On social bite & design…

On a recent walk through St Andrews Square in New Town I happened across Social Bite, a homeless outreach charity. I remembered them from our dLab1 project regarding homelessness but only knew about their coffee shop and donation arm. However, today I learned about their "Recovery Village", which has one location in Edinburgh and a new one planned for Dundee. What was so interesting was that they had one of the actual accommodation pods in St Andrews Square for the public to view.

While showing the proposed home is in fact an exciting way to garner public support, I was curious to know more about the infrastructure of support that the residents could expect. The Social Bite website has a good explanation of the services they will provide and great renderings of the village, highlighting the social component that is so crucial in recovery. They call the residences "modular homes", with 15 of these units gathered around a central community hub with pathways connecting the homes to give the setup a real community feel.

Courtesy of Social Bite
https://www.social-bite.co.uk/what-we-do/dundee-village/

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Being inside the model unit was a pleasant experience. The
finishes were sturdy and sustainable, and the details were
well considered. The website talks about providing a shelter
with dignity and you can really feel that when you're in the
space. It appeared the structure would meet the new
Passivhaus Equivalent Standards Scotland has pledged to adopt
(www.gov.scot, n.d.) but the volunteers were not sure and my
research could find anything definitive. That aside, the
interior was warm, the natural light was great and it felt
cozy without feeling cramped.

I know this is an environmental design course but with social
design being such a heavy influence this semester I was
curious to see if this project would be considered "social
design". In my summative assignment 1 for dLab1 we were asked
the question, "what is social design?" My argument was for
three criteria to be applied to any given project, beginning
with Armstrong et al's (2014) criteria, *modus operandi* and
aim. I have been fascinated by this idea of removing the

designer as expert (Design, 2019) for a truly collaborative effort so my argument was to include this as the third criteria for defining social design. In the few project I have analyzed with my "criteria" I have found that most do not satisfy all three, with most stumbling over the designer as expert in the process. The reason I think this is important is that it confirms the process to be truly social since the *modus operandi* and *aim* cannot eliminate the potential self-interest of the designer. I pleasantly surprised to find that this rehabilitation village did in fact reflect all three criteria when analyzed. Of course the goal of the project is social, as well as how they went about instituting it but most crucially, they displayed a truly collaborative spirit by including not only NHS workers in the process but also current and former homeless persons. This does not mean the project or process is perfect but I do think that employing true social design gives it its best chance for success.

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