

COMMUNITY DESIGN: IDEALISM AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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- In the early 1960s, when a crisis of confidence in professional competence sparked a radical reevaluation of how professionals work, and for whom, many design and planning professionals rejected traditional practice. Instead, they fought against urban redevelopment, advocated for the rights of poor citizens, and developed methods of citizen participation. Community design grew out of these activities and was supported by a host of federal programs focused on the needs of the urban poor. But as the political climate grew increasingly more conservative, and funding diminished, the political model gave way to an economic model. As a result, community design became more pragmatic in developing a multiplicity of economic and social agendas to help community groups gain some measure of control over resources in their environment. Thus, community design practice identifies and solves particular environmental problems in which the client is a special-interest group and the problem is social, economic and/or political, as well as physical. Community design can be distinguished from traditional professional practice because it is client-, process-, and value-specific, yet remarkably nonspecific in terms of its professional tasks. These characteristics provide a framework for evaluating community design as a new area of professional activity. □

Twenty years ago, the first community design center opened in Harlem. At that time, community design was seen as the antithesis of traditional architectural practice. Today, community design is synonymous with advocacy planning and participatory design, and in practice represents the provision of architectural and planning services to low-income neighborhoods and community groups.

The label *community design* stands for an alternative style of practice, but it cannot be used without an awareness of its ideological implications. Community design is based on a recognition that professional technical knowledge is often inadequate in the resolution

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of societal problems, and it represents the addition of a moral and political content to professional practice. In particular, it grew from the belief that all citizens had a right to be represented in decisions about the environment, and that planning would benefit from the maximum public input.

The application of these ideals has changed a great deal over the past twenty years. In the 1960s, the problems of the inner city received national attention. This was a time of unprecedented government support for advocacy programs focused on the needs of low-income minority groups, and all disadvantaged and environmentally dependent populations, such as migrant workers, hospital patients, children, the elderly, and the handicapped. In the 1980s, however, the political pendulum has taken a swing to the right, and the overall professional concern for environmental and social justice seems to have diminished.

Yet professional mood and political climate aside, what began experimentally as a counter-professional practice based on a vision of social change through advocacy and empowerment has evolved into an established form of community-based professional services. In New York City, U-HAB (The Urban Homesteading Assistance Board) helps tenant groups to purchase and renovate abandoned apartment buildings into housing cooperatives through "sweat-equity," and then trains those groups to manage and maintain their buildings. In Cleveland, ARC (Architecture-Research-Construction, Inc.) remodels hospital wards, community-based treatment centers, and group homes, working with patients, staff, administrators, and visitors in a participatory process in order to overcome the institutional aura of these facilities and involve residents in designing, changing, and managing their living spaces.

In Tennessee, the East Tennessee Community Design Center organized and staffed a major exhibit on Appropriate Community Technology at the Knoxville World's Fair in 1982, while in Tucson, the design center there removed over one hundred pit privies from barrio homes and replaced them with prefabricated bathroom units. In San Francisco's Chinatown, Asian Neighborhood Design builds scaled-down furnishings for the occupants of residential hotels, while across the bay, in Oakland, the University of California's Elmhurst Community Design Center works with the Oakland Neighborhood Housing Service on the first inner-city owner-built housing.

Hundreds of similar projects are completed annually by professional designers trained in architecture, landscape architecture, and planning, who call themselves community designers. Their work involves a diversity of tasks and covers a range of design, planning, and policy issues. Compared to early advocacy efforts, the focus of today's community designers appears to have shifted from political to practical, and from process to product. This shift in approach, which is more than a pragmatic response to a changing political and economic climate, represents a new model for community design practice. Community design methods are being modified in light of experience, and in deference to emerging ideas on grassroots initiatives, community ownership, and economic development. The underlying values regarding justice and empowerment, and the motivation to help people gain control of their own resources, however, remain as guiding principles.

In order to present a reasonably accurate description of the theory and history of community design in the United States, and to explain what makes the current model new and different, I will begin by examining the origins of community design and focus on the ideas that were critical to its development. Then, I will present a brief history of the past two decades of community design. In this section I will look at the market forces

that have shaped the early idealistic phase and the present entrepreneurial phase, as well as the theory that has informed this work.

In the final section of the paper, I attempt an assessment of the ideas and the practice at this point in time. I discuss how the field is changing, and describe the emerging model of community design in terms of the characteristics that distinguish it from traditional professional practice. These include: 1) a focus on client type rather than building type; 2) a recognition that a variety of tasks (some nonarchitectural) are necessary when the end product is not clearly defined from the outset; 3) an acceptance of the notion that projects are developed from a grassroots or bottom-up process; and 4) a belief that the goal of all work is to combine political empowerment with enabling products. In the conclusion, I estimate the success of community design and suggest some directions it may take in the future.

