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Co-creating social value in placemaking: the grand balancing act

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Abstract

Social value in the built environment refers to the social impact any organisation or project in that sector makes to its many and varied stakeholders. This involves different agents, such as design and planning professionals, engineering and construction professionals and workers, trades, facilities management providers and their personnel, and community groups and their members. We examine social value activities with a focus on placemaking, and show how in the Midlands, UK, regional strategic influence, consultant, design, and planning efforts relate to the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework and align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We highlight how the agents collectively help ensure that Nottingham is one exemplar city with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operates regularly and democratically; how their activities help improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning; and how they together ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. We present a transformative case study of social value in practice, which has a partnerships model at its heart, and the potential to inform future methodologies for business and community engagement to improve social outcomes.

Keywords chosen from ICE Publishing list

Social value, social impact, sustainability, education & training, environment

1. Introduction

Social value is the social impact that any organisation, project, or programme makes to the lives of the stakeholders affected by its activities (Raiden et al, 2019). It encompasses the three pillars of sustainability: social, environmental and economic factors, and seeks to understand them in terms of the benefits that they bring to society or the quality of life of people.

Placemaking is an overarching idea and a hands-on approach for improving our everyday places, where we live, work and play. This invariably involves many different agents, such as local authorities, design and planning professionals, engineering and construction professionals and workers, trades, facilities management providers and their personnel, and community groups and their members.

We examine social value activities with a focus on placemaking and show how different agents' activities and interventions in the Midlands, UK, align multiple stakeholders' efforts and thus collectively achieve social value. Our discussion will relate the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework (Dobson et al, 2020) and the following United Nations (UN) global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts), and 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels). We recognise social value is really about all the SDGs, at least indirectly. The focus on SDGs 11, 13 and 16 allows us to depart from the interests associated with achieving improvements in industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9) which feature in many discussions about social value in the built environment. Elsewhere we discuss social value in relation to poverty (SDG 1) (see Raiden and King, 2020).

The Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework shows eight lifecycle phases of a project: (1) Strategic Brief, (2) Options Selection & Investment case, (3) Procurement of Design & Delivery Teams, (4) Design Development, (5) Planning Approvals, (6) Construction, (7) Operation, and (8) Decommissioning, alongside three different aspects to considering social value: 'what you build', 'how you build', and 'how you operate' (Dobson et al, 2020: 17).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Figure 1. The Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework (Dobson et al, 2020: 17)

This framework is intended to inspire ambition and creativity in approaches to creating and delivering social value as a call for action: *“much more work needs to be undertaken in early stage infrastructure planning to understand community needs and identify opportunities to create social benefits”* (ibid: ii).

This call is consistent with the SDGs 11, 13, and 16 targets and indicators that are most relevant to our discussion of social value and placemaking in this Midlands case study below (see Tables 1, 2 and 3).

[INSERT TABLES 1, 2 AND 3 HERE]

2. Method

We present insights from different stakeholders, all directly involved with placemaking, including a regional strategic influencer, a professional consultancy firm, a charity dedicated to connecting people with the design of their places, and a city council (urban design) office. We describe their activities relating to creating social value through placemaking using extracts from phenomenological conversational interviews (after Given, 2008; Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2018), which were conducted face-to-face and via telephone during winter and spring 2019-2020, in addition to written research correspondence and published material available from the organisations' web pages. The research process, akin to action research, has been a developmental journey to co-create and refine our collective understanding of social value, placemaking, and the SDGs through continuous critical reflection. Aligned with this philosophy, we have co-authored this research paper with the following key stakeholders at the centre of practice:

- A regional strategic influencer, Chairman of the Midlands Engine Executive Board, Sir John Peace,
- A national professional consultancy firm, Focus Consultants, Founding Partner, Kevin Osbon,
- A national charity that connects people with the design of their places and connects design with people, The Glass-House Community Led Design, Chief Executive, Sophia de Sousa,
- Senior Principal Urban Design and Conservation Officer, Nottingham City Council, Dr Laura Alvarez.

4. Findings

We describe each of the stakeholders' social value activities and how they relate to the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework and the SDGs in turn, before discussing how their voices align with the SDGs 11, 13 and 16, and contribute to developing a deeper understanding of the 'what we build' aspects of the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework.

