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# Building culture. Co-production, context and justice.

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## **ABSTRACT**

As scholars have demonstrated mainstream architectural practice is characterised by collaborative and contingent activities, rather than by the autonomous vision of independent geniuses.<sup>1</sup> Co-production also functions throughout the global south as a normative mechanism of urban development, throughout the conception, design, construction and maintenance of buildings and the urban realm, both within the formal and informal sectors.<sup>2</sup> The long history of co-production likewise demonstrates not only its normativity but also its benefits to processes of urban, economic and social development and its centrality to considerations of justice within democratic society.<sup>3</sup> As theorists demonstrate, co-production's central quality as a mechanism for empowerment derives from the collective making and curation of common goods and satisfies the often competing values of lay, institutional and professional actors. Co-productive 'making' results in both improved products but also increased capacity and empowerment and critically, reveals insights about common needs and capacities to designers within development contexts. Through citizen-led making, creative practices and building, a more sensitive description of existing and future context is revealed.

However, the reality and imperative of co-productivity is largely absent from architectural education in the UK, both in project conception and in design and realisation processes. This renders student architects not only less prepared for the reality of practice, but also with a skill-set less reliably applicable within other industries and less able to influence the urban environment towards the common good. As such, increasing co-production within academic practice is essential if architectural education is to enable graduates to operate fruitfully, collaboratively and with agility in fluctuating social and urban contexts.

Focusing on the work of two practices in India and Scotland, this paper describes co-productive architectural approaches and output and how common components of co-production between institutional, educational and community actors can be seen to not only to generate better urban space but for the designer operates to generate improved understanding of social, environmental and economic contexts and therefore better architecture. The paper then describes how such approaches can be fruitfully integrated into learning environments, both academic and 'in the field', towards architectural education more closely aligned to social context, enabling new practitioners to engage more broadly in urban culture towards socially just ends.

**KEYWORDS** co-production, India, Scotland

### Studio Blues

The traditional approach to architecture studio project work has been frequently and sharply criticised from all quarters. It doesn't bear repeating in detail. For us, whilst speculative design projects are sufficient exercises in developing conceptual thinking, the approach has specific limitations relating to the generation of competent design thinking and creative practices which engage with issues of social justice. This, we suggest, derives in part specifically from the seemingly anti-contextual approaches to the geographical, socio-cultural and environmental context of much design work which bulldozes the site of architecture flat, leaving only a sort-of data rubble which can be easily concreted over. Thus, much student design is situated on a foundation that has little reference to reality and is therefore unable to engage with issues of justice in anything other than a theoretical manner.

### Other ways of doing architecture

There are many examples of other ways of doing architecture which suggest a way out of this impasse. Indigenous approaches remain alluring and famous formal practitioners abound. Participation of the public in planning and development, institutionalised in the 1967 Skeffington Report, enhanced and established modes of practice which enabled greater control by residents of their urban realm.

However, we suggest that participation in architecture fails to live-up to its potential because, to quote Frances Cleaver, it has been "translated into a managerial exercise ... domesticated away from its radical roots" and has, as a consequence, lost much of its value as a tool for empowerment.<sup>4</sup> Rather, it is generally promoted as a means towards a better fit between product and recipient, but it is not used to challenge the central tenet of much contemporary urban renewal, which is the imposition of urbanism and home by institutional actors on the functionally disenfranchised.

Participation as a strategy is not used to address its originally stated and more valuable goal, which is the redistribution of power through the design, construction and use / maintenance of a built project but instead, usually, climbs no further up Arnstein's ladder than the third rung.<sup>5</sup> It is in this context that co-production has emerged as an alternative approach,

one which focuses on empowerment through the production of goods or services.

Co-production has been a key aspect of discussions of public service provision for a number of years; indeed, as Brandsen and Honingh suggested in a 2016 paper, 'this phenomenon has always existed, even before the term was coined.' Elinor Ostrom's definition of the concept in 1996 as 'the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not "in" the same organisation'<sup>6</sup> and where 'services are not only delivered by professional and managerial staff in public agencies but also coproduced by citizens and communities'.<sup>7</sup>

This followed years of significant conceptual discussions by a broad range of scholars largely based in the fields of 'economics, political science, public administration, and voluntary/third sector research'.<sup>8</sup> The discussion of co-production around this time reflected emerging approaches in public and academic discourse on the nature of governance, broadly speaking, in turn reflecting a realisation that systems of service delivery from centralised bureaucracies had not proved practically capable of meeting governance objectives in what was becoming a more complex and contested social, economic, environmental and urban realm.

