

PART 3

CONCLUSIONS



Although design has been our driving concern up to now, you will have noticed that the range of issues, problems and concerns you identified does not solely refer to design; for each issue it is possible to identify a number of people, groups, institutions or organisations that you could involve in further discussions and work. The process we have suggested can help you – raising issues that, faced together, might help you and your team being involved in, or initiate a discussion on, the sustainable development of your neighbourhood.

Community involvement in design can help achieve satisfaction among users, and instil in them a sense of social cohesion. Our research is ongoing and further applications are taking place; a number of limitations need to be considered and resolved.

First of all, the Multi Method Strategy (MMS) on which this Handbook is based, has so far only been tested in the briefing stages of design. To verify its usefulness it must be tested throughout the whole design process, including the development of design solutions and in Post Occupancy Evaluation. It is also essential that MMS is applied to a number of different contexts and design issues, to develop its flexibility and applicability as an approach to design; this requires an extensive knowledge of other methods of assessment and evaluation.

The second point regards the user groups of MMS: it has so far been proved valuable with Community-Based Housing Associations, students and pupils (it has been tested at Primary and Secondary schools and University). It is important to find out to what degree MMS could be applied by other groups of people. This experience might reveal that other forms of participation besides MMS might be more beneficial

for different tasks. An essential instrument for this differentiation between approaches and strategies is a feedback system to be employed at each stage of its process. Our Handbook has been tested in a number of pilot projects; feedback from community groups and suggestions and recommendations by professionals have been taken into account and included in this document.

It is useful for communities to join up with universities in the use of the handbook. Here, an invaluable resource is available: students. With their commitment and time they enrich the process, adding to it precious details, ideas and resources. Engaging students from disciplines such as of architecture, planning and urban design, and social science into live community projects helps them develop important intellectual, critical, professional and social skills of support to and reinforcement of their own disciplines, and can have strong motivational and mobilising impacts on community groups. Whenever such a collaboration between citizens and university is not feasible, it is recommended that the person that takes up the leadership of a community working team has good knowledge and experience of work with community groups. Moreover, this person should possess knowledge of the research that supports the Handbook (resources are included in the bibliography). Professionals willing to work with community groups should also be aware of, and familiar with, the handbook.

It is interesting to notice how the developed methodology has so far been applied by community groups, process leaders, professional designers and students. There is general agreement that all these experiences have been valuable but most of all that

– independently from the role individual people have played – they have learnt a lot and have developed new skills – as clients, designers, and observers. That is to say, education occurred for all those involved, and this was our first goal: educating both clients and designers by exposing each other to the other's ideas and experiences.

One person that was initially involved in the process as an observer – he was at the time the tutor of one group of students from the University of Strathclyde, Department of Architecture working with a housing association in Glasgow on new design ideas for their neighbourhood – has been exposed to each of these methods over a period of one year, appreciating their potential when compared with traditional design approaches. He has then moved into private practice and works now in a successful International Urban Design firm. As a professional, he now employs all the techniques we have presented to work both with peers and with client groups in every single project he is involved in. He regards them as invaluable procedures when the goals in design are quality, responsiveness and sustainability.

Finally, the MMS requires a considerable commitment from both clients and designers; such commitment, together with the training of a project leader, has financial repercussions. The financial and temporal expenses that traditionally lead design processes might appear to be lower, but in the long run methods like the MMS can be more efficient in social and physical terms.

This study has shown how client participation in the design process does not substitute clients for designers; on the one side it stimulates clients to

become more aware of their needs and opportunities and so to brief the designer more thoroughly. On the other, it offers designers cognitive resources that can inform the design process and make it increasingly context-sensitive, and assures continuous realistic feedback. In the long run, this could have positive repercussions on the use of local resources – both physical and social. Here is a statement that sums it all up:

“As Design Consultants we recognise the value of good community consultation as identifying key issues which will subsequently be recognised and owned by the community as the issues that require to be addressed by design proposals. This ought to preclude inappropriate design solutions and promote ownership and pride in the outcomes – outcomes that the community have been fundamentally involved in commissioning and implementing. In turn, this helps promote ongoing use and maintenance in conjunction with a management programme owned and run by local people. Without this process so many mistakes have been made with the subsequent huge waste of resources - not to mention the head of frustration and resentment that is built up locally. As a design team involved and experienced in this type of work we would be reluctant to undertake design proposals without this qualitative and soundly based consultation approach. The merit of the design handbook is such that skills, knowledge and practice of the tools and methods can be transferred with some basic training to local communities to implement them as a matter of course in every new project. This becomes a basic pre-cursor to the employment of specialist design consultants and makes for a more informed and knowledgeable client. This leads to a more robust brief and a discerning critique of subsequent design

proposals. The intent is to provide a more sustainable long-term built form but it also affects ultimately the image and character of the sense of place in the city – something from which we can all benefit.”

Colin McNeish, (Davis Duncan Architects, Glasgow) and Richard East (City Design Cooperative, landscape architects, Glasgow) were both involved in one of the pilot project as design consultants.

FURTHER READING

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