

# CLIENT'S DECISIONS IN STRATEGIC BRIEFS AND THEIR IMPACT ON USER VALUES

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The public client has in the early phase of a cultural construction project an important role of managing the strategic brief and delivering economic value and social benefits to the stakeholders and end-users. The purpose of this paper is to analyse how the public client's decisions have an impact on the community and its citizens by studying the requirements formulated in the strategic brief. A case study of building Houses of Culture has been accomplished where the public client's decisions in the briefing process and end-users estimations of the building performance have been analysed in terms of means and ends. The public client's decisions, including the clients' entrepreneurial role of combining different cultural activities in one building, together with the communication between construction professionals in the strategic brief, has been crucial to the development of end-user values.

Keywords: briefing process, culture, decision, public client, user value.

## INTRODUCTION

Famous theatre buildings, opera houses, concert halls, libraries and other public and monumental buildings create values to the visitors and to the actors performing or working in the building. Today people still tend to value buildings in their environment according to the classical Vitruvian formulation of the building performance of architectural design in terms of "commodity, firmness and delight" as an expression of the desired properties of utility, durability and aesthetics in the final building (Courtney 2008). Spencer and Winch (2002) have expressed the components of value in terms of the way that the arrangements of space within the building support the functions and its impact on the surrounding urban area. In the meantime the construction client has to consider the organisational objectives and needs when making decisions about a construction project (Atkin and Flanagan 1995).

Short *et al.* (2007) argue that the design and construction of arts buildings have been considered to be both very different to other building types and uniquely complex due to exacting technical demands and accommodation of various and sometimes conflicting stakeholder needs. Construction clients in the performing arts sector tend to be highly focused on the delivery of their original vision. Designing and delivering buildings for arts clients appears also to require additional commitment from construction professionals. Giving form to a coherent "artistic vision" and translating the "vision" into a building design is thus a cumbersome matter. Good design has

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often been associated with expensive buildings and high project costs. This may however not be true. Discussions during the last several years (Egan 1998; Finch 2000; Spencer and Winch 2002; Saxon 2005) has shown how integrating design and construction delivers better value for money as well as better buildings, particularly when attention is paid to the full costs of a building over its whole lifetime.

A cultural construction project combined with the public client's vision and goals and end-users needs and desires creates a complex building project. The public clients' decisions including the rules for how the public client has managed to transform the requirements are of interest here. The purpose is to analyse how the public client's decisions have an impact on the community and its citizens. A case study of a house of culture has been accomplished by studying the end-users estimation of functionality and technical solutions related to the client's formulation of requirements in the strategic brief.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The context for the decision process in the early stage of the construction process is the briefing process. The aim with a briefing process is to define the operations demands and support the development of the business process. Briefing enables the communication of the end-users' needs and desires to the construction professionals (Spencer and Winch 2002). In managing a cultural construction project the client is responsible for the translation of the user's needs, expectations and desires into requirements and prerequisites for the construction project based on society's need for a sustainable built environment. Criteria for briefing, designing, and building new environments should be based on the evaluation of existing ones; however, these assessments are seldom done according to Preiser and Vischer (2005). In this section research within the field of briefing, client's role and decisions and values surrounding building will be discussed.

### **The brief**

Research on construction briefing and construction performance encompasses several theoretical and methodological approaches from a variety of disciplines and seems to agree with two fundamental and sometimes contradictory issues (Barrett and Stanley 1999, Blyth and Worthington 2001, Green *et al.* 1999, Koskela 2000).

On the one hand briefings seem to be developed irrespective of the design process and are based on prescriptive measures that in detail describe the context in which the design will be carried out, identifying the specifications to be met per the demands of the construction sectors (Peña and Parshall 2001, Cherry 1999, Bertelsen *et al.* 2002).

On the other hand, briefings are considered integrated if the process runs throughout a construction project. An integrated briefing process should address the requirements of the client and other relevant stakeholders by capturing, interpreting, confirming, and communicating relevant data and issues to the design and construction team (Blyth and Worthington 2001, Barrett and Stanley 1999, Ryd 2004).

