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CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITY: SYNTHESIZING LAY AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN ARCHITECTURE

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INTRODUCTION

The synthesis of lay and professional knowledge in building and urban renewal works can operate to 'construct community', and make strong, vibrant, integrated urban space, by establishing reciprocal bonds within communities and between institutional, enterprise, community and individual actors and actor groups. In this paper I'll describe how architectural interventions and buildings can do this, through the work of Baxendale, a practice that explores an interdisciplinary approach to regeneration through the simultaneous development of both programme and place. Baxendale's practice is concerned with the intersection of agency and design - work is orientated towards enhancing communities by building capacity, utilising active making as a tool for developing local empowerment and transferring knowledge and skills. Principally working in marginal communities, on interventions, buildings and processes, the work relates closely to, and builds on the long-standing discourse on participatory and marginal design practices, as found in the writing of Henry Sanoff, Colin Ward, John Turner and Nabeel Hamdi amongst many others, and latterly in the building work of practices like Peter Hübner, Ralph Erskine and Lucien Kroll and to a certain extent, self-build pioneers such as Walter Segal and activist organisations like Habitat for Humanity. Baxendale's engagement, however, challenges aspects of such prominent participatory work by focussing on the processes of spatial practice, presuming collaborative learning between institutional, private and community actors towards synergistic outcomes. Work of the kind described is an important component of a thoughtful approach to urban renewal relevant to contemporary conditions, particularly renewal orientated towards making more just urban environments, which is of particular importance to the debate on housing provision. A community that is empowered in the public realm will generate for itself urban space which is creative, delightful and secure. This can only be beneficial for those tasked with providing sustainable housing in the future.

PARTICIPATION

The conceptual context in which Baxendale's output sits is within the broad field of participatory design, an area of practice and theory that has been extensively explored over the decades since its conscious formulation and application in the mid-1960s. Even then, however, participation in development was contested and analysed in terms of its capacity to do good. Sherry Arnstein, in her seminal paper 'A Ladder Of Citizen Participation' recognised that much participation tended towards the lower rungs of her ladder, and did not therefore function to satisfy the basic precept of participation, which was the redistribution of power towards more just societies, but instead often fell into the trap,

either by intention or accident, of manipulation and therapy, or tokenism. Arnstein argued that this was largely due to a misunderstanding of what citizen participation was, and what it was for. Simply put, she stated, participation is:

'the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated.'[i]

But even though identified in practice and purpose, participation has remained a problem for those charged with the organisation of social and urban development. Francis Cleaver noted in 1999 that whilst 'Heroic claims are made for participatory approaches to development, these being justified in the terms […] of contributing to processes of democratization and empowerment…'[ii] such a status was not founded on reality and that in fact 'there is little evidence of the long-term effectiveness of participation in materially improving the conditions of the most vulnerable people or as a strategy for social change'.[iii] Evidence, she suggested, of the beneficial effect of participation on empowerment and sustainability was 'reliant on assertions of the rightness of the approach and process rather than convincing proof of outcomes.'[iv]

For architecture this problem is significant, and appears to stem from an under examined relationship between power and empowerment; social relations in processes of architectural production and in buildings have not been adequately linked to the latter. Because power tends to be viewed as 'force', inherent to physical bodies and transferrable in series through these, its significance to the social dimensions of the built environment is downplayed. If however, as more recent theories have posited, power is 'three dimensional',[v] emerging through social relationships and, to use Hannah Arendt, is possible wherever people come together for a common purpose in what she calls the 'space of appearance',[vi] the potential of the built environment as a mechanism for empowerment is clear. In this analysis the potential for participation to enable experiential, social and symbolic meaning through collaborative action *in space* becomes obvious. Further, power conceptualised in this way can be realised through participatory processes which are orientated towards achieving the greatest amount of meaning for a building project via physical collaboration on actually making stuff - by participating in the design and production of things, people add to the collective meaning of the built environment. This endows the urban realm with a sense of relevant identity which in turn allows for ownership, and a meaningful distribution of agency according to individual's and community's capacity.

In this conceptual context, it is evident why current models of participatory design practice don't work to empower people or communities: most commonly they are abstract and largely therapeutic processes applied from the top downwards which do not facilitate the free association of people towards collectivisation, dialogue, mutual understanding and the discernment of common practical or socio-cultural goals. They tend not to be spatially situated in real ways which relate to everyday experience of urban space, or even to promote the thoughtful analysis of needs and desires within communities. Rather, experience suggests that engagement is curtailed so as to limit and control output, better to manage unrealistic expectations.