THE IDEAS THAT FORMED COMMUNITY DESIGN

The Architectural Renewal Committee in Harlem (ARCH) was organized in 1963 to fight a proposed freeway in Upper Manhattan. This was the first self-proclaimed community design center, but the concept of community design—the idea that professionals should represent the interests of disenfranchised community groups—was already present in the concept of advocacy planning.

The Revolt Against a Professional/Technical Bias

It would be easy, as an explanation of the revolt against a professional/technical bias, to draw a direct correlation between the growth of advocacy and the political ferment of the 1960s. Advocacy, however, was more than a professional empathy with the needs of the poor generated by turmoil and social unrest. The concept of advocacy grew out of a crisis of confidence in professional knowledge and competence itself. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was generally believed that the need for technical expertise was growing, yet at the same time critics were speaking of lagging understandings and unsuitable remedies. Government sponsored "wars" against the deterioration of the cities, poverty, pollution, and other crises seemed to exacerbate rather than solve problems. In fact, the solutions developed by professional experts often created problems that were as bad as or worse than those they had helped to solve (Schon, 1983, pp. 3–20).

For some critics, professionals became villains, instruments of the all-powerful establishment. Urban renewal, for example, was more than an ineffectual solution to the problems of inner cities: it was the conscious uprooting and destruction of some neighborhoods for the benefit of others (Hartman, 1974; Anson, 1981; Goodman, 1971). For these critics, the public problems in society could not be resolved through expertise, but only through moral and political choice. In 1965, Paul Davidoff argued for the politicization of the planning process. In the past,

... it was believed that if men of good will discussed a problem thoroughly, . . . the right solution would be forthcoming. We know today . . . that there are no right solutions. . . . The right course of action is always a matter of choice, never of fact. In a bureaucratic age great care must be taken that choices remain in the area of public view and participation. (Pp. 332, 335)

For Davidoff, and others, their skepticism about professional effectiveness led to a reevaluation of how professionals do work, and for whom. At the same time, there

developed a growing awareness that professional practice was characterized by complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict. Further, these characteristics were antithetical to "Technical Rationality"—the dominant epistemology of professional practice (Schon, 1983, pp. 21–69).

According to Donald Schon (1983), Technical Rationality is a model for instrumental problem solving, made rigorous by the application of scientific theory. It comes to us as

... the heritage of Positivism, the powerful philosophical doctrine that grew up in the nineteenth century as an account of the rise of science and technology and as a social movement aimed at applying the achievements of science and technology to the well-being of mankind. Technical Rationality is the Positivist epistemology of practice. It became institutionalized in the modern university, founded in the late nineteenth century when Positivism was at its height, and in the professional schools which secured their place in the university in the early decades of the twentieth century. (P. 31)

From the perspective of Technical Rationality, professional practice is a process of *problem solving*. It provides the professional with an ability to find the best way to build a road, for example, but it does not provide a good mechanism for dealing with the complex political, economic, geographic, or social issues involved in deciding where the road should be placed.

The flaws and limitations of technical rationality became increasingly evident, both in the general public and in the professions themselves, in the period between the early 1960s and the early 1980s (Schon, 1983, p. 39). The "crisis of legitimacy," rooted in the professions' failure to live up to their own norms and their perceived incapacity to help society solve its problems, led to a good deal of experimentation and debate regarding methods of practice.

The Emergence of Pluralism and Participation

Architects such as Christopher Jones, Christopher Alexander, Tom Markus, and Ray Studer, hoped that formal mathematical models would lead to a methodology that would externalize the decision-making process.¹ But by the early 1970s, these "design methods" were rejected as a means of dealing with the problem of defining problems and setting goals in contemporary society, which is made up of diverse and vocal minorities, each with a different set of values and priorities. In a landmark paper entitled "Dilemmas in the General Theory of Planning," Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber (1974) discuss the difficulties encountered when we attempt to apply scientific methods to "divergent" situations: In the first half of this century, a professional's job was to solve an assortment of definable problems, primarily to eliminate undesirable conditions by paving streets, connecting roads, sheltering people, providing sanitation, and so forth. Now, Rittel and Webber argued, that style of problem solving could no longer be adapted to the wide array of social problems that needed planning attention. In a diverse society, they claimed, social problems were "wicked problems," and these were generally symptoms of other problems, with no definitive single formulation. Because solutions to wicked problems required value judgments, there would be no neutral, objective criteria to characterize a

