

about what underpins these preferences. Consequently, when pressed to articulate these preferences they may resort to referring to styles or periods of history. Sometimes they can refer you to another place they would like the new one to resemble, but they cannot describe it in the abstract. I was asked to help deal with this problem by two of the large national brewery combines in England, who were refurbishing a large number of the public houses which they either owned or licensed. In many cases the refurbishment was not successful in attracting additional or even the same amount of custom. Frequently, however, the tenants or managers of these pubs knew very well what sort of places their customers wanted, but they were not trained to express this. Consequently they would, if asked at all by the designers, explain their answer by referring to what they had before, or in terms of other pubs they knew. The designers took exception to being told what they saw as the answer instead of the problem – as an architect, to be told the customer wants horse brasses on the wall, nicotine-stained ceilings and oak beams is not encouraging!

From this, though, we know some important things. We know that some spaces seem to work well for a particular setting whereas others do not, and we know that people can often judge the likely success of spaces by looking at them, even though they may find it hard to describe a successful space without referring to one already built. We therefore now need to find out two more things. First, what are the aspects of a space that people commonly use to judge its overall quality – in other words, what are the dimensions along which people assess spaces? Secondly, for the particular setting in mind, how do they rate spaces they judge as successful along these dimensions?

Obviously we can simply ask a lot of people to describe how they feel about a particular space. Simply put in that way the question rarely elicits useful information, but if it is more specifically constructed, even this simple tool can often be revealing. I often use a question inviting respondents to list the first three adjectives that come into their mind about a space. Whilst this may yield interesting and rich data, it is not likely that many people will use exactly the same words, which makes it difficult to compare how people feel and thus get a generic assessment. To make more useful tools, we need to rely on a little simple psychological theory.

In fact, a remarkably large number of psychological measurement tools have now been created to elicit people's feelings about a place in a formal way, and some other tools have been developed to analyse place in terms of its physical characteristics. A popular form of research in recent years has been to try to link these two. In other words, can we find ways of linking people's reactions, feelings, emotions, and even behaviours to physical and perceivable attributes of places, spaces or forms? We shall now spend some time exploring this question.