COPRODUCTION

In contrast, coproduction has emerged as a mechanism for generating the goals that were once the objective of participation.

In her 1996 paper 'Crossing the Great Divide: Co-production, synergy and development' the Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom defined coproduction as being 'the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not "in" the same organization'.[vii] This definition sums up well the nature of an approach to the provision of social goods increasingly seen used in the Global South to deliver necessary social and physical infrastructure, often in places where the abilities of the state are lacking. Coproduction across the world operates to meet the needs of people who are becoming increasingly informed and competent citizens and who are thus able to

participate in the processes of service provision, including both infrastructure and governance. By implication, coproductive processes are therefore seen to derive from interconnected actor groups and operate with agencies of varying scales, from individuals to the state. In this way, coproduction involves all parties in the success of failure of a given service - the user is inherently important, vital indeed not just to the success of the project, but necessary for its realisation. This linking of users with service provision, also stresses the responsibility of institutional actors in project outcomes, Coproduction therefore operates to generate collaboration and co-learning.

The concept of coproduction has developed, growing through contestation and application in the work of Boviard, Mitlin, Mottiar and White and Joshi and Moore, amongst many others.[viii] It stands in contrast to participatory processes within otherwise hierarchical models of service provision, which have become in many situations, according to Frances Cleaver "translated into a managerial exercise[s] … domesticated away' from their radical roots"[ix] and have, as a consequence, lost much of their value as a tools for empowerment. This contrast between coproduction and participation is a significant issue insofar as whilst design participation already exists as a strategy to make housing an empowering process, it does not adequately address its originally stated and more valuable goal, which is the redistribution of power through the lifecycle of a building: design, procurement, construction, use and maintenance. In contrast, coproduction retains an orientation towards empowerment as its principal output, chiefly by preserving a focus on production, thereby maintaining the link between making and agency.[x]

Ostrom suggested four criteria which would make coproduction 'an improvement over regular government production or citizen production alone'.[xi] First: complementary technologies, legal options, credible commitments and incentives to encourage inputs. The objective of these criteria is twofold: it leads to the 'vernacularisation' of the processes of development away from overly-professional systems towards collectively achievable outputs, and it simultaneously exposes institutional actors to non-professional knowledges and practices enabling service orientation towards more holistically sustainable ends. As such, the ends of coproductive processes are not only better-designed services, but also through this, the redistribution of power across the lay/professional divide.

BAXENDALE

The work of Baxendale, then, has developed to cross this divide, moving participation on from managerial exercises in placation and therapy. By centralising the making of *things* in urban space, Baxendale, re-establishes a clear link between the coproduction of urban space and its capacity to empower. People, who might be lay or professional, either institutional of otherwise, are through the making of things *together*, not only endowed with the right to leave their imprint on the built environment, but also the responsibility to do it for the common good; thoughtful design of both the processes and built interventions allow actors of varying capacities to collaborate in these processes. Three case studies illustrate this, one short, one medium and one long term. Each demonstrates the ability of coproduction to make urban environments which 'construct community' through both processes and product.

TEST UNIT

Test Unit was a short-term programme undertaken in July 2016. Organised by non-profit partners Taktal and Agile City with Baxendale, this project output took the form of a one-week summer school supported by stakeholders including Creative Scotland, Scottish Canals, Glasgow City Council and the Glasgow School of Art, and which began with discussion, analysis and design and moved quickly to making, occupying Bairds Brae, a small site on the edge of Forth & Clyde Canal on land owned by Scottish Canals. The wider area had initially been subject to large-scale plans including extensive new housing, but the recent recession had necessitated a change of approach, one which placed 'cultural activity, alternative use and temporary activation at the heart of the regeneration initiative'.[xii]

The Test Unit summer school had a discrete agenda: it wanted to supply an antidote to the customary participatory processes of talking, charrettes and oral consultations which had been applied to the site, but which had resulted in little actual improvement and a weariness and wariness amongst participating groups. Test Unit instead instigated the prototyping of physical things, small pavilions and installations designed and made by the participants with direction by Baxendale and other experts, as mechanisms for exploring the potential of the site as a discrete physical and social space, as a potential locus for urban creativity and as a setting for broader discussions about the nature and potential of urban renewal.

Figure 1: Test Unit, showing main pavilion (left) and 'The Nettle Inn' (right) under construction.

By developing the site in a single week, Test Unit also demonstrated the potential of a shorter development process to parties invested in the site, both in terms of how quality occupation *can* be achieved quickly - it doesn't have to be slow and arduous - but also how knowledge about urban space can be more effectively revealed through the act of design-making rather than talking. In addition, as a live process Test Unit avoided the tendency towards abstraction that can declaw participatory practice - the work remained vital.

