



Beauty and the big society

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The government's advisor
on architecture, urban design
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What does the Big Society mean?

- Acting together to take control of decisions
- Power to “shape the look and feel of the places where they live” – David Cameron
- Community right to build; Big Society Bank; neighbourhood plans.

People and places

- 37% of people agree they can influence decisions affecting their local area
(down from 44% in 2001)
- 18% took part in a „civic consultation’ last year
(lower than five years ago)
- 3% regularly engage in civic consultation
(constant since 2003)

Research approach

- Omnibus survey of 1,043 people
- Discussion groups and interviews in Sheffield with 60 people
- Ethnographic – in-depth, filmed interviews with 5 people

Research findings – qualitative

- Initial reactions: beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Individual not public beauty.
- But also: it affects the way you feel about yourself. Surroundings are closely linked to self-esteem, sense of belonging, ownership, safety and happiness.

Research findings - quantitative

- Overwhelming majority – **81%** - of people say that everyone should be able to experience beauty on a regular basis
- Just **12%** are too busy to notice beauty in their area
- Very few think beauty matters less if you are poor
- **65%** experience beauty in the natural environment
- Local authorities have the most responsibility for ensuring that places are beautiful

Essays series on beauty, public policy, and civic engagement

- Diana Athill - writer
- Hasan Bakhshi - cultural economist
- Irena Bauman - architect
- Bonnie Greer - cultural commentator
- Matthew Kieran & Glenn Parsons - philosophers
- Alan Powers - historian

Does beauty matter?

- “Beauty enables a nation to create well-being, happiness, purpose and courage for itself, all vital components in productivity and peace. Dismissing it as frivolous could prove fatal.” – **Bonnie Greer**
- “That beauty is important to humankind is universally accepted. That it should form part of the process of policymaking is highly contentious. Somehow in our desire to prove value for money, the definition of value itself has become too narrowly drawn, to the detriment of society as a whole.” – **Hasan Bakhshi**
- “Beauty is a natural part of, and a stimulus for, civic discussion.” – **Glenn Parsons**

Why does beauty matter?

- Way into thinking about meaning of place
- Links between place and identity
- Pride in surroundings
- Aspiration for self and place
- Relationship between old and new
- Importance of green space
- Linked to maintenance, cleanliness, safety and security



Thank you.

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