¹A discussion of these methods presented at the 1967 Portsmouth Symposium, *Design Methods in Architecture* can be found in Geoffrey Broadbent, "The Morality of Designing" in Robin Jacques and James A. Powell, eds., *Design Science Method: Proceedings of the 1980 Design Research Society Conference* (Westbury House Publishers), pp. 309–311.

solution as correct or false. But, without such criteria, the search for a better solution could be endless. Thus, time, money, patience, and political judgment ultimately determine the resolution of these wicked problems that were essentially unique. As a result, Rittel and Webber argued that planning and design problems would be best solved in a process that recognizes direct involvement and deliberative dialogue among "all" concerned.

The idea that design is a public discourse that welcomes public debate in order to externalize and extend knowledge about the problem, because no one has the sole expertise to determine a resolution, came to be known as "Second Generation Design Methods." Rittel's (1972) "symmetry of ignorance" (Popper, 1965) was the central concept.

Historically, the principle of self-determination—and, thus, the right to participation—has been defended on the basis of the equality of men. Among [these] arguments . . . from the time of Pericles, to those of Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau and Jefferson, . . . none is as compelling as the argument of the "symmetry of ignorance." This argument essentially says that the amount of knowledge required to solve a planning problem adequately is infinite. Compared to this infinite amount of knowledge, while the knowledge each of us has may greatly differ in extent and content, we are equals in what we do not know, in ignorance. (Ouye and Protzen, 1975, p. 305)

This view, of course, implies a rejection of the notion that planning can provide the single "best" solution to urban problems, and thus points to a more "democratic" idea of planning, the idea that any and all groups that have an interest at stake in the planning process should have those interests articulated. Clearly, this antipositivist argument is linked to the politically based critiques of professionalism which insist on the need for participation in planning on the basis of justice and fairness.

The Revolt Against a Physical Bias

In the bitterly antiprofessional climate of the 1960s (Halmos, 1973), educators in planning were particularly critical of their own profession. Paul Davidoff and Lisa Peattie, for example, wrote extensively on the need for advocacy and pluralism in planning (Davidoff, 1965; Peattie, 1968). In addition to their skepticism about the technical models available for decision making, they were greatly concerned with the political implications of decision making done, in isolation from democratic processes, by professionals. They thought that if the planning process was to encourage democratic urban government, it had to operate so as to include rather than exclude citizens from participating in the process. Moreover, to do this the process had to stop being based on the myopic view that city planning was equivalent to physical planning. As Davidoff (1965, p. 336) said, "The city planning profession's historic concern with the physical environment has warped its ability to see physical structures and land as servants to those who use them." Physical relations, according to this view, took on value only in terms of their social, economic, psychological, or esthetic effect on different users. In other words, physical decisions are political decisions about who gets what, when, where, why, and how.

The idea that planning should become pluralistic and partisan, combined with concern for political decentralization, for race and class issues, and for the humanization of technocrats, produced not only an attack on conventional planning practice, but also two significant remedial strategies: the development of professional advocates, and the development of citizen participants in the planning process.

Professional Traditions

In architecture, where all decisions are presumed to be physical decisions, there is, in fact, a strong humanitarian "caretaking" tradition. In the nineteenth century, the profession saw itself as an instrument of progress and social improvement. Institutions of all kinds—prisons, schools, hospitals, asylums, orphanages, etc.—were built for reformative purposes. Housing was developed for factory towns, and utopian communities were built, because it was thought that the miseries of the poor and the unemployed could be remedied through physical and social arrangements.

In the twentieth century, the "Modern Movement" combined revolutionary technology and utopian dreams to give us a sentiment about the greater public good and a vision of the future that included ideas about social justice and quality of life.

The development of new technology fed revolutionary concepts about the organization of society and individual expectations; industrial advances were to give the workers power and create a better world; they underlay the machine aesthetic and the teachings of the Bauhaus. . . . Utopian philosophy was a rational ally of radical change and massive new construction. (Huxtable, 1983, p. 31)

For all that was good and bad in the Modern Movement, for all the rhetoric that naively equated advancing technology with egalitarian human values and architecture with revolution, the Modern Movement was building on a nineteenth century tradition. At the same time, it sought to revive the essence of architecture so that it would be a progressive economic and social force.