In this context public service provision through co-production was promoted as a means of improving service provision, particularly in the South, to deliver necessary social and physical infrastructure<sup>9</sup> often in places where the abilities of the state were lacking.<sup>10</sup> Co-production was increasingly used in the North also<sup>11</sup> and across the world was seen to operate to meet the needs of people who were becoming 'increasingly competent service users'<sup>12</sup> and who are thus able to participate in the processes of service provision, including both infrastructure and governance. Joshi and Moore argued for two main motivations for the use of this type of co-production: 'governance drivers which respond to declines in governance capacity' and 'logistical drivers which arise when some services cannot effectively be delivered because the environment is too complex or too variable or because the cost of interacting with large numbers of households is too great'.<sup>13</sup>

More mystical benefits to co-production have also been proposed, including a capacity to 'reinvigorate

voluntary participation and strengthen social cohesion in an increasingly fragmented and individualized society'.<sup>14</sup> Other authors, expanding the definition of public good or service, have also identified the co-production of the culture of space, from incarceration to collectives to informality.<sup>15</sup>

From this we may speculate on future scholarship which specifically considers the actors and actions which co-produce the spatial characteristics of urban life, including issues of poverty, opportunity and territorial occupation, for example. In all cases, we suggest, key characteristics for the normative production of architecture are in evidence, notably the interplay of institutional and non-institutional actors, the generation of social goods or services which satisfy all groups' objectives, and synthesis between professional and lay knowledges.

In each of these analyses co-production is defined by the instance of its application – the *production* in *co-production* is intrinsic to its identity. As such, it is argued that co-production has resisted clear delineation and the nuts and bolts of what constitutes a co-productive system, approach or process is unclear which, according to Brandsen and Honingh, makes it of little value to academic research.<sup>16</sup>

The abstraction that such use-application generates also limits the concept's 'potential for generalization'.<sup>17</sup> In practice this means that co-production is difficult to apply because it is difficult to describe. This lack of scholarly clarity, we suggest, has functioned to somewhat de-fang co-production as a process and ensured that it continues to be an innovation rather than the norm, the marginal practice of 'radicals' rather than simply a good way of going about making sure stuff is done well and in accord with the needs and will of the communities in which it is done.

In contrast, however, we suggest that the conditions Ostrom suggests as necessary if a co-productive arrangement is to emerge - complimentary technologies, law, credible commitments to inputs and incentives - can be understood as effectively 'vernacularising' intricate, often bureaucratic and technologically complex systems and process and that it is this effect which ultimately allows for a systematic approach to co-productive practices.

These four conditions are site specific, relating to the socio-spatial, cultural and material characteristics of the place and suggest a way of making co-production

applicable to and valuable within the field of architecture research and practice, even in contexts when it may seem difficult to define architecture as a 'service or good'. At the same time, such an approach helps avoid some of the wooliness, allowing projects to be assessed against criteria of what does or does not constitute co-productive practice. This has recognisable benefits for the use of co-production within education.

In addition, it is our suggestion that the effect of co-production in architecture as conceptualised by Ostrom and delivered through the four criteria is the *de facto* de-institutionalisation of the approach towards grassroots objectives and needs. As such, co-production's identity as a mechanism for institutional and grassroots cooperation is, to a lesser or greater degree, effectively disestablished by a functioning co-productive process, the end-game of which is the empowerment of communities towards self-determination, citizen control of urban processes and collaborative partnership inter- and intra-communally and with civic and corporate agencies. This objective of deinstitutionalisation has implications for educative processes, a concern we will address later in the paper.

### Case Studies

In light of this discussion, how does co-production manifest itself in architecture in practice, and how might it be seen as empowering? To answer this, this paper describes the approach and tactics of two architecture and urbanism practices. Hunnarshala operate out of Gujarat, establishing a base in Bhuj, Kutch in the wake of the earthquake there in 2001. Baxendale, a practice of which I am a director, have operated principally in Scotland since 2007.

