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6.30-8pm

The Adventure Playground: Out of the Sandbox and Into the City by Sol Pérez-Martínez

KEYWORDS

Colin Ward, centres, architecture, urban, playgrounds, people, spaces, programmes, developed, environment, architects, adventure playground, civic engagement, practices, community, organisation, building, Britain

SPEAKERS

Sol Pérez-Martínez, Shannon Charlesworth

Shannon Charlesworth 00:03

Hello, and a very warm welcome to you all. My name is Shannon Charlesworth, and I'm the assistant curator here at live programmes at Nottingham Contemporary. We hope you and your families are well and enjoying the summer thusfar. Our curator of live programmes Canan Batur could not be here tonight due to illness and for that she extends her apologies. Tonight we welcome Sol Perez Martínez for her presentation titled Out of the Sandbox and into the City. This event will kickstart kickoff our The Adventure Playground: Architectures of Contemporary Play, which is a series of exploratory talks and propositions that investigates processes of play and imagination and their role in the built environments and the designed spaces of playgrounds in Britain. The Adventure Playground brings forward the architectural and political histories of playgrounds as dedicated spaces for children across contemporary cities, and centres on the idea of creating worlds. In this talk, Sol Pérez Martínez will explore how groups inspired by Ward's ideas help children and other marginalised groups make the city their playground during the 1970s. Sol will unpack how Ward writes about children's relationships to play spaces, to critique top down city planning, advocating instead for a broader engagement

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in urban change. Finally, the talk will uncover how these past practices are re-emerging in groups in Britain today. In terms of the running order for tonight's event, Sol's presentation will be followed by questions from yourselves in the audience. Please wait for the microphones to be given to you by one of our event assistants or myself before you pose your question. Some very brief introductions to our live programmes and housekeeping notes before I introduce our guests. Our live programmes open up different interventions and propositions within our curatorial research across the organisation. And this event expands on our current research strand Emergency and Emergence, a multi platform programme that looks into transdisciplinary, sensorial and speculative practices of radical sensemaking and wayfinding via questions of repair, pedagogy, redemption and mutation to investigate how to move from crisis to renewal, from emergency to emergence. Although we will keep an informal atmosphere throughout the evening, our talks, performances and screenings seek to create challenging environments where open mindfulness and respect for each other's approaches and perspectives can foster growth, so please be mindful and respectful of each other's opinions and views. We will keep an informal atmosphere throughout the evening. In the unlikely case of emergency, a member of our staff will guide you to the nearest fire exit. We'd like to use this opportunity to extend our thanks to our funders, the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University for generously and gratefully supporting today's event, as well as my colleagues, Canan Batur, Paul Buddle, John Chambers, Lachlan, John Leighton, Ethan and Catherine for making this event possible tonight. Lastly, with all events here at Nottingham Contemporary, today's talk is free to attend But all donations are genuinely greatly appreciated to help support the future free programmes. So without further delay, I'm very pleased to introduce Sol Pérez Martínez. Sol is an architect, researcher and educator. After receiving her architecture and master's degree from Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Sol ran an architectural practice where she and her firm partners developed projects for private clients and the Chilean government. Their last public building in 2014 was a school in the South of Chile, which inspired her research about architecture, education and public engagement. Since then, Sol has collaborated with teachers, artists and architects and community groups in public history projects, curating educational programmes,

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conferences and exhibitions to widen the public's involvement in architecture and the built environment. Sol has lectured at the Bartlett as a module leader for the MSC Learning Environments and at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile as part of the undergraduate architecture programme. She has also been invited to present her work internationally, including at the Whitechapel Gallery, Tate Exchange, Slough Museum, Urban Education Live, Folkestone Triennale, Central Saint Martins and Max Planck Institute. Sol has a PhD in architecture and education from the Bartlett and the Institute of Education at UCL, as well as a masters in Architectural History from the same university. In addition, Sol has received grants and fellowships in support of her research from the Chilean government, the Bartlett faculty of the built environment and the Canadian Centre for Architecture. Sol has participated as a consultant, critic and advisor in community groups and universities in Chile and the UK. Currently, she is a postdoctoral fellow at the Group Hultsch (gta-ETHZurich) in the project 'Women Writing Architecture'. Her postdoctoral research focuses on the experiences of Latin American women writing about architecture and the built environment. So without further ado, I'd like to give the floor to the floor to Sol. And many thanks again for joining our event and community tonight. Thank you.

