Politics of social value in the built environment

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ABSTRACT

The built environment can have a major impact on people's economic prospects, health and wellbeing, and affect their everyday lived experiences. Additionally, due to their high costs, construction investments, which shape the built environment, involve high opportunity costs for society. Following from an increasing awareness of these issues, social value has become a rapidly growing area of research and practice in the built environment, accompanied by policy interest. Despite its popularity, theoretical engagement with the concept of 'social value' has been very limited. Particularly, so far, the politics emerging from subjectivity of value(s) have been either ignored or mentioned in a broad-brushed manner. However, the politics need to be considered at the core of any debates relating to social value due to the tensions between different views involved in conceptualising/analysing, creating/implementing and realising/experiencing social value. To address this gap, this paper introduces three types of politics of social value: analytical politics, participatory politics and lived politics. By clarifying these types of politics that are key to any social value consideration in the built environment, this will allow a deeper and more democratic engagement with the concept of social value.

POLICY RELEVANCE

Existing policies have so far framed Social value in the built environment as a 'balancing' act, where the public's interests were advised to be taken into consideration in the development of the built environment. In line with this, social value has primarily been approached by researchers and practitioners as a managerial activity, instead of being seen as a transformational impulse to rethink the professions and businesses in the built environment. Thus, the current dominant framing and practices conceal the politics involved in conceptualising/analysing, creating/implementing and realising/experiencing social value in the built environment. The introduction of three types of politics of social value in the built environment can enable improved policy-making. This new basis will explicitly consider the different types of politics involved with social value in the built environment. This will allow for a more democratic development of social value in the built environment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social value is a rapidly growing area of built environment research and practice. An ever-increasing number of academic publications, policies and companies focus on this concept. The interest in social value in the built environment stems from an increasing recognition that the built environment has a significant impact on people's economic prospects, health and wellbeing, as well as their lived experiences (Smyth & Vanclay 2017). This has led to the understanding that economic arguments, which predominate decision-making in projects in the built environment, should be complemented with social ones. This adds social liabilities for key decision-makers such as urban planners, construction clients and contractors (HM Government 2012).

In line with the project delivery-oriented origin and focus of the term, so far the theoretical engagement with this topic has been limited. Most efforts have been dedicated to developing universal categories, attributes and/or methodologies of social value to tame social value into a definable and measurable managerial issue (Çıdık 2020). While there has been an acknowledgement that 'social value' means different things for different places, to different people, and from different professional perspectives (UKGBC 2021; Raidén *et al.* 2018, Samuel & Hatleskog 2020), the theoretical and practical implications of this plurality have not yet been adequately unpacked or debated.

As a result, current research and practice attempt to address this plurality mainly through managerial approaches such as stakeholder mapping, analysis and consultations (*e.g.* UKGBC 2021). Such approaches are, however, limited in their consideration of the wide range of stakeholders and their various value perspectives (Chow & Leiringer 2020). They also hide values embedded in the wider institutions and decision-making which pre-determine what 'social value' could mean for projects in the built environment (Savini 2019; McAuliffe & Rogers 2019). Samuel & Hatleskog (2020) argue that the term 'social value' itself reflects a certain value perspective that is embedded in a neoliberal view of the world, thus alienating authentic cultures of respect and love. Hence, there is a need to discuss the different, often conflicting, ways in which the social value of projects in the built environment can be framed, and to make explicit the trade-offs, biases and tensions involved. In other words, there is a need for a discussion of the politics involved with delivering social value through projects in the built environment. This is required to enable a comprehensive theoretical and practical development of the social value agenda in the built environment.

To this end, this paper conceptualises social value as political based on a synthesis of some of the previous debates around power and politics in the built environment. As a unique contribution, the paper proposes and discusses three types of politics of social value in the built environment (analytical, participatory and lived). These three types of politics refer to the trade-offs, biases and tensions involved with the practices of conceptualising/analysing, creating/implementing and realising/experiencing social value, respectively. Thus, the paper advances the ongoing debate on social value in the built environment. This also provides an anchoring to the previous debates and theories in social geography, planning, architecture and project management research. The proposed types of politics provide a conceptual basis and vocabulary for further theoretical development, and for a more aware practical consideration of the politics involved in the social value agenda in the built environment.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides the general framing of the paper by making the ontological argument that 'social value' does not have an existence of itself, but it is rather enacted through 'practices of valuation'. From here, it is suggested that the politics of social value can be conceptualised through a focus on the trade-offs, biases and tensions involved in three types of valuation practices that enact social value in the built environment (*i.e.* practices of conceptualising/analysing, creating/implementing and realising/experiencing social value). Section 3 briefly discusses how the built environment intersects with social life (and enables/disables social value) by building upon the wide literature on the relationship between 'space' and 'social phenomena'. This suggests using socio-spatial theories to understand the trade-offs, biases and tensions involved in conceptualising and experiencing social value, thus laying the ground for

Sections 4 and 5 on the analytical and lived politics of social value, respectively. Section 6 discusses the 'participatory politics' of social value highlighting the power relationships between actors with different social value considerations for projects in the built environment. The concluding section reflects on the interrelationships between the three types of politics and the future avenues for a better consideration of the politics of social value in the built environment.

2. SOCIAL VALUE AS AN OUTCOME OF VALUATION PROCESSES

The ontology and epistemology of value has long been discussed with various emphases on its subjective (*e.g.* beliefs) and objective (*e.g.* price) aspects, which underpinned its mutually exclusive subjective and objective conceptualisations. However, another strand of work also suggests that value (*i.e.* the noun) is neither a subjective nor an objective unit of analysis, and should be rather understood through activities of valuing (*i.e.* the verb) (Muniesa 2011, based on Dewey 1939, Kornberger 2017). According to this view, value is dynamic and is always enacted through valuation practices, whereby some acts of rating are performed in a specific context and towards a practical end (*e.g.* deciding what to do), which involves an entanglement of both subjective opinions (*e.g.* liking) and objectified forms of value (*e.g.* the price) (Çıdık & Bowler 2022). Similarly, Stark (2009) suggests that the distinction between 'value' in an economic sense and 'values' in a cultural–ethical sense is an artificial one. This is because in practice there are always various logics of values ('orders of worth') that intersect with, and influence, each other to different extents in determining the value of something in a particular context. Further, Knight & Cuganesan (2020: 194) argue for a focus on valuation (*i.e.* the activity) as a social practice, suggesting that valuation practices are:

> sayings and doings that actors express, which do not merely mirror or bring to the fore particular perceived views, but also actively constitute and enact them.

For this reason, Kornberger (2017) claims that valuation practices are the corollary of value, meaning that it is the accomplishment of valuation practices that constitute value.

From this pragmatic/practice–theoretical view, social value in the built environment means different things in different situations where different actors engage in various acts of rating and weighing regarding the social outcomes of the built environment. For example, an urban planner sitting in their office and reviewing a planning application, a main contractor preparing a social value statement for a bid, and a disabled person using their wheelchair on the pavement: they all engage in practices of valuation that enact the meaning of social value of the built environment for that particular situation. Hence, working with a pragmatic/practice–theoretical view of value enables one to conceptually embrace the plurality of perspectives on social value in the built environment. On the other hand, viewing the practical activity of valuation as constitutive of value raises the question of how valuation as a social practice is performed, when there can be multiple 'economies of worth' invoking alternative and sometimes incompatible principles to valuate (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006). This implies that valuation (*i.e.* the activity) is a power-laden and political social practice for defining what is worthy or valuable (Fourcade 2011), which determines what views, approaches and methods are acceptable for understanding, representing, analysing, creating and realising value (Dionysiou & Tsoukas 2013; Dery 2018).

Building on these ideas, the discussion in this paper centres upon three types of valuation practices through which social value of the built environment is enacted. These are the practices of conceptualising/analysing, creating/implementing and realising/experiencing social value in the built environment. This paper presents the respective terms of analytical, participatory and lived politics of social value in the built environment through a discussion of the trade-offs, biases and tensions involved with these three types of valuation of the social outcomes of the built environment. This will conceptualise the politics of social value. Hence, it will provide a conceptual basis and vocabulary for further theoretical development, as well as a more aware practical consideration of the politics involved in the social value agenda in the built environment.

Next, the relationship between the 'built environment' and 'social phenomena' will be discussed with a focus on the concept of 'space'. As the built environment is a major determinant of the space where people live, drawing upon the literature on 'space' will enable a rich conversation in explaining the 'analytical politics' and 'lived politics' of social value in the built environment.

3. THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT, SPACE AND SOCIAL PHENOMENA

There is a consensus that built environment projects can deliver social value, and social value means different things for different places, and to different people. But what is the connection between the built environment and social phenomena? There has been a lack of conceptual discussion in social value literature explaining how the built environment shapes social phenomena, thus variously enabling (or disabling) social value. Making this connection is essential for the conceptualisation of social value and its politics. Therefore, this section will introduce the concept of 'space' as a fundamental determinant of the social context, relationships and outcomes. This will justify using the social theories of space in explaining the trade-offs, biases and tensions involved in practices of conceptualising/analysing (*i.e.* analytical politics) and realising/experiencing (*i.e.* lived politics) social value in the built environment.

The extant literature on the relationship between space and social phenomena is vast and includes entire disciplines such as urban studies and social geography as well as others that have developed an increasing interest in space in their analyses, such as political sociology, organisational studies and history. Since the 1970s, an increasing number of studies in the humanities and social sciences have considered space as a key issue in their analyses of social phenomena. The so-called 'spatial turn' in social theory (Blank & Rosen-Zvi 2010) has (re)emphasised that space is not fixed, inert or given, but rather performative, transient and dynamic in the sense that it is a fundamental part of human experience, actions and interactions (*i.e.* social phenomena) (Warf 2017). Borrowing concepts from traditionally space-focused disciplines such as geography and physics, the 'spatial turn' has 'influenced the understanding of reality as constructed and determined by complex spatial relations' (Lähdesmäki 2018: 1). In a similar way, Warf & Arias (2009: 1) state that:

> everything happens in space, [... and] where things happen is critical to knowing how and why they happen.

This aligns with Massey (1995: 52), who claims that there are no purely spatial processes, but neither are there any non-spatial social processes. Thus, spatiality can be defined as the spatial dimension of agency (Shoorcheh 2019), meaning that the space, where social phenomena happen, is a determinant of the phenomena, and thus of its (social) outcomes.

Because space is a constituent part of agency in social phenomena, the way in which socio-spatial relationships are conceptualised/analysed has a direct influence on how social value is framed. In other words, there is 'analytical politics' involved with social value in the built environment precisely because different approaches to analysing the role of space in bringing out social outcomes imply different ways of considering and influencing those social outcomes (*i.e.* arguments about who does what, how and why for enacting the social outcomes of the built environment). Similarly, because space is a constituent part of agency in social phenomena, it is an essential part of the ordering of everyday life interactions between people. It is in this sense that there is 'lived politics' involved with the social value in the built environment. The following sections will elaborate the 'analytical politics' and 'lived politics' of social value in the built environment.

4. ANALYTICAL POLITICS OF SOCIAL VALUE IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The relationship between space and social phenomena can be analysed through a variety of lenses, which would lead to different understandings of social value. This is due to ontological and epistemological tensions among various conceptions, as well as the tensions between various levels of analysis, which highlight different relationships between space and social phenomena.

Therefore, it can be argued that conceptualising/analysing socio-spatial relationships is a valuation practice where certain assumptions are made about who can do what, how and why for enacting social value through the projects in the built environment. Hence, in this section, 'analytical politics' of social value in the built environment will be discussed through the demonstration of some of such tensions based on Jessop *et al.*'s (2008) seminal framework on socio-spatial relationships.

The starting point of Jessop *et al.* (2008) is that the four major perspectives (*i.e.* territories, places, scales and networks) used for socio-spatial analysis are mostly used in isolation, and this conceals the inherently polymorphic, multidimensional character of socio-spatial relations. From here the authors present a comparative analysis of these four lenses to argue for a theoretical framework that includes all four perspectives. Although Jessop *et al.* have an integrative agenda, the differences that they skilfully captured between the four perspectives have been seen as trade-offs, biases and tensions in others' work. For example, Amin (2002, 2004) criticises scalar and territorial approaches for being topological (non-relational) and hiding the relational nature of all socio-spatial relationships. Allen & Cochrane (2007, 2010) argue that the scalar view of power and politics sees it as something held, thus, ignoring the relational aspect of power coming from networks of relationships. Hence, following from the path of these latter studies, in this section Jessop *et al.*'s (2008) comparative analysis will be used to highlight the trade-offs, biases and tensions between the different perspectives to explain the analytical politics of social value in the built environment. This will expose the major assumptions and considerations of each of these perspectives, which tend to variously foreground and shadow different aspects of social value.

Under the 'territories' perspective, space is understood in terms of a specific territory—a bounded space associated with a certain social entity, such as a state, a group of people or an institution (Storey 2020). Thus, imagining space as 'territory' highlights the notions of bordering, bounding, parcellation and enclosure in the construction of social relationships, and thus of social outcomes. This emphasises the construction of the inside/outside divide (and the constitutive role of the 'outside' in the construction of that divide) exploring issues such as claims to a specific physical part of the world, the production of territories and the deployment of territorial strategies (Jessop *et al.* 2008; Storey 2020). While there are different assumptions regarding whether a territory is materially, socially or socio-materially constituted, in all cases the territorial perspective brings to the fore how claims over a particular physical part of the world (*i.e.* a territory) are laid, and how in return such claims affect the social reality within, at the borders and outside of that specific territory. In this sense, it is perhaps no surprise that the territorial perspective has been widely used to study social issues that are predominantly understood in terms of different physical parts of the world such as in globalisation and immigration studies (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002; Brenner 2004).

Under the 'place' perspective, space is predominantly seen as 'discrete, more or less self-contained, more or less self-identical ensembles of social–ecological interactions' (Jessop *et al.* 2008: 391). Therefore, imagining space as a 'place' comes with a different set of connotations and analytic emphasis in terms of explaining social phenomena. A place-centric view of socio-spatial relationships tends to emphasise what makes a space peculiar, thus highlighting issues such as proximity, spatial embedding and areal differentiation. This means that the analysis of socio-spatial relationships tends to explore the influence of such issues on configuring social relationships, the construction of spatial divisions of labour and the differentiation of social relations horizontally (*i.e.* among different places).

Under the 'scale' perspective, socio-spatial relationships are predominantly seen as an outcome of a hierarchical (vertical) structuration process. According to this, social phenomena that can be observed at different scales of social (*i.e.* institutions, regimes, *etc.*) and spatial organisation (*i.e.* global, regional and local) could be related to other scales of social and spatial organisation (as a structurated process). Hence, under this perspective, issues such as hierarchisation and vertical differentiation are emphasised (Jessop *et al.* 2008). Accordingly, the analysis of socio-spatial relationships tends to focus on exploring how such vertical structuration configures social relationships at a given scale, the construction of scalar divisions of labour and the vertical differentiation of social relations (*i.e.* among different scales).

Finally, the 'networks' perspective emphasises a flat ontology where the attention shifts to:

> horizontal, rhizomatic, topological, and transversal interconnections of networks, frictionless spaces of flows, and accelerating mobilities.

(Jessop *et al.* 2008: 391)

This is yet another distinct way of understanding socio-spatial relationships, putting issues such as interconnectivity, interdependence and transversal (*i.e.* rhizomatic) differentiation at the centre. Thus, analyses adopting a networks perspective tend to focus on exploring how networks of nodal connectivity become established, their effects on social phenomena and the differentiation of social relations among nodal points within topological networks. For example, a network perspective on socio-spatial relationships becomes necessary in explaining how protests that erupt in one part of the world spread so far to distanced parts of the world through networks of people who do not know each other but share similar ideals and pains (Bosco 2001).

It is clear that the four perspectives laid out by Jessop *et al.* (2008) highlight different aspects of socio-spatial relationships; hence, they reflect different but equally valid ways of interpreting the relationship between space and social phenomena. Therefore, an adequate understanding of the politics of social value in the built environment needs to consider the tensions and conflicts that are highlighted by each of these perspectives, and at their intersections. Currently, social value research and practice in the built environment tend to consider single perspectives for different types of interventions to the built environment. For example, the 'place' perspective is the dominant one for social value considerations of individual construction projects and urban planning, also evidenced by the focus on 'place' lexicon used in this domain (*e.g.* UKGBC 2021; Adams & Tiesdell 2012). On the other hand, territorial perspective seems to be the dominant one when it comes to infrastructure planning and state investment decisions (*e.g.* Charles 2003; Xu 2008). These suggest that there is a lack of proper consideration of the 'analytical politics' of social value in the built environment where the social outcomes tend to be framed in a singular way without proper consideration of the other analytical perspectives for interpreting what social value might mean in a specific spatial context (*i.e.* infrastructure, buildings, cities, *etc.*). The lack of appreciation of the analytical politics of social value ultimately curtails the full scale of the politics of the social value in the built environment by prioritising certain social considerations at the expense of others. As a result, opportunities for a better exploration and treatment of the social value of the built environment become missed.

What could be a more comprehensive approach to the analytical politics of social value in the built environment? This would require consideration of social outcomes from all perspectives, but more importantly it would require a recognition that the four perspectives are interrelated in enacting social outcomes (Jessop *et al.* 2008). Some insights on this could be gained from studies that have already brought together two or more of the aforementioned perspectives to better understand the politics involved with socio-spatial relationships. Pierce *et al.* (2011) is a good example here: they propose the notion of 'networked politics of place' to bring to the fore the networked political processes of framing a place, which eventually determine the peculiars of that place and make it what it is for those who experience the place. By bringing together the perspectives of 'place' and 'networks', the authors propose a way to capture the tensions that span across 'place' and 'network' perspectives, thus enabling a more comprehensive treatment of the spatial tensions that are involved in social phenomena. Hence, it is through such cross-perspective considerations that multiple issues highlighted by separate analytical perspectives could be better understood as a whole, and used in the analysis and implementation of social value in the built environment.

5. LIVED POLITICS OF SOCIAL VALUE IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The second type of politics of social value in the built environment also draws upon the literature on the relationship between space and social phenomena. However, in explaining this type of politics, the attention shifts to the experience and everyday practices of realising/experiencing the value of the built environment. Clearly, people whose livelihood is provided by the built

environment engage in practices of valuation as they go about their lives. This delineates the everyday lived experiences of people who are subject to the ordering of the built environment in myriad of different anticipated and unanticipated ways.

In this paper, the lived politics of social value will be explained based on Lefebvre's triadic understanding of 'production of space'. Lefebvre's seminal *The Production of Space* (1991) conceives of space as the outcome of an ongoing social (re)production process that appropriates the material context with which it is bound. Lefebvre suggests that space is produced through three dialectically interlinked dimensions, each defined through a pair of concepts (Schmid 2008): 'spatial practices/perceived space', 'representation of space/conceived space' and 'spaces of representation/lived space'. The concept of 'spatial practices' designates the material dimension of social activity and interaction; thus, the concept highlights that social and material patterns of particular practices are interlinked. This means that the organisation of social practices and material spaces is mutually dependent, and being part of a social practice requires a particular type of spatial competence to be able to undertake a particular spatial performance (Shields 1999), hence the pairing concept of 'perceived space'. 'Representations of space' refers to the discourses and the imagery used to think and communicate about a space, *e.g.* definitions, descriptions, theories of space as well as maps and plans. Therefore, 'representations of space' determine an epistemological framework for abstract thinking, knowledge and truth claims, as well as people's communication about a space, hence the pairing concept of 'conceived space'. Finally, 'spaces of representation' refers to space 'as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of "inhabitants" and "users"' (Lefebvre 1991: 39). This aspect represents situatedness, individuality, diversity and deviation of experiences of space (Watkins 2005), hence the pairing concept of 'lived space'. Lefebvre (1991) suggests that the social production of space can be explained through the dialectical relationships between three pairs of concept. This means that 'spatial practices/perceived space', 'representations of space/conceived space' and 'spaces of representation/lived space' mutually shape each other on an ongoing basis, thus continuously (re) producing what people consider as routine spatial experiences and socio-spatial orders while also enabling new ones to break through the routines and emerge anew.

By arguing that production of space is an entanglement of material (perceived space), mental (conceived space) and social (lived space) aspects, Lefebvre (1991) provides a useful framework to demonstrate the lived politics of social value in the built environment. According to this, neither the materiality nor the abstractions of the built environment can be thought separately from the socially determined lived experience of the built environment. Thus, in many ways, the lived space, the everyday lived experiences and their social outcomes are directly affected by how a space is imagined in the first place and how it is materialised by those who are in positions of power to make decisions about these (hence, the analytical and participatory politics of the social value— see the previous and next sections). But equally important is the implication that neither the abstractions nor the materiality of space can alone, or together, fully dictate the social experience and social outcomes of the built environment (Gottdiener 1993). This is an important argument in understanding (1) how the lived experience of the built environment is shaped variously favouring and disadvantaging certain values, activities and social groups, and (2) how such attempts for domination are resisted and reappropriated in everyday practices in the built environment.

For example, drawing on Lefebvre's triadic framework, Borden (2001) studies 'production' and 'reproduction' of space through the 'body-centred' practice of skateboarding. Emphasising that space is not only built on plans, blueprints, maps, concrete, bricks and mortar, Borden emphasises that it is also built on (bodily) practices, objects, ideas, imagination and experience of people occupying the space (Spencer 2003). It is based on this emphasis that Borden (2001) demonstrates how skateboarders repurpose the built environment, which was designed into discrete functional spaces of work and commerce, functional paths, ramps and stairways, into an *ad-hoc* adventure playground seeking out adventure, opportunity and pleasure.

As a result, it can be argued that every social action and interaction in the built environment is constituted through various wider influences of power either embedded in the thinking of those who design, and practice within, or within the materiality of the space, but these always

become subject to renegotiation within situated practices of everyday life. Hence, there is a very lively account of 'lived politics' of social value in the built environment that has been largely left untouched by academics and practitioners of social value in the built environment. To truly understand what social value is, and how it can be best implemented and realised, it is crucial to develop a sound understanding of 'lived politics' of social value, and embed it into thinking and practical frames of social value in the built environment.

6. PARTICIPATORY POLITICS OF SOCIAL VALUE IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The third and final type of politics is participatory politics of social value in the built environment. This refers to the power relationships and tensions that determine who has the authority to have a say and how in the planning, design, delivery and governance of the built environment. This is a key part of the politics of social value in the built environment because those with such authority have the power to dominate the valuation practices of creating/implementing social value, where the meaning of 'social value' is negotiated, thus determining who benefits how much from the value delivered. The power relationships and tensions that determine the planning, design, delivery and governance of the built environment have been widely discussed in various domains of the built environment, such as urban planning, architecture, construction and urban governance. However, the discussion of the implications of this on defining and implementing social value through projects in the built environment has been limited.

At a paradigmatic level, several important intellectual figures have argued about the connection between the political economic system and the ways in which the built environment is shaped to benefit the powerful groups the most. For example, in his *Discipline and Punish* (1979), Foucault argues that the spatial organisation of a society reflects the wider organisation of power and social relationships in that society. 'Societies of sovereignty', which existed before the Industrial Revolution, were spatially organised to tax production (rather than to organise production) and to rule on death (rather than to administer life) (Deleuze 1992), whereas the subsequent 'disciplinary societies' were spatially organised through vast enclosures that each had their own laws to discipline, such as schools, barracks, factories, hospitals and prisons. For instance, in the rising capitalist system, factories were spatially/physically optimised for the highest possible productive output through a disciplined activity of production. Finally, in the most recent times, 'societies of control' replaced 'disciplinary societies', where the spatial enclosures have become less relevant for exercising power due to more subtle ways of controlling power and social relationships through, for example, widespread surveillance using CCTVs, mobile devices and digital activity. In a similar way, Elden (2007: 106) makes the following argument:

> Social space is allocated according to class, and social planning reproduces the class structure. This is either on the basis of an abundance of space for the rich and too little for the poor, or because of uneven development in the quality of places, or indeed both. Like all economies, the political economy of space is based on the idea of scarcity.

Thus, debates on social value in the built environment need to recognise that all practices of participation in shaping of the built environment, such as investment planning, urban planning, design, construction and governance, are mostly framed after the existing political economic system which itself reflects a certain understanding of 'social' and 'value'. This is what Adams & Tiesdell (2010) imply when they state that planners are market actors. A similar argument was also made by Çıdık (2020) for the construction industry for the companies that design and construct the built environment. Çıdık observes that the arguments about social value in the construction industry are underpinned by a 'balancing' rhetoric where efforts at enabling social value are seen as *ad-hoc* philanthropic activities, instead of being an essential part of the mission and purpose of companies. This is evident in the predominantly top-down understanding of social value in the construction industry through concepts such as 'shared value' (Awale & Rowlinson 2014), 'social enterprise' (Loosemore & Higgon 2016) and 'corporate social responsibility' (Murray & Dainty

2009). Raidén & King (2022) raise a similar concern and argue that there is a 'social value industry' emerging with an aspiration to devise a single definition and list of all things social value. Thus, whether social value is one of the deliverables for those who participate in the enactment of the built environment, or rather their key driving purpose, is a fundamental issue in the participatory politics of social value in the built environment.

Besides the participatory politics underpinned by the wider political economic system, there are also rather more empirical participatory tensions involved in defining and implementing social value as part of professional practices. For example, Watts *et al.* (2022) report five case studies where clients and contractors of small infrastructure projects had different understandings about who has the responsibility of defining and delivering the social value, which ultimately hampered the social value of the projects. As they are interested in different timelines and have different types of resources to frame and create social value, the differences in construction clients and their contractors constitute an important part of the participatory politics of social value in the built environment. Furthermore, Çıdık & Bowler's (2022) theorisation of project value as practice suggests that construction project professionals continuously engage in value-laden decisions as part of their everyday work without being explicitly aware of the value implication of such decisions. Therefore, although the tensions and politics in construction project teams have not attracted much attention in social value research and practice in the built environment, it is those tensions and politics that affect everyday decisions, thus affecting the social value of individual projects.

Another important aspect of participatory politics is the ways in which the public has been consulted about the development and governance of the built environment. There is abundant literature about the inherent power imbalances and information asymmetry in public consultations, which are mostly argued to be the evidence for engagement, for both urban planning and governance (*e.g.* Bickerstaff & Walker 2005) and built asset design and delivery (*e.g.* Chow & Leiringer 2020). Against the backdrop of growing criticism about traditional consultations based on surveys or focus groups, there is a growing interest in co-creation methods that seem to be promising a longer and deeper engagement with the public (Lund 2018). However, precisely for this reason, co-creation has also been seen as more costly and effortful, thus experiencing challenges for wider implementation.

Finally, there are also some unregulated and/or informal participatory practices in enacting the built environment, such as squatting (Pruijt 2013), do-it-yourself urbanism (Iveson 2013), temporary use (Colomb 2012) and self-organisation (Boonstra & Boelens 2011). Despite breaking apart from the formal methods of participation, and even sometimes from law (*i.e.* squatting), such bottom-up participatory initiatives in the built environment can create social value (Mens *et al.* 2021) which accrue to a variety of actors and can even affect municipal urban planning policies and lead to innovations in urban development (Mens *et al.* 2023). Thus, such initiatives need to be considered as an important part of the participatory politics of the built environment.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the challenges of defining and measuring social value in the built environment, most practical guidance and research suggests a define–measure–manage approach (Çıdık 2020). The debates on social value in the built environment seem to mainly revolve around developing categories, attributes and/or methodologies to develop definitions of social value to enable measurement and inform project management (Mulholland *et al.* 2019). Importantly, more often than not such publications provide little or no theoretical discussion about the limitations of their suggested approaches in capturing the multiplicity of the perspectives, and so the politics of social value in the built environment.

