

A Conceptual Framework for Enriching Architecture: Nine PIDPR Models

This paper focuses on public interest design (PID) and proposes a conceptual framework of PID to help examine PID in more depth and also to enrich architecture by advancing PID. The author directs The Detroit Studio, a community-based, design-based outreach program of Lawrence Technological University College of Architecture and Design, where he teaches. The Detroit Studio is housed in a satellite building located in downtown Detroit. Given his familiarity with Detroit and its relevance to the subject matters of this paper, the author uses examples or cases that are based in Detroit. Data from other locations are used whenever necessary.

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CONTEXT

Why does this paper focus on enriching architecture? For the last decade or so, a number of significant social, economic, and environmental challenges have had significant impact on the architectural profession and the built environment. For example, Detroit has been hit hardest by the Great Recession for the last several years, and the several decades-long shrinking city phenomenon has significantly undermined the very foundations of Detroit's survival. As a result, architects have received a growing call to make the architectural profession more relevant and reposition the profession.

METHOD

This paper suggests that research on PID will help explore how to reposition the profession in order to make it more relevant, particularly because PID has received significant attention from the public, media, academia, and the profession lately. A growing number of architects have shown an interest in PID to explore alternative architectural practices in recent years. This paper also suggests public interest design practices and research (PIDPR) as an approach to investigate PID in more depth, in order to address the aforementioned challenges and concerns. To conduct the study, the author first identified several models of or approaches toward practicing PID based on the results of an in-depth literature review. The author then verified the models through interviews with 28 students and 20 architecture practitioners. Afterwards, the author used focus groups and surveys to support the findings from the literature review and

interviews. This paper reports the outcomes of a pilot study as part of a larger research project and is based on the results of an in-depth literature review, case studies, and interviews. The author plans to incorporate the findings of the focus groups and survey questionnaire into the project, when the results of the focus groups and the surveys become available.

NINE PARTIALLY OVERLAPPING MODELS IN PID

The author proposes nine partially overlapping practice models as a framework for examining PID and exploring the responses of architectural students, practitioners, and scholars to the models. These nine models include Design as Political Activism (e.g., addressing social justice), Open-Source Design (e.g., developing/sharing building systems via the Internet), Advocacy Design (e.g., responding to humanitarian crises in order to meet urgent daily needs), Social Construction (e.g., fostering social interaction as a catalyst), Collective Capability (e.g., encouraging the participation of laypeople in the design process via the Internet), Participatory Action Research and Practice (e.g., promoting partnership between local resident experts and technical experts), Grassroots Design Practice (e.g., advocating informal, guerrilla, and insurgent urbanism), Pro Bono Design Services, and Architect-Facilitator (e.g., curating or cultivating a design process).

DESIGN AS POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Designers in this group strive to respond to social justice, environmental justice, hunger, inequality, racism, unemployment, and the like. The Architects' Resistance (TAR) group that was active in the late 1960s and 1970s in the USA is a good example of this approach (Figure 1; Millard, 2013). Since then, there have been other political movements or initiatives, but by and large, they are limited in terms of size, scale, duration, and influence. As a result, they have not received much attention from the architectural profession, the public, or the media.

OPEN-SOURCE DESIGN

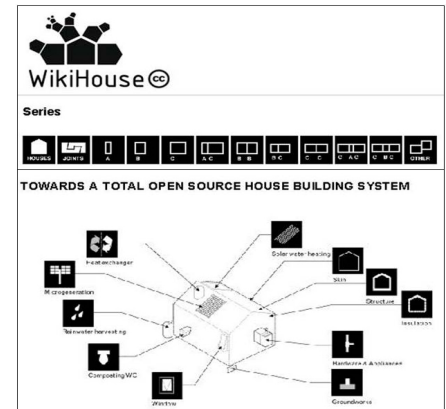
Open-Source Design focuses on developing systems, software, or hardware via the Internet to help build buildings, such as houses and other building types. Architects who have technical knowledge in this area collaborate and share their products or related information with other architects and anyone else who needs the information. WikiHouse is a well-known example of this kind of online-based practice (Figure 2). WikiHouse is a project where architects around the world work together via the Internet to develop a "Total Open Source House Building System" using a trial-and-error, collaborative process and share the results with the public, designers, builders, and others.

ADVOCACY DESIGN

Architects who advocate this model tend to focus on humanitarian crises around the world and on helping to meet the urgent daily needs of people in unfortunate circumstances, such as war, earthquakes, hurricanes, environmental pollution, or extreme poverty or starvation as a result of chronic high unemployment. Designers in this camp may design temporary shelters, build infrastructure to help low-income residents earn a living, or design a system to supply clean water, to name just a few. Perhaps Architecture for Humanity is one of the most well-known examples of this kind. Besides a globally recognized organization such as Architecture for Humanity, many other locally or regionally based groups of architects work with other professionals and philanthropic groups. A number of



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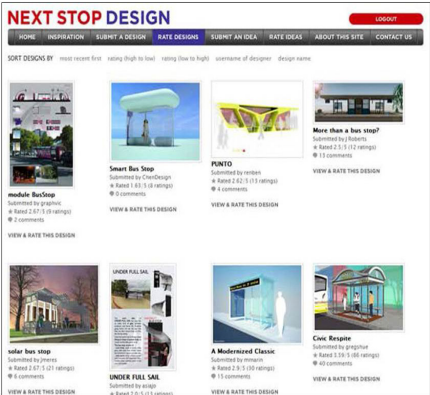
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Figure 1: The Architects' Resistance (TAR) group @ <http://www.architectmagazine.com/architects/change-agents.aspx>.

Figure 2: WikiHouse @ <http://www.wikihouse.cc>.



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Figure 3: Detroit Soup @ <http://detroitssoup.com>.

Figure 4: Next Stop Design @ <http://nextstopdesign.com>.

authors such as Bryan Bell have written books that discuss various types of projects along the lines of this model (Stohr, K. and Cameron Sinclair, 2006; Bell, 2003).

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Designers in this camp focus on building opportunities for social interaction and promote it as a way to actively involve people in the revitalization of underserved communities. Detroit has many examples of this type of practice. For example, SOUP, a “Monthly Dinner Funding Micro-Grants for Creative Projects in Detroit,” advances social entrepreneurship and a number of communities in Detroit, each of which holds its own monthly SOUP event (Figure 3). Typically, residents gather in, for example, a large, empty warehouse or another public place in their community. They bring soup or salad and enjoy food together. Then, several people present their proposals for funding support. Next, all attendees have a chance to review, evaluate, and rate all of the proposals. Finally, before everyone goes home, one proposal will receive a grant.

COLLECTIVE CAPABILITY

Architects are the key players in the Open Source Design practice that was previously discussed, especially architects who have technical expertise in developing software and hardware for building systems. In contrast, non-designers or laypeople are the main participants in the process under Collective Capability. In other words, this model focuses on involving non-designers with the design process via the Internet. Unlike the Open-Source Design camp, where architects lead the process of developing building systems in collaboration with other architects, Collective Capability advocates are more interested in encouraging laypeople to submit their design ideas and share them with others online. For example, “NEXT STOP DESIGN” uses a digital platform for laypeople to submit their design ideas for bus shelter designs and to discuss various design plans and implementation ideas with others via the Internet (Figure 4).

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

In this model, resident experts as local knowledge generators + investigators and architect experts as technical knowledge generators + investigators work together as equal partners in the placemaking process. For example, using the Place Model proposed by David Canter in 1977 (Canter, 1977), residents may focus on their activities in a place under study in their community and investigating the meanings of or conceptions about that place. Meanwhile, architects may also investigate the physical attributes or characteristics of that place. Both groups will then share the information they find, exchange ideas about what to make of the collected data, and discuss how to use them and how to incorporate the results of the data analysis into their placemaking efforts

GRASSROOTS DESIGN PRACTICE

This practice is often led by small, grassroots, non-profit organizations engaging in revitalization efforts for low-income communities. These groups are small, often mom-and-pop operations, with alliances built among them, that share limited resources and engage in installations, graffiti arts, murals, sculpture, urban gardens, or small-scale design-build projects. Detroit has many examples belonging to this camp. For example, the Michigan Urban Farming Initiative in Detroit (<http://www.miufi.org/?gclid=CKjOoI3-w78CFQmraQodm1EAXw>), which is run by a group of architects, engineers, designers, local residents, and other volunteers,

buys vacant lots, transforms them into productive land, and invests its profit on developing programs that benefit disadvantaged communities. *“Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture”* and a number of other books report on various kinds of grassroots design practices around the world (Awan et. al. 2011).

PRO BONO DESIGN SERVICES

Architects working in this model dedicate a number of hours per week or month to socially meaningful or responsive projects for needy people. Pro bono design services are generally provided by large firms, and it is typically rare for small firms to participate in this. *“The 1% (<http://www.theonepercent.org>)”* has been one of the leading organizations in this regard and has attracted much attention from the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Recently, the AIA and The 1% have begun collaborating in the pro bono design service movement and joined forces in encouraging small and medium-sized firms to participate in this type of service across the country.

ARCHITECT-FACILITATOR

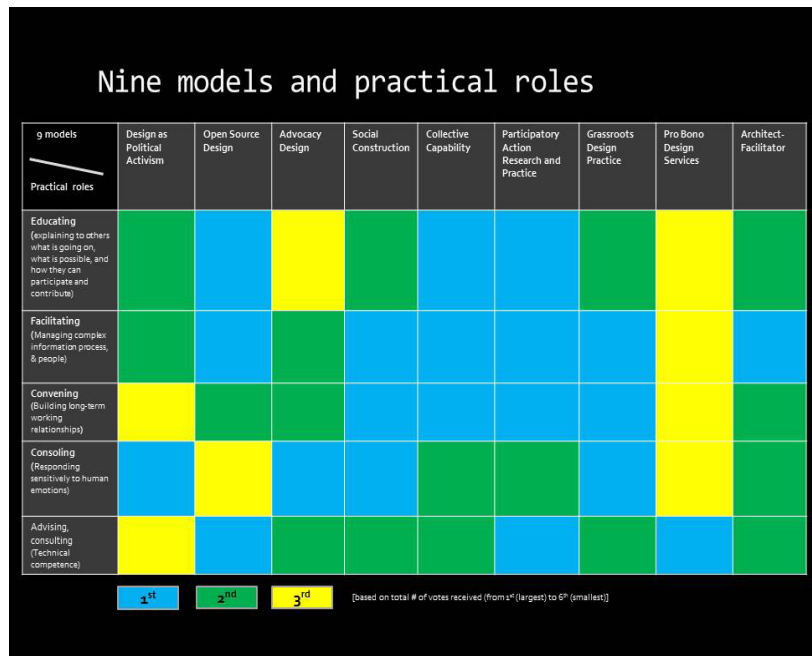
In this model, architects do not play the role of project director—the role that is generally perceived by the profession to be a primary role of architects; rather, they play the role of a cultivator or curator in the design process. Groat proposed a framework of architects as cultivators a number of years ago (Groat and Wang, 2013). Several other models are similar to or considered to be variations of hers, but they all advocate a role for architects as facilitators or curators, above and beyond those of technicians and artists (two conventional roles of architects). They argue that the need is growing for architects to play a role as a facilitator, in addition to roles as technicians and artists, as architects should be able to manage effectively increasingly complex design and development processes and to expand the influence of the architectural profession.

COMPARISON OF THE NINE MODELS IN PID

The nine models are comparatively analyzed according to several criteria, such as the focus of the model, the types of service delivered, scope or types of project, funding sources, types of client, the role of the architect, and the roles of non-architect participants and lay public, among others. These nine models are different in many ways, but there are three common threads that cut across the nine models. First, the nine models are reactions to the Great Recession and a long stretch of high unemployment, which has had a devastating impact on the architectural industry. As a result, the purpose of architecture was called into question. Subsequently, architects have been searching for alternative practices or careers. Second, we have seen the emergence of “crowd” power (e.g., unlimited opportunities for expressing one’s opinion and public participation in global forums via social media). Third, we have seen the rise of new types of “creative” classes (e.g., young, insurgent, grassroots-based designers working collectively in disadvantaged communities). The participants in the author’s pilot study support this finding in general, although more research is necessary.

NINE MODELS AND PRACTICAL ROLES

The interview participants were asked to suggest what practical roles architects need to play in order to implement the nine models more effectively. Five practical roles stood out more strongly than others: (1) Educating via social learning (explaining to others what is going on, what is possible, and how they can



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participate and contribute); (2) facilitating (managing complex information, processes, and people); (3) convening (building long-term working relationships); (4) consoling (responding sensitively to human emotions); and (5) advising and consulting (performing professional tasks in key areas where technical competence is required as an architect) (Figure 5). Currently, we do not typically teach students about the first four roles in architecture school. If we are interested in expanding the architectural profession, it will be necessary to consider modifying the current curriculum to help educate students about the benefits, principles, and techniques of the four roles in a way that enriches architecture.

Figure 5: *Nine Models and Practical Roles* by Joongsuk Kim.

ENDNOTES

1. Awan N. et. al. (2011). *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*. New York, NY: Routledge.
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3. Canter, D. (1977). *The Psychology of Place*. London, England: Architectural Press.
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6. Mllard, B. (2013). *Change Agents*. Retrieved from <http://www.architectmagazine.com/architects/change-agents.aspx>.
7. Stohr, K. and Cameron Sinclair, C. (2006). *Design Like You Give a Damn: Architectural Responses To Humanitarian Crises*. New York, NY: Metropolis Books.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The nine proposed models are not merely used to label designers or categorize them in a formal, rigid manner, but to understand the various approaches to PID more carefully. Different researchers or practitioners may have or prefer different names for the nine models. Nevertheless, the majority of participants in this study agreed that the nine models are feasible and useful because they help to explain what is possible and what is emerging and help the participants to think about their career goals and trajectories in the long term and in a more meaningful way. However, they agree that the nine models require practical guidelines (e.g., what to prepare, how to start, etc.), so that the nine models can be truly useful and implemented in practice. The nine models proposed in this paper may be a tip of iceberg, depending on how one perceives them, but they are a useful, good start in the right direction in many aspects. It is important to recognize the growing list of alternative architectural practices in many street corners around the world. It would be educational to expose students to those emerging practices. It will also be beneficial and meaningful to teach students how architects can or should do far more than what they normally do in a design firm.