Sol Pérez-Martínez 05:46

Thank you. Good evening, everyone. Thank you Canan, Shannon and Nottingham Contemporary team for the invitation to be part of this series of lectures. I am delighted to be here tonight. Today, I want to share with you some highlights of the research I have done in Britain during the last six years, following the projects and ideas connected to the British radical thinker Colin Ward. Ward is an author that has been overlooked in recent architectural and educational histories, being more of a cult underground figure, rather than a main figure in architecture and educational environments. However, I believe it is important to look at this work again today, because he advocated and proposed ideas for people from all ages and especially children to become involved in architecture and urban change as a way of making environments more diverse and inclusive. Almost 50 years later, we're still struggling to create diverse and inclusive environments. So instead of starting from scratch, I believe we can learn from Ward and the broad network of

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collaborators he inspired to help us all, all of us, to climb out of the sandbox and into the city. To start, let me introduce Ward - Ward was born in Essex, England, and left school at the age of 15. eager to learn by doing and disappointed by the school system. Even though this decision was frustrating for his parents who were both involved in education, it led young Ward to a series of work opportunities in engineering and architecture offices that will be fundamental for his thinking. So first important fact about Ward is that he comes from an education, a family of educators. A second fact is that he worked as an architect, but never trained as one in an architecture school. Ward learned about architecture through mentors, and on his own through practice and interest. A third fact about Ward is his radical connections. While drafted during the Second World War in Glasgow, he heard radical speakers in the Glasgow square protesting against the war, and as a result got involved in dissenting and anarchist circles, reading and then writing for radical newspapers. These three facts represent Ward's main interests, combining education, architecture, and radical ideas. After the war, Ward developed further his love and criticism of architecture and the built environment while working for 15 years in architecture practices as a draughtsman, a senior architectural assistant and as a researcher. During the 1950s and 1960s, Ward worked for well known architects like Gabi Epstein and Peter Shephard, both presidents of the AA and RIBA. With Epstein and Shephard, Ward developed the designs of multiple schools in Britain, which expanded his interest in the connections between education and the built environment that would help later his thinking. But parallel to his work designing schools, drawing details, and developing buildings, in his spare time, Ward was editing and writing for Freedom, a long standing anarchist newspaper. It is important to mention that Ward's form of anarchy is not with a capital A, but with a lowercase a, often described as a soft or social anarchist. Ward believed in mutual aid, federation and autonomy, as well as in the power of communities to self organise and care for each other, without the need of the state or any other form of control. He was not a bomb thrower, or an advocator of a utopic world. Instead, he saw anarchy in simple everyday gestures of kindness amongst citizens. To spread further this anarchist ideas, in 1961, he founded and edited the monthly journal anarchy, where he published regularly about forms of anarchy in action, which were part of everyday life. One of his preferred examples

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was the adventure playground, the name of this series. In 1961, Ward writes that adventure playgrounds are a parable of this kind of anarchy, an experimental verification of an anarchist social approach. In his article, Ward makes us notice that the playground is only a modern invention as a response for high density, urban living, and fast moving traffic. The authoritative solution for playgrounds, Ward explains, was to provide a tarmac surface with metal slides and swings that provides a limited and defined type of fun. As you can see in the picture, this type of playground can only be used in one way and provide almost no opportunity for fantasies or creativity or skill development. In the same way, older children are encouraged to join team games and are seen as a danger if they are not engaging in predefined activities. It is no wonder, Ward points out, that children soon get bored of these limited play options and find more interesting activities in the street, the building side, the bomb site, or derelict building for example. If children in the countryside are left to their own devices, Ward notes that they naturally build dens, create nooks and make space with wherever they can find, engaging in spontaneous play - something that we see almost every day if you go to a park nearby. But what happens to the children that live in the city, Ward asks. In 1943, the Copenhagen workers cooperative housing association created empty playground after the landscape architect Sørensen observed that children prefer to play with materials stolen from the building site, rather than play on the playgrounds that he designed for them. Sørensen provided children with space, raw materials, tools and a friendly guide, who assisted them in their endeavours. Its success depicted in this photograph made the idea of the adventure or junk playground disseminate quickly around the world, and by 1961, there were at least a dozen popup adventure playgrounds in the UK. The adventure playground, even though objected as ugly, dangerous or difficult to maintain, offered children opportunities to do and undo according to their imagination and desires, resolving conflict and managing risk. For Ward, the adventure playground allowed children to develop their individuality and exercise their skills for voluntary association, with no pre established forms or rules, full of temporal structures and groups to respond to spontaneous play. Ward says the adventure playground is a free society in miniature with the same tensions and ever changing harmonies, the same diversity and spontaneity, the same unforced growth of cooperation and release of

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individual qualities and communal sense which lie dormant in society devoted to competition and acquisitiveness. Ward while working in architecture firm observed that architecture professionals did not allow for people to make the environment theirs and hoped the whole city shared the principles of the adventure playground. In his search to find ways to encourage people to take ownership of their local environment, he left his job in architecture, and went on to study and work as a further education teacher for a year. This combination of teaching, architecture and publishing gave way to an array of publications which encourage the involvement of people in the built environment. 6 years ago, I had never heard of Colin Ward. And I don't know how many of you have heard of Colin Ward before this moment. But when I started looking for initiatives to widen participation in architecture and the built environment, I found this book, Ward's seminal book, *The Child in the City*. In this book, Ward returns to the adventure playground among other spaces used by children and seeks to explore the relationship between the child and the urban environment and tries to uncover and explore how this relationship can be more productive and positive. Ward argues that we should prepare children to become masters of their own environment using the city and the local area as a resource for learning, as a preparation to a more direct form of democracy. In the chapter that gives this talk this title, Ward explores how different playground designs reflect different approaches to city making, and social relations between the state and the citizens. For Ward, citizens in post war Britain were treated like the children in the sandbox which you see here in the photograph, they were given a defined area by adults, where they were kept busy away from adult issues. If children fight or get bored, more toys and sand are delivered inside the sandbox. This analogy seeks to highlight how authorities and professionals kept citizens away from decision making, given them little options deciding about the environment around them. Returning to the parable of the adventure playground, Ward wanted citizens to have decision making power and to effect direct change where people live, work and play. For Ward, cities and urban areas during the 1970s were not responding to the needs of a diverse set of people since their development was controlled by professional groups that represented a very small segment of society. Ward encouraged others to create educational initiatives to bring people closer to the environment around them, getting them involved