The wider literature on the concept of 'value' suggests that it is the power-laden and politically driven social practices of valuation (*i.e.* activity) that enact value (*i.e.* the noun). Based on this assumption, this paper introduced three types of politics that fundamentally affect the practices of conceptualising/analysing, creating/implementing and realising/experiencing social value in the built environment. 'Analytical politics of social value' highlights that there are various ontologies

and epistemologies for understanding socio-spatial relationships which imply different foci on how the built environment affects social phenomena, and thus how social value could be approached analytically to generate knowledge about it and its implementation. 'Lived politics of social value' highlights that the built environment is not given and fixed, but it is rather dynamic and continuously negotiated in everyday life as a contested, political realm. Finally, 'participatory politics of social value' highlights that participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of social value is determined by the dominant political economic system as well as other power structures operating at other organisational levels such as at urban municipality and project team levels. Given that the engagement with any of these three types of politics has been very limited in social value research and practice, it is timely to consider and incorporate them in future research, policy and practical efforts on social value.

In the limited space of this paper, the discussions of the three types of politics do not claim to fully represent all relevant value perspectives, valuation practices or debates that might fall under each of them. The focus is rather on developing each type of politics by providing examples. Thus, the contribution of the paper is not based on the exhaustiveness of the literature in explaining the three types of politics, but rather on developing a typology that is anchored in previous concepts and theories of the built environment.

The theoretical implications of the paper are threefold. First, it conceptualises 'social value' as political by problematising the trade-offs, biases and tensions involved in value-laden practices of conceptualising/analysing, creating/delivering and realising/experiencing social value. This conceptually grounds the plurality of perspectives on social value, and argues for a more critical approach to understanding such plurality compared with the managerial approaches suggested in the extant literature (*e.g.* Raidén *et al.* 2018). Second, social value in the built environment is a topic area where policy and practice have mainly driven the research agenda, thus leading to a lack of conceptual engagement with the term. In this situation, the conceptualisation provided herein provides several conceptual anchorings between 'social value' and some other key debates in the built environment research (*e.g.* space and place). This provides a useful basis to enable future conceptual crossings between social value research and the wider built environment literature, as there is still much that can be learned. Such conceptual crossings will be essential for a comprehensive understanding and further development of the social value agenda in the built environment. Third, by proposing and discussing three types of politics of social value, this paper provides a conceptual framework for further conceptual and empirical analyses of politics of social value.

The three types of politics discussed in the paper reflect different but interrelated dimensions of the politics of the social value in the built environment, *i.e.* they are not mutually exclusive. For example, the analytical approach that will be adopted by an urban planner (*e.g.* placemaking versus networks) in understanding social value (*i.e.* analytical politics of social value) is directly influenced by the participatory role determined for that actor (*i.e.* participatory politics of social value). And the decisions that will be made by that urban planner under such a context will affect the everyday lived experience in ways that create certain advantages and disadvantages for different social groups (lived politics of social value). Thus, the three types of politics need to be considered together to start systematically exploring and addressing the political nature of delivering social value in the built environment.

Future work should explore and pursue the interrelations between the three types of politics put forward in this paper as well as perform deeper investigations in each of the types of politics themselves. For example, how (and to what extent) do the analytical, participatory and lived politics of the social value influence each other? What are the major structures and relations of power that play out in determining the meaning of social value in practices of conceptualising/analysing, creating/implementing and realising/experiencing social value? Research questions such as this will be essential in better understanding and addressing the politics of delivering social value in the built environment.

Politics is an indispensable part of social life where a large variety of different interests, backgrounds and agendas coexist and compete. Hence, recognising the politics of social value in the built environment is necessary, but not sufficient. Future policy and practice on social value in the built environment must work towards making such politics explicit in their approaches and methodologies (1) to expose the value perspectives and agendas embedded in their assumptions, and (2) to enable spaces for negotiation of different value perspectives and agendas. By demonstrating three types of politics of social value in the built environment, this paper provides a useful basis for such improvements in policy and practice, thus enabling an important step forward for a more comprehensive and democratic development of social value agenda in the built environment.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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