From the 1930s through the 1960s, CIAM (the *Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*) carried forward the social ideals of the Modern Movement, particularly with regard to housing and urban design.² With this legacy, the advocacy planners and the architects who began community design saw social reform as part of their tradition. Advocacy became the expression of an enlightened professional conscience, and participation became the methodology essential to the democratic process.

THE HISTORY OF COMMUNITY DESIGN

The history of community design can be divided into two stages: the idealistic phase and the entrepreneurial phase. Each can be characterized by the kinds of projects that were undertaken, the types of clients served, the ways that projects were staffed and funded, the goals that were hoped for, and the actual results that were achieved.

The Idealistic Phase

Advocacy planning typically involved a small number of professionals working with community groups in a fight against major development projects that threatened their neighborhood. The fight might be against an urban renewal designation, a freeway, a convention center, or any other redevelopment project that meant progress to businessmen and civic leaders, and certain death to low-income communities. A few Community Design Centers opened between 1963 and 1968, but the majority of CDCs began during the turbulent years between 1968 and 1972, the height of the idealistic phase. Architects

²Numerous proceedings of International Congress for Modern Architecture (CIAM) meetings were published between 1929 and 1959. See in particular Tyrwhitt, Sert, Rogers, eds. (1952), and Jeanneret-Gris, ed. (1973).

were inspired, and perhaps embarrassed, into action when black leader, Whitney Young, spoke at the 1968 AIA national convention in Portland, Oregon and chastised the professionals for their inadequate response to urban problems.

Some of the battles of this phase have become famous: Walter Thabit's alternative plan for Cooper Square in the Lower East Side of New York City, which began in 1959 and lasted until 1970, was the first effort to stop the demolition of existing housing units and involve citizens in developing a community plan (Thabit, 1961; Piven, 1975). Other such advocacy plans have had books written about them. *Yerba Buena: Land Grab and Community Resistance* is Chester Hartman's story (1974) of the attempt to preserve a San Francisco neighborhood that housed a population of elderly men, mostly former merchant marines, and the convention center that was eventually built on the site. Brian Anson's book, *I'll Fight You For It* (1981), documents the neighborhood battle against gentrification in London's Covent Garden. Robert Goodman's *After the Planners* (1971) tells the same kind of story in a Boston setting.

The clients of the 1960s were neighborhood groups with a problem, and the advocates themselves were volunteer professionals. Typically, the professionals sought out the clients and formed planning assistance groups to let low-income communities know that they were available as advocates. But when it came to identifying the needs of such communities and establishing a consultant-client relationship, a number of difficulties began to appear. Lisa Peattie recognized early on that neighborhood groups frequently lack homogeneity, community feeling, and common interests, and that this made it difficult for an advocate planner to identify representative groups adequately. Further, it was difficult to draw the lowest-income families into the framework of planning. The result was that the issues were often defined by the planners themselves, and the community groups sometimes looked upon the advocates as manipulators rather than defenders of their interests (Peattie, 1968).

The 1970s, however, was a decade of incredible grassroots organizing, and during the 1970s, professional designers and planners provided technical assistance for the hundreds of neighborhood plans, day-care centers, food co-ops, health clinics, parks, and housing rehabilitations these groups organized. Community Design Centers became the mechanism for serving these groups. Most often, the centers were organized by university faculty, their students, and young volunteers, and funded by government programs and public institutions.

San Francisco's CDC was typical. In 1968, Claude Stoller, on the faculty of the Department of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, secured office space in the city through the university extension and took a group of students out to the "real world." Within six months he had received funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity to hire a director and a minimal staff.

Because the design of housing and community facilities was a major aspect of neighborhood planning, the architects were as concerned about the design process as planners were about the political process. Many community designers looked to social science research to learn more about their clients and to develop methods for involving users in the design process. One method for finding out about the users was through the analysis of human behavior and the study of man-environment relationships. A great deal of empirical research was funded, and the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) was organized as a forum for the presentation and discussion of the most current research work.

Not all community designers, however, viewed this behavioral research as part of community design because they felt the research represented an objectification of planning. These practitioners believed that solutions to human/environmental problems were so complex that the only possible way solutions could be found was through argumentation, through a process that would promote mutual learning for experts and laymen alike (Robbins et al., 1975). As a result, they tended to focus on the generation of concepts, goals, design ideas, and design methods to be used with clients. Henry Sanoff's extensive publications on design games and participation techniques (1979) are perhaps the best known in the United States, but many design centers were involved in developing a participatory design process and debating the ethical questions of who should participate, who should choose the process, and when does this form of design process become manipulative and/or exclusive. The Washington University Community Design Workshop, for example, published a number of "Participatory Design Studies" (Comerio et al., 1974; Hurwitz, 1975) that document detailed and elaborate cases of community involvement in the design of day-care centers, playgrounds, schools, and housing.

