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Approaching Community: Design as a Relational Endeavor Symposium

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Approaching Community: Design as a Relational Endeavor Symposium

Abstract

In this symposium we will examine ways in which designers working with community-based issues can and should look beyond spatial and physical conditions to generate strategies for the future. The underlying premise of this session is that spatial design is an instrumental practice that can shape and potentially transform reality. To do so effectively, however, requires not only dealing with instrumental tools such as function and materiality but also understanding the broader context of social, economic, and political relationships over time.

Disciplines

Architecture

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Urban Environments

Urban Environments Symposium

Approaching Community: Design as a Relational Endeavor Symposium

Organizer: Nadia Anderson (Iowa State University)

Presenters: Peter Goche, Ferruccio Trabalzi, Keihley Moore, and Nadia Anderson (Iowa State University)

Discussant: Lynn Paxson (Iowa State University)

In this symposium we will examine ways in which designers working with community-based issues can and should look beyond spatial and physical conditions to generate strategies for the future. The underlying premise of this session is that spatial design is an instrumental practice that can shape and potentially transform reality.¹ To do so effectively, however, requires not only dealing with instrumental tools such as function and materiality but also understanding the broader context of social, economic, and political relationships over time.

The presentations in this symposium offer a diverse spectrum of design projects that begin by developing an understanding of relationships as a way of engaging community issues. They illustrate how design practice that engages issues of diversity, multiple stakeholders, and dynamic environmental and socio-economic conditions must consider itself as part of a broader systemic undertaking. Contemporary life is global and local, isolated and connected. Above all, it is about a layering of relationships between individuals and systems in ways that create a broad network of communities. As designers, we can engage this complex reality by moving beyond problem-solving and object-making to become strategic organizers and articulators of

multi-layered community relationships.

¹ Stan Allen, *Points and Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), p. 50.

Presentation Abstracts

Agricultural Urbanism: Small-scale Urban Farmers in Iowa

Peter Goche (Iowa State University)

The natural space of Iowa was reinvented in the nineteenth century as a reflection of the rationality of capital production. The product of this rationality was the overlay of a grid system of surveys that indiscriminately subdivided the land - subduing its embodied natural and cultural characteristics. The grid provided the structure whereby farms, towns and cities were created to cover the entirety of the state and established a network of agricultural and industrial production. This modern landscape also produced the culture of the family farm, which, until the mid twentieth century, was the dominant production unit in Iowa.

In the twenty-first century, Iowa is experiencing significant challenges on social, economic and environmental levels that accentuate the tension between the modern cycles of production and the sustainability of the social and natural environment. Through this course of study, we look to negotiate this tension by proposing a prototype of spatial regeneration in Iowa that is developed through interdisciplinary research and the proposition of a new type of urbanism based on locally sustainable places that support the production and exchange of food by small-scale farmers. With emphasis placed on regional sites in Iowa, our concentration focuses on the one-mile gap between two towns, Slater and Sheldahl, in Central Iowa.

Thematic Abstracts

Urban Environments

The Way We Were and the Ways We Will Be: Inventing Community at the Urban Edge

Ferruccio Trabalzi (Iowa State University)

The Idroscalo is a sixty-year-old informal settlement of 2,000 people located at the mouth of the Tiber River in Rome over an abandoned airport strip. The recent arrival of foreign immigrants and plans to expand the nearby tourist port are pulling the place apart. Settlers with vested interests see these changes as an economic opportunity and, claiming the historical right to determine the future of the community, are envisioning ways to buy the land and develop it accordingly. Residents who like the site just the way it is experience change as a social and cultural crisis. Between these is the immigrant who contributes with her rents to the welfare of the community yet is an alien body simultaneously both visible and invisible.

The Idroscalo is an example of a community under stress and we do not know what kind of identity the place will have once the dust settles. The Departments of Architecture and Community and Regional Planning at Iowa State University have been invited by the local church and by concerned members of the community to work with the residents to develop alternative visions and plans for the future of the Idroscalo. Work will begin in January 2009 and this presentation will report on the progress of this project.

