



Buildings in the making

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A sociological exploration of architecture in the context of health and social care

The design, planning, construction and delivery of buildings for social care involves many stakeholders. Architects and building contractors have to negotiate not only with each other but with many other parties, and must ensure that they comply with a plethora of environmental, health and safety, financial, and building regulations. They must also heed guidance on age-friendly design for which collaboration is key. Professor Sarah Nettleton led an ESRC research project, 'Buildings in the Making: a sociological exploration of architecture in the context of health and social care', that examined in detail the day-to-day social processes associated with making buildings. The findings were effectively communicated in collaboration with the artist Lynne Chapman, who captured the challenging complexities of 'A day in the life of an architect' and 'A day in the life of a construction site manager'. This led to a deepening of relationships with those working in the design and construction sectors.

The research

The design, construction and delivery of social care settings is complex. In the context of demographic change, which sees people living longer but with a greater range of preferences and requirements, design has diversified. This is further complicated by the marketisation of social care and a multiplicity of funding, commissioning and procurement models. The design and construction sector is evolving. Digital design and product innovations require new ways of working and collaboration. Yet, what often gets lost is a vision of the user's needs. Good working relationships built on trust and a shared understanding of what a building is for, who it is for, and what building users want, are crucial. Successful projects are those where architects, developers and contractors work with clients and agree on, and commit to, a shared vision at the outset.

The outcome

Two sets of illustrations were produced to portray 'A day in the life of an architect', and, 'A day in the life of a construction site manager'. What is striking about the day-to-day work of both architects and building site managers is how much of it involves verbal communication. The building site manager is in constant dialogue with colleagues on and off site, handling a myriad of tasks and unforeseen events. The architect too, moves between designing, responding to technical and planning issues, and meetings with developers, contractors, and clients. The illustrations have prompted considerable interest, serving as a catalyst for knowledge transfer between sociologists, architects, construction managers and end-users. In particular, they can be deployed to encourage stakeholder reflection on the importance of working relationships, to challenge stereotypes, and to address embedded views that mitigate collaborative working.



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