Figure 2: Test Unit, showing main pavilion under construction (left) and 'The Nettle Inn' (right).

Test Unit also operated at a number of scales and for a number of audiences. To use Arjun Appadurai, it enabled the scale jumping inherent to a 'deep democracy' approach[xiii], allowing the participants, groups and institutional actors to engage with the programme towards plural ends - skills acquisition,

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social experience, promotion, site development and occupation and ideas generation, as well as visibility and community engagement - through a process of spatial prototyping and by demonstrating capacity - in a week on a very marginal site interventions were developed which not only improved the public realm in a very direct way, but also produced public space through the development of new social activities, consolidated in built fabric.

Figure 3: Test Unit, complete and with an event in full swing.

POLLOCKSHIELDS

The Pollockshields Playhouse project, a one year collaboration between numerous non-profit groups directed through Pollockshields Community Council and in collaboration with a private developer, situated on a site in south central Glasgow, was a programme of informal making activities overseen by Baxendale, each of which were ordered towards the development of social events. Each building project was initiated with the objective of providing a mechanism for *the community* to prototype ideas about space, place and programme in an urban and semi-marginal context.

The area of Pollockshields has a significant low-income, ethnic minority community living alongside an increasingly middle-class population attracted by traditional housing, proximity to the urban core and an attractive cultural context. This gentrification was stimulated (if not entirely started) by the development in 1988 of a disused tram depot into Tramway, an arts centre, extended to its rear in 2003 by the development of The Hidden Gardens as a space for intercultural community building.

Figure 4: Playhouse in context (Image from Google Maps. Accessed 26.

Pollockshields Playhouse was located on a brownfield site opposite the Tramway and could be read spatially as deriving much of its identity from Tramway's agenda of creativity and co-operation. However, it differed insofar as the Playhouse was public space which was wide open to interpretation - it was just a big, walled space with a quite small gate and lots of rubble. But insofar as it was practicable, Playhouse was unbounded which allowed programmes of social activities to emerge in space according to the identity of Pollckshields as a singular place. In this way, the Playhouse acted as a framework onto which socio-culturally relevant programmes could be applied and tested.

Figure 5: The site developing (clockwise from top left)

The Playhouse's space, then, was not without any context: there was both a pre-existing place and a programme and together these produced an environment which was structured or programmed, but in which there were also 'gaps', as with free periods in a school timetable. These gaps were given impetus and coherence, too, by the programme and place, which then created situations through which the 'users' - developers, council, community, designers, visitors, and so on - could explore the boundaries and possibilities of public space - the what, where, who, why and how of being a citizen of a city. The Playhouse, then, was a new way of prototyping public space from the grassroots up, with the objective not of creating a pristine piece of urban renewal, but towards building a social and practical capacity in the community. As such, it radically contrasted with usual methods of public space development which customarily sees expert knowledge applied in the abstract so as to assess the risks and probabilities of a site towards concrete and permanent ends.

Figure 6: Activities on-site (clockwise, top-left) - Tinker Town; dance; theatre; carnival.

BEITH

The work done by Baxendale since 2012 in the small town of Beith, North Ayrshire, twenty miles from the centre of Glasgow demonstrates a long-term, embedded process of urban renewal via both social and spatial practices. Like many places in post-industrial Britain, Beith has seen its stock sink with the departure of traditional and heavy industries from the region, including textiles and furniture manufacturing. North Ayrshire is rural and suffers from high levels of deprivation. Beith is surrounded by agricultural land, with a large whiskey bond bordering the town to the west. Its historic identity has been slowly leeched away with the development of peripheral service provision, schools and leisure facilities, and the commercial draws of nearby urban areas, which has led to a sense of isolation and belief in the community that an active marginalization was in some way at play.

Figure 7: Mapping the key areas which flagged up in the engagement exercise.

In light of these pressures and the town's decline, Baxendale were commissioned in 2012 to produce feasibility work on potential mechanisms to improve the fabric of the public realm, including social infrastructure, small-scale interventions and building works, which would reinvigorate the town's sense of its own virtues by emphasising and enhancing existing activities. In line with Baxendale's process-orientated approach, they worked with the town's development trust to generate activity, latent or otherwise under-realised, identify social and built assets and to reveal the 'voice' of the town. This was undertaken through small to medium-scale public engagement projects which would reveal characteristics of the town which could be promoted and improved.

