Conrad Collaborative

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This community project includes a Babe Ruth and legion baseball grandstand, media booth, restrooms, and concession stand for Conrad, MT. Montana State University architecture students collaborated with community groups and contractors to develop a social process that helped varying community interests unite and the students develop political intuition.

The process of design was structured by the students' educational goals, the contractors practices, community values, and the enthusiasm of kids that play baseball in the region. Constitutionally relating these values created a win-win-win situation. The students learned how to conduct in-depth research (including community interviews, meetings and site observation/investigation), develop models of political feedback, and link the material and assembly aspects of the fabrication process directly with the design (through reviews with contractors).

The community is benefiting by the projects' creation of a community icon, development of an activity to focus the attention of the community's youth, and the development of new intercommunity constituencies. The community also benefited by the sense of pride the students bestowed with their thoughtful research based designs. [1]

A provocative artificial landscape provides the community with an icon, Margaret Chan.

POLITICAL INTUITION

First hand research by the students with the baseball players, spectators, community interest groups, fabricators and contractors emphasized the complex knowledge and political value systems that are formative in a project.2 The students collaborated with the community to develop a model of political interests which focused on value commonalities. It is an exceptional example of an "open system," one that makes instinctive and sometimes irrational decisions. A topological approach, one that built in political "stretch," was critical for success.

> "... topology is understood more generally, as a theory of a certain family of concepts centered around the notions of 'region', 'connectedness', 'boundary' or 'limit', 'point', 'neighborhood', 'similarity', 'relevance', and so on. The inventory of topological concepts and the associated differentiations allow a series of quite different qualitative understandings which is to say non-metrically-describable phenomena to be grasped in a unified way. The topological approach thus yields a hitherto

unanticipated overarching perspective for a range of different types of research."[3]

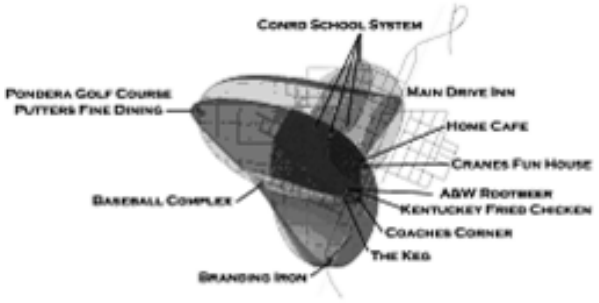
MUTUALITY

A topology of mutuality began by understanding the values of separate interest groups within the community. This included varying sports interests, municipal concerns and business related hopes. With resources and public services limited, there is competition for their allocation. This sometimes created adversarial relationships between special interest groups. Although everyone agreed that a project which benefited the kids was a common goal. The differing values were presented to all the groups at once in a single visual model that visualized potentials of associative value. The results of this political collaboration defined the performative program.

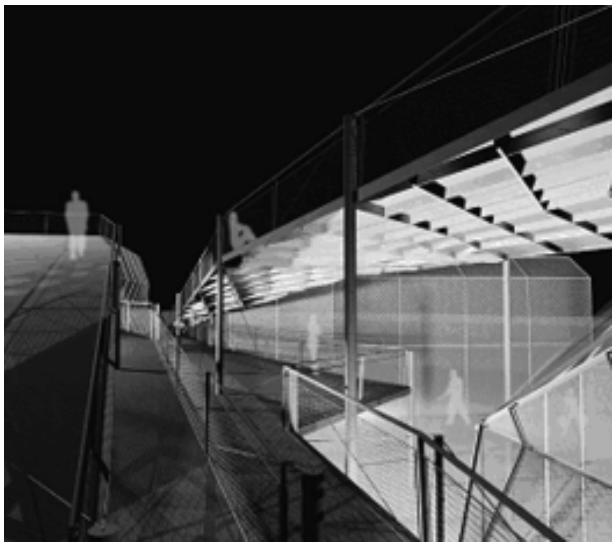
The design proposals presented a win-win-win scenario by creating an icon for the town, one that could be partially disassembled in the winter to allow views of the Rocky Mountains, a construction type that was low maintenance, a construction method that could implement unskilled volunteer labor in the town, an exciting design that would attract grant money, and ultimately an environment that created memories and inspired dreams for the kids.

DESIGN, CONSTRUCTABILITY AND COST

Each of the students engaged an aspect of the community in focused research and worked closely with fabricators and contractors to create a socially and economically relevant proposal.4 The research included: demographic information on the community; patterns of spectator movement around the main field and through out the complex; interconnecting relationships between businesses in the community; layout of roads, railroads, and farm fields to the natural landscape; and correlating interest and values of community and regional businesses. The structural logic of the social, cultural and political systems was then directly related to specific programming moves. The efficiencies of CNC technologies were combined with cost effective materials and regional labor forces to respond to the realities of limited resources. The synthesis of design values, constructability efficiencies, and cost accountability won support across a new created spectrum of community.



