# ARCHITECTURE AND ITS COMMUNITIES

## SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to undertake a review of literature to identify how architecture is seen within the humanities and social sciences, and to identify specific focus areas for further research.

Many architects would consider that architecture is one of the great humanist discourses through which we collectively contemplate the human condition. The Roman architect Vitruvius (*c*. 25BC) insisted that architecture only ever happened when people gathered together in conversation, and it gave form to that gathering. Architecture is the art that gives form to social groups. It spatialises them and thereby makes them possible. And yet given its salient position as the form-giver and image-maker of our social environment, architecture is under-represented in debates about communities, their identities and the ties that hold them together. The architecture of our communities is rarely discussed in the humanities and social sciences.

Architecture is no longer seen as part of the humanities and social sciences within the public (rather than university) academic and media worlds.  The British Academy, for example, in a publication *Past Present and Future: The Public Value of the Humanities & Social Sciences*, saw these disciplines as comprising the humanities: history, literature & languages, psychology, economics, law, medieval studies, archaeology, classics, geography, linguistics, sociology, African & Oriental studies, theology & religious studies, philosophy & ethics, history of art & music, anthropology, international relations and political studies.  An article in the *Guardian* listed the top 300 intellectuals in Britain today, which included academics (10), activists (2), authors (54), classicists (2), critics (33), economists (10), historians (42), journalists/editors (61), lawyers (9), media executives (1), museum directors (1), musicians (2), philosophers (11), playwrights (6), poets (12), policy advisers (4), political philosophers (3), political scientists (4), political theorists (2), politicians (7), psychotherapists (2), religious leaders (2), scientists (12), social scientists (4) and theatre directors (4).  The Arts and Humanities Research Council recently published *Leading the World: The economic impact of UK arts and humanities research*.  Out of the 33 accepted essays, there were contributions from 3 architects and architectural historians: Professor Iain Borden (architectural historian), University College London, Professor Deborah Howard (architectural historian), University of Cambridge and Professor Alan Short (architect), University of Cambridge.  In the completed publication, *The public value of the humanities*, however, only the contributions from Borden and Howard were included.

One can hardly argue that architecture and architectural landscapes are not in the public mind in the United Kingdom.  The National Trust is the largest non-commercial membership organisation in the United Kingdom, with a current membership (2007) of 3.5 million, compared to the combined membership of all political parties of 0.5 million.  Among the statutory and official bodies concerned with architecture - the Architects Registration Board [ARB], the Royal Institute of British Architects [RIBA] and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment [CABE] - only CABE addressed issues of the humanities in the practice of architecture.  CABE published numerous works e.g. *Ordinary places*, *People and places: Public attitudes to beauty*, *Physical capital: How great places boost public value* and *Character and identity: Townscape and heritage appraisals in housing market renewal areas* intended to guide public and official opinion.  CABE was disbanded in in 2011, which might be taken as a verdict by central government on the importance of architecture to the built environment.

To examine the representation of architecture in academic disciplines we reviewed the literature on communities in representative disciplines of the human sciences except architecture: politics, economics, philosophy, sociology, psychology, history, geography and anthropology.   One aspect that is striking is that other disciplines within the humanities and social sciences freely and seemingly unconsciously use architectural concepts to conceptualise and define their own work.  This might be taken to mean that architecture does not have its own unique and irreducible concepts and thus is essentially redundant as a discipline within the humanities and social sciences.  It will become apparent in this scoping study that this is inadequate.  We believe that it is axiomatic that architecture

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is the unique discipline that can spatialise concepts of self and society, and that this discipline is irreducible to other disciplines.

To sum up, there seems a demand for a greater understanding and appreciation of architecture in public life, but this has been deprecated within the academic and media worlds.

As a result of this review we identified 3 directions in which this scoping study might develop: an extension of the present desk top survey into greater depth, additional disciplines and collaborative interdisciplinary research projects, and further research into the reengagement of architecture with the discourses and policies regarding community, with a view to making qualitative guidelines for the development of liveability, sustainable living and communities.