

# TOGETHER WE DESIGN: LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS OFFER THEIR BEST TECHNIQUES FOR TRANSACTIONAL FORM-MAKING

**de la Peña, David**

University of California, Davis  
dsdelapena@ucdavis.edu

**Hester, Randy**

University of California, Berkeley  
rthester@frontier.com

**Hou, Jeff**

University of Washington  
jhou@uw.edu

**Jones Allen, Diane**

DesignJones  
diane@designjonesllc.com

**Lawson, Laura**

Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey  
ljlawson@rutgers.edu

## 1 ABSTRACT

*In spite of increasing demand for participatory design within democratic cultures, the most effective transactional methods remain elusive. Which are most useful to address contemporary issues? CELA activist scholars have recently articulated contexts in which their techniques are successful; there is now a critical mass of such work, but it has infrequently been brought together in a forum for critical discussion. This paper modestly initiates that discussion, bringing together five participatory designers who teach and practice community design to share the techniques they consider most effective in achieving truly collaborative form-making with people. Each presents the one technique he or she thinks best enables the designer and community to work together to actually design landscapes. The focus is methods for decision-making and shared form-making as opposed to preliminary activities like listening and program generation. Attention is paid to the transaction—the give and take between designer and community—regarding precise design layout, spatial configuration and experiential qualities. The five techniques include “Design Buffet: Work with what the participants have”; “Kitchen Table Work Session”; “El Carrito: Go where the people are”; “Make It Real: communication and empathy through building small”; and “Drawing-out-the-sacred, upside-down.” We describe the techniques with instructions for implementation, case stories and reflections, concluding with tentative insights, a few lessons for improvement and how others can contribute to create a collective techniques catalogue. A long-term objective is to publish a catalogue of best transactional design techniques for landscape architects. Such a publication would significantly advance this field and serve society.*

### 1.1 Keywords

Participatory design, participatory techniques, transactional design, landscape architecture, community design

## 2 CONTEXT

As democratic cultures have increasingly expected citizens to participate in decisions about the design of their cities, community designers have borrowed participatory techniques from other fields and created ones appropriate to landscape design. But, which are most useful and in what contexts? Which are best-suited to address contemporary issues? This paper begins the search for answers.

Books on participatory techniques are outdated or more related to planning than to the detailed design of landscape architecture (Hester, 1990; Sanoff, 2000). Although many of the techniques most often used today were developed during the Civil Rights Era and are still appropriate, some are not (Linn 1968, 2007; Alinsky, 1971). Classic techniques have been iterated to the point of incomprehensibility. Some are sadly neglected (Friedmann, 1973; Halprin, 1969; Davidoff, 1965; Iacofano, 2001). Some have been replaced by fresh ones springing from new insurgencies as well as cross cultural, regional and global movements (Hou, 2010; Liu, 2005; Palermo, 2000; Angotti et al 2011; Sandercock, 1998; Irazabal, 2008). Some of these remain too vague for others to replicate. Most emphasize programming and conflict avoidance, skimping on collective creativity and form-making (Zoh, 2012). Until recently rigorous participatory techniques were buried in inspiring grass roots stories (Hester, 1999). Young activist scholars have begun to articulate their techniques: there is a wealth of old and new techniques that need evaluation and collective advancement.

This paper initiates those actions by bringing together six participatory designers who teach and practice community design today to share the single technique each considers most effective for transactive form-making with people. Transactive design- a process of give and take between community and designer through which each learns and teaches the other and they actually design the landscape together- is concerned with both how the designer “designs” with community members and how community members “design” with the designated professional designer (Friedmann, 1973; Sanoff 2000). We chose techniques we think most effective in that regard.

The objectives of this paper are to share what we learned in this effort. We wanted to 1.create a simple four-part framework of describe, instruct, illustrate and reflect; 2.test that framework for presenting, comparing, evaluating and disseminating techniques; and 3.pose questions for improvement. The main body of the paper presents the five techniques using our preset format.