Unfortunately, a large percentage of the designs and plans produced in the early years of community design were never implemented. Advocates often could not identify their constituencies, social research could not reduce the gap between professionals and clients, and the participatory process would not change the system. The real problem, of course, was powerlessness: planning without control of land and resources could only hook the client communities into a new network of dependency. The realization of this helped bring community design out of its idealistic early years and into its current phase.

The Entrepreneurial Phase

A shift in practice began to take place in community design in the late 1970s. As the political climate became more conservative, funding was reduced and community design was forced to become less idealistic and more pragmatic. The change did not represent a loss in values, but rather a recognition of what community design could and could not do.

The pragmatic shift to the entrepreneurial phase was an important transition in community design. Advocacy and citizen participation were derived from a political model where the goal of an ideal practice was to bring about social justice and empowerment. In the entrepreneurial phase, a political model of empowerment has been replaced by an economic one.

Accordingly, the present phase of community design work is less academic and more oriented toward local activism and social services. The typical university-affiliated design center of the earlier years provided general planning and preliminary design services. By contrast, the later community design agencies took on one problem and followed it through, in entrepreneurial fashion, from beginning to end. Because these agencies focused on one or two specific physical and social problems, and because they were often involved through the actual construction, their work was relatively straightforward, manageable, and highly visible.

The Urban Homesteading Assistance Board (U-HAB) in New York began by working with exconvicts in a "sweat-equity" program, where they would renovate abandoned tenements purchased from the city for one dollar. In the process, the exoffenders would

learn some construction skills and, at the same time, build equity in housing, which they would own and manage (Terner and Laven, 1974).³

Asian Neighborhood Design in San Francisco's Chinatown began in 1977 by building office furnishings for Chinese community organizations with crews of high school dropouts working in a youth training program. This kind of work is a much more direct, less passive style of intervention than most design centers had been providing. It was also entirely "local"—aimed at problems locally, rather than globally defined.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, "localism" was perceived as bad—as narrow, reformist, and generally unrevolutionary. Repairing potholes did not develop political content or ideological coherence or broaden issues. This new art of community design began with the recognition that local action was, in fact, cumulative. What happens in the neighborhoods does affect city policies, and what happens in the big urban centers does in some way affect the nation. More important, community designers came to realize that at the local level, where they have a stake in the same issues as the groups they serve, they could really be effective. They were better able to understand the politics, the problems, and the inherent contradictions in what they did, and, at the same time, they could continue to stand up for the values and ideals that had shaped community design over the past twenty years.

It is not clear that these agencies foresaw Reagan's impending cuts in federal funding and therefore changed market strategies. Rather, it seems they were following the thinking of grassroots groups in the 1970s who were shying away from universal solutions to society's problems and focusing on self-reliant economic and community development strategies that served locally specific needs.

In San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood, for example, community organizations fight the encroachments of downtown development at the same time that they attempt to deal with the immediate needs of day-to-day survival. The local bums, who sleep in the planter boxes installed by community organizers, are often viewed with the same contempt as highrise developers. The developers may be the ultimate enemy, but big business is not, necessarily, as neighborhood groups bemoaned the loss of a Safeway and welcomed the first fast-food restaurant to locate in the neighborhood. While the distinction between "good guys" and "bad guys" has always been blurry, what this represents is a turn towards complex value judgments and pragmatic local self-interest, and a turn away from leftist rhetoric and utopian idealism. The distinction here is that groups operating under the earlier, more academic models tended to revel in the problems themselves, while entrepreneurial groups have less of an interest in abstract questions of right and wrong, and more concern with getting things done.

"Entrepreneurial" implies the championing and carrying through to completion of projects. It also implies the making of a profit. The end of the government funding was only one of the market forces influencing the new type of entrepreneurial practice, another was the emergence of a new type of client—one who could pay—for community design services. Many community-based organizations and Community Development Corporations doing housing, economic development, and neighborhood preservation grew up during the 1970s. They became small businesses with needs for architectural, planning, and construction services, and they had the funds to pay for these services. Some of them

³A series of New York Post articles in 1973-74 on the "Renegades," an East Harlem Gang doing sweat-equity, in Terner D, Laven C (April, 1974, Appendix 5).

clearly preferred to hire more traditional professional services, but many others turned to the social-action type of community design agencies because they maintained a community-oriented value system and a kind of service that did not hold the dollar as the bottom line.

