

FOREWORD

This special issue of *Housing and Society* presents post occupation evaluations of several dormitory areas. The basic purpose of these user oriented post implementation or post occupancy evaluations is to provide programmatic information to designers. This form of evaluation research involves a systematic reexamination of a design once it has been completed, occupied and used for a reasonable length of time. While the evaluation might range from a simple return visit by the designer to formal research endeavors by trained researchers, its primary purpose is to identify "the problems and assets of the design." Problems are those features of the design which fail to meet the needs of its users and consequently should be modified both in the example evaluated and in future examples, if the environment is a prototypical one. Assets are those features of the design which do work well and are valued by users. These features are worthy of preservation efforts in existing examples and reiteration in future designs.

Designers can use the results of post occupancy evaluations as programmatic inputs which will enable them to systematically improve the design of dormitories. This provides the designer with a way to link isolated building projects into a single design activity aimed at discovering the optimal solutions to typical problems in dormitories. Robert Sommer described this process of incremental improvements of prototypes in his "Volkswagen Model." He contrasts the activities of the producers of the Volkswagen "Beetle," which at that time consisted of annual refinements of the basic "Beetle" design, with that of the Detroit designers who pursued a course aimed at producing a novel design each year with little reference to the functional successes or failures of preceding models. His analogy very nicely serves to illustrate the power of post occupancy evaluation research to give designers the possibility of progressive design improvement as opposed to purposeless variation.

The major strength of post occupancy evalua-

tion as a source of programmatic information is its basis in holistically assessing the performance of real settings as opposed to predictions derived from theory. Even in those rare instances where we have "good" theory it inevitably deals with only a small portion of the entire range of concerns that the designer of an environmental setting must consider. Looking at the overall performance of a real setting, on the other hand, provides one with a comprehensive and concrete list of attributes that work and do not work for particular client groups in particular situations. Given the spotty and faddish nature of environment/behavior theory this holistic non-theoretical stance is probably the major strength of this approach to generating design guidelines.

Using post occupancy evaluation as programmatic input obviously requires that the designer have access to relevant evaluations. That is the purpose of this issue.

We have encouraged the authors to utilize plans and photographs so as to better describe the settings they evaluated. We have also asked them to go beyond the basic evaluative/diagnostic task of identifying the successes and failures of the evaluated settings and to be prescriptive by providing suggestions for designers who might be engaged in redesigning that particular setting or in designing similar dormitory settings in the future.

An additional interesting feature of this issue is that it presents two separate evaluations of the same setting done by different evaluators from different perspectives at different times. These are reported in the papers by Franklin Becker and Daniel Kegan.

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