Hunnarshala's work has undergone systematic and extensive analysis and serves as a reasonable basis for the assessment for more speculative, less established practices.<sup>18</sup> In addition, it is instructive to view approaches to urban renewal in the north through the prism of innovative and inspirational practices currently occurring in the south because, whilst conditions of history, context and policy may differ substantially, and following the work of Max-Neef, it is our position that human needs are consistent across space and time, only that means of their satisfaction varies.<sup>19</sup>

### **Hunnarshālā**

Hunnarshala's work had two main purposes: to meet the immediate housing needs of the communities after the earthquake, but also to help slow the deterioration of indigenous culture, everywhere evident, caused in large part by migration into urban centres. To this end, I will describe the historical and social context of the communities, thereby allowing parallels to be drawn between intention and outcome in co-produced architecture.

### *Sadar Nagar*

At Sadar Nagar, originally a relocation site for those persons whose homes had been destroyed in the earthquake or during the redevelopment of Bhuj, a process of engagement between the community and institutional actors was established by non-community agencies (including Hunnarshālā) in order to address the evident decline towards 'slum' status and entrenched informality that had taken hold. An owner-led programme of development devised by Hunnarshālā was adopted which sought to replace the emergency housing with culturally resonant and structurally sound buildings and urbanism.

Funding was provided by both state and civil society agencies and, because Hunnarshālā had devised a maximalist housing programme in line with community wishes, one which promoted an holistic interpretation of human needs over basic needs in pursuit of social emancipation for the residents (and which therefore cost more), by families through loan agencies and private savings. To off-set this, housing designs utilised low-cost and self-procured or manufactured materials and necessitated extensive self- and community-build.

At the time of fieldwork the development of Sadar Nagar had not been completed, and the heterogeneous community, curiously grouped along caste lines in the initial post-disaster resettlement plan by state authorities, had not gelled but instead had become more divided, the divisions manifest in an increasing reluctance to act collectively in pursuit of communal goals.

### *Hodka*

At Hodka Hunnarshālā had provided the semi-nomadic community with a complete 'updated' reconstruction of their settlement through a

participatory design and construction process.

As with Sadar Nagar, the scheme was maximalist, attempting to align traditional formal and aesthetic designs characteristic common to the community and contemporary building regulations whilst, at the same time, satisfying the apparent and stated urge for modernity evident in the community. Further, traditional modes of procurement and construction as well as traditional governance structures provided a framework into which new processes could be inserted, particularly relating to both the physical re-building of the settlement but also, and most importantly, in relation to democratisation agendas central to the approach of state and institutional actors.

At the time of the fieldwork the reconstruction of the settlement was long finished and a self-sustaining business in the form of the Shaam-e-Sarhad tourist resort had also been constructed with state government and civil society assistance. The original village appeared to be flourishing and regular engagement with state agencies was frequent still; the community was also being promoted as something of an exemplar vision of community- and owner-driven construction by agencies concerned with it and some community members travelled very widely to promote it with NGO actors.

### *Junawada*

At Junawada Hunnarshālā met community demands by making the community's self-reliance a key element of the process, endowing them with rights and contingent responsibilities, particularly in relation to the procurement of materials and services. Civil society actors began the process of reconstruction by establishing land rights which had never been formalised or documented so that legal recognition was granted. Once this had been established central post-disaster funding was allocated and services provided. Architectural and urban designs again promoted community- or owner-led construction and continuity with the past.

As at Sadar Nagar and Hodka materials, technologies, construction techniques and design processes derived from community norms, but were augmented to improve structural standards, lower costs and to ensure lower embodied energy. Building work was undertaken by the residents themselves with hired labour where necessary. At Junawada the local

government approved an entirely community-driven approach and reconstruction funds were given to the families to spend as they saw fit. Consequently, the funding provided by external agencies was sufficient for a direct reconstruction of that which had been demolished in the earthquake; indeed, Hunnarshālā's innovative material procurement process, involving price tendering by suppliers and permitting homeowners to use reclaimed materials, ensured a surplus that was used in communal building work.