How design centers provide the new type of service while attempting to become more self-sufficient depends on who they are. Old well-established centers like the ones at Pratt, East Tennessee, or the University of Colorado, centers with a strong institutional base of support, are currently going after a combination of contract work, funded research, and clinical training for university students along with their ongoing technical assistance and political advocacy. They hope to become partners in some of the redevelopment schemes that they have been involved in planning, and to share in the profits of new developments in their cities in proportion to the value of their input.

The scale of these ventures is out of reach for the younger or more teaching-oriented university design centers. For them, the new emphasis on diversity takes the form of a combination of research, clinical training, and technical assistance supported by universities, local cities, and contracted work. One example is the University of California Berkeley Design Center's university-community partnership arrangement, where the University Chancellor and the local mayors have agreed to match each other's contributions to the Design Center as a recognition that the services provided are mutually beneficial.

The newer agencies, such as U-HAB and AND, that have developed outside of, or with only minimal connections to, universities, aspire to be small business operations. They are attempting to combine a variety of job training, public education, design research, and other funding-dependent programs with saleable specialized services such as architectural design, building construction, furniture production, or housing management. Their hope is eventually to be able to support their community service work on the profits from their private businesses. In the meantime, however, they and the university centers are dependent on the last drops of public funding as well as on the tremendously overburdened private foundations.

In truth, this kind of service simply cannot exist without some kind of subsidy, no matter how entrepreneurial community designers become. Their nonprofit client groups are still dependent on project grants to cover design fees, and it is simply a fact that these funds are always inadequate. Further, any design center's new venture into private business is inherently problematic. As a nonprofit agency, they are faced with conflicting management strategies: should they maximize income or continue to maximize services? Then, of course, there is the ever-present problem that any small business must confront: in an uncertain market and a troubled economy, business is risky and loan monies are hard to secure. For design centers, whose track records are built on public service and public money, the risk is clearly double.

Business risk is only one side of the picture. The other great risk that design centers face is that their entrepreneurship may at some point compromise their values. Still, change is inevitable. The old-style design center as the provider of free services to needy community groups will simply not survive in the current political and economic climate. Whether or not the trend-setters attempting to develop new financial arrangements to underwrite the cost of their community services will be able to survive is yet to be seen. The market will play a strong force. So will their ability to maintain some kind of public or institutional subsidy during the necessary transition years, and that will depend a great deal on the public mood.

THE STATE OF THE ART OF COMMUNITY DESIGN

A Definition of Community Design

In the last twenty years, the term "community design" has meant many things to many people.⁴ The movement began as one of professional reform, and for many it has remained primarily a political cause and a mechanism for social change. For others, citizen participation has been more important as a design methodology than as a political cause. They have been concerned with externalizing the process of design as a means of including more people in the decision-making process, especially in regard to the environment. For still others, community design has simply been a desire to find ways to make what they designed more responsive to all those who used it.

For all its manifestations, community design is the attempt to identify and solve particular environmental problems in which the client is a special-interest group and the problem is social, economic, or political, as well as physical. Further, community design can be distinguished from traditional professional practice by the following characteristics:

- Community design focuses on the client type, rather than the building type.
- Community design requires a variety of tasks to solve problems because the end product is not clearly defined from the outset.
- Community design problems are generated by a grassroots or bottom-up process.
- Community design combines principles of empowerment with enabling products.

This definition provides a framework for describing community design as it has emerged over the last twenty years.

The use of a particular client group to define one's work—rather than an activity like building design—has been important in both phases of community design. In the early years, design centers defined their work in terms of the needs of poor and disenfranchised urban groups. Currently, most design centers act as advocates for specific populations in targeted neighborhoods.

A variety of tasks is often necessary because design solutions to community problems are not necessarily plans or buildings. Community design represents a rejection of professional practice as a process of problem *solving* in favor of what Donald Schon calls problem *setting*—"the process by which we define the decisions to be made, the ends to be achieved, [and] the means which may be chosen (Schon, 1983, p. 40). As a result, it is often impossible for community designers to use standard contract documents because the relationship between designer and client does not follow preestablished norms.

