

Building Communities: Constructing New Educational Paradigms

ROBERT I. SELBY, AIA

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The title of this paper makes reference to both the Carnegie report and the thesis of this paper: that architecture education needs a paradigm shift if it is to equip the next generation of architects to participate in a global community. As practicing architects and educators debate what kind of education is appropriate it is prudent to ask: what kind of world do we seek to build? Do we seek diversity or homogeneity? Will architects trained in North America be able to design fitting communities in Rio de Janeiro or Shanghai? Will future practitioners be prepared to appreciate the values of different cultures? Or will future practitioners export design concepts appropriate in North America and Europe, but questionable in South America or Asia? If this were to occur, will architects in international practices be propagating a form of creative and intellectual "colonialism?"

This paper will argue that future architects must be able to appreciate values of and to advocate for the environmental goals of indigenous populations in different cultures and settings around the globe. It will argue that professional education needs to introduce students to the theories of regionalism and *localism* to serve diverse populations in distant locations. To serve distant clients, future architects will also need to develop global communication skills.

CRITIQUE OF THE CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM

How well is the current educational system preparing future architects to practice around the world? Practicing architects complain that schools of architecture stress theory over practice. In other words, architects think universities avoid the real world. Architects engaged in international practices work in teams often with some of its members located in distant cities. Yet, as architects admonish, students still typically work as individuals on studio design projects. This educational paradigm fails to develop students' negotiating skills with others on the design team, a proficiency they will need in practice. Critics further argue that students seldom work in multidisciplinary teams. Architects believe students do not learn how to design holistically, i.e., how to incorporate diverse ideas from landscape architects, planners, and engineers in the early phases of conceptual design.

The current educational paradigm does not adequately prepare future architects for a global practice serving culturally diverse clients. It is still common for students and faculty to speak about the need to "educate clients" to appreciate the esoteric virtues of an architectural design. Students currently learn to seek approval from magazine editors and design awards juries more than they seek satisfaction from the public that will inhabit their designed environments. Students need to learn to appreciate the values of the population they choose to serve, which may differ significantly from the

values of North American architectural critics and academics. Students need to learn how to listen to and learn from their future clients.

So, the current paradigm stresses theory over practice, individual versus team authorship, undisciplinary versus multidisciplinary design, and the authority of the designer's values over the authority of the user's values. What students need is an opportunity to get off campus, to go into the "real" world, to work in interdisciplinary teams, on behalf of people who are culturally different from themselves.

POTENTIAL FOR A NEW EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM

Urban communities throughout the world are in a continuous state of evolving through cycles of birth, growth, decline, and rebirth. Throughout their life cycles, cities are excellent learning "labs" within which the next generation of architects may study and test ideas for building communities.

As cities progress through periods of decline they risk losing what made them exciting and vital: cultural diversity. For example, in North America, cities such as East St. Louis and Detroit have lost many affluent residents to exclusive suburbs. Once vital urban centers are now virtual ghost towns with empty buildings, vacant lots, and decaying infrastructure. The remaining population is predominantly moderate- and low-income African-American residents with little voice in the process of planning for urban renaissance.

Other cities, like Shanghai, are experiencing rapid growth. Rural peasants, formerly denied permission to resettle, have recently been allowed to migrate to the city's overpopulated, older, low-income neighborhoods. The city planners of Shanghai and a roster of internationally prominent architects are not focusing their attention on meeting the needs for housing low-income immigrants. Rather the building boom in the new PuDong district is for new corporate offices and housing for the new class of wealthy entrepreneurs.

Throughout the world underrepresented minorities and low-income citizens in distressed urban communities are excluded from influencing what happens around them. They are left out of the community building process. These citizens want to remain in their neighborhoods and to restore their cities to livable standards; they do not want to be dislocated through the process of urban gentrification. Accordingly, these citizens are often in conflict with those in power who wish to profit from urban renewal. Disenfranchised residents possess a clear understanding of the life cycle of cities through birth, growth, decline, and rebirth. They know what needs to be done to remedy their environmental problems. And, despite being treated as aliens in their own communities, low-income residents possess an extraordinary resolve to stay and rebuild their neighborhoods. These residents have much to teach future architects about the endurance of hope and power of vision. These residents are the "faculty" of the new educational paradigm's urban learning labs.

What underrepresented minority residents need is technical assistance to help visualize and express their aspirations, and to communicate these ideas persuasively to government officials. Urban communities throughout the world need pro-bono assistance from university students who can listen effectively, plan creatively and advocate vigorously for the agendas of indigenous peoples. In return, residents are willing to teach university students valuable lessons about the "real" world, community building and working with culturally different populations. Reciprocal service and learning are the defining characteristics of the new educational paradigm.

CONSTRUCTING A NEW EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM

For a number of years faculty and students at the University of Illinois have been constructing a new multidisciplinary program based upon the concepts of reciprocal service and learning. The program, called the East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP) is comprised of faculty and students in architecture, planning, and landscape architecture. Faculty and students from other teaching units also participate in ESLARP projects. East St. Louis, Illinois, has proven to be an excellent lab for learning about serving a culturally different client in a distant location. East St. Louis is approximately a three hour drive from the Urbana-Champaign campus.