Renewal in Beith has taken the form of a slow, incremental process of capacity building towards larger-scale architectural works. The aim here has been almost archaeological, using social events and programmes of learning, witnessing, accompaniment and presentation to map the needs and possibilities of the town revealing existing identities and activities. These were consolidated into a series of strategic moves and a menu of interventions. Beginning in 2013, a pop-up shop on Main Street called Project Main Street tried various activities to reinvigorate the town centre, including supplying graphic design professionals, photographers and skilled makers to improve the image of the place, to expand the brand identity of many of the business, and to improve visibility through the use of social media and promotional literature. The intention was not gentrification but to work with local businesses so that they could learn how to access skills and expertise which would otherwise remain beyond their reach. The use of professionals and highly skilled creative practitioners was based on a belief that in part the isolation of places like Beith derives from a reluctant acceptance of bad quality stuff and that marginal communities have as a consequence come to have a very limited idea of quality and value in urban space is. By providing useful, beautiful things Baxendale demonstrated that this needn't be so; this craftedness wasn't limited to building improvements, however, but also to creating stylish promotional material for new local events, such as Beith Beer Fest.

Figure 8: (Top left, clockwise) Public kiosk - 'One thing that would make Beith better?...' / 'Things to do in Beith?'; Beith Past and Present interactive map; Beith Banter - drop-in centre on Main Street; Project Main Street pop-up shop.

The outcome of this process was the eventual acquisition of the Geilsland School site on the town's eastern edge. Once a residential centre run by the Church of Scotland, its closure and disuse saw a substantial public asset wasted. On receiving a substantial grant Beith Development Trust were able to purchase the site with a view towards developing it into a project where the good things demonstrated through Baxendale's work could be self-generated in the town's own learning and making environment. This project is underway and has seen Baxendale develop proposals for the renovation of the old sports hall for use as a camping, sports, dance, dog show and roller disco venue.
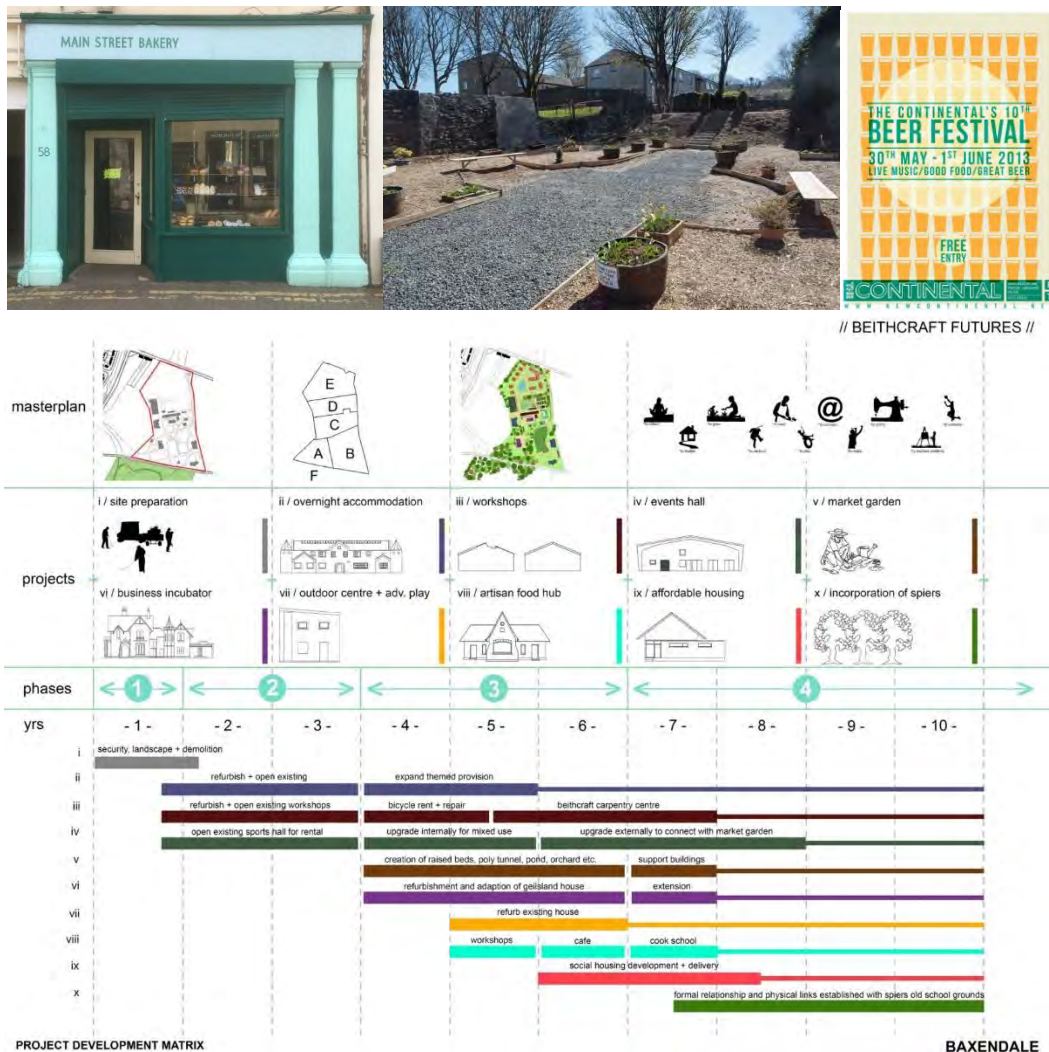
Figure 9: Top left, clockwise: Main Street renovation and re-branding; Main Street community garden; local produce and cultural event; Geilsland School site development strategy.