Community design also shies away from official government programs set up to expand citizen participation. Public input solicited by city planning or other government agencies tends to serve administrative ends, such as meeting federal funding requirements or providing information for incorporation into comprehensive plans. In community design, projects are developed from grassroots actions or issues, rather than from established procedures, because neighborhood problems result from decisions and institutions that

⁴In 1982-3, Randolph T. Hester, Jr., professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture at University of California, Berkeley, and I conducted a survey of 130 of our colleagues—both academic and practitioners—who do community design. I have used materials from this survey in developing the definition of community design. The survey is published as a working paper (Comero, 1984).

operate largely outside the neighborhood. To alter the consequences of those actions, it is necessary to alter the process (Checkoway, 1984).

Community designers face problems that are unfamiliar to traditional planning and design professionals. "What will convince outsiders of local capacity to complete projects? What tactics activate residents without alienating allies and funding sources? How can planners give individuals a sense of the power to participate?" (Checkoway, 1984, p. 106). To address the ever present political and ethical questions, community design is guided by two principles of empowerment, one political, the other enabling. The first recognizes the rights of all citizens to have a voice in future decisions that affect the places they inhabit, work, and linger in. Further, it recognizes the professional's responsibility not to be neutral in the face of the exploitation of people or the destruction of the environment. The second principle of empowerment, humanistic rather than political, recognizes that professionals have a responsibility to design buildings that are usable and understandable, with a sense of territoriality and an appropriate scale, and to develop neighborhood and city plans that allow the greatest opportunity for all people to participate in the activities a city has to offer—transportation, open space, housing.⁵

Manuel Castells aptly describes community design as something that exists in the tension between professionalism and social idealism.⁶ The definition of community design practice developed here suggests that it is client-, process-, and value-specific, yet remarkably nonspecific in terms of the tasks it will take on. The difference between this style of work and traditional professional practice is best illustrated by four examples, two of community design and two of types of traditional professional practice that might be mistaken for it.

San Francisco's Asian Neighborhood Design concentrates on the problems of the Asian population in Chinatown. They design and build housing, playground equipment, day-care centers, and offices for community service agencies. In addition to this relatively traditional range of architectural work, they run job-training programs in construction for "hard-core" youth, write Chinese-language pamphlets on energy conservation, provide emergency repair services for the elderly, and lobby city officials on issues of housing and open space in their neighborhood.

As AND worked to renovate dilapidated housing, they recognized that almost any improvements would result in rent increases that would displace low-income tenants. In order to keep the neighborhood intact, and thereby continue to supply affordable housing for the very poor, it seemed the only option was to keep the buildings in their existing unsafe and unpleasant conditions. Determined to do something about the situation, AND proposed an alternative to the deathtrap versus displacement dilemma. For a small sum of money, they could build furnishings and help tenants fix up the interiors of the hotels and apartments in which they were currently living. This would at least improve the day-to-day quality of life for some tenants—without displacement. The project proved to be a good interim solution for the tenants and served to focus political attention on the larger housing problems in the community (Comerio, 1983).

The special combination of client, place, process, and values that makes AND a community design practice is easy to recognize. It is not always possible to practice

⁵This two-tiered conception of empowerment was developed out of discussions with Giancarlo De Carlo and Donlyn Lyndon in 1983 at the International Laboratory for Architecture and Urban Design, Siena, Italy.

⁶Interview with Manuel Castells (Fall, 1983) University of California, Berkeley, CA. See also Castells (1983).

such comprehensive community design, so it is important to distinguish between projects that embody certain elements of community design and those that take the name in vain.

The University Avenue Coop Housing in Berkeley, designed by the architectural firm Lyndon/Buchannon, is a multiunit apartment complex located on a difficult infill site (Lyndon and Buchanan, 1983). Aimed at providing affordable housing for cooperative members, the design is responsive to the needs of the occupants, neighborhood issues, and economic constraints. It is an enabling piece of architecture, whose program was developed by local cooperative members. Although the architects may not particularly seek out housing cooperatives or other such special interest groups as the exclusive focus of their practice, they certainly bring a number of community design concerns to this housing project.

By comparison, Sim Van der Ryn's plan for an ecologically sound community development at the Hamilton Air Force Base site in Marin County, California, known as the Marin Solar Village, had a tremendous amount of public discussion and input (Van der Ryn, 1980; Buck, 1981). But while there is no doubt that if a project had been built it would have been a milestone in suburban housing development, Van der Ryn's concern was primarily with appropriate technology, not with the process, and not with the rights or needs of special populations. He has said, in fact, that he "does" community design, but he is only willing to work with communities that agree with him.