### **The construction client**

Construction clients are the initiators of projects and those that contract with other parties for the supply of construction goods and services (Atkin and Flanagan 1995). In Sweden the definition of a construction client is formulated in the Swedish Planning and Building Act (PBL 1995) as "a party who carries out or assigns others to carry out construction, demolition or land work". The Swedish Construction Clients

Forum (2006) has expanded this definition to include the following: "The construction client is also responsible for interpreting and translating the user's needs, expectations and desires into requirements and prerequisites for the construction project based on society's need for a sustainable built environment."

The construction client is thus not just the person who pays for the construction, the client is the bridge between the 'stakeholders' - all the people who have an interest in the final output from the project, as users, owners, financiers, 'the public' etc – and the people who will design and construct it – the architects, engineers, contractors, suppliers etc., according to Courtney (2008).

### **The client's role and decisions**

The way construction clients' perceive their role will affect their decisions in the early stage of the building process (Courtney 2008). Briefly, the construction clients' can be divided into three main categories; the terms "user, manager and seller clients" are often used. A user client is a company, e.g. with a requirement for industrial or office space that uses buildings for purposes where great flexibility is necessary, but where ownership of the property is not required. The manager client is involved in a long-term operation, managing housing, office premises or various types of facilities. A seller client (or developer) has a business concept that involves selling off the property as soon as the construction is complete to another owner, e.g. a building society (Vennström 2008). Public construction clients' can be regarded as manager clients' whereby the main orientation is to develop facilities for public use, such as schools and libraries. Since the organisation that the client belongs to, creates the limits for how they think and proceed in the construction process, they relate their decisions in the construction process to their own organisations responsibility for the society (Vennström 2008).

The public construction client has an important role in the change and development of a community and society and thus a construction project can be seen as a national economic driver (Boyd and Chinyio 2006:2). The construction client needs to understand the entire quality chain covering all decisions and activities leading to customer satisfaction. This approach combines the "right project" (building, installation, function) with the "right process". "Right" meaning what the customer wants in every link in the chain. In managing the citizens' needs and desires, the public client has to take decisions about the citizens' opinions of how the municipality should invest the tax money and what kind of activities that are going to be performed in a new public building (Swedish Construction Clients Forum (2006). A cultural building project is thus also about the building itself.

### **The public culture building**

Building a house of culture has been a popular investment for Swedish municipalities during the last years (SKL 2008). A new trend in the construction of these buildings is that the design and production phases include the development of different spaces and functionalities for different cultural activities, i.e. for example a concert hall is combined with a library and an art gallery in the same building complex. The construction of a house of culture combined with the client's vision and goals and end-users' needs and desires creates a complex building project. Technology development in light, sound and new art performances puts pressure on the design and the technical solutions of new art, theatre and music halls. Even traditional art performances such as classical music performed by symphonic orchestras can today be experienced in halls created with specific acoustic solutions. The form and design

of the building is also of importance to the city and its citizens. The building may create a value in itself to the community. Icon buildings symbolise urban revival as well as create a trademark for the city or country (Jencks, 2005). However, it is impossible for a public client to satisfy all users and fulfil their requirements.

### **Stakeholders, strategic briefs and the client's means and ends**

End-users functional and technical requirements are today much more technically advanced, putting a new kind of pressure on the client, designer, developer and contractor in the different construction phases of a cultural construction project. The development and formulation of end-users requirements is in general an activity performed by the architect with focus on the users' activities within the building and the buildings expression in the public environment. When building a public cultural house, the challenge is not only in satisfying the users working in the building. There are also end-users visiting the building as well as there are citizens that may have other interests in the building. With different stakeholders' aims and goals the project performance and the building performance may be different. A successful construction project is per se not a successful building. On the other hand an overdrawn construction project may be a loved and useful building in the long run for its end-users.

According to Lindahl and Ryd (2007) the strategic brief involves the identification of the different stakeholders' aims and goals. All the players in the strategic part of the briefing process are responsible for adopting the operation's overall goals, developing them and realising them in the best possible way in the individual project. Olander (2007) discusses the impact of stakeholder influence on the construction project and according to Olander and Landin (2008) there is a natural tendency for stakeholder groups to try to influencing the implementation of construction projects in line with their individual concerns and needs. Stakeholders' aims and goals are thus important to identify.