CONCLUSION

The work of Baxendale represents an emerging, radical agenda amongst practitioners for new architectures for marginal communities. This agenda understands the capacity of architecture as an effective agent for change, through both its artefacts and processes. By recognising the core purpose of participation, which is empowerment, and by discerning what power is and how power develops, architectural practice can produce built fabric which makes empowerment more likely to occur. By deriving built form from collaborative design and development approaches, Baxendale make built environments which more closely resonate with community visions of what good urbanism is, looks like and does. Further, the processes used towards this end operate to engage various user-groups in the act of building production which not only builds capacity in a practical sense - people learn hands-on skills - but also in a psycho-social sense - the built environment becomes appropriable by dint of the fact that it is de-mystified.

Through the three case study projects outlined the ability of Baxendale's kind of approach to construct community is evidenced. At Test Unit, a process of prototyping demonstrated the possibilities of spatial appropriation as a mechanism for broader discussions about public space and use, at the Pollckshields Playhouse, new ways of developing and using public realm for the benefit of a diverse, complex and

fluid community have been demonstrated towards plural goals; at Beith an embedded process of urban renewal has explored the possibilities of architectural output deriving from a long-term programme of social activities. Each show how capacity can be built by expanding the agency of users and institutional partners. The answer to the question of urban decline then, does not necessarily entail more urbanism, more building. Instead, as Baxendale's approach demonstrates, the solution to urban problems lies in activating greater synergy, more engagement, more dialogue; in short, more of that stuff that distinguishes happy community life.

The engagement of a coproductive agenda and processes in urban renewal do however, speak of a new and perhaps somewhat worrying development in state-public relations with regards urban spatial and infrastructural maintenance, renewal, growth or change. The use of coproduction is arguably used in conditions where the ability of the state is limited or lacking, [xiv] and not only in response to increasing capacity in service users.[xv] Scholars have argued for two main motivations for the use of coproduction: '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'[xvi] It should also be noted that most significant literature on infrastructural coproduction relates to governance in LEDCs and not in major cities in the global north, and that the approach is largely used in relation to marginalised populations. Whilst often done very well, with good intentions and towards good ends, logistical nor governance drivers represent an ideal relationship between the state and the people. That marginal populations are more likely to be participant-recipients in such engagements is also significant, effectively demonstrating state inability to engage with the most needy.

Baxendale's approach, then, whilst effective and welcome, does underline a broader structural issue in urban renewal in Glasgow: that areas populated by marginal and economically deprived groups are increasingly effectively having to do the job themselves, with the help of well-meaning non-profits, charities and private enterprise and with limited resources and state support. The alternative, which has had questionable success for large parts of cities like Glasgow, appears to be to wait for global financial conditions to improve such that state intervention is once again possible. And whilst a coproductive model does facilitate levels of pluralism and agility in urban development less possible in centralised governance systems, it does likewise mean that urban centres are perhaps faced with increasingly heterogeneous and uneven growth and change. As described in the three case studies, Ostrom's four criteria are variously, and unevenly evident: whilst complementarity is developed in project design and delivery and the multi-actor work is clearly an incentive to community engagement, the credibility of state and institutional commitments are not, perhaps, as assured as necessary to ensure long-term project sustainability. As such, it is arguable that any 'vernacularization' of process and object is inconsistent and perhaps not that deep-rooted. Even so, the emergence of practices like Baxendale's does signify a new and potentially radical departure from customary models of participation in urban renewal in the global north which, for these authors, is worthy of note.

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