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and hopefully encouraging them to feel that the environment is also theirs, starting first with children. In the rest of this talk today, I will briefly explore three initiatives that Ward supported and advocated for helping children and adults climb out of the sandbox and into the city. So first, you might wonder how does a Chilean architect ends up following Ward and researching about British initiatives for civic engagement. It all started in this patio almost 20 years ago in a Chilean architecture school protected from the city outside and secluded from real life problems. Critical the disconnection between architecture and education and the lives of most Chileans. In 2009, with a couple of friends, we set up an architecture firm, eager to learn by doing. After our first year in practice, Chile was struck by one of the biggest recorded earthquakes in history. As a young firm interested in the public realm, we wanted to get involved in the reconstruction of the public buildings destroyed in this earthquake. We were lucky to win a couple of public competitions and had the opportunity to build a town hall and a school in the South of Chile. However, during the development of this buildings, there were two problems that made me feel uncomfortable. First, my gender was a problem in all men teams, which highlighted the limited set of actors involved in the construction of cities in Chile. And secondly, I felt uncomfortable developing public projects where communities didn't fully participate, and there were strong power asymmetries. Us architects coming from the capital to design a school for a community more than 10 hours away from our office. The consultation meeting for the design of this school in the image in the South of Chile changed my career path. The meeting posed three issues. First, my lack of preparation to facilitate this meeting and a participatory design process. Secondly, the limited interests of the government officials to hear what the attendees wanted to say and integrate their views in the design. And thirdly, the awkwardness of those invited to participate in the design process. When asked their opinion about the design of the school, some people said you decide you are the expert. However, I was not from their town and didn't have the knowledge or their educational community. This meeting and the problems it revealed prompted my research about civic engagement and architecture and the built environment. Meanwhile, we were designing public projects with our firm in other parts of Chile, heritage protected towns were destroyed by an unscrupulous development. Vertical ghettos were built for profit

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with no services and little connection to a local urban area. And questionable private developments were popping in multiple locations around the country. All these concrete constructions are here to stay. The damage is done. So I wondered what can we do to make it stop before it happens again? My experience as an architect showed me that every building takes many years to be completed. Architecture on its own was too slow to affect change. My hunch was that only large groups of active citizens could change these questionable building practices, but how can we organise to act collectively? Of course, these problems are not only local to Chile or South America. Here in the UK, we confront similar problems that are regularly in the news. Like Liverpool losing its UNESCO World Heritage status because of new development, or the debate around the tunnel surrounding Stonehenge, as well as the housing crisis in London and other parts of the UK, an ongoing issue since after the World War. So how can we be part of the solution and have a say in urban change? Long story short in 2013, I came to the UK to look for new practices to engage citizens in architecture and the built environment. I argue that without the input of citizens and a diverse workforce in the built environment professions, urban areas will not represent the diverse population that live in our countries with their different needs depending on their age, gender, race, health, etc. Here civic engagement and urban change is understood as a wide set of activities that citizens can do to better their local environment. Civic engagement generally are the actions we do to improve our communities that go beyond voting, including youth participation, political institutions, community organisations and volunteering. The question that drives my research is how to increase civic engagement in architecture and urban change. As a historian I decided to look back and search for past initiatives to learn from their experiences. Luckily, I found a long tradition of civic engagement in Britain that has been overlooked in recent architectural and educational histories. During the last six years, I have collected archival documents and testimonies about the urban study centres network, a group of organisations that brought together architects, planners, geographers, artists and teachers during more than 20 years to engage citizens with a local environment. With almost 40 centres spread around towns and cities in Britain, it seems rather surprising that this experience has remained untold by recent histories. However, even though the urban study