Starting a construction project, the public construction client has a purpose or meaning with the building leading to a realised "end", i.e. the actual outcome of the adopted means may be quite different from the abstract end for which the means were adopted in the first place. Boyd and Chinyio (2006:77) argue that both means and ends connect to an organisational value system and that value today is not only identified with money in the industry, values are what clients and the industry use to make decisions and take actions. Values determine what we think of as good and bad and tend to have a bipolar character, i.e. every good value has an opposite bad value, which can change depending on circumstances. People and organisations determine their objectives on the basis of their values, search for suitable solutions, evaluate these solutions and finally make a choice (Boyd and Chinyio 2006:75-80). The Construction Clients' Group (2008) suggests that the best possible solution in terms of design, environmental performance and sustainable development is done by an integrated project team that collaborates together. An integrated perspective on construction briefings should create balanced and ongoing synergies between the construction sectors' production demands and the clients' and end-users' operational demands (Spencer and Winch 2002).

## **METHOD**

The method chosen in this study is based on the arguments of Yin (1994) that a case study with one or more cases and with different methods for data collection can be

theorised and generalised. The case House of Culture is selected by its different stakeholders, special functional design and conditions of combining different cultural activities and involving art professionals with different goals. Previous studies (for example Short *et al.* 2007) have discussed how arts clients require additional commitment from construction professionals. Building a house of culture is in this sense an interesting cultural construction project to study.

### Research design and data collection

The research design is based on an analytical research perspective (Miles and Huberman 1994). Data has been collected from a construction project, the House of Culture and project reports, the written brief, functional and technical documents and a survey to visitors of the building, Table 1.

*Table 1: Data collection*

Stakeholders	Semi-structured interviews	Secondary data
Investor/Initiator/ Developer	Municipal commissioner (Cmc080401) and	Feasibility study A 2002-08-15
Building owner	Cultural manager (Ccm070601,080117)	Feasibility study B May 2003
Construction client	Municipal employee (Cme070905)	Planning document 2003-12-22
Contractor	Head of project (Chp080117)	Project directive 2003-10-20
Designer	and Project leader (Cpl080220)	Written brief (Strategic brief) Programme 2003-12-22
The Swedish Construction Federation	Architect (DA081002)	
Citizens	Project leader in construction company (Cop080930)	
Municipal and cultural organisations	Architect (DA081002)	
Commercial organisations	CEO Region North (BI090330)	
Public opinion	Public (Eci, 2090330)	
Visitors	Cultural manager (Ecm080925)	
	Library manager (Elm081006)	
	Concert Hall manager (Echm081005)	
	Art Hall manager (Eam081015)	
	Tourist manager (Etm081022)	
	Business manager (Ebm081023)	
	Orchestra member (Epo070905)	
	Visitors (survey 449 respondents, one question analysed, but not statistical) (Evi0903)	

The interviews have been semi-structured (focus on the actor's roles and activities, min 1 hour with each respondent during 2007-2008), recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions have been edited and sorted in chronological order. From interviews and secondary data, activities during the construction project are described and identified together with stakeholders' valuation of the project, relations between actors and the actors' views of the building performance. A survey has been accomplished by visitors of the building. 449 surveys have been collected during seven different occasions and places in the building. In this paper the result from one question regarding visitor's opinion about the building has been used in the data analyses.

## **DATA ANALYSES - THE HOUSE OF CULTURE CASE**

A qualitative data analysis of the House of Culture case has been accomplished by using the model for values surrounding building, developed by Boyd and Chinyio (2006:80).

### **Analysing the values surrounding the House of Culture**

The results from interviews and analyses of the secondary data (feasibility studies, planning document, project directive and written brief) concerning the clients requirements and the consequences of building a House of Culture for society and citizens are summarised in Figure 1. In the figure the results have been related to the values surrounding the House of Culture. The ends are described in terms of known and rational clients' decisions and in terms of evaluation and coping of end-user values. The means are expressed in terms of clients requirements formulated in the briefing process.