4.1. Regional Strategic Influence

The Midlands in the UK has a population of some 10.6m people; 816,000 businesses; 5.3m jobs and an annual economic output of more than £233bn (Midlands Engine, 2020a). The Midlands Engine (2020b) is an apolitical partnership that seeks to increase economic growth and improve the quality of life across the region. It does this by drawing together public sector partners and businesses to complement the activity of local and combined authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), universities, businesses and other stakeholders. In particular, the Midlands Engine Partnership focuses on pan-regional issues, such as transport, innovation and enterprise, digital, connectivity, internationalisation and amplifying the voice of the region. More specifically, Sir John Peace advocates for a new long-term industrial strategy that focuses on building resilient, locally based value for money supply-chains that employ a skilled and well-trained workforce. Education, training and retraining people migrating across sectors lies at the heart of the vision and relies on an integrated network of collaborative employer-facing interventions that meet the needs of the 4th industrial revolution and fuel the recovery from the current and developing economic crisis.

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91 During a telephone interview, Sir John Peace discussed an example to contextualise this vision:
92 in the spring of 2020, at time of the global COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2020), the UK
93 experienced severe Personal and Protective Equipment (PPE) sourcing problems, which
94 demonstrated that UK supply-chains lack resilience and are not fit for purpose. While
95 globalisation and a corresponding focus on efficiency has led to many benefits, it has also led to
96 many failures, such as a reliance on just-in-time imports from overseas and consumers being
97 encouraged to base their buying decisions on the lowest capital cost. This is not sustainable.

98

99 Building resilience requires skilled and well-educated local supply-chains that can deliver
100 sustainable benefits over the long-term. Developing the right skills is key, with apprenticeships
101 and other forms of on-the-job learning (such as the new T-levels) taking the centre stage to train
102 and retrain people of different age groups with retraining becoming increasingly important.
103 Moreover, there needs to be an integrated approach to training, education and skills
104 programmes that can no longer be delivered in a piecemeal fashion that differs across the
105 region. Instead, provision needs to be managed and delivered through joined-up local
106 approaches that simplify engagement and provide cross-region consistency to meet the needs
107 of local employers including huge global brands such as Rolls Royce and JCB. In this way,
108 placemaking is about capitalising on the regional community assets and potential, with the
109 intention and strategic direction to create a sustainable environment that promotes people's
110 health, happiness, and well-being.

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112 Further, in relation to the built environment, an infrastructure example was provided. Aggregates
113 are a key constituent of the built infrastructure supply-chain and are currently often imported
114 from overseas, including African countries, which represents an environmental burden. Tarmac,
115 the UK's largest supplier of building materials, has facilities in the Midlands to produce
116 aggregates, yet has suffered from a lack of skilled workers. To meet the demand for
117 infrastructure across the UK, they have focused on developing their own highly skilled local
118 workforce through their investment in their Midlands-based National Skills and Safety Park,

which provides a range of training opportunities, including apprenticeships, to local people of different ages who often retrain from other industries.

Such strategic influence at a regional level feeds into stage 1: Strategic brief in the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework (Dobson et al, 2020: 18), and offers a useful steer for project specific action. The Midlands Engine benefit from a holistic view and have the opportunity to influence how a broad range of stakeholders, including clients, designers, contractors, and planners, create social value. In this way, they play a crucial role in helping different groups converge and collectively achieve social value outcomes.

This regional strategic influence links to multiple SDGs. Firstly, the activities are well aligned with SDG 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) in that, the Midlands Engine is clearly focused on enhancing inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management (11.3), by operating a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operates regularly and democratically (11.3.2). They draw together key stakeholders within the region with ambitions to invest in major transport projects, innovation and enterprise, and digital connectivity. The strategy that Sir John Peace advocates clearly articulates the aspiration and drive towards co-creating social value and aligns well with (11.A): to support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning. Focus on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable is evident in the recognition that transport, and the global/local movement of materials and people, feature at the heart of a sustainable future. The Midlands Engine are focused on reducing the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities (11.6). This is evident in the indirect appreciation of the need to reduce annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (11.6.2).

