

A Studio Focused on Societal Challenges: Case Study on Placemaking and Resilience

JOONGSUB KIM

Lawrence Technological University

This submission is based on the results of our architecture school's multiphase project in Detroit from spring 2015 to spring 2016. The project's central question was, "what would be an ideal studio model to help our students to address societal challenges frequently raised in two low-income study communities." This project focused on two societal challenges: lack of social construction (an inability to shape their own community reality) and lack of resilience (an inability to bounce back after misfortune).

Nature of the collaboration: To address the central question and the two societal challenges, we engaged in a multifaceted collaboration consisting of hybrid studios (with the participants being 22 undergraduate and graduate students in architecture, urban design, engineering, behavioral science, landscape architecture, and environmental graphic design), partnership with community organizations and the College of Management, the integration of social scientific research and design, the use of conceptual models, and pilot studies that used small quasi-experiments to test theories and their applicability. What students learned: Three collaborative models for placemaking (see supporting materials) can

strengthen social construction and increase resilience. Each model has pros and cons, and each community needs a different model or integration of some or all of the models. Models are useful only when they are considered pragmatically. Collaboration with communities through public participation requires the right timing and facilitation of "informing," "consulting," and "deciding." Democratic design can create value and build social capital. How the community benefited: The community had ample opportunities to experience shared governance via collaborative decision-making, reciprocal appreciation of disagreements via social learning, empowerment via co-designing, and more meaningful design via placemaking. The project helped us win the National Endowment for the Arts grant, which will allow us to develop detailed designs to address the two societal challenges under consideration through placemaking and resilient community development.



F14: North End Community Design Workshop

A STUDIO FOCUSED ON SOCIETAL CHALLENGES: CASE STUDY ON PLACEMAKING AND RESILIENCE

This submission is based on the results of our architecture school's multiphase project in Detroit from spring 2015 to spring 2016. The project's central question was, "what would be an ideal studio model to help our students to address societal challenges frequently raised in two low-income study communities?" This project focused on two societal challenges: lack of social construction (an inability to shape their own community reality) and lack of resilience (an inability to bounce back after misfortune).

Nature of the collaboration: To address the central question and the two societal challenges, we engaged in a multifaceted collaboration consisting of hybrid studios (with the participants being 22 undergraduate and graduate students in architecture, urban design, engineering, behavioral science, landscape architecture, and environmental graphic design), partnership with community organizations and the College of Management, the integration of social scientific research and design, the use of conceptual models, and pilot studies that used small quasi-experiments to test theories and their applicability. What students learned: Three collaborative models for placemaking (see supporting materials) can strengthen social construction and increase resilience. Each model has pros and cons, and each community needs a different model or integration of some or all of the models. Models are useful only when they are considered pragmatically. Collaboration with communities through public participation requires the right timing and facilitation of "informing," "consulting," and "deciding." Democratic design can create value and build social capital. How the community benefited: The community had ample opportunities to experience shared governance via collaborative decision-making, reciprocal appreciation of disagreements via social learning, empowerment via co-designing, and more meaningful design via placemaking. The project helped us win the National Endowment for the Arts grant, which will allow us to develop detailed designs to address the two societal challenges under consideration through placemaking and resilient community development.



F5: Community Engagement



F8 (Left): Agency-Based Approach



F9 (Middle): Local Knowledge and Technical Knowledge Approach



F10 (Bottom): Environmental Graphics Approach

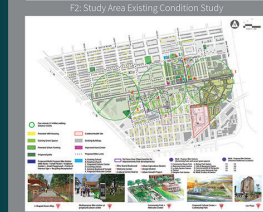
INTRODUCTION

When doing a project in cities like Detroit that have experienced decades-long problems such as shrinkage, high unemployment, and blight, the relevance of architecture is called into question. As an educator and faculty in an architecture school, the applicant is interested in service learning pedagogies to educate students about those problems or issues. We conducted a multi-phased project for design studios that took place in spring 2015, fall 2015, and spring 2016. This project is to educate students about how to address two different but related societal issues (lack of social construction and lack of resilience) through various collaborative strategies (F1).

KEY PHASES

PHASE 1

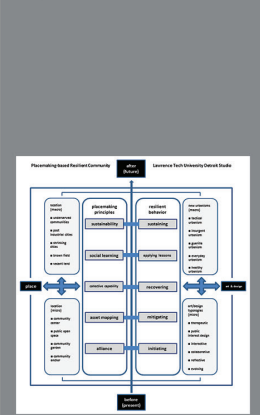
An overall framework for the project consists of several phases, each of which has its own focus, and later phases build on earlier phases. Phase 1 in spring 2015 (four weeks) focused on studying the two communities of interest (West End and North End, Detroit), identifying opportunities (focus areas for future development), and developing concept sketches to visualize possibilities (F2 & F3).



F3: Study Area Conceptual Masterplan Study

PHASE 2

In fall 2015 (four weeks) developed a conceptual framework for using placemaking-based resilient community development to address the two societal challenges. This framework is based on the results of Phase 1, in-depth literature review, and case studies (F4).