Each semester students travel from campus to East St. Louis. They listen as residents brief them about the city's history of growth and decline and of their vision for rebuilding. Students listen as residence describe recent achievements of their community based organizations. Residents then outline agendas to be addressed by students in the coming semester. In this way, students learn to accept the authority of residents in the planning process.

While in the community, students and residents work together in teams on community defined improvement projects. Recent examples include the construction of a farmers market and a neighborhood park and playground.

Students also help the communities organize by knocking on doors, handing out leaflets announcing future meetings, and surveying residents regarding their priorities for improvements. As students work with minority residents they learn to abandon previously held stereotypes and they learn to appreciate the neighborhood's cultural values. An ability to look at the world through the eyes of others will help future practitioners approach programming, planning and designing of projects in many multicultural international settings.

Back on campus students address the problems presented by neighborhood residents as members of design teams, many multidisciplinary. These projects range in scale and scope from city wide planning, to neighborhood planning, design of affordable housing, and the programming and design for transit oriented development.

ESLARP AS EXEMPLAR

Several defining characteristics of ESLARP may be helpful to those seeking an appropriate model to emulate. First, the program began modestly at the invitation of the district's state legislator. It is important to be invited to the community because it is ESLARP's policy that community building is appropriately a local enterprise. Beginning modestly is essential to avoid raising expectations beyond the capacity of either the university or the community organization to deliver on its promises. Beginning slowly and achieving small victories builds trust in the community/university partnership.

Second, the program is multidisciplinary. Comprised of faculty in architecture, planning and landscape architecture, ESLARP has the capacity to provide holistic and comprehensive technical assistance. ESLARP also provides opportunities for students to work on multidisciplinary teams in the field and in the studio.

Third, ESLARP serves exclusively community-based organizations. Residents are equal partners in this enterprise; they are never treated as "research subjects."

Fourth, ESLARP has provided continuity of service for an extended period of time, semester to semester, year to year, regardless of sabbatical leaves, varying teaching assignments, and the regular succession of students. Continuity is critical if the program is to establish a relationship of trust with the community. Residents are highly suspicious of university professors who conduct brief "paper studies" of their community but fail to return to implement the study's recommendations.

Fifth, ESLARP maintains a daily presence in the community. Although the university is a three hour drive from East St. Louis, ESLARP operates the East St. Louis Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center (NTAC) staffed with planners and an intern architect. Staff either provides direct technical assistance to low-income residents, or it forwards requests for assistance to ESLARP faculty for development as studio or workshop projects on campus.

Sixth, ESLARP project text and images have been published on the world wide web where it is available to neighborhood residents at the NTAC office and to anyone throughout the world. As students publish their work on ESLARP's web site they learn the kind of global communication techniques now common with firms conducting international practices.

IMPEDIMENTS TO CONSTRUCTING A NEW EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM

ESLARP, and other model programs, demonstrate that it is possible to involve students in comprehensive, interdisciplinary educational activities that transcend cultural differences and fosters advocacy of grassroots goals. Yet, such programs still relatively rare for several reasons:

First, in a climate of scarce financial resources, it is difficult for schools to fund programs like ESLARP. This often means that participating faculty spend their own time seeking necessary operating funds. Each year ESLARP takes 1000 students on six or more work weekends to East St. Louis. This requires renting vehicles, providing food and motel accommodations for students, and purchasing or renting tools to work on neighborhood improvement projects.

ESLARP has been funded partly from the central administration of the university, but the most significant source of funds has been two grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). When these contracts expire, ESLARP will need to find replacement funding. Seeking funds takes time and talent away from solving problems in the community.

Second, it is difficult to coordinate multidisciplinary student participation. Courses that could work together do not always meet at the same. Students and faculty spend extra effort finding mutually convenient times to meet.

Third, promotion and tenure practices at large research universities do not reward service learning and action research activities as highly as publishing papers of other forms of research. Many junior faculty who might be attracted to joining community/university partnerships understand that doing so might be at their peril.

FOSTERING A NEW EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM

Schools of architecture that want to adopt this new educational paradigm need to remove many obstacles in the path. Specifically, schools and their host universities need to do the following:

First, universities need to provide greater levels of funding to establish and maintain community/university partnerships. Schools need to dedicate a significant portion of their development efforts to securing funds for operating expenses, faculty release time, supplies and staffing for outreach centers in distressed urban communities.

Second, school administrators need to facilitate scheduling of interdisciplinary studios and workshops. Courses need to be cross-

listed in all related disciplines, scheduled simultaneously, and located in close proximity with each other. Interdisciplinary service learning courses need to become part of the required core curriculum in all related design disciplines.

Third, schools need to assist interdisciplinary programs to provide service beyond the academic calendar. Schools need to provide summer salary for faculty spending that time organizing for the coming academic year and administering or conducting summer service learning activities. The community-based outreach centers need to be staffed for year round operation.

Finally, the university reward system must recognize the value of community/university partnerships for community building. Time spent on this type of action research in community "learning labs" needs to be valued as equivalent to time spent conducting scientific research in a campus laboratory.

Action research conducted by students and faculty in distressed urban communities is critical to obtain a clearer understanding of how cities throughout the world are to be reborn as places of economic, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Participating in reciprocal service and learning projects gives students in academic studios invaluable experience to prepare them for engaging in an international practice serving culturally different clients in distant locations around the world.

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