### **Means - Clients requirements**

Based on the second feasibility study the municipal council decided to build a House of Culture, The client's arguments were based on the issues that a building combining the library, the hall of arts and a concert hall could create a new meeting place for the citizens in accordance with the culture policy of the municipality. However, the decision was not a fast upcoming idea. The decision was a result of a more than 50 year long discussion in the municipality, where special interest organisations argued for and against a new concert hall in the city. During this very long period, the public opinion was divided and the politicians did not come to any solution. In the end of the 90s the municipality got a new municipal commissioner with two main issues in his political programme; a) organising the infrastructure of public transportations in the city and b) giving the citizens a concert hall. However, the politicians had many tough discussions, based on the discrepancy between renovations of the library building and building a concert hall. The new municipal commissioner presented a new solution: building a House of Culture by combining the library, the hall of arts and the concert hall. The municipal council decided to build a House of Culture based on the idea from the new municipal commissioner. The budget for the investment was 320 MSEK which was decided in 2003 together with the formal political decision. This investment was based on calculations of costs for cultural activities already existing in the municipality and by adding the new activity, a concert hall to the project. After a new decision of also including the local music ensemble in the building, the public client invested 370 M SEK in the project.

### **Ends - Clients' decision in the briefing process**

In Figure 1, the clients' decisions in the briefing process has been analysed in the known rational dimension of the values surrounding the House of Culture. The activities performed in the briefing process, are based on the clients decisions regarding a) the feasibility studies, b) development of a strategic brief by relating the goals and aims with the construction project (regarding costs, time and architectural and building qualities including functional and technical solutions in space and room as well as an expansion area), with the municipalities cultural organisations goals and aims, c) the procurement decisions concerning an architectural competition and design-bid-build agreements, d) the integrated brief (by the "dream-team" where the designer "architect" and developer "client" together with the conductor and sub-contractors worked in some aspects with developing the clients requirements with