Getting to Know

Keihly Moore (Iowa State University)

In thinking about what defines a community, stereotypes and preconceptions were the leading factors our architecture studio faced in its involvement with the Castel Romano Roma people (commonly referred to as "gypsies"). Designers tend to think in terms of spatial solutions but through this two-week intensive studio in Rome, Italy in March 2008, we were in a context that

and physical conditions. Professor Karen Bermann asked us to "get to know" the people and the place by listening, observing, and absorbing. In doing this we engaged our "whole selves" not just our "architecture selves" and learned how these are different. Examining the broken water pump surrounded by garbage and the metal "boxes" that constituted housing and smelling open sewage, we physically encountered the conditions this community tolerates daily. Through conversations translated by Professor Bermann, students were quickly swept up in the political strife of citizenship issues, stringent police protection, and unemployment. As design students we are trained to think of solutions in terms of built objects but after learning about the layers of social, political, and economic history present in this community we realized that a design intervention would need to be rooted in these complex contexts. Presented here is some of the work produced in the studio, documenting voices that are not normally heard.

Rebuilding Green: Disaster Recovery as Neighborhood Revitalization

Nadia M. Anderson (Iowa State University)

During June of 2008, eastern and central Iowa were inundated with some of the most severe flooding to occur in the region since the floods of 1993. In many areas, floodwaters broke levees and submerged communities that were beyond the 500-year floodplain. The city of Cedar Rapids was one of the most severely hit, with 14 per cent of the city affected by floodwaters. Already suffering from a shortage of affordable housing, nearly 5400 residential properties were affected by the floods.

The Oakhill-Jackson neighborhood in Cedar Rapids was one of the most severely affected by the floods. Already targeted as by the city as a neighborhood with great potential for urban revitalization, the neighborhood has been eager to rebuild in a way that is both socially and

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environmentally sustainable. During the 2008-9 academic year, students at Iowa State University have worked with this community to develop models for affordable, sustainable housing and a community development strategy that will promote diversity and interconnection. This presentation focuses on the tools used by the design students to understand the complexity of the institutions involved in flood recovery and how to use these to implement strategies that look toward the future.

Urban Environments Workshop

The Inclusive City

Organizers: Susan Goltsman and Daniel Iacofano (MIG, CA)

Join these EDRA Achievement Award winners for a workshop based upon their impressive book, "The Inclusive City". See the Invited Papers Section for further information.

Urban Environments Paper Session #1

Kronsberg, Germany: A Study in Sustainable Urbanism

Gary Coates (Kansas State University)

In order to create a sustainable pattern of human settlements we must create socially diverse, pedestrian-scaled and livable eco-communities that integrate renewable energy production, urban design and transportation planning, climatically adapted architecture, organic agriculture and ecologically based land use planning. Kronsberg, Germany, is the largest such eco-community yet to be built anywhere in the industrialized world. Designed within the frameworks of William McDonough's "Hannover Principles" and the United Nations Agenda 21, Kronsberg was planned as a model sustainable urban district in the city of Hannover for EXPO 2000, a World's Fair hosted by the city of Hannover. To date two neighborhoods housing

6,500 people have been constructed, which include:

- A Compact Urban Fabric, comprised of five mixed-use neighborhoods planned to support 6,000 energy efficient, passive and active solar housing units for some 15,000 people when it is fully built out sometime between 2010-2015;
- Diverse Public Amenities including: a primary school and sports hall; day care centers and community meeting rooms; an arts and community center; a health center and a shopping center;
- An Ecological Landscape Design (the "city as garden") that maximizes on-site rain-water retention while providing a pedestrian network of therapeutically restorative and recreational green spaces;
- Integrated Living and Working realms through the provision of an adjoining office park that already provides more than 2,000 information industry jobs within easy walking distance of all the neighborhoods;
- An Efficient, Decentralized, Integrated Energy System that uses natural gas powered CHP (Combined Heat and Power) units to provide district heating as well as electricity to the entire community;
- Renewable Energy Systems: three large wind generators located on nearby Kronsberg hill, as well as Building Integrated Photovoltaics, that, combined with the CHP units, provide more electricity than the district needs;
- Urban Agriculture: the Kronsberg Organic Farm and Rural Workshops, containing an organic farm, dairy and cheese-making operation, butchery, brewery, bakery and farmers' market, houses for business proprietors and farm workers and an inn for participants in workshops on sustainable agriculture;
- An Ecologically Varied Surrounding Landscape comprised of woodlands, meadows, parks and avenues, pasture and arable land that is available for recreation

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