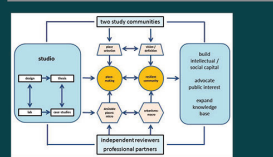
F4: Conceptual Framework for Promoting Placemaking-Based Resilient Community Development

PHASE 3

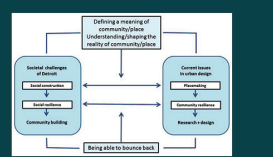
In spring 2016 (five weeks) was the final step where students (i) conducted a pilot study through a small quasi-experiment to examine and compare a democratic design process (designers as facilitator) and a conventional design process (designers as directors); and (ii) developed three collaborative approaches to placemaking (anchor agency, local knowledge-technical knowledge, and environmental graphics) and applied the approaches to our designs. Phase 3 also included the project evaluation through surveys of the project participants (students, community stakeholders, and residents) (F5).



F5: Community Engagement



F6: An Example of Hybrid Studio



F7: Two Societal Challenges and Two Contemporary Urban Design Issues

COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

Key stakeholders and resident representatives from the two study communities participated in all three phases via facilitatory processes, design charrettes, interviews, focus groups, and surveys. All three phases were led by three different urban design-based hybrid studios (i.e., a different group of students from various disciplines for each phase). All three phases integrated social scientific research and design theory (models) as well as practice (applications). In Phase 1, our studio collaborated with the College of Management at our university to learn about current trends in organizational behavior and resilient behavior literature (F6).

OVERALL APPROACH TO THE PROJECT

The project was framed in terms of service learning, design, and evidence-based study. The central question for our study was, "what would be an effective pedagogical approach to existing students in architecture school about societal challenges?" To address the question, students in the Phase 1 hybrid studio conducted an in-depth community study. In the Phase 2 hybrid studio, students selected two societal challenges relevant to Detroit's context: lack of social construction and lack of social resilience. Considering Detroit's urban blight, we framed our study of these two challenges in the context of the two of the most relevant contemporary urban issues: placemaking and community resilience. To conduct more grounded research, we put together a conceptual model to hypothesize the positive relationship between placemaking and resilience. The model is meant to help students investigate how placemaking-based designs can strengthen social construction and increase resilience in underserved communities. Guided by the model, students in the Phase 2 hybrid studio proposed three practical approaches to placemaking-based resilient community development (see details below). Students also conducted a pilot study through a small quasi-experiment to examine and compare a democratic design process and a conventional design process (see details below). The purpose of the experiment is to educate students and residents about both processes so that they understand expectations, ideal timing, the pros and cons of each process, and when and how to use them to support the three approaches to placemaking and community engagement (F7).

THREE PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO PLACEMAKING

The agency-based approach is based on using a local agency as a key anchor or a driver to lead placemaking efforts in a particular area within the study community. These agencies are nonprofit community development organizations, large churches, cultural entities, or social agencies that are located in the community and provide services for the community. The local knowledge and technical knowledge approach is based on a three-step engagement process: resident-driven (or laptop-driven) design in the first step, and expert engagement-based design as the second step. The final step is to propose a final design informed by the results of the first and second steps. The environmental graphics approach is focused on a user-friendly visual convention using environmental design graphics and color coding to communicate the various purposes, meanings, characteristics, or values of different places at different placemaking designs. Environmental graphics were also used to clarify or highlight certain aspects or attributes of the built environment in the study community (F8, F9, & F10).



F8 (Left): Agency-Based Approach
F9 (Middle): Local Knowledge and Technical Knowledge Approach
F10 (Bottom): Environmental Graphics Approach

DEMOCRATIC DESIGN VS. CONVENTIONAL DESIGN

A conventional design process is defined as a practice wherein designers are the primary design decision makers and clients (residents) are only informed about and consulted on design. In contrast, designers in a democratic design process primarily play the role of facilitator or cultivator and help clients make decisions. It is suggested that skilled designers will be able to determine when to inform or consult clients and when to help them decide or co-decide with them (F1, F12, F13, F14 & F15).



F11 (Left): Design of Quasi-Experimental Study
F12 (Right): Weekly Schedule of Quasi-Experiment



F13 (Left): West End Community Design Workshop
F14 (Right): North End Community Design Workshop



F15: Examples of Designs Before and After Community Workshops

RESULTS

The preliminary results of the data collected via the literature review, interviews, surveys, focus groups, community design workshops, and post-project surveys suggest that placemaking-based design can help reinforce social construction and increase resilience. Furthermore, the hybrid studio model exposed students, residents, and other stakeholders to more socially responsible, collaborative, holistic, and grounded approaches for addressing the two societal challenges frequently mentioned by residents in underserved communities in Detroit (F16).

| Community | Design Process | Design Approach | Design Outcome |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| West End | Democratic | Agency-based | Design of Quasi-Experimental Study |
| | | | Weekly Schedule of Quasi-Experiment |
| North End | Conventional | Local knowledge-technical knowledge | Design of Quasi-Experimental Study |
| | | | Weekly Schedule of Quasi-Experiment |
| West End | Democratic | Local knowledge-technical knowledge | Design of Quasi-Experimental Study |
| | | | Weekly Schedule of Quasi-Experiment |
| North End | Conventional | Environmental graphics | Design of Quasi-Experimental Study |
| | | | Weekly Schedule of Quasi-Experiment |

F16: Comparison of Three Approaches to Placemaking and Post-Project Surveys
Survey questions: Rate each approach in terms of your preference (1 being most preferred)