

RLDP submission on aesthetics

The SP4 draft currently assumes a false dichotomy between so-called 'traditional aesthetics' and 'good design', where the former refers to simply how pretty something looks, while the latter concerns the functions and values it embodies. But really, this is a misconception of 'traditional aesthetics', which is more wide-ranging - beauty in particular incorporates ethical, civic, and environmental values.

The issue is that these other values, which under the current proposal are given priority in principle, are rarely adequately adhered to in resulting designs. If they were, we would get a kind of beauty known as 'functional beauty' for free: if a building or public space is well designed to realise the values of the community it serves, for instance, then functional beauty ensues. With that being said, however, communities also care about how something looks: in other words, it's important to consider the different ways functional beauty can be realised.

The experience of beauty in both its visual and deeper functional sense should not be treated as an add-on luxury or privilege, but as a matter of social justice. This is not least in light of considerable research that shows that beauty increases physical and mental health, wellbeing, and civic pride, as well as having intrinsic value, but that there is a widespread distributive unfairness in access to beauty and these connected values.

These considerations point to the need to consult both experts in aesthetics--who are not stakeholders in proposed developments--and local communities on proposed projects--ideally through the introduction of panels. The current RLDP is an opportunity to embed beauty into the very values it already espouses, and take aesthetic considerations seriously as a demand of justice.

Dr Panos Paris

Dr Daisy Dixon

Cardiff University

On behalf of Cardiff Civic Society