### **Baxendale**

Baxendale's process involves 'prototyping space' with communities, that is, making things which are used to reveal social and physical activity and potential in a given context. This process is instructive for both architect and community members alike. Unlike traditional live-build type architectures, the process is not proposed as a means of learning how to make things but instead tests and explores the parameters of a given condition, discovering who uses a site and how they use it. In addition, building a thing in public space is an act of occupation which exposes underlying political and economic conditions.

For the architect, the act of co-producing a physical intervention in this way is seen to move spatial analysis beyond customary mapping exercises by demanding that the designer gets to know the landscape, infrastructure, services, assistance and opportunities of a site, how it is used and moved across, by whom and why. The experience of a place is modified in this way, towards a located and contextualised knowledge which corresponds to the experience of residents.

Making things which are to be left in a space also reveals anxieties and hopes within a community too that derive from the social conditions that interact with the site specifically, and the neighbourhood more broadly. The process of making in Baxendale's work is predicated on a particular form of capacity building, however. Rather than suggesting that a small co-design and live build exercise equates to meaningful participation or a sustaining learning experience, the act of making and the intervention are used as mechanisms for nurturing agency by establishing reciprocity and discourse between otherwise actively separated groups (state and community; professional and non-professional; public and commercial, intra-communally, etc.), by engendering confidence and an

engagement with place. In this context the thing made is considered secondary to the act of making, which in turn only operates as a means of gathering and coalescing community.

### *Hamiltonhill*

At Hamiltonhill, Baxendale were commissioned to undertake a short engagement exercise to investigate community attitudes and responses to proposed large-scale residential development on open public land. A historically working-class district of the city, Hamiltonhill has fallen into chronic disrepair in the post-industrial period. The building work, to be undertaken by a housing association and largely for private sale, is part of north Glasgow's renewal programme in which large areas of inner-area ex-industrial and open land is being built-up once more.

Little or no meaningful consultation beyond the customary charrette-type exercises had been undertaken with the community and they consequently viewed themselves as once again marginalised by economic development objectives. In response to a request by a faith community group and community activists, Baxendale organised the collective making of a pre-designed and cut pavilion in the street, which served as a framework to orchestrate a day-long discussion with residents, either passing-by or more fully engaged. The making activity and conversation was supplemented by third sector actors and written response documentation was undertaken. A nearby community centre organised talks to supplement and inform the conversation.

The finished intervention was then moved across the hill, to a location in the middle of what has become known as Hamiltonhill Park, and which is to be built on, and a barbeque, football and activities were organised around it. Following this, Baxendale produced a small booklet outlining the engagement, the outcomes and their analysis which was delivered to the community members as a considered documentation of what was done and said and an outline of identified needs and desires.

### *Govan-Gdansk*

The area of Govan is likewise challenged by common post-industrial problems, with issues of worklessness, poverty, disenfranchisement and depopulation, as well as having been battered by



megalomaniacal Corbusian renewal strategies. Its status today is as a down-at-heel semi-suburb of Glasgow, but one with huge potential, particularly in the remaining industrial buildings and infrastructure. Part of this includes the old graving docks which lie empty and formally closed to trespassers; it is only informally occupied.

Baxendale undertook a small installation as part of a collaborative art and urban regeneration project between groups in Gdansk and Govan, which saw activists and artists from both cities collaborating on interventions which functioned to explore and reveal the socio-spatial and cultural identity of the sites, by insinuating a 'scenario of intrigue' that effectively changed the way people behaved on the site (briefly) and in so doing, set in motion a chain of events which revealed larger narratives and necessary modes of action. The project was realised on the dock-side and involved sourcing and modelling a small shelter out of materials found on-site, in this case, shipping rope. Again, site scoping visits had allowed for a pre-designed work which could be realised in a day with limited labour. Some local youth who sometimes use the site engaged with the process after a manner during the day and burnt it to cinders after Baxendale had left.