Another "negative" example: Since the public participates by electing their government officials to make policies and programs in their interest, and since social programs are specifically for the poor and disenfranchised, do we consider public housing as community design? No, because government programs must address the general welfare of the general public, not the needs of any one special interest group or any one neighborhood. Thus, the San Francisco Planning Commission's concern for affordable housing in the city does not make design studies for new communities into community design. Although architect Dan Soloman's plan for Rincon Hill (Soloman, 1981) was an important look at the densities and types of development necessary in order to produce reasonably priced housing units in the city, it was ultimately a plan without a constituency.

CONCLUSION

Community design developed out of a radical critique of professional practice in favor of methods that would recognize and encourage a multiplicity of values in society and the environment. In the early years, it was assumed that advocacy planning could provide the new clients, the poor, not only with technical assistance but also with power, and that through power there would be justice and change. It was also assumed that participatory planning, which would make the design process transparent, could give the new clients, the users, more control, and therefore through that process there would be justice and change.

Instead, as this paper has shown, advocacy and citizen participation did not demystify professional knowledge, but instead created a new category of expertise in special-interest politics. The efforts to achieve empowerment did not lead to democratic consensus, but to extended conflict (Schon, 1983; pp. 338-344). Yet the contradictions, surfacing over the past twenty years, have been critical in the development of the current entrepreneurial model. The unitary vision of social reform through citizen empowerment and the elim-

ination of "expertise" has given way to a messier process of cooperation and negotiation in an adversarial setting.⁷

The newly oriented community designers have found that it is possible to focus on the needs of lower-income clients in inner-city neighborhoods, and other special populations, without complete dependence on a social welfare system of service. Practitioners also have discovered that entrepreneurship and pragmatism are not completely antithetical to their values, that, in fact, their clients are better served, in the long range as well as immediately, by small do-able plans rather than by just, democratic, and unattainable ones. With this new emphasis on the do-able, community design practice appears to be realistic, definable, and manageable. The question remains, is it successful?

If success means taking control of physical changes in a community by developing political and economic power, then success has been and remains marginal. The institutionalization of citizen participation has come to mean merely that middle-class groups are considered representative of community interests. Neighborhood preservation has come to mean gentrification, where buildings get saved and people get displaced. Certainly, things might have been worse without advocacy, but we cannot say that community design has been very successful at building power within communities.

If we define success as actual buildings, parks, or neighborhood plans that have been executed through community design, then the success rate is rather good. Two hundred pounds of brochures and annual reports from design centers across the country will attest to the thousands of house renovations and community buildings that are designed each year. While we recognize that on the average probably only 50% of what gets planned actually gets built, it still represents a significant volume of actual work, especially since it does not account for the "other" goods and services (pamphlets, jobs, advice, etc.) that come as a by-product of this work.

Further, if we define success as "building people," something Janice Perlman defines as the development of leadership capacity, self-esteem, a feel for participation, and an ability to analyze small problems in a larger context (Perlman, 1982),⁸ then success is probably considerable, though more difficult to measure. We cannot say that lessons are internalized by the clients of community design, but we do know that clients are the central focus of community design, and what happens to them is the ultimate test; one example will explain this.

Earlier, we described Asian Neighborhood Design's furniture-building program as a quick and inexpensive interim solution to improving the quality of life for tenants in residential hotels in San Francisco's Chinatown. Two years after the program had begun, an elderly man called the agency because he heard that they made small beds and he wanted one. In his room, his present bed only fit one way and the roof leaked right over his head. With a smaller bed, he could position it in the other direction and avoid getting wet. The agency told him that he could have the bed, but that they would like to see his room and talk to him about the problems in his building. To make a long story short, this man organized the building tenants in a rent strike, saw the process through the courts, and won, forcing the landlord to repair the code violations without passing the costs on to the tenants.

⁷This is Schon's term for describing a nonpositivist approach to professional practice, which he calls "reflection-in-action" (Schon, 1983, Chapters 2, 10).

⁸"Building people" is part of a three-part analysis of community empowerment—"building power, building community, building people" (Perlman, 1982).

Every person who has ever done community design work has a comparable story to tell, and many would say that this is what community design is really all about. But though real success is certainly more than the volume of building starts, it is also something more than character building. Looking ahead, community design will need to develop multiple agendas to be truly successful. It will need to:

- bring about visible physical improvements;
- develop economic alternatives for the owning and managing of a neighborhood's residential stock and services;
- continue political advocacy on housing, open space, and other issues that affect neighborhood stabilization;
- develop social services and community education programs that involve citizens in the community development activities.

Community design may not be able to do all these things at once, but its survival and success in the 1980s will depend on its capacity to take on some combination of these tasks and develop a strategy that is as just as it is pragmatic.

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