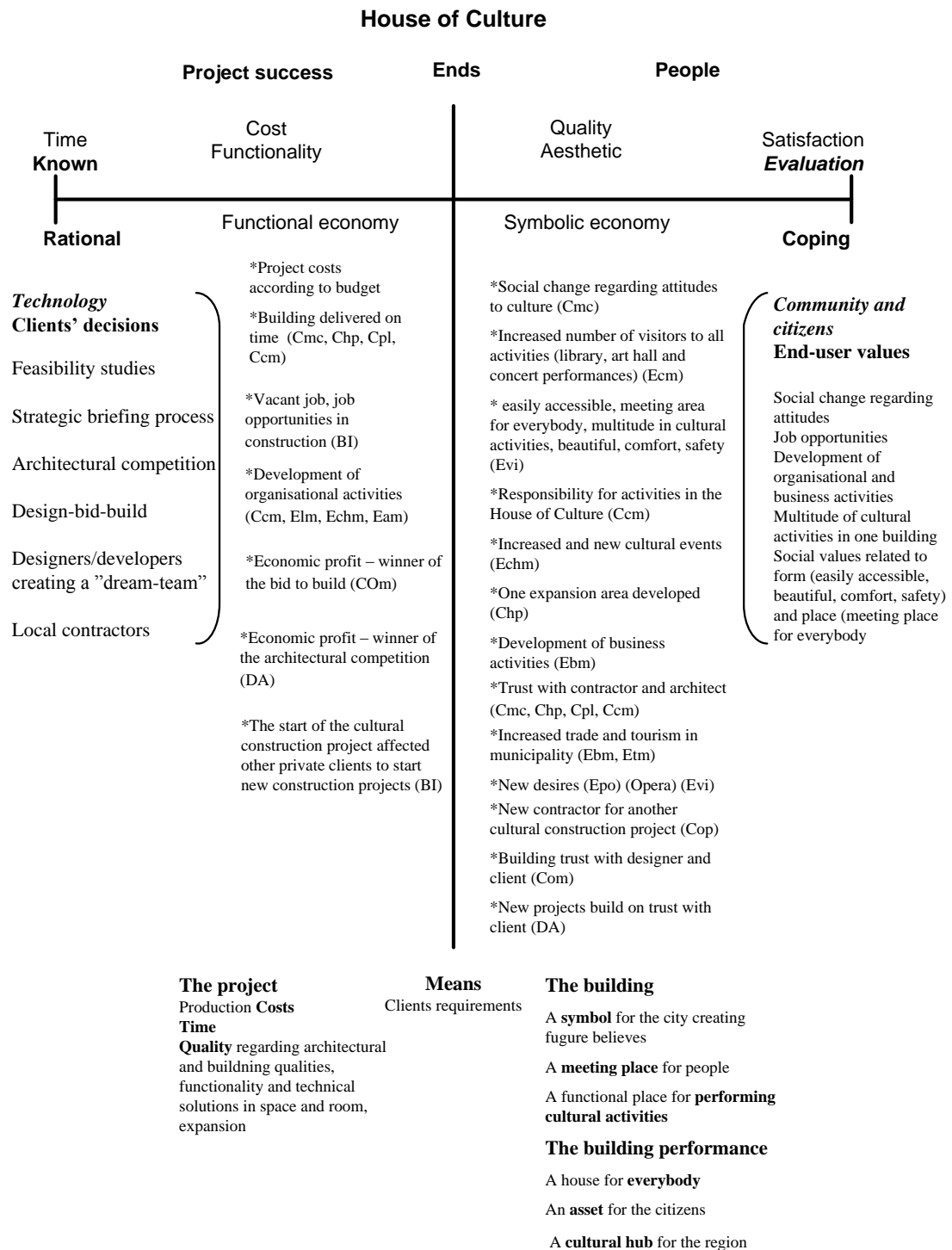


Figure 1: Values surrounding the House of Culture

focus on end-users needs and desires during the production phase and e) the relation between the actors and the stakeholders due to the engagement of the local contractor.

**Ends - End-user values**

In Figure 1, the impact on the community and citizens have been analysed in the evaluation and coping dimension of the values surrounding the House of Culture. The

end-user values have been categorised and estimated from interviews with representatives of the stakeholders regarding their valuation of the building in terms of value for the individual and value for the society as well as their evaluation of the building performance. The visitors positive opinions about the building have also been investigated (based on an open question about how the visitors value the building, i.e. What do you think is the best with the House of Culture?). The purpose of analysing the question about the positive aspects was just to identify the characters of the good values to be able to relate them to the clients' formulations in the written brief and the terms developed during the strategic briefing process. In the survey the "bad" values are also studied.

## **RESULTS**

The public client's decisions regarding the activities and cultural functions of the House of Culture made it possible to finance the construction project. Due to political interests in building, both as monumental and functional, the House of Cultural has generated positive effects in the community.

### **The public client**

The public client, the municipality, was the investor and developer of the project and is today also the owner and the facility manager of the building. The House of Culture has two concert halls, a public library and an art hall. These three cultural activities together with the Reception, Tourist information office and the Car parking are managed by the municipality. The municipality has also its administration for cultural activities, including conference management, within the building. The Restaurant and the Café are managed by private companies. The municipality has thus to manage different client roles and can be regarded as a manager client relating their decisions in the construction process to their own organisations responsibility for the society. The public client also acted as initiator of the building project, first by deciding and conducting the feasibility studies and then by the decision of starting the building project in 2003. Here the new municipal commissioner played an important, entrepreneurial client role.

### **The public client in the strategic briefing process**

The public client's role during the strategic briefing process has been important. Different people in the client's organisation have been involved with the development of the feasibility studies, taking political decisions and developing the project directives with requirements regarding cost, time and responsibilities. In the strategic brief the public client has formulated the overall vision and goals with the building and the end-users functional requirements. People from the artistic organisations have been involved, partly in the brief. The public clients' procurement decisions regarding the architectural competition made it possible for the architect to create a "dream-team" of consultants working together with the brief, design and planning of the project. The bid to build procurement decision engaged a contractor adept at developing new knowledge within the own construction organisation concerning technical solutions in the building of concert halls.

### **The public clients' decisions influencing end-user values**

The public client's decisions have had an impact on creating user value for the community in terms of social change in attitudes, in terms of economic value regarding new job opportunities, development of organisational and business activities and in multitude of cultural activities in one building and for the citizens in terms of



social values related to form (in terms of easily accessible, beautiful, comfort, safety) and location (place and space).

## CONCLUSIONS

The public client's decisions, including the clients' entrepreneurial role together with the communication between construction professionals in the strategic brief, has been crucial in the development of end-user values. The citizens have expressed that the House of Culture is easily accessible and creates a meeting area for everybody and that it is very positive with the variety of cultural activities in one and the same building. The building itself is characterised as beautiful, standing with an air of comfort and confidence by its end-users. The cultural organisations in the municipality have been given space for cultural activities.

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