### Test Unit

Established in 2016, Test Unit is a summer school organised in Glasgow by a collective of design, architecture and urban development agencies, including Baxendale, with financial support from institutional stakeholders, including state, third sector and higher education bodies. Operating out of recommissioned industrial buildings, Test Unit runs short programmes that uses making as a way of exploring the social, material, logistical and spatial nature of small unused or derelict sites in inner-Glasgow, and their potential as sites of/ for creative practices as part of a wider discussion about the nature of urban renewal. Recognising the deficiencies of customary talking-based approaches to participation in the inner city, which have been extensive and ineffectual and resulted in resignation and deflation in participating groups, Test Unit uses a principle of the rapid prototyping of built interventions as a means of testing the physical and social boundaries of discrete sites.

Test Unit operates at a number of scales, engaging

with small sites as a means of exploring wider narratives, both of social use, identity and perception, as well as the political economies of sites. As such, it fits within Appadurai's theme of 'deep democracy', promoting a multi-agency, multi-scaled engagement with common urban issues through the making of a tangible 'thing' in pursuit of varied and often conflicting goals.<sup>20</sup>

### Analysis

In all case studies described, it is evident that Ostrom's definition and four criteria of a co-production were in active in the systems and praxis displayed, although at differing scales. However, the analysis revealed a deeper and more affective aspect to co-production which augments standard ideas as to its role in development practices, including housing. As a socially-orientated approach based around bridging epistemological divergence between lay and professional actors, co-production's identity as a socially constructed phenomenon is established. It follows therefore that co-production *means something* to the actors engaged in it, and that the artefacts produced are therefore subject to interpretation.

In each of the cases described, the process and the artefact satisfied numerous, often competing needs. For Hunnarshālā and Baxendale the ends of development intervention run along the spectrum of better housing and urban space that promote and maintain the benefits of customary ways of dwelling. For the community they are practical but also immaterial, pertaining to the psycho-social state of the community as both a single entity and as individuals and families. The community also receive basic amenities and a consolidation of ownership and the promise of active citizenship, either through legal tenure or, in the case of Baxendale's work, through the development of community assets, including social networks, knowledge and activity and the legitimisation of ordinary ways of being. For the State the benefits were likewise mixed – undocumented poor people properly housed; low-cost urban development with self-sustaining services and the re-allocation of basic service provision to the third sector. In this way, singular visions are resisted – coproduced architectures are inherently pluralistic.

### Education

In both cases, the model of practice lends itself directly to pedagogic approaches in the design studio. Seven initial suggestions are made below:

First, the method of site engagement is predicated on an assumption that any given context has a cultural life already, at varying scales, from the specific to the universal. The architect observes, engages with and learns this.

Second, the method of designing for the site is responsive to the existing modes of occupation on the site. Design follows use.

Third, making is an act of occupation which goes beyond trite declarations of 'ownership'. It is a declaration of existence, identity and contingent rights.

Fourth, making and the made intervention transform behaviour on a given site, within the boundaries of normative behaviours. The limitations and borders are thus revealed.

Fifth, collaborative making and design is an opportunity for ethnographic research practices more than it is a robust process for skills acquisition.

Sixth, to intervene in any context in a way that is appropriate to the site and appropriable by residents requires a located construction approach based on resource availability.

Seventh, co-productive practices necessarily include a broad spectrum of actors

Eighth, the life over time of an intervention on a site continues the story.

### Co-production, context and justice

Each theme above has direct application in the design studio and none are entirely absent from the studio as it stands. Site analysis occurs, live projects exist and research methodologies are sometimes applied. What the approaches described in the case studies point to, however, is the deconstruction of epistemological boundaries.

Viewed in light of a substantive realignment of the role of the architect, away from the bespectacled, black-clad genius of yore towards a co-participant in the fruitful life of the city, a fellow traveller so to speak. The act of making as described above in both Hunnarshala and Baxendale's practice is a conscious and conscientious attempt to deinstitutionalise both the production of architecture and the production of architects.

Rather than consolidating the great divide between professional and local knowledge, between institutional and grassroots actors, between corporate and state agencies and between individuals and groups, the approach adopted seeks ways of informing and revealing the dimensions of a given site at numerous scales. In so doing, it enables designers to formulate approaches based on sensitive, clear knowledge, which is both responsive and complex, reflecting the nuanced, hybrid reality of sites as socially constructed. In this way, architecture is transformed from an industry orientated towards the production of things applied to discrete landscapes, to a mode of analysis that diffuses the borders of sites towards complexity, collaboration and civility..

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