Each of the five authors describes his or her technique with step by step instructions of how it is prepared and carried out. We intend the instructions to be precise enough for others to use the technique. A case story accompanies each technique, followed by a self-reflection regarding the strengths and weaknesses, contexts in which it is more and less useful, how it has evolved over time, and what each panelist uniquely learns from this technique. After we present the five techniques, we offer preliminary evaluations of the four-part framework, insights from trying to communicate a technique clearly and concisely, questions to be answered and next steps in developing a catalogue of techniques.

## 3 METHOD

For several years the organizing author, Randy Hester, discussed with others at CELA the need to create a catalogue of participatory design techniques most useful today, especially techniques that shape landscape design decisions. Observing the numerous presentations of new techniques, he asked those involved in the Service-learning and Community Engagement Track to submit what they considered their best method—old or new—for collaborative form-making. Many expressed interest; five submitted a brief description of the techniques included here. Each wrote 1000 word descriptions of his or her technique as a test example, using the four-part framework of *describe*, *instruct*, *illustrate* and *reflect* that the organizing author had developed. Each technique was written independently by each author, in their own words without any attempt to standardize descriptions beyond the four-part framework. This resulted in significantly different aspects of emphasis and divergent descriptions of each technique. After drafts were written, we used a Delphi Probe to give each other comments and ask questions to improve clarity and utility, and to determine next actions. After four rounds of back-and-forth discussions we tried to generalize our conclusions about the format. We did not try to write as a single author. We did consider how to modify the four-part framework and how to invite others to add their best techniques.

## 4 TEST CASE TECHNIQUES

The major part of this paper consists of the five test case techniques that were submitted to the organizing author. Each follows the four-part format: Description, Instructions, Case Story and Self-reflection.

## **5 DESIGN BUFFET: WORKING WITH WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE**

**Contributor: Jeff Hou**

### **5.1 Description**

Despite benevolent intentions, participatory design can be an alienating experience for community members, particularly in immigrant communities where language and culture present challenges for communication and engagement (Hou, 2013). This is worse when professional designers are unaware of social nuances that impact the efficacy of a participatory process. How can designers overcome these challenges in practice? How can they develop techniques that bridge the cultural divide and enable multicultural participants to engage effectively in transactive design?

A decade of work with city officials, local professionals and University of Washington Department of Landscape Architecture faculty and students in Seattle's International District taught me that a community designer could overcome such barriers by uncovering, recognizing, and working with what is familiar to people and the assets that already reside in the community (Hou, 2011). These include the skills and knowledge that community members currently possess, the existing organizations and social groups to partner with, and activities that are already occurring in the community that might serve as venues for participation. Rather than seeing the community members as lacking skills to participate, using what the participants already have can enable them to work with experts as equals.

### **5.2 Instructions**

After a community invites the University or, more recently, me directly, a first step is to identify partners: organizations and individuals that have a deep understanding of the issues in the community with networks for further outreach to identify assets in the community. Initially I relied heavily on the few community gatekeepers whom I trusted to identify appropriate partners. After working in this neighborhood for ten years, I know most of the potential partners and can immediately identify the best ones for a particular issue.

Community engagement involves truly interacting with community members, not just giving them their legal right to participate. Rather than inviting community members to a public meeting, removing them from their "comfort zone," inviting ourselves as designers to the activities already taking place in the community is a more empathic and effective approach. Once we have identified a setting to engage the community, we then work with the nature of that event, activity, or venue to determine the appropriate format and techniques for engagement relative to the nature of the projects we were asked to work on by the community. Precisely how this is done is critical. During the participatory process, unforeseen outcomes can occur that may require the design team to improvise further on the spot. Without following a strictly prescribed format, the unforeseen interactions can yield unexpected results.

### **5.3 Case Story**

International Children's Park in Seattle's Chinatown International District was built in 1980. In 2006, I was approached by a neighborhood organization to improve the park, facing issues of safety, disrepair, and lack of use. First, I found out more about the park from the individuals with intimate knowledge of the site: nearby residents, members of organizations nearby, the manager of a Community Center and staff of a daycare center who brought children to the park daily. Their knowledge provided the basis for the participatory design process. For example, safety was the top concern; children often came to the park with adults; and young and older adults also used the park. It was necessary to involve users of different ages.