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centres have been considered a minor project by historical narratives until now, this experience is significant again today when new groups are trying to revive similar methods of engagement. But before delving in their histories, I would like to set the scene for the people in the audience who are not familiar with a British context. After years of shortages and difficulties due to the war, the 1960s was a decade characterised by economic prosperity and affluence thanks to the post war recovery and full employment. However, the changes of Britain's global position in the economic market and the decline of the Empire were two problems that were simmering underneath the surface, and that will unleash a crisis in the following decade. Furthermore, wartime destruction put heavy restraint in cities generating housing shortages for decades. Planning doctrines became problematic when slum clearance and the destruction of established communities were replaced by high rise public housing and motorways. While officials felt positive about their housing programmes, discontent was rising among residents who had to deal with waiting lists, displacement and the perils of high rise blocks. Planning proposals were increasingly confronted by public rejection, making the residents opinions almost unavoidable. The repetition of the situation gained the government's attention and gave way to discussions about participation and the effective planning of the environment. The demonstrations against redevelopment made clear that citizens were engaged with their local built environment, but the government didn't know how to transfer this interest into the planning or design process. As a result, in 1968 Arthur Skeffington was asked to lead a commission to tackle the best way of securing public participation. A year later, the Skeffington report was delivered to offer local authority methods to inform and include people's views in their projects. Following the report, community consultation became a required step in the planning process in Britain. As Dennis Hardy explains, planning committees were unable to openly dismiss people's opposition anymore. However, John Keen argues that tokenism and failed participation exercise led many think that participation was simply not enough, and that education was a necessary prerequisite. The effect of the report was twofold. Firstly, several planning departments hire professionals to mediate planning proposals. And secondly, it made an argument for organisations related to the built environment to develop their own educational proposals. The most influential organisation in

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this respect was the Town and Country Planning Association. During the 1970s, the TCPA set up planning aids and an educational unit that led the debate with innovative experiments. This was possible to a great degree thanks to the leadership and advocacy of its educational officer, Colin Ward. For Ward, engagement with the built environment was important not only for its static dimension, but also because it encoded power relations in a visible form. As I explained before, Ward combined education and built environment knowhow with a radical publishing background. Together with his deputy officer, planner, geographer and teacher, Tony Ferguson, they disseminated the ideas of the TCPA education unit through newspapers, journals, lectures and their book *Streetwork: an exploding school*. The team was later completed with Eileen Adams, an art teacher who developed a pioneering programme in schools in collaboration with council architects. The TCPA education unit had three aims: first to publish a magazine called *The bulletin of environmental education* or BEE. Second to promote urban trails for learning, and third to advocate for the creation of urban city centres in towns and cities in Britain. Urban city centres were local, independent organisations that provided resources and meeting space for communities and especially young people to become aware, skilled and take action over the local built environment. They were developed based on the idea that only citizens with environmental literacy would be able to participate meaningfully in the construction of their surroundings. To set up a centre, the TCPA encouraged the use of derelict buildings in city centres and abandoned during the crisis, like for example churches or high street shops. The centres could suit the following purposes, a learning base for visiting local schools, a teaching resource centre where teachers interested in environmental education from different schools and subjects could gather and discuss their ideas, a visitor centre, a connector between people and planners as a space for planning consultation, a venue for community forum, an archive for urban resources and finally and more importantly, a catalyst for urban change. The pedagogical activities used in the centres used the local environment as a primary resource and were based on interdisciplinary collaboration between environmental professionals like architects, planners or geographers and educators. Through the Urban Studies Centre, Ward advocated for issue based learning and place based methods, which gave an active role to the learner and consider learning

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as a situated practice. To support the creation of USCs, Ward and Ferguson established the Council for Urban Studies centres to connect academics, politicians and professionals in the creation of centres around the country. Between 32 members were MPs, professors, advisors and trustees. By 1980, there were 31 centres established across the UK and many were in the making. The lack of a defined framework and an overarching institution made the centres vary in structure, scale activities and funding depending on their context. The centres worked as a flexible archive of resources to explore the urban environment. Therefore it depended of the material available in its locality and the group of people involved in it. But more importantly, the centres responded to a popular unrest related to urban problems as a result of decades of top down planning. They had the double function of integrating citizens in the building process, while at the same time made professionals aware of the relevance of hearing people's needs. So now that I've introduced a little bit of Colin Ward and also the context of the urban study centres, I would like to show you now two examples of urban study centres in London and their practices. In the bottom right corner, you can see the Notting Dale Urban Study Centre in West London. Chris Webb, a historian and teacher became director of the first Urban Studies Centre in December 1974. In order to engage with the students, Webb used active learning, learning by doing and collaborative problem solving - all methods that were advocated by Colin Ward in his magazine, the Bulletin of Environmental Education. The centre included three large working rooms, two large dormitories for 16 students and accommodation for the teachers. Also a dark room and a wet room to process photographs, and media room with a state of the art printing machine, a large communal kitchen and administration facilities. The equipment that was available for use to anyone who visited the centre included recorders, cameras, projectors, and other tools not normally accessible for schools or local community groups. The learning experience was described as I quote, autonomous, collaborative and self generating with no right or wrong answers, but a range of beliefs and opinions close quote. The center's ethos was I quote again, a fluid and flexible learning context within which students and adults generate much of the information and opinion on the area themselves, end quote. It was set as an enabling place where the possibilities of participation were meant to be experienced. The city was

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a resource and the question asked Where, what is it, how it works and why? The process would help students realise that architecture and urban fabric is malleable and not God given. Also the centre was a community forum and groups like the Tenant Association held meetings and exhibition in their spaces. It was a teacher resource centre where teachers could try new pedagogical methods with help of the team in charge. But more importantly, the centre was an archive of material about the urban environment available for everyone to use and explore. An example of the centre's achievement was a self built community centre that sprung out of an urban trial and a research project done by local kids of a council estate that is still available today so you can still visit it today. Not far from Notting Dale urban city centre and also in West London is the second case that I would like to show you today - the Hammersmith and Fulham urban Study Centre. Planner Anne Armstrong set up the Hammersmith and Fulham urban city centre as an extension of the planning department of the council as an organisation in charge of connecting with local schools and community groups. Connected as well to the TCPA and trained by the team at the Notting Dale, Armstrong hired and trained staff and then developed an independent organisation supported by governmental funding. Teacher and planning Lynn Dixon was the center's first director and was actively involved in the learning activities here in the photo doing a local urban trail with young people. The centre offered advice, resources and a teaching base for all ages, as well as a chance to investigate local issues and to take a critical look at the borough. To disseminate their ideas with local schools and neighbours, they created a newsletter called Roundabout which was available to all local teachers in the borough with examples of activities and news about the built environment in the area. Their most successful activity was a plan away day, a day of activities hosted by the Urban Studies Centre in collaboration with local teachers, schools and the town council planners to involve children in the planning process and develop their skills in the appraisal of the built environment. These are only two centres of almost 40 centres across the UK. Alongside the urban study centres there were multiple community initiatives that shared similar aims. Like the planning aid centres, the street action centres, the Community Technical aid centres, among others. All the centres engaged with a local area in their own way and focused on different areas. However, the network meetings and

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publications allow them to share their experiences and learn from each other, and so therefore were fundamental to their work. Interesting, interestingly enough, throughout my research, I learned that these ideas were not new. Colin Ward acknowledge that the biologist and planner Patrick Geddes had already created a prototype for the urban city centre almost 80 years before him. In 1892, Geddes developed the outlook tower in Edinburgh to connect the citizen with its surroundings. The building was organised as a civic observatory where people could first see the local environment from a new point of view. Geddes insisted in the relation between the young humans and the environment, because he believed that understanding and sympathy of their environment will lead to awareness, value and potential improvement of it. I want to stop a little bit in this drawing because it's a really interesting organisation of the building. So the idea that Geddes had with the outlook tower, was that you access in the door that you can see there in the bottom the first floor, and then you would go through the staircase all the way up to the very top of the building quite quickly, you will get quite tired because there were a few floors and a little bit dizzy, you would arrive upstairs to the little hut that you see there, which was a camera obscura, which was a device, it was still a very novel device, and if you haven't experienced it yet, I would definitely recommend you to visit it because it's quite an incredible mechanical device where you can see the city in a wooden dish. And this device was developed during the 19th century. So you'd see the city like if you were looking at it with a camera from up the top but into this wooden plate. And then after that, you will go each floor will expand your view of the city so you will look at first at Edinburgh and then you will look at Scotland and then you will look at English speaking countries and then finally in the world. So in a way each of the floor was designed by Geddes helped you understand the city from a different perspective. And it's quite an interesting way of organising and curating content in a building. Geddes insisted in the, I think I said that already, oh no, Geddes insisted in the relation between the young humans and the environment because he believed an understanding and sympathy of their environment would lead to awarness value and potential improvement of it. And here we can see Patrick Geddes himself doing an urban trail with a group of local children nearby the outlook tower. So as you can see, this practice goes walk all the way to the end of the 1800s. The aim of the tower was to deliver a more effective and affective kind of

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learning that encouraged the citizens to be active and involved in the construction of their environment. This room that you see here in the photograph, equipped with a 3D model of Edinburgh, representations of the local area and tables with chairs and pencils to discuss future projects of the city was a visionary proposal ahead of its time, and many cities would be lucky to have a room like this with so much information about the local area. And it's something that even today, it is something that we can see in new practices. These ideas as well continue today, and this is something that I would like to show throughout my presentation. So there's three different historical moments all connected to this practices of engaging citizens in architecture and the built environment. The Urban Studies centres and the outlook tower show that there is a long tradition of civic engagement in local areas in Britain that has been scarcely explored. During the last five years, it has been a quick increase of similar initiatives resurging in Britain and beyond. To conclude, I want to show you a few contemporary examples that I think connect to this long tradition of civic engagement in Britain. First is the urban rooms network that seek to engage people in the past, present and future of their local area. Initially, an idea proposed in the Farrell review, in 2013. This idea was taken over by local groups that organised to develop these kinds of spaces where people again could learn about their local area. At the moment, there are at least 10 urban rooms peppered around Britain and a healthy network that meets regularly to share their experiences and learn from each other. Also, at the moment, the group is developing an urban room toolkit, so for anyone in the audience interested in setting up an urban room, you will be able to access a manual and a toolkit to help you set the spaces with the different practices that can help you develop the civic engagement between wider population and architecture and urban change. A different approach is the one developed by artist Verity Jane Keefe, who has long term engagement with different local communities to develop her art projects. In the image is her Mobile Museum that collected information publication and objects from a local council state. And another model that has survived is Bristol architecture centre, now called Design West, which still offers activities for young people to shape their cities, and also professionals promoting a lifelong learning approach to architecture and the built environment, An award winning urban room is the one developed by Croydon's Council planning team to

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reach out to their citizens and discuss local plans. As you see here, they have foldable and mobile structures that now they're setting in a new location to continue with their project in the next phase. In a different line, interdisciplinary practice Public Works has developed the idea of the school for civic action, as a way of preparing whoever is interested in how to affect change in the local area. As part of the programme they have a public programme that you see here at Tate Exchange and which I was lucky to participate as well, with some colleagues from the Bartlett School of Architecture. Lansbury micro-museum is a very small shop in a Council State to exhibit the estate's history from multiple perspectives, with the support as well from the V&A team. And last, but not least, is Live Works Sheffield, an urban room which pioneered a mixed model where Sheffield University funds this community space as part of their public engagement strategy. This funding allows the architecture school to run live projects or projects where students actively get involved and help local community to solve issues. So throughout this talk, I've been talking about different strategies of how do we help others climb out of the sandbox and into the city using this analogy of Colin Ward. I also want to show how as part of my research, I tried some of these past methods collaborating with local schools in London and in Chile. So I managed to combine historical research with practice led projects as well. In the image is co-creating an urban archive, a project we did with the teachers and young people of a school in Stratford to help students represent their views of their neighbourhood. In the workshops, we used historical material and activities by Ward in the 1970s as a starting point, like this building impact score sheet, or the exercise that you see in the back about The Good, the Bad, and The Ugly, which is really interesting, because we had very different views with the students of what was good, what was bad and what was ugly, which of course encouraged a really rich conversation discussion of their interests in the city. We also explored the local area giving each student an analogue camera. But funnily enough, they had no idea how to use because they're only used to phone. So it's interesting how that new tool helped us explore the city in a different way. And here you see one of the beautiful pictures of one of the students portraying their local area. Throughout the process, the teachers were equipped with new skills and became interested in environmental issues as a tool for teaching. And I think that that was the

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most successful part of the project, that it was the collaboration between the teacher and myself as the built environment professionals to learn how to collaborate, to learn how to set these activities, and to deliver them in the classroom. The students throughout the project developed guides, posters and collected objects to represent to their communities, their views of their neighbourhood. Another project that we did as well with local schools was in Chile, where we founded a charity called Aula Abierta, which means open classroom inspired in the work as well of the urban city centres. Well, Aula Abierta means open classroom in Spanish, just to be clear. We deliver with them workshops about architecture, nature and citizenship for teenagers and communities through place based education, and collaboration with artists, architects, and researchers. We worked with different methods of looking at the environment, methods of construction that you see here, mud construction, different methods of drawing, of using tools to represent their reality. And also interestingly enough, this workshop was really successful of collaborating with architects that work with wood, giving the students the tools and the raw material for them to develop their own stool, where you can see them here proudly showing their their work in this also in this beautiful image of their different creations that were just developed out of their own creativity. So well, this research is an attempt to map this forms of civic engagement, so we can learn from the past and avoid trying to reinvent the wheel again. So I guess I leave you with a question, how do you can help others climb out of the sandbox and into the city? Thank you for listening.

Shannon Charlesworth 43:02

I'd like to say thank you again, for Sol for such a rich and very interesting presentation. We're now at the part in the talk where we'd like to open up the questions from the audience. If anyone has a question if you'd just like to raise your hand, and if you'd patiently wait for either myself, or Lachlan to bring you a mic, that will be very appreciated. Does anyone have any questions that they'd like to ask? I myself would like to ask, considering the changes that have come in into primary and secondary education curriculums, what would you like to see the government doing in terms of moving towards creating environments and spaces which are more like Ward's ideas of adventure playgrounds?

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Sol Pérez-Martínez 43:47

Thank you for your question. It's a difficult question as well, because I guess that what we're looking at here in the 1970s, it was a completely different educational system, and also a different approach in the relation between educators and external people to schools. With the students today we have health and safety, DBS checks, and all kinds of things that, you know, we make more difficult, that interaction of external people from the schools in relation to the school students. So there's something there that we certainly need to look at if we want to re-engage with this activities. But I do think that there's something about the working parties. There's something I didn't mention in during the talk. But throughout the process of the urban city centres, the group's developed working parties where built environment professionals and teachers got together to just share experiences and share ways of practicing. And I think that that was incredibly helpful. And I think that that would be very easy to implement again today. Sometimes it's harder to get people into the school system, but maybe offering teachers exposure to different ways of learning and different ways of doing could be a way forward. Another I think another response to that will be taking something similar to the Farrell review. Instead, like in the idea of encouraging civic champions, or people who are built environment professionals, that can lead those activities or learning, and how we can encourage that throughout architecture school or planning school, for them to get involved in civic engagement aspects of their professional practice. So I think that those two things, I think that they're important, but I think that I'm not answering your question, because I think this is very complex, to change the educational system, how it is at the moment, since it's very tied to the curriculum.

Audience member 45:43

Thanks it was great your talk, I really, really enjoyed listening to and what it made me think about in terms of Colin Ward, I build adventure play equipment, that's my sort of, it's not my day job, but it's one of my jobs. And the thing that, that I sort of think about when I read Ward, is the anarchy of children's imaginations. I think that kind of he takes you back not to being a child, but just the power of childhood imagination of what could be, like what the city could be, or what life could be. I wondered if you had any ideas about this idea of liberation of dreams and the

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potential that is held in Ward's writing?

Sol Pérez-Martínez 46:24

Yeah, thank you for your question. I think that like if I'm my try to find this, yes, here and this, I think that this book, Utopia by Colin Ward is something that will be very interesting to respond to your question, because while he was developing, tenants take over, at the same time, he wrote Utopia, a book for secondary students, which was all about trying to look at utopia, not as the distant revolutionary reality, but a utopia in the present. So how we can find pockets of anarchy, as Cathy Burke says, instead of looking at a utopia that is far away, and I think that that's something that I also appreciate a lot about Ward and his approach of social anarchy, that it's not about a revolutionary future, it's about liberation and freedom in the present. And I think that children in a way are really good at embracing that freedom, especially when you give them space to do it. And I think that that's why the adventure playground is such a fantastic space for children to engage in that free interaction with space. Thank you.

Audience member 47:41

I really enjoyed your your talk, and it was great to see all the links you made across also back to Edinburgh, which was great. I, one of the things which I thought about Colin Ward and adventure playgrounds and, also it's interesting that you mentioned about Chile was that both the Second World War produced the spaces, which existed in the city, which were like spaces without an agenda. To a certain extent, they were sort of not designated in any way. And I imagine that equally the architecture destroyed by the earthquake in Chile would again almost clear the mind or clear the space and enable new thinking to be done about how a space could be available. And given that space is now all land has become this enormously valuable basis for the whole sort of economy. And land has become contested, then trying to open up the kinds of spaces that Colin Ward talks about, those spaces without agenda is quite a difficult, a difficult task, and probably needs some kind of legislative process or some kind of rescue process to save these spaces, in order that they can actually have the freedom to go where the children want them to go.

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Sol Pérez-Martínez 49:24

Absolutely. I think that that's a really good point and really nice way of connecting the work of Ward and what I was talking about Chile, that this is the cycle of destruction and reconstruction. And I think that like in our context, in the Chilean context is always opportunities to do things differently. Because unfortunately, so many buildings just disappear. And you have to think again about how you want to use that land. But even though I think that it's more difficult today to find those bombed sites, for example, that were ideal places for play, or free spaces as you say, we do have the death of the High Street as a real problem today, and I think that that's opening up again, a similar opportunity than the 1970s of, for example, derelict churches, that people didn't know what to do with them. And we have now the problem of high streets and that is, again, a problem and an opportunity, but as you say, is who is in control of those lands. So it will be interesting to explore that further, and see what are the really the spaces that for example councils operate now that can be room for opportunity for develop new projects. But yes, thank you for your comment, it's a really good comment.

Audience member 50:41

Sorry, the centre of Nottingham now looks like a bomb site, and the council is debating what to do with it.

Sol Pérez-Martínez 50:48

And then it will be interesting to know how is the council integrating the views of their citizens? And what are the practices that they're using to do to make that happen? Because as one of the interviewees of my research project said, now we see developers using very similar strategies of doing models and doing 3D views and walks around places, but for completely different aims. So it will be interesting to see what are the practices they're using. And also there's an opportunity, an opportunity to get involved and an opportunity to also for practitioners involved with a built environment to do, to take this activities forward and try them again.

Audience member 51:40

Thank you for a great presentation. Can I have two questions?

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Sol Pérez-Martínez 51:44
Of course.

Audience member 51:46

So it is maybe a statement you will disagree, but it seems like adventure playgrounds are a thing of the past. Even those progressive one that still exist in Copenhagen, they are still more of a museum pieces than active playground. Hence the question, what do you see as an equivalent of this adventure playgrounds today? And the second question, you said that your leading question in your research was how to increase civic engagement in architecture and urban design. You've shown us some examples of what's happening urban rooms and so on. Is there anything else we could do to increase civic engagement that doesn't exist yet?

Sol Pérez-Martínez 52:37

Thank you. Thank you for your question. I am not an expert in playgrounds. So I lift my hand to that I am. There's an expert in playgrounds. I think that like you need you need microphones.

Audience member 52:52

There's about 135 left in the UK, or in areas of urban deprivation, still doing exactly the same sorts of things that they've been doing since 1947. But the funding is getting difficult. The training for play stuff is getting difficult, but I'd say all 130 still follow the the rules, not the rules, the kind of ideas of adventure play in terms of free play. There's an annual conference. So it's still alive, but I think since 2011, it's gone down from about 350. So there's been a kind of culling and very few are now funded by local authorities. So you kind of in difficulty, but I think kind of my my heckles rose them slightly, because I think they're not gone. They're not the thing of the past. I don't know about Europe. But yeah, sorry.

Sol Pérez-Martínez 53:50

Yeah, thank you. Yeah. And I was going to say like my experience locally, in Hackney, I visited multiple adventure playgrounds and children still love them. And they're very popular and they're very well protected by the community. And I think that is, is a really good point that now that the Colin Ward centenary is coming in a couple of years, maybe

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it's an excellent opportunity to do some fundraising for the existing adventure playgrounds, something that maybe we should explore, to help them. And in terms of your second question of how we can increase civic engagement in architecture. For me, I guess, the throughout my research, which is probably this, just a little section of it. I think that, for me, the most important thing would be to address architectural education and change architectural education. Because I do think that it's this disconnection of architects with local communities that is really problematic, and appeared over and over again, throughout my interviews and throughout my research, as I complained, so I do think that if we want to increase civic engagement, it's not about others, learning more about architecture, it's about architects learning more about others. And I think that that, for me will be the core of what we need to do. And there's plenty of possibilities there to explore, to change architectural education. But yeah, that's my view.

Shannon Charlesworth 55:25

I think I'd like to make a comment as well, going back to the gentleman's contribution. My primary school was demolished in 2006, I believe, because we had a new building built. And I drove past it the other day, when I went home and still today, the land has just been left by the Council, the trees are overgrown, they've never done anything with it. They've, there's, it's just empty. And to me, it's, it's very sad when I drive past because that was my playground as a child. I'm only 22. So it wasn't very many years ago. And just to see my home and local area, a place which was a playground just be completely overgrown. It's a very sad thing to see day to day.

Sol Pérez-Martínez 56:06

Yeah, thank you, thank you for for your comment, I think that these are the observations that can really make change happen. Because the problem sometimes is that we see and observe this kind of things, and we want them to change, but we just don't know how to get there. And I think it's difficult, it's difficult to organise. And I think that what is so special about urban study centres is that help people get together discuss these issues. Like if there was a place, for example, Nottingham urban room, for example. It's something that you can pin on the wall and say like, oh, by the way, I think that this is very sad. If someone else

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wants to change this or make something happen, please contact me. And then you can start a conversation, maybe it won't arrive to anything else, but it maybe can arrive to another outcome that will be beneficial for the community. So I think that it's about how we share those observations with others who are also interested, and other people have the tools to help us deliver change. And I think that's why the deposition of urban study centres is still, for me very relevant and contemporary today, because we all have those kinds of issues. You know,

Shannon Charlesworth 57:12

I'd like to ask as well, if you have any further examples of any methodologies or adventure playgrounds, if you know any local to East Midlands as well, I think that'd be great for our audience. Or if you have any further research things that you've been looking at recently that you could share with us?

Sol Pérez-Martínez 57:28

Yeah, well, I guess like, I would like to also connect to the research that I'm doing now I'm researching something completely different in some way, I'm researching about women writing architecture, during the 1700s, to 1900s, which is you can see though, something, maybe you think that is completely different. However, what I'm looking at different ways of approaching architecture and opening architectural culture to people who are not architects. So women during the 1700s and 1800s, weren't architects, but also were involved in architecture by writing about architecture, but thinking about architecture getting involved in different political issues. And I think that is for me, what Colin Ward has taught me and what I carry with this, I think I will carry for the rest of my life is this idea that architecture is really not only about architects, and we really need to rethink that. And we need to open up architecture and architectural culture to a wider set of voices and to look for those voices and to lift them and to show them and to make them visible. So while this was all about people who are especially children and non architects during the 70s, and the 80s, in Britain, now I'm looking at women during the 1700s and 1800s, and making them visible now. So you can see how there's loads of work to do. And there's probably many other groups that we need to look at to include an architectural culture today.

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I think that's it. Well, thank you so much for coming here today and for your fantastic comments and questions. I also want to congratulate the curator as well, the exhibition above I think that is inspirational to have it. And to see so many children having a fantastic time in the exhibition because I think that also this is the other thing. Colin Ward, what he was talking about was about enjoyment, and enjoying life and taking part of life and feeling that you belong there, you can take part of an exhibition space, and it's really nice to see that. So thank you as well for the invitation to Nottingham Contemporary. And hope to be back soon again.

Shannon Charlesworth 59:31

Thank you Sol for so generously sharing your work with us and our audiences today. I'd like to extend our thanks as well to Canan, Catherine, Paul, John Chambers, Lachlan, John Leighton, and Ethan for their support this evening. We couldn't have done it without you. And a word of thank you as well to the Paul Mellon Centre, Nottingham Trent University and University of Nottingham for supporting our events. We hope to see you all again soon and thank you very much for coming. This event won't be available immediately on our social channels, but please do keep your eye out in the next coming weeks and months. Thank you again all and get home safe. Thank you

Colophon

Curator: Canan Batur

Assisted by: Shannon Charlesworth

Technicians: Paul Buddle, Ethan, Catherine Masters

Event Assistant: Lachlan