Catalyst by Design
Resilience-Building Scenarios as Key Outcomes of an Engaged Studio

Ken Tamminga | Dept. of Landscape Architecture | Penn State University
2015 Engagement Scholarship Consortium Conference

As a flagship course in partnership with the Penn State Center: Engaging Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh Studio promotes high-impact diversity learning in design for advanced Landscape Architecture students at Penn State. This poster presents examples selected from a corpus of some 70 design projects in low-income neighborhoods that were generated through the Pittsburgh Studio since 2008. It also provides a glimpse into the pedagogy and process (see Fig. 1) that undergirds the Studio.

Conducted each Fall semester, the Studio directly partners 12–14 Landscape Architecture seniors with neighborhood groups and resident activists in one or two Pittsburgh neighborhoods. To date, 14 communities have benefited from the Studio’s process of place-based reciprocal learning and creative co-design of neighborhood-scale assets that have included civic spaces, green infrastructure, public art installations, parks, urban farms, vacant lot recycling, and green riverfronts—projects specifically targeted to enhance local quality of life and kick-start community development. The upcoming Fall 2015 Studio will take place in several neighborhoods in Pittsburgh’s Northside district, supported through a Buhl Foundation grant.

Each Studio and its slate of projects is by invitation—via the Center—from local groups to 14th faculty and students. The resultant relational tetrad (see Fig. 2) serves as a community of practice to unleash stakeholder imagination and bolster consensus. Neighborhoods aligned with the Studio have consistently gone on to leverage concepts into broader professional planning initiatives, grants, and ongoing implementation efforts in Wilkinsburg, Larimer, Beltzhoeffer, Hazelwood and others.

For their part, students have gained real-world insights that simply would not have been available on campus. Overall, the corpus of studio work has furthered interactions between Pittsburgh neighborhood groups, the Penn State Center, and other faculty and students from the Penn State system.

The Studio’s institutional framework and broad outcomes have been documented in both scholarly and professional outlets. It has been recognized nationally (W. K. Kellogg Foundation Engagement Award; Peter C. Magrath University / Community Engagement Award finalist) and on University Park campus (Community Engagement and Scholarship Award; Service Learning/Student Engagement Task Force), and is well publicized in the Pittsburgh print and online media each Fall.

However, glossed over have been the collaboratively generated solutions themselves. Displayed here, then, is a cross-section of concepts prepared by my students in close collaboration with local participants (“community collaborators”). My hope is that these visually robust products attest to the intensive and embedded design process (see Fig. 1), and give a sense of the transformative potential of place-based collaborative studio experiences, both in the student and in the community. If so, it may prompt ESC discourse on the transformation-by-collaborative-design approach that lies at the core of the engaged studio.

References