beyond the place of residence. Gated communities appear to provide an extreme example of more common attempts by other social groups to insulate against perceived risk and unwanted encounters." (Atkinson and Flint, 2004: 875) However, there are some potential challenges to this, namely in the fact that further research has shown there to be a disparity in terms of access to green spaces. Despite initial impressions, those of a lower socio-economic background actually have a higher rate of access to parks and other urban spaces. As Barbosa et al. (2007) write, " While access to public green space varies significantly across different social groups, those enjoying the greatest access include more deprived groups and older people. This study highlights the need for additional green space to be created and existing green space to be protected in light of increasing development pressure." (Barbosa et al., 2007: 187) This shows that the link between class and housing is stratified, and that there are a number of related issues that are intrinsically linked within the phenomenon.

2. 1. 3 Community

Ancillary to the nature of class and housing, there is a related issue - that of community. Community refers to the interpersonal interactions and the social cohesion within a particular space. Naturally, it is linked with both class (as well as culture) and with housing. The development of communities is something that is being regarded as increasingly important in shaping the way that different groups interact within a shared space. There has been an important shift in the last fifty years that has shown that architecture itself has the capacity to alter the way that a community regards itself. Creating positive spaces helps to create a positive sense of community, and this is critical in moulding the attitudes of those that live therein. Clayden, Mckoy and Wild (2006) conducted a longitudinal study into a community in Sheffield, and found that: " different factors, which include design quality, community consultation, funding and street typology, may impact upon the potential of home zones to meet their objective of improving liveability. The Sheffield case studies illustrate the potential of alternative design solutions... to the design context and in addressing community needs." (Clayden, Mckoy and Wild, 2006: 55) This therefore highlights the extent to which the development of a strong and coherent community (a marked governmental priority) is bundled up with the role of the architect in creating spaces that are shared and enjoyed by a number of different people.

2. 1. 4 Security

In addition to the duty of the architect to create spaces that are positive, in order to foster a sense of community, there is also the duty of the architect to avoid creating potentially negative spaces. Although crime is more than a

feature of poor architecture, creating 'blind spots' and areas without adequate lighting, for example, has the capacity to exacerbate particular issues with regard to crime and security. Increasingly, town planners and other architects have realised that architecture is a potential solution to issues related to security. As Raco (2003) states, "Urban regeneration programmes in the UK over the past 20 years have increasingly focused on attracting investors, middle-class shoppers and visitors by transforming places and creating new consumption spaces. Ensuring that places are safe and are seen to be safe has taken on greater salience as these flows of income are easily disrupted by changing perceptions of fear and the threat of crime." (Raco, 2003: 1869) What this shows is that the role of architecture in the UK has a highly socialised approach. Governmental (and by extension local government) policies relating to housing are designed to have social implications as well as architectural ones. Although a number of gated communities may suggest a stratification of British society with regard to housing, there is also a sense that the solution to potential stratification may come itself through architecture. However, the overarching point on which the literature agrees is that there is a real sense that governmental policy is fundamentally rooted in the idea that architecture has the capacity to alter behaviour and to shape communities.

2. 2 Architectural Innovation

One of the key supposed benefits of using an architect on a project is the ability to innovate, and to develop new ideas and approaches. This is something that is touted throughout the literature as being one of the key aspects of architecture. Certainly, for those looking to build in a new way, or

use new techniques or materials, an architect is an invaluable resource. As Carayannis, Gonzalez and Wetter (2003) write, there is a clear sense that architecture and architects in general are able to continually innovate in a manner that is constantly improving: " Architectural innovations serve to extend the radical-incremental classification of innovation and introduce the notion of changes in the way in which the components of a product or system are linked together." (Carayannis, Gonzalez and Wetter, 2003: 120) However, the ramifications of this have the capacity not only to improve the nature of the way that projects take place, but also to shape the way that different processes are interlinked. As Frenken (2006) states: " Importantly... architectural innovations often have severe organisational consequences. Unlike a simple mutation in a string, which requires new knowledge of a particular new component, successful architectural innovation requires more complex knowledge as the whole assembly process putting parts together is reorganised." (Frenken, 2006: 40) The streamlining of processes is one of the key architectural innovations of recent times, and is something that has greatly reduced the cost and the time required to create a major structure. Therefore, there is a sense that the nature of innovation often best demonstrates itself through the means of process and efficiency rather than through materials and resources. This is critical in understanding how and why different projects may require architects.

2. 2. 1 Fordism

One of the key exemplars of this architectural movement came in the Fordist movement. It was this movement that fundamentally altered the way that processes were streamlined. Although Fordism is fundamentally a

mechanical means of production, it was used in many respects as part of a wider artistic movement, and came to be one of the key aspects of modern design. Although this has been increasingly shunned in recent years, and has been superseded by other artistic movements, there is also a key sense that the way that Fordism approached design was a way that did much to greatly innovate the field of architecture. As Kaminer (2011) writes, " The perceived failure of modernism was the result of a shift from industrial to a post-industrial society and the eclipse of Fordism. The logic of mass-production, internalized by modernism in its attempt to adapt the discipline to the ideas and realities of industrial production, created an environment and a social order that was rejected by the logic of post-Fordism as overtly and excessively objectivized." (Kaminer, 2011: 67) In addition to this, there is also the sense that Fordism greatly reduced the cost of a wide range of houses. Throughout the Western world, the rise of mass-produced housing did much to create a generation of homeowners. Again, although many of these simple houses have been derided, this is missing the key aspect of their creation. As Gartman (2009) states: " Drawing on the ideas of Progressive reformers early in the century, Abraham Levitt saw the boxlike bungalow design as simple and efficient. It conveyed the individualism of agrarian life, while simultaneously asserting a community through conformity to established aesthetic standards." (Gartman, 2009: 223) The legacy of Fordism therefore remains in many respects, especially given the fact that many processes continue to be improved in terms of efficiency and logistics, despite an ending of a mass-production of homes.

2. 2. 2 Modernism

Fordism is often regarded as being synonymous with modernism. However, there are subtle, but important distinctions made throughout the literature on the subject. For example, there are those who argue that whilst Fordism is dead, its legacy is modernism, and this has continued to shape the way that many different processes of home-building take place. As has been stated above, there is a clear sense that the nature of building a community and shaping behaviours is fundamentally rooted in the idea of modernism. There is an intrinsic sense within modernism that external environments have the capacity to shape the nature of behaviour, and of the development of communities. This is something that is fundamentally therefore linked with the idea of modern architectural approach. As Herrle (2008) writes, there are many aspects of the modern environment that are fundamentally linked with the need for a new architectural approach: " As we passed through ' modernism', the forces of globalization and the ever-growing IT-industry surging us on yet another spiral of societal and individual development, uprootedness and lack of identity continue to be issues of concern." (Herrle, 2008: 13) The modern world is becoming increasingly modular in terms of interpersonal interactions, and this is something that has the capacity to be either exacerbated or undermined by different architectural styles. Increasingly it is being addressed by the tenets of modernism, rather than emphasised. This is the primary distinction between Fordism and modernism, therefore.

2.3 Management of Stakeholders

One of the key benefits identified within the literature with regard to the employment of architects comes from the fact that architects are able to manage stakeholders to a more optimal degree than are those who are not trained in the field. The number of potential stakeholders in a project, whether government-led or private, can be extremely large, and thus there is a major need to ensure that different stakeholders are balanced to ensure that the project can progress as smoothly as possible. Since modernism within the field is about the streamlining of processes, and ensuring that different processes take place as efficiently as possible, there is a key sense that it is necessary to balance stakeholders to ensure that different groups do not hold up key aspects of the building process. This is a diplomatic as much as a logistical process. As Nash and Chinyio (2010) write, " Apart from urgency, stakeholders also have different levels of power with which they can influence the course of a project. They have power to be either a threat or benefit to an organisation (Gibson 2000). The power of stakeholders could be high or low depending on their involvement in the project and what they are expected to contribute." (Nash and Chinyio, 2010: 3) Therefore, the different power dynamics can be extremely complex, and therefore must be managed with great care. An architect, although the designer of the project, must continually liaise with different stakeholders, and ultimately it is he or she who will be able to develop creative solutions to prospective issues that can ultimately hinder a project. Balancing these different groups, therefore, is one of the key roles of the architect. That is not to say that an architect is operating as a project manager, but rather that an architect can not only design the project, but can operate within a consultancy framework in order

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to address potential issues. As Kemp (2005) writes, " On a project, there are always at least three groups with different perspectives - the customer, the project manager, and the technical people... The project manager simply has to meet with each of these groups, give them all a picture and a description of the project, and then coordinate the ideas and changes from each group across all the other groups and into the project work plan, budget and schedule." (Kemp, 2005: 138) Ensuring that the budget and other different aspects of the project are retained is something that is not always possible without an architect on hand. In addition, the presence of an architect allows plans to change relatively flexibly, and with minimal effort. In essence, an architect is able to retain the important features whilst abandoning those that are less important. This enables a project to run far more smoothly. Therefore, this aspect of stakeholder management is something that can provide a key practical benefit of using an architect within a project. As Nash et al. (2010) writes, " Stakeholders interact with each other in diverse ways in the course of a project. Stakeholder management is a part of project management that requires into alia good communication and relationship networks." (Nash et al., 2010: 472) The tangibility of this benefit is something that therefore has the capacity to greatly shape the nature of the project, and will need to be assessed throughout the work through the use of a series of questionnaires, since it is hypothesised that the ability of an architect to manage stakeholders is one of the most tangible benefits that he or she can provide.

2. 4 Residential Architecture in different environments

The nature of residential architecture, in addition, must be discussed.

Although this work is concerned with the nature of residential projects, it would be fallacious to assume that all residential projects are of a similar nature. Indeed, one of the key developments in the stratification of UK architecture discussed above stems from the fact that one of the key roles of the architect is to create different environments. Much has been written on the differences between what Devlin and Nasar (1989) refer to as ' high' and ' popular' style architecture: "' High' style residential architecture had fewer materials, more concrete, simpler forms, more white, and off-center entrances. They were judged as more complex, novel, and exciting. ' Popular' style residential architecture was characterized by use of more building materials, horizontal orientation, hip roofs, framed windows, centered entrances, and warm colors." (Devlin and Nasar, 1989: 333)

Although the styles and fashions have changed somewhat since 1989, there is a clear sense that different residential projects with different socio-economic aims have the capacity to greatly change the way that individuals think about architecture. Modern British cities, despite their destruction during the Second World War, show a continuity of purpose, and of social division from the period before the war. This was initially troubling for UK architects, although is something that modern architects have learned to embrace. As Welter (2007) writes, " Contrary to the often-heard assumption that a tabula rasa was the perfect ground on which to erect the modern city of the future, some architects and planners in the mid-twentieth century began to argue that the latter was not an immaculate creation out of nothing. Instead, the city of the future was the product of an evolutionary

process that had originated in the past." (Welter, 2007: 59) Modern British residences exist within the free market, and therefore there is a real sense that the nature of architecture greatly follows the nature of the way that consumers operate. This is a process that is therefore exacerbated by increasing demand in upmarket housing from upwardly mobile individuals and families. Thus, residential architecture is far from a unitary body, and is something that has the capacity to change based on overall market forces within a state. In addition, governmental policy-making also exerts an influence on the way that residential architecture can gain its character. As Kauko (2011) writes, " When analysing the ways in which the built environment is produced as well as consumed, either by the user or investment side of the real-estate market, much is determined by the way in which investors and developers respond to differences in policy environments. It is furthermore argued that in inner city residential development projects the relevant investment criteria ought to reflect multidimensional sustainability rather than one-dimensional profitability considerations." (Kauko, 2011: 144) Increasingly, therefore, green materials have played a role in shaping the way that residential architecture has changed, and modern buildings are now deliberately intended to operate in as environmentally-conscious a manner as possible.

2. 5 Urban Planning Regulations

As Kauko (2011) writes, there is a sense that urban planning regulations play a major role in shaping the way that architecture has changed in the last decades. An architect, therefore, has one of his or her major benefits in ensuring that the legal aspect of buildings are maintained. As government

has become increasingly involved in the issue of housing, so housing codes and regulations have greatly increased. This shows, therefore, the necessity of employing an architect. Fundamentally, the role of planning legislation is to strike the balance between private and public interest: "[McAuslan] examines the underlying objectives of the planning legislation. He identifies three ideologies which are at times in conflict. These are the protection of the public interest, and the furtherance of the cause of public participation in decision-making." (Garner, 1981: 18) Thus, an architect is able to strike this balance, and ensure that there is a public benefit to private buildings.

Another dynamic that is often mentioned within the literature stems from the fact that often there is competition between hyper-local factors and those that are based on macro policy-making at a governmental level. Thus, each individual project must ensure that it meets with regional or even national legislation. As Razin (1998) writes, " Urban sprawl, fuelled by powerful market forces, is unlikely to be controlled by macro-scale regional plans or by comprehensive reforms of the local government map." (Razin, 1998: 321) Again, this is something that greatly increases the value of the architect to a project. Often, local planning regulations, despite their seemingly prohibitory approach, are based upon producing positive policy decisions - in effect to shape an area based on governmental decision-making. As Rydin (2011) writes, " The most apparent form of local planning activity - and the one that people and companies usually have the strongest views about - is the use of regulation to achieve the visions set out in planning documents." (Rydin, 2011: 14) However, there is also a balance that must be struck on behalf of the planning commission. It is they that must ensure that various projects that are prohibited do not reach a critical mass. In effect, they are

representing the public, and it is to the public that they are accountable. As Cullingworth and Nadin (2006) write, " Poor architecture, ill-conceived schemes, mock Tudor frontages may upset the planning officer, but how much regulation of this type of ' amenity-injury' will be publicly acceptable?... Planning authorities have power not only to prevent developments which would clash with amenity... but also to reject badly designed developments which are not intrinsically harmful." (Cullingworth and Nadin, 2006: 165) Thus, the planning commission, and those who write legislation are key stakeholders. However, to be completely clear about the issue, the power dynamic is not completely mono-directional. There is a clear sense that the role of the architect again is to be flexible in making changes without altering the key functions and key features of a given building. This can be extremely difficult for the non-trained individual, and is an area in which an architect represents an optimal saving.

2. 6 Negligent Design

2. 6. 1 Architectural Negligence

The benefits of using an architect according to the literature can often be highlighted in terms of liability. In an era of growing litigation, and a keener sense of blame and responsibility, the use of an architect is something that has the capacity to ensure not only that safety procedures are followed, but if they are not, that the responsibility lies with the architect and not the individual commissioning the project. As Sweet and Schneier (2012) write, this is particularly important given the potential scope of negligence: " Negligence is a broader concept with almost limitless applications. A contractor's claim of negligence may encompass allegations that the design

professional: was slow in approving submittals, was negligent in rejecting submittals, imposed on the contractor higher performance standards than were required by the contract, or wrongly refused to approve progress payments." (Sweet and Schneier, 2012: 283) Architectural negligence refers to the extent that a building is poorly designed, which will often require extensive remodelling. This is something that is therefore ensured against in a situation whereby an architect is employed, as a contract will ensure that he or she is responsible for the piece of work. In terms of specifics, there have been a number of court cases in which architects have been found to be liable for faulty design. As Templer (1995) writes, " Courts have imposed liability for improper construction or design in many instances. In general, liability may be imposed where stairways or ramps fail to meet customary construction standards." (Templer, 1995: 161) Although it is not optimal to consider the nature of faulty design, it does provide for an extra level of security when commissioning a project, however small.

2. 6. 2 Project Manager Negligence

There is also an additional sense that allowing an architect to interact with a project manager may highlight issues of negligence on behalf of site security. An architect, as the one ultimately culpable for a project, will be vigilant in ensuring that the optimal materials and fittings are included. Therefore, the use of an architect will ensure that there are additional checks on the project manager. PM negligence is something that is also of great importance in shaping the legacy and risk involved in projects, and importantly, of the safety of those involved. As Hess et al. (2007) write, there is also a sense that it can be complicated to attribute blame between PM and

architect: " Injured workers typically allege one or more of three theories: negligent design; negligent construction management or supervision; and negligent failure to warn of dangerous site conditions. Design professionals are obliged to exercise such reasonable care, technical skill and ability, and diligence as are ordinarily required of design professionals in the course of preparing their plans or performing inspections." (Hess et al., 2007: 172-3)

However, the presence of an architect is something that will help to ensure that little blame can be placed on the person commissioning the project, and thus provide insurance for the client.