The Midlands Engine demonstrate leadership at a regional level and thereby mitigate one of the three key barriers (absence of leadership and ownership) that many practitioners believe are hindering the creation and delivery of social value (Dobson et al, 2020: 8).

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150 In terms of SDG 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts), the strategic
151 focus on localised action and mobilising resources in a sustainable fashion helps strengthen
152 resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters (13.1). Sir
153 John Peace outlines a specific disaster risk reduction strategy (13.1.3), using the example of the
154 COVID-19 pandemic, and suggests that appropriately educated and skilled local networks of
155 workers and supply-chains present a future proof solution to disaster mitigation. Improving
156 education, and human and institutional capacity, is central to the regional strategic influence
157 (13.3), including advocating the strengthening of institutional, systemic and individual capacity-
158 building explicitly (13.3.2).

159

160 **4.2. Consultant**

161 Focus is a Midlands based multi-disciplinary construction consultancy operating nationwide.
162 They work on community, public sector, socio-economic, and people-focussed regeneration
163 programmes with social value at their core. Focus are keen to give back to the communities in
164 which they serve. Education and skills training are central to their approach. They deliver pro
165 bono lectures, seminars, training and workshops on a wide range of built environment topics to
166 university students, industry practitioners, local people, community groups and the third sector.
167 Their work extends to include work experience to school children, apprenticeships, sponsored
168 education to masters level, and supporting the Prince's Regeneration Trust 'BRICK' heritage
169 education programme. The multiplier effect of local expenditure drives Focus to require their
170 contractors to use local supply-chains, guarantee that an agreed percentage of site labour is
171 sourced locally, and provide training programmes and apprenticeships for adults and young
172 people. The company itself is also committed to:

- 173 • Employing local staff - all equity partners live and work in the local community and they
174 generate jobs for people living in the local area,
- 175 • Recruiting young people direct from local education providers in order to develop and retain
176 core skills in the local community and providing personalised training throughout their
177 careers.

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Examples of Focus' social value initiatives more specifically related to placemaking include:

- Securing funding to help a local Parish Council develop a Parish Plan that in turn guided a District Council Local Plan,
- Advising District Councils on custom and self-building throughout North Derbyshire and supporting a local school to secure £7,500 to create an allotment-style school garden.

In terms of 'the environment' Focus have combined their commitment to minimising the effect of their operations on the environment with a recognition that this can make sound commercial sense to all parties. Specific actions include:

- Leading sustainability reviews for professional project teams that promote client awareness of reduced energy consumption in the construction and operation of buildings,
- Delivery of Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM), which assesses, rates, and certifies the sustainability of buildings,
- Promotion of electronic tendering on all projects,
- Reduced travel through homeworking, videoconferencing and maintenance to minimise harmful vehicular emissions,
- Built-estate energy efficiency and energy saving, including consolidated stationary orders, continual reduction of utility use including, low energy lighting, high efficiency boilers, improved insulation, use of renewable energy suppliers and reduced paper use.

Focus Consultants' work feeds into stage 2: Options selection & investment case of the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework (Dobson et al, 2020: 19-20): they demonstrate social value in practice and promote joined up thinking in advising clients and project teams on sustainability matters, including use local supply-chains, employment and training, and the assessment and certification of social value and environmental impact. Their offer of leadership and ownership of social value at organisational level complements that provided by the Midlands Engine at regional level, and thereby helps further mitigate one of the three key barriers (absence of leadership and ownership) that many practitioners believe are hindering the delivery of social value (Dobson et al, 2020: 8).

The SDGs 11, 13 and 16 are central to the Consultant's social value interventions; both internally and in managing their supply-chain. Their impact on the environment is recognised and actively considered in the way the business is operated and how they advise their clients (13.1 and 13.2). This helps reduce annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (11.6.2). Education, training and enhancing institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation and impact reduction (13.3) are important tools for the business. Furthermore, the strong value base that drives Focus' approach to social value supports achievements towards enhancing inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries (11.3); ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (16.7); and, indirectly, securing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities (11.7).