Finding an appropriate venue to engage the diverse users was the next task. Community partners told us about a weekly social hour that took place in the Community Center each Friday afternoon. Elderly residents from the neighborhood came to meet friends, watch videos, and play Ping-Pong. We inquired whether it would be appropriate for us to "borrow" their social hour to get their input on improving the park, along with high school students from a youth organization. They accepted.

The next challenge was for us to develop a format to engage the participants. To involve high school students, we wanted the workshop to be interactive, distinct from passive and all too often alienating public meetings. With the goal of capacity-building in mind, we wanted them to gain new skills from the workshop. We also wanted to build on abilities they already had in order to more effectively engage them as participants. We knew from previous exchanges that people in the neighborhood all enjoyed a buffet meal. There is an inside joke among Chinese immigrants about the central import of eating to their culture. With that in mind, we began to design our workshop around the notion of a buffet, resulting in a game called “design buffet.”

Because the design game proceeded like a buffet, it required little explanation. As soon as it was announced that the workshop would be like a buffet, the audience immediately queued up. With a plate (site model) in hands (Figure 1), the participants selected park design elements (cut-outs) from aluminum trays on what looked like a buffet table. The trays had bilingual labels to ensure people understood what the elements were. Each person was to generate a design to share with others. We assigned high school students to sit around tables with the elderly so that the students could help the elders, sparking interactions between the different age groups. Each person explained his or her design to others around the table.

Features and elements emerging directly from the Design Buffet transaction were subsequently incorporated into plans for the park’s renovation, which was completed in 2012. The park now includes a spacious gateway entry and a common area for people of all ages to gather, elements that most residents had included in their Design Buffet proposals. One element in most Design Buffet proposals, fencing the entire park, was eliminated, replaced by the open entry and newly cleared sight lines that increased visibility. During the workshop, people were most concerned about safety, which prompted their fencing proposals. But improved accessibility, features appealing to more users and increased use made fencing unnecessary. There are now more eyes in and on the park, and residents and visitors more actively use the park since the renovation.



**Figure 1. Workshop participants selected their chosen park elements on the “buffet” line.**  
Photo by co-author Hou

## **5.4 Reflection**

During the design workshop for the International Children’s Park, it was surprising how quickly and smoothly the participants were able to go through the exercise without much difficulty. The Design Buffet had a sense of novelty yet familiarity that alleviated the discomfort typically experienced in

community meetings. Informal conversations at the tables also reinforced the workshop as an extension of everyday activities.

Ownership emerged from physically and mentally generating a design. Some weeks later students presented design alternatives based on what they learned from the “buffet” designs, the participants actively inquired about design features in degrees that I had not expected. The “buffet” made details of design familiar and actionable. The intergenerational workshop enabled everyone to appreciate the needs of diverse users beyond just children. Furthermore, it helped all participants understand that by increasing the diversity of park users, the park’s safety also increased.

## **6 KITCHEN TABLE WORK SESSION**

### **Contributor: Diane Allen Jones**

#### **6.1 Description**

The Kitchen Table Work Session is a participatory research and design strategy developed by our firm, DesignJones, LLC. It has been crafted to build new or strengthen existing interactive networks and practices, specifically providing venues that go beyond the public meeting and stakeholder interview processes. Using this technique, the designer seeks group information, perspectives and visions that directly speak to the desires and concerns of those living in and/or directly impacted by any design proposed for the area.

Transactive form-making begins with building trust and transparency through clear and open communication strategies with groups that have historically and recently experienced unfulfilled promises in spite of diligent participation in city planning hearings regarding disasters or economic loss in their community. Such groups suffer a general feeling of a lack of representation. Thus, designers can expect a great deal of skepticism, reservation and even resistance to participating in the design process, particularly if the approach is not deemed fair and inclusive. On the other hand, there are groups who see an inclusionary process as the perfect opportunity to finally share an extensive amount of information that would potentially derail the timing or even broadness of a public meeting. In short, designers have to conceive workshop strategies that move beyond the typical. Experience using the inclusionary Kitchen Table Work Session technique has made us acutely aware of its value and appeal, over formal approaches like institutionalized meetings and public hearings, to certain cultures and environments. It significantly improves communication and participation by bringing designers and community members together to do research and exchange knowledge and ideas leading to and influencing form-making and the work at hand. The Kitchen Table Work Session provides the design team with on the ground detailed data, ideas and beliefs guiding the expectations of people whose lives and neighborhoods will be directly impacted by the outcomes of the proposed development.

