

## Universities Research Forum on Social Value

A write-up of the presentations by academics at the Universities Research Forum on social value

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Last Tuesday a group of academics and industry representatives met at the UKGBC offices to discuss research being conducted on social value in the built environment. This blog provides a summary of that work and highlights some of the key opportunities identified by the group for further research.

### Key opportunities for further research:

- Due to the ongoing confusion around some of the terminology used when discussing social value, social impact and social sustainability, academia needs to work with industry to better define these terms within the context of the built environment, including better understanding of how local the impacts considered should be.
- Most social value measurement has focussed on housing, which means that many of the measurement tools and proxies are more geared towards that asset type. There is increasingly a need for the development of measurement methodologies and metrics bespoke to other asset types, for example, education, offices and retail.
- Better understanding of which actors (ie. architect, contractor, developer) can best deliver interventions which create social value (apprenticeships etc.) or establish practice which enhances social value outcomes (ie. community engagement strategies).
- Further research is needed to link health outcomes and the built environment, especially when a specific intervention has a direct health benefit. These can then be used to help develop the dialogue between the health sector and developers.
- More publicly available benchmarks, specific to various asset types would help to ensure that, when required, social value is created over and above the original product or service provided. This would help reduce concerns around “social value wash”.
- There is a lot of confusion around who should be measuring social value and what should be measured. Helping industry understand when and what to measure is an important next step. It was highlighted that from ethical business perspective it is to unpick in whose interests social value measurement is undertaken, again helping to reduce issues of “social value wash”.
- Digital technologies provide huge opportunities for delivering social value. Investigating how we can harness the power of big data and citizen science could improve local needs assessment and community engagement, as well as making social value measurement a less resource-intensive practice, which is essential for the mainstreaming of social value measurement. As part of this, validity of data, and the resulting “social values” needs to be better verified.
- Developing the commercial case for creating place-based social value was identified as the most important focus for further research. UKGBC organisations need ready to hand evidence of the social value of certain interventions, as well as the likely commercial value for the organisation investing in those interventions. Ideally this evidence would be bespoke to particular services.

If you are developing in work in any of these areas, please email [sophia.cox@ukgbc.org](mailto:sophia.cox@ukgbc.org) that we can support your efforts and help communicate findings with our members.

## Recent research conducted on social value in the built environment

### **Social sustainability and social value as distinct and measurable concepts**

**Professor Tim Dixon, University of Reading**

Tim highlighted the outstanding issue of built environment organisations conflating various terms such as social sustainability, social value and design value. Drawing on research for UK housebuilders on social sustainability, the presentation explored the use of these terms and provided a critical perspective of social sustainability assessment frameworks. Key messages:

- Both 'social value' and 'social sustainability' (as outcomes and measures of social impacts) are distinctive and measurable concepts
- Needs to be much more focus on 'ex post' (downstream) assessment of built environment projects
- It is vital to examine the social impacts of built environment projects on existing communities

### **Social Life Cycle Assessment**

**Erica Russell, University of Surrey**

Erica introduced the emerging efforts to calculate the social value of an asset over its lifecycle, reflecting the methodology developed for environmental lifecycle assessments. The research looked at the role of the main contractor in directly affecting the sustainability of a build, using a whole life approach to an asset build, aligning the materials and build process with the supply network.

### **Integrating Social Return on Investment in the built environment**

**Dr Kelly Watson, University of Manchester**

Kelly gave an overview of how SROI can be applied as a novel form of post-occupancy evaluation, outline a wellbeing valuation toolkit for buildings, and show how these approaches are being used in practice with industry across a range of sectors from healthcare, housing and commercial property to cities, digital and major infrastructure schemes.

### **Enablers and barriers to social value implementation within and organisation**

**Guy Schmidt, Loughborough University**

Guy outlined his research, which seeks to identify and understand enablers and barriers to social value implementation within an organisation. The purpose of this investigation is to develop policies and processes that are capable of effectively integrating with future functions. Key takeaways:

- There is still a lack of transparency across social value measurement tools and databases leading to uncertainty about confidence in the values used and generated by the tools.
- There is minimal understanding of how to utilise combinations of social value tools in order to meet the requirements of organisations.

For more information on each of the presentations, the full deck of slides from the session can be [accessed here](#).