4.3. Design

Public narrative and policy on community engagement in design and placemaking is evolving. Early meaningful community engagement to shape design at key decision stages helps local people shape better places and empowers, builds capacity and provides employability through design (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019). This shift in planning policy guidance, where community engagement is seen as an opportunity for co-designing change and embedding social value lies in stark contrast to how it has often been seen as an obstruction to navigate.

The Glass-House Community Led Design focuses on generating social value to local people by facilitating discussion and debate and actively practicing collaborative and participative design. It does this by bringing different sectors, disciplines and scales of placemaking initiatives together for mutual benefit.

They apply mostly basic and easily replicable techniques to support the dialogue, networking and ideas generation required to enable a collaborative economy approach to placemaking. They act as the convenors in many sessions, such as a recent debate in Nottingham 'Place: a

shared responsibility? What are the rights and responsibilities that we have in shaping our places?'. During the debate, many people in the audience raised the importance of building, managing and evolving relationships between those who live in places, and those who play a role in their design and management (de Sousa, 2016). A desire for inclusive and participative systems of decision-making (rather than traditional paternalistic mechanisms) was voiced, together with the need to consider neglected places as well as investment in grand designs, to ensure that places are created "for everyone" (ibid). 'Everyone' includes stakeholders as wide ranging as universities, schools, local SMEs, city councils, professionals, local neighbourhood forums, citizens, school children and tenants in council housing.

Sophia de Sousa argues, however, that there is no reason why any sector could not take on this role. Through their own practice they showcase how models can be applied to a wide range of contexts to help foster locally based dialogue that informs, co-designs or tests local policies, strategies and the visions and briefs of projects.

Such a collaborative design influence feeds directly into stage 4: Design development in the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework (Dobson et al, 2020: 23-24), and offers an exemplar of a specific action in giving a community an opportunity to contribute to the placemaking process.

Such placemaking activities link clearly to SDGs 11 and 16, specifically 11.3.2: Proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically, and 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. These also help towards SDG 11.7 with the aim to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities. Indirectly, they also feed into 13.3 (Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity).

4.4. Local Authority (Urban Design)

Laura Alvarez's view as a City Council Officer is that social variables of place are not considered fully in the industry and, despite an increasing interest in environmental issues, there is a strong bias towards economic factors in the UK. The National Planning Policy Framework (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012) sought to reform planning and initiate a period of increased neighbourhood engagement and governance through the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans, Local Development Orders and Local Listing. However, the majority of changes were optional and underprivileged communities often found themselves lacking the skills and resources to deliver owing to the technical complexities of the British planning system.

Laura Alvarez believes that local government should be responsible for delivering community empowerment through the planning system, and Nottingham City Council does this at two levels:

Policy-making:

- a. incorporating social structure analysis as part of the baseline studies for policy development;
- b. delivering continuous engagement strategies that focus on targeting social variables through the process itself.

Placemaking:

- b. incorporating social assets analysis as another technical requirement of planning submissions;
- c. requiring that developments with a public or shared place component offer opportunities to meet local social targets.

To help meet critical social targets and support their ambition to become Carbon Neutral for 2028, Nottingham City Council is keen to deliver high quality socially valuable developments by focusing on two main strands:

- social resilience – resolving problems and creating wealth through the communities' capacity to work together

- social capital – social norms, mutual trust and the capacity of communities to form relationships and networks.

In order to achieve this, a process of internal and external transformation was initiated which required a cultural shift, cross-sector engagement, and education to change attitudes and behaviours. Communities have been involved in shaping new design guidance through a process of empowerment that gave voice to minorities and groups that were previously excluded from policy development.

Laura Alvarez showcases how Nottingham City Council has taken a proactive stance in integrating social value in planning practice, which has a partnerships model at its heart, and the potential to inform future methodologies for business and community engagement to improve social outcomes with reference to stage 5: Planning approvals in the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework (Dobson et al, 2020: 25). Additionally, Nottingham City Council showcase good practice in informing the 'what we build' decision-making in Stage 2: Options Selection & Investment Case by incorporating social structure analysis as part of the baseline studies for policy development and requiring social assets analysis in planning submissions, in line with the call for a Local Needs Analysis (Dobson et al, 2020: 10). Moreover, the Council facilitates communities' engagement with and input into stage 4: Design development.

