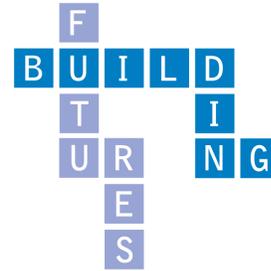


THIS HOUSE BELIEVES TOO MUCH CONSULTATION INHIBITS GREAT DESIGN



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Opening the debate, *Ruth Reed*, 2009 RIBA president, highlighted that the built environment is currently driven by consultation, and that it has become embedded into the democratic process of design. She pointed out that consultation now has many guises and has moved away considerably from the traditional model of town-hall debate. Reed questions whether the processes and related costs of consultation are really reflected in the outcomes, and whether it really has the power to reassure a community? She asks if it can reduce NIMBYism and whether we have simply overcomplicated an already complex design process.

Leading the argument in favour of the motion, *Stephen Bayley* defiantly spoke of the stifling nature of consultation, and defied anybody to name a great building that was the direct product of consultation. He advocated the primacy of creativity, an elusive concept that could and should not be defined. He proposed that great design was partly a product of creativity, which could be characterised as cussed, awkward and confrontational- supporting his assumption that it is therefore adverse to any form of consensus. Bayley criticised the pseudo-democratic affliction of numerology, denigrating this 'McKinsey' approach as 'witchcraft'. He admitted that a good architect should be aware of local context, and that in some instances casual consultation in the form of conversation could contribute to successful design – name checking Heatherwick's east beach café. He summarised his argument with reference to Henry Ford who famously refused any type of consultation in the conception of the Model T Ford – and subsequently changed the world.

Supporting Bayley's proposition, *Alex Lifschutz* bough to light the success of Baron Haussmann's undemocratic design process for Paris (1850-1867). He argued that although the scheme uprooted around one third of the population, there was no doubt that today the most visited city in the world, appreciates the long term benefits. Following on from this, he questioned how often one fails to make the right decisions for the wrong reasons, or how often changes are made to schemes to placate and to dilute their quality? He went on to argue that consultation can aid bad design by assuming that public debate naturally improves whatever is on the table. He admitted that meaningful and long-term consultation can be positive but in turn questioned why democratic institutions have delegated consultation in the planning process, allowing it to be hijacked by undemocratic influencing forces. He brought to our attention the fact that on some occasions one voice is heard louder than any others. Lifschutz highlighted Prince Charles, famously hailing the Luftwaffe for leaving rubble rather than modernist buildings. He concluded by suggesting that cities which are sensitive to the needs of their citizens do not have to resort to consultation. Elemental's Quinta Monroy in Chile is used as an example which lead to his assertion that citizens could have more physical control over what is built, and through a loosening of the legislative reins, the opportunity to shape their environment.

To begin the argument against the motion, *John Twitchen*, emphasised elements that make good consultation, highlighting its roots in democracy. Twitchen argued that society is founded upon democratic principles and so architects have a responsibility to uphold these principles in the design of places and buildings. He went on to question what creates a sustainable community, concluding that successful places, which provide comfort and functionality, welcome their inhabitants through the promotion of ownership. Twitchen asserted that this can only be achieved through interactive dialogue and the participation of the occupants at an early stage together with the creative expertise of the designer. He suggested that the negative reputation of consultation can often be put down to 'consultation fatigue', where the same questions are asked repeatedly, and there is clear failure in the process. For Twitchen, the value lies primarily in the dialogue – whether formal or informal. He finished with two examples: Covent Garden and Castleford Bridge, where in each instance Twitchen believes their success can be in part attributed to local consultation. In conclusion he called to attention the conflict that is identified through the comparison of CABE and English Heritage design criteria, which he believes can only be thoroughly resolved with discussion.

Anna Minton reiterated the need for the design process to be democratic, pointing out that bad practice is all too common, proving that when one does not consult properly there can be disturbing consequences. Minton highlighted occasions where actors had been used to fill up council meetings in Brighton and where councils have forged letters from residents on support of a project. She goes on to use the Pathfinder Housing Market Renewal Scheme as another prime example, whereby opposition groups were not properly consulted, if at all, resulting in broken and displaced communities. She emphasised the box-ticking nature of much consultation, suggesting that architects often conduct consultation 'by the book', which cannot be considered as a productive method, defining proper consultation as participation. Minton also raised the idea of 'grandiose visions' that are impressed upon a community, and how this approach cannot hope to engage with local residents. Minton goes on to express that although her opponents had argued that consultation inhibits creativity and that great developments, from the pyramids to Hausmann's Paris, were not subject to consultation neither where they democratic societies. She concluded with the question: what do people really prefer, The **Champs Elysées or Le Marais?**