

Book review

ARCHITECTURAL MANAGEMENT: INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Stephen Emmitt, Matthijs Prins and Ad den Otter (eds),
Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, 2009, ISBN 978-1-4051-7786-3,
£72.99, 344 pp.

The stated aim in the overall introduction is 'to provide the reader with a wide variety of ideas' in the field of the title; and the ground covered is certainly wide. Articles range through project collaboration websites, design for climate change, researching communication in groups, embedding management training in an architecture degree, patient-centred hospital design, blob buildings – and this list is not complete. So the book in some respects reflects the sheer variety of challenges faced by a designer with management responsibilities (or a manager of the design process).

I can think of many individual colleagues with whom I have collaborated in design teams or in design-build projects who would find some selection of the chapters of interest. Chapters which I might group together as having appeal to particular interests are not grouped together in the book. This again reflects the complex interdependencies of the construction process. If there are any unifying themes in the book these are the value of design and the collaborative and social nature of building design and construction. This is not, however, surprising as the book was partly generated from a conference on 'Designing Value' at the Technical University of Denmark in 2005. Indeed the Scandinavian contribution is strong in both the general chapters and in the case studies.

If the content is highly variable so too in my view is the standard. There are many good things in it and I was often drawn into a chapter in an unexpected way. For the uninitiated (and as far as the theory of design value goes I count myself among them) Matthijs Prins' introduction to Section 1: Architectural Value, is both thoughtful and thought provoking. In quoting Arup, 'in the end value still remains a question of Architectural design', engineers such as myself are given pause for thought. In case study C in Part 3, Design Management, Raveala, Kruus and Kiiras give an interesting account of an approach to designing for future flexibility and the consequences for design, procurement and detailing.

On the other hand, elsewhere one reads a number of pages only to arrive at unremarkable insights. For instance, in Section 2, Communicating Design Values, case study B, Architectural Design Management Using a Project Web, we are told that 'regular and formal face-to-face communication within the office is necessary' – an unsurprising insight for a complex project. More worrying is the assertion: 'by using a project web, all building elements need to be drawn only once and human mistakes can be avoided as much as possible' – and the lie is given to this superficial assertion by the later description of detailed paper coordination checking. In Part 4, Inclusive Design, Hansen and Jenso's account of 'Patient Focus Throughout the Process: The Case of St. Olaf's Hospital' is fascinating. Those of us who have laboured through many promising dawns at project initiation, been energised by visionary statements and later been somewhat disappointed by the reality are once again tempted to believe that the ideal (and idealistic) client is waiting out there to realise a new vision. (This project is, however, not due for completion until 2014.)

Accounts of the loss of local adaptation of housing design against extremes of climate through centralisation and codification sit alongside interesting critiques of lean manufacturing ideas applied to construction. A technique called 'morphological overviews' is proposed and piloted.

It appears to be a kind of structured way to promote listening and inclusiveness within diverse groups. Architectural educators try to come to grips with education for management at undergraduate level – and designers of 'free form' buildings suggest fees of 20 to 40% can be expected.

On balance the book succeeds in providing a high-level snapshot of international thinking and trends in the construction industry with a particular focus on the design process and how it impacts on the end result.

It is likely to appeal to mid-career practitioners managing large or complex multidisciplinary projects or to those engaged in researching related issues.

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