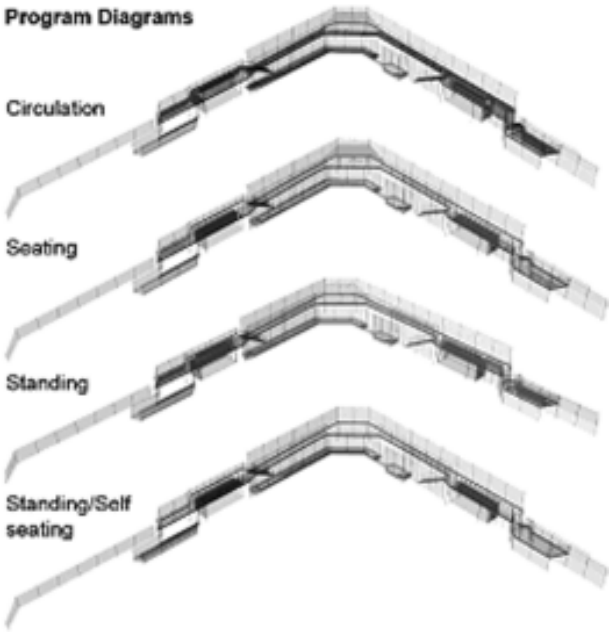
Centripetal business forces within the community define "neighborhoods," Kyle Kelly.



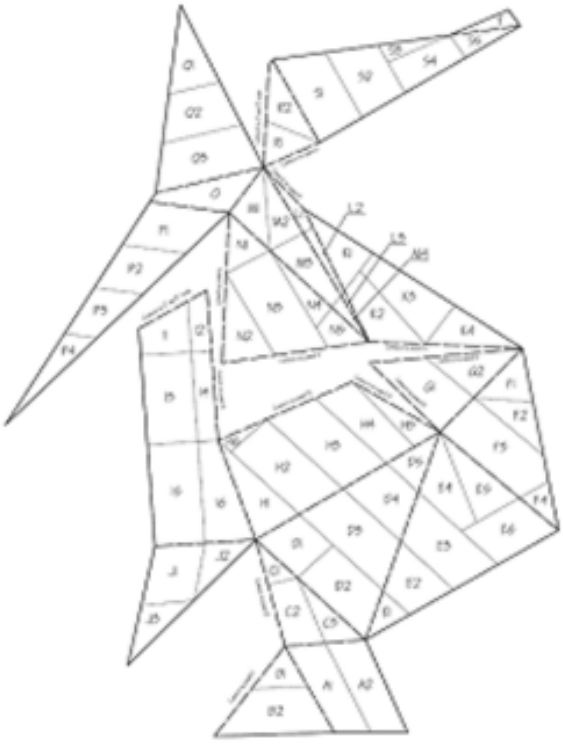
Layered "program platforms" create a flexible surface for staging community events, Peter Grossman.

GAME ON

All of the students presented designs to the community. All of the proposals were then exhibited for three weeks in the lobby of two local banks to encourage public review. A townhall meeting was then held to select finalists. The community selected the two schemes because of the following attributes: weather protection, flexible program opportunity, ability to accommodate standing, sitting and people with their own chairs, unique vantage points for viewing the game and low cost.... and the kids thought it would be great stuff to climb on!



Distributed viewing locations and typologies emphasize the wide range of "activities" at the game, Sam Schmitz.



Fabrication assembly for Parklex panels, numbers are keyed to CNC layout nesting files, Bronwen Harms.

The project is currently in design development. A final proposal will go through the same process of community review and the actual project is scheduled to be constructed by another class of students in the summer of 2005.

NOTES

1 Conrad community members who have worked with the students include: Mayor Byron Grubb, David and Jayne Brown, Sharon Eisenberg, John McFarland, Laura Swanson, and David Oien.

2 The Montana State University summer 2004 4th year design students included: Peter Andrews, Jacob Augenstein, Margaret Chan, Bronwen Harms, Kyle Kelly, Sam Schmitz, Veronica Schreibeis, Lance Walters, and Michael Walters.

3 Barry Smith, "Topological Foundations in Cognitive Sci ence"

4 The collaborating fabricator on the project was Midwest Industries in Bozeman, MT and the collaborating contractor on the project was Doug Oswood Construction Inc. in Great Falls, MT.