Their planning interventions and activities link to SDGs 11, 13 and 16. Strengthening of institutional, systemic and individual capacity-building (11.3.2) is a clear focus and a key area of responsibility for the City Council, driven by national policy framework. Ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making (16.7) similarly features at the heart of the Council's plans and activities, evident in the form of cross-sector engagement. Alongside this, an important vehicle to achieving the Council's ambition to become Carbon Neutral is improved education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning (13.3). Becoming Carbon Neutral is the Council's most explicitly expressed aim, thereby integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning (13.2), and also reducing annual mean levels of fine

particulate matter in cities (11.6.2). The efforts and activities directed towards engaging communities can help provide, use efficiently, and maintain in the long-term, a universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities, indirectly (11.7).

5. Social Value in Placemaking in the Midlands and the SDGs

The different stakeholders' activities, and how they voice social value in placemaking, align in aspirations towards, and commitment to, achieving SDG 16.7 (Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels). All the agents communicate their efforts in this regard, and it is especially important for the local authority.

All the stakeholders also explicitly and frequently connect with SDG11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) but we find variation in their priorities and focus. Whilst target 11.3 (Enhancing inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management) is important to all, regional strategic influence, design and planning agents specifically and actively talk about mechanisms to achieve 11.3.2 (A direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically). Quite naturally, since this indicator refers to the societal level systems that support the achievement of the SDGs, the activities of the consulting organisation are less focused on this indicator.

Target 11.6 (Reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities) is relevant to the accounts of all but one respondent, the designer. Similarly, 11.7 (Universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces) is relevant to the accounts by all but one respondent; regional strategic influence. 11.A (Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning) was mostly evident in the accounts of the regional strategic influencer and the consultant. These variations are likely to be explained by limitations in our data (focus on social value and placemaking instead of the SDGs specifically).

SDG 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts) is clearly and explicitly important to both the regional strategic influencer and the consultant. Specifically, target 13.1 (Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries) and 13.3 (Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity) feature as important elements of practice. Indirectly, 13.3 is also achieved via the inclusive and collaborative design influence. The local authority officer is focused on 13.2 (Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning) and 13.3.

6. Practical Relevance and Potential Applications

Throughout the paper we showcase how the different stakeholders' views and activities relate to the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework. Our Midlands case study has focused on the 'what we build' aspect. This is important, yet often overlooked aspect of considering, creating and delivering social value (Dobson et al, 2020: iii). Much greater social value can be created when we understand that the way we design impacts how we build and how we operate.

In Figure 2 below we show how our respondents collectively create and deliver social value within the 'what we build' phases of a project lifecycle.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Figure 2. Bringing together the key contributions, SDGs, and the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework

There is potential to transfer the activities in this case study to other regions and indeed at a national level through, for example, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA).

6. Conclusion

We show how regional strategic influence, consultant, design, and planning efforts and interventions in placemaking align together and thus collectively achieve social value, and link to

the SDGs 11, 13 and 16, and the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework. We highlight how the agents together help ensure that Nottingham is one exemplar city developing a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically (SDG 11.3.2), how their collective activities help improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning (SDG 13.3) and ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (SDG 16.7).

This regional case study demonstrates the potential to create social value across a range of different groups, and it reveals how social value can be created whilst balancing a range of differing and competing needs. It points to the importance of placing social value at the heart of any organisations' activities upfront and early, rather than bolted-on later, in order to achieve the crucial 'balance' in creating economic, social and environmental value. Moreover, the case points to the huge potential available when such approaches are joined-up at a regional, national and international level using the SDGs as a crucial part of building a common language.

Too often the social and environmental aspects of place are not considered fully in decision-making and, despite an increasing interest, there remains a strong bias towards economic factors. Through a transformative case study of social value in practice, which has a partnerships model at its heart, we aim to inform future methodologies for business and community engagement that help improve social outcomes and quality of life, and minimise the effect on the environment, with a recognition that this can make sound commercial sense to all parties.

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Figure captions

Figure 1. The Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework (Dobson et al, 2020: 17)

Figure 2. Bringing together the key contributions, SDGs, and the Useful Projects Social Value Maturity Framework