#### **6.2 Instructions**

The Kitchen Table Work Session provides a face-to-face dialogue among friends and neighbors with a trained community facilitator/landscape architect in the most local of settings. The setting may be a kitchen table, a stoop, beauty salon or even a bar or restaurant. Once it is determined whose home or establishment will host the work session, that person can invite friends, neighbors and other community members they know. This allows for an ease and openness to express ideas. Someone should inconspicuously take notes. The designer or residents may draw ideas on paper or a map. Over time participant tools have increased to include laptops, iPads, iPhones, large flat screen monitors or even the host resident’s television for displaying up to the moment information, digital images and drawings. We observe that in the familiar setting among close friends and neighbors, even those with computer phobias feel free to ask questions about alien technology, and many soon engage its use. Individuals not only see their ideas expressed in an expedient fashion, but just as important, the processes of inquiry and discovery are demystified in a familiar personal surrounding. This also allows for easy capture of the information. Access to the Internet provides many of the tools needed to guarantee a high level of interactive exchange related to city information and best practices for design and implementation. We often have a central body of expertise available remotely for the kitchen table participants.

#### **6.3 Case Story**

DesignJones, LLC saw a positive increase in participation among New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward residents around a proposed warehouse district development. We held several Kitchen Table Work Sessions in the homes of Holy Cross residents (Figure 2) enabling dialogue and education about the potential site. The main focus was to determine if the Holy Cross/Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood could use the Warehouse Waterfront District as a site for sustainable food security, economic development and cultural livability. Through the Kitchen Table Workshops we got a clear understanding of the type of development residents really wanted. Mixed use would serve their needs. Most importantly, we were able to galvanize opposition for the proposed zoning change, from Mixed Use to Industrial, which would have constrained development by limiting it to industrial and port-related uses. After several Workshops where a thorough understanding of zoning issues was gained, residents came out to the Planning Commission, and won a victory. The existing zoning remains. As one result, a local organization, The Backyard Gardeners' Network, is developing a plan for a community-serving park on land that the rezoning would not have allowed.



**Figure 2. Gathering around the kitchen table. Photo by co-author Jones Allen.**

## **6.4 Reflection**

There are challenges with this technique. One difficulty is to guarantee consistent messaging aligned with objectives of the project. The leader must keep the informal chat focused so that adequate time is spent determining how the community desires the project manifested. Another difficulty is that demand for the Kitchen Table Work Sessions will grow as word of the opportunity to participate in meaningful and personalized dialogue spreads. We propose several ways to address both problems. First, implement a Centralized Information Exchange Center (CIEC) available during every Kitchen Table Work Session to serve as a reverse webinar approach to communication through the group facilitator whenever a Kitchen Session is held. In a central location a panel of representatives from the project team

would constitute a think tank to offer answers to inquiries from localized discussions. The panel need not agree yet offer insight that keeps groups engaged and learning from different perspectives, serving as a catalyst for greater understanding of the endeavor. Second, advertise the exchange widely and maintain a strict, standardized schedule for both the Kitchen Sessions and CIEC. Standardizing time allows numerous groups to simultaneously access the CIEC from different venues. Hold all of these sessions one or two days each week throughout the project.

The Kitchen Table Work Session provides the designer the essential deep understanding of a community's needs and desires. It develops greater community interaction and clarity of goals. Unlike techniques that occur in larger forums, the Kitchen Table Work Session in an intimate setting allows freedom to express one's ideas, and to learn, question, and exchange without the judgment or influence of a larger audience. Community members gain confidence to participate in a larger group, armed with knowledge and the strength of their ideas.

## **7 EL CARRITO: TAKING THE CHARRETTE TO THE PEOPLE**

**Contributor: David de la Peña**

### **7.1 Description**

Carrito is the Spanish equivalent of the French charrette, now more associated with public workshops than the carts used at the École des Beaux Arts to collect drawings to present final designs to experts. Today's institutionalized charrette process involves experts and the public (NCI, 2015; Sanoff, 2000). Although charrettes typically take place in the communities their projects affect, participation is seldom representative. Furthermore, inviting neighbors to participate in a process tightly orchestrated by experts gives a false sense of empowerment.

The carrito is an innovation that adds another dimension to community outreach. It is simply a cart that designers take into public spaces. Instead of inviting people to a controlled charrette, the carrito engages people within their daily routines by meeting them where they are—on their way to work or lunch. It is a small movable object adaptable to local conditions—an architectural curiosity, an art piece that attracts people because it is out of the ordinary. In a location that slightly disturbs but becomes part of the community's rhythms, on the edges of the flows of everyday life, it can be deployed on a temporary basis, or repeatedly. It allows users to display drawings or even games. It penetrates beyond the "usual suspects" that appear in most charrettes. Most importantly, it flips the tables, taking experts out of their comfort zone and opening new ways for them to understand the communities they are acting within.

### **7.2 Instructions**

Making a carrito expresses one's attitude to form-making, requiring some construction skills, but allowing every member of a design team to contribute. Consider the project a team-building exercise. Guidelines regarding size, materials, features, and aesthetics are not hard-and-fast rules but a starting point.

The size of the carrito should reflect its objectives, the scale of spaces it must command, and the ability to transport it easily: a small rolling suitcase or a large trailer. The carrito has wheels; it moves without falling apart. Materials reflect the builders' expertise, but should be lightweight, sturdy, and easily replaced like bicycle parts. Consider its kinetics: closed and open. Closed, it should occupy little space. Open, it may unfold to provide a tabletop, pin-up space, storage, signage, or shade. One of the carrito's main purposes is aesthetic—to stand out, well designed and crafted evoking curiosity or wonder. Avoid making it too polished. An imperfect object may be more approachable to passers-by. Using recycled materials assembled in an understandable manner says that locals create public space best.

But the carrito does not create community engagement on its own—it is not a drone. The opportunities it creates—to observe behaviors, to hear local stories—require designers to spend extended periods of time in a community, rather than looking at it remotely. Take the carrito to the project site, to popular public spaces, to parking lots, wherever people are. Placement is critical: position it at the edges of pedestrian activity, where it can slightly disrupt without impeding flows. Display useful transactive props—maps, models and photos of the community. Add flyers for community events, distribute surveys, or conduct unstructured interviews. Take notes, draw, diagram, paint, smile, and listen to what the community tells you.

### 7.3 Case Story

For the activist group in Barcelona, Raons Públiques, the carrito expresses a commitment to empowering communities to make their own public spaces. I worked with the group as a participant observer and continue to communicate with them as an activist scholar. The group includes environmental designers, anthropologists, sociologists and educators dissatisfied with the city's urban planning model. Raons' work emphasizes diagnosis and dialogue—knowing a neighborhood in order to design its spaces transactively (de la Peña, 2013).

The Raons built a prototype carrito to stand out, enliven public space and invite dialogue for a workshop in France. Raons group member Carlos explains: “the carrito has more use when you set it loose and learn from what happens. It's not just an intention of transforming. Every element when you project it into space transforms the space, but in a social way, to generate participation.” The object itself is an odd box on three wheels, sheathed in translucent ribbed plastic and painted wood flaps that transform into tabletops with the help of a hacked tripod. The carrito is used often, rolled into public squares as a temporary kiosk to distribute information, to play games about public space, to interview neighbors. At meetings and workshops its quirky design has disarming effects, attracting children and seniors alike, engaging hundreds of people in design discussions—people who would have otherwise never come to a charrette.

In 2012 the city of Barcelona announced a competition to “improve” car mobility and access to Collserola Park; most teams responded with structured parking and aerial trams. In contrast, we, the Raons, brought our carrito to the working class neighborhood targeted for “improved” access. At the bocce courts where parking was scheduled to destroy their community space, elderly users expressed nervousness about the influx of more cars. Our “carritos sessions” produced a counter-proposal that was named a winner in the city competition. The massive access project was scuttled; community space was saved.



**Figure 3. The *carrito* as a magnet for curious citizens. Photo by co-author de la Peña**

#### **7.4 Reflection**

Carritos abound in many variations from food-like-carts in Medellín that make everyday spaces slightly unfamiliar, to collectives in Madrid who hack public space by teaching citizens to make urban furnishings from found objects to provoke suspension and elicitation as a performance of use (Lab 2012; Corsin Jimenez, 2013). The carrito functions at multiple levels—as an embodiment of a participatory design philosophy, an object that evokes dialogue, and a reminder that small gestures create humane public spaces. It does not replace other useful engagement tools, but the diversity of publics demands a diversity of approaches. Taking the charrette to the people is a participatory experiment with a great deal of promise.

## **8 MAKE IT REAL: EMPATHY AND COMMUNICATION THROUGH BUILDING SMALL**

**Contributor: Laura Lawson**

### **8.1 Description**

In community design, constructing a small part of the design deepens the learning, engagement, and purposefulness of the endeavor. While the intention may be to develop a long-range plan, a smaller implementable project often brings big ideas down to the literal everyday needs of the people. With limited funds, time, and experience, the building project must be simple, yet it encapsulates the intention of the larger project, grounding it in what is possible now. The small project is often, but not always, the first step in accomplishing a grander vision or attacking a bigger issue. In some cases, what seems to require visionary design is actually solved with a small intervention. This technique creates a direct opportunity to work side-by-side with community. It moves the conversation away from the drawing, where the designer is expert, toward problem solving that engages a broader range of skills. When completed, the basic utility of a path or sign, removes distinctions between designer and user. Everyone enjoys the new feature and discusses next steps.

Although appropriate for designers generally, this technique is particularly relevant in the community engagement studio (Lawson, 2014). Attracted by studios providing “real world” experience and opportunities to learn professional skills, students initially think they are simply providing technical assistance to a needy community (Lawson et al; 2011). While these goals are appropriate, they reduce the process to a business transaction. Knowledge moves in one direction, missing mutual learning opportunities (Angotti et al 2011; Vidal et al, 2002). Community engaged building allows students to learn about socio-economic and cultural contexts different from their own upbringing (O’Grady, 1998). It also assures community partners that time spent in planning is worth it. In grassroots projects in low-income communities with limited resources, it is essential to identify doable improvements that move the project forward within the community’s means. Larger overall plans take considerable resources and time, often years, to develop and be realized. In contrast, doable small built projects improve daily life, sustain commitment and interest, keep spirits up and help advance greater realization of the project across extended timeframes..

### **8.2 Instructions**

Unlike other techniques within the design process, a Building Small project grows from desires, opportunism, and ability. As a technique it runs parallel to a long-term project and is not intended as a “design-build” model of engagement. As the larger project unfolds, identify smaller elements that seem to have a quick and positive impact for residents. The project may arise through comments by residents about a problem or a vision or the designer may imagine a small intervention creating a new opportunity. Acting on this idea often is spur-of-the-moment requiring opportunistic planning for its design and implementation. The Building Small project should be able to be designed and built quickly by inexperienced students and residents with minimal funding or red tape that might stall the enthusiasm. The challenge is to coordinate a series of workdays so the materials, tools, and labor are all available to efficiently build the project. Prepare for chaos and stress. Make building fun, social, and eventful. Invite local media to raise public awareness of the effort.

### **8.3 Case Story**

In 2004, the University of Illinois began a multi-year park project with the 41<sup>st</sup> Street Neighborhood Coalition as part of the East St. Louis Action Research Project. We met with residents to discuss goals for the project, conduct fieldwork, and develop design alternatives. Realizing the project was daunting to this small community group, we slowed the process to discuss questions of phasing and maintenance. The following year the group developed a modