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- Rarely does everyone on this board agree on every aspect of the project.
- We may overlook possible synergies that could make a piece of architecture truly innovative.



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Who Are We Designing For?

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At the start of every design and construction project, there is a client that instigates the process. Architects and contractors are hired and work for this client to produce a building or buildings that meet the client's needs. It a process that is very familiar for all those who work in this industry, and it is well known by both designer and constructor that we must do our best to keep the client happy. It is ultimately this client that allows there to be a project in the first place, so it's somewhat indisputable to claim otherwise. But, to look at a project with a broader perspective, the client's needs or desired should never be the end-all-be-all to the architectural process. When we ask the question, "Who are we designing for?" the consideration given should be much more extensive. While sometimes (not often enough) additional stakeholders are solicited for input in the design process, we usually defer back to direct request from the client as priority. The selection of stakeholders who are considered is usually only representative of a fraction of those who actually have stake in the project. If we truly consider all those who hold stake in the project, the design challenge becomes much more complex. Aside from the client which instigates the project, there are a number of other individuals whose needs, wishes, preferences and ideas need to be considered throughout the design and construction process. Below, we will look at the client as well as some of these additional stakeholders.

The Client

To start, the client is sometimes not a single person, but rather a committee or board chosen to give input and make decisions as it pertains to the project, on behalf of a larger institution or organization. As with all individuals, rarely does everyone on this board agree on every aspect of the project. To the benefit of the project, there is sometimes a person appointed with the authority to make the final call on decisions, but often that is not the case. Whether an individual or a board of many, often the client is unknowledgeable about the process a building project goes through, from conception to construction. It is up to designers—as the knowledgeable professionals—to guide the client through the process and decisions to be made. It is important to give the appropriate time and attention to large decision on the project; a hastily made design move can result in backpedaling later on, delaying the project, effecting the budget or eating unnecessary work for the design team. This complexity in prioritizing needs or expectations even at the client level only begins to speak to the challenges design professionals face when working through a design.

The Users

The perspective that is most often considered secondarily to the clients are the users, who will occupy the completed building on a daily basis. In some cases, this includes the owner, but often it does not.

When considering the user's needs, we often break down occupants into users groups, grouping together those most likely to have similar needs or



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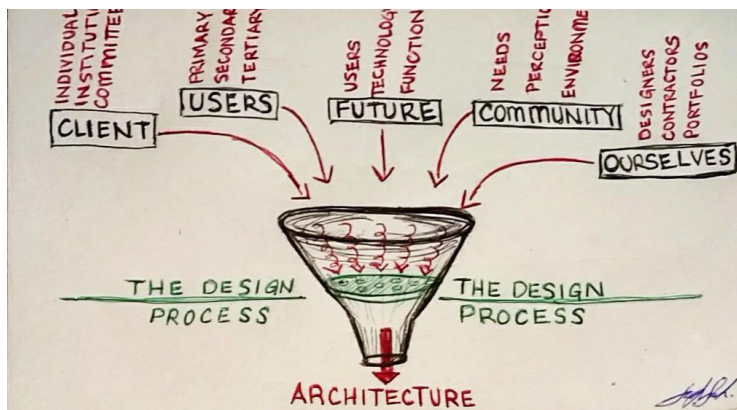
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preferences. Regardless, it is likely that users within these groups will not be in consensus on every aspect of the design. Even more likely is the chance that each of the different users groups will have different priorities. If we're lucky, these priorities will not be mutually exclusive of each other, but this is not always the case. When considering user groups, users can be categorized in tiers. The primary users of a building would be those who work or who spend the most time there daily. In the case of educational institutions, these are the instructors or administrators. The secondary users would then be the students who attend classes there. Looking a step further, guests of the institution who may only have limited visits are tertiary users. These tiers are not strictly defined, but are rather ranges along a sliding scale. Ideally, we would at least minimally try to anticipate the needs of each of these user groups' at all three tiers during the design process, even if we do not have the opportunity to speak to each to gather direct insight.



The Future

Though it may be less than practical to attempt to gain direct input from them, future users of the space, who may not utilize the space for another ten, twenty, or fifty years, should also be considered. This, again, requires anticipating how the space will need to be used by primary users each and every day, and those who visit the space only on occasion. While challenging to successfully speculate the spatial needs of the future, doing so can allow the building to remain relevant for longer. Since the technology, the population it supports, or even the buildings use can change entirely, this means designing spaces for flexibility and multiplicities of function.

The Community

In addition to direct users of the space, we should consider the impact a building may play in the larger community in which it sits. Again, this is a stakeholder group that is too often overlooked. When we consider the impact on the larger community surrounding the site, ideally the project captures the community members as users as well. The most valuable buildings and the best clients are those that are able to look beyond their own needs and provide for some unmet needs of their neighbors. Unless by sheer luck, this cannot be achieved without considering what those needs may be. Aside from the use of the facility, the larger community impact should be considered in both qualitative and quantifiable environmental impacts, public perception, and a sensitivity to the local social condition. This requires the design team to utilize not only a critical analysis of the site based in their professional training, but also to capture local knowledge of the area through observation of community behavior and conversation to receive community input.



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Ourselves

Further removed from the end product—but nonetheless relevant—are the needs or wants of the team responsible for the creation of the space, including the designers and constructors of the building while it is still a “project.” Above all, the goal is for the project to be successful and aesthetically pleasing, filling contractual obligations to the client and creating a showpiece for incorporation in a portfolio that will attract more work. We want a happy client. Beyond these baselines desires of the project team are much more specific desires often guiding design decision. We each entered into this field because of our own interest around the creation of space, and as individuals, desire to insert our own perspectives into the project. For example, the contractors may consider simplicity of construction a priority, therefore making a successful end product easier to achieve; or they may be looking for an opportunity to learn a new type of construction method, or gain experience with a new product. Architects may have similar desires, looking for opportunities to try new products, test design ideas and theories, or challenge space typologies. These priorities may differ or may be aligned between the individual designers on the project and the firm as a whole, much like priorities may differ between institutional clients and individual users.

Why Does it Matter?

Why does it matter that the numerous stakeholders involved in any one architectural project have priorities, desires, and needs that may range the gamut? To understand this is to understand the complexity of the design process, which is a constant evaluation and balancing act of priorities. To consider each individual thought and desire around a project, is to be overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the task at hand. The architect’s role is—as much as anything else—to act as a filter. We are there to extract this information, find resolution and compatibility between differing perspectives, supplement with institutional knowledge based on experience, and distill it all into a final product of a building with which everyone is satisfied. Either to simplify the task at hand or possibly because we think we can make an educated assumption based on experience, both designers and owners may fail to adequately consider the full scope of all the stakeholders. But in doing so, we may overlook possible synergies that could make a piece of architecture truly innovative. It is the nuanced understanding of both aesthetic and function, that when integrated into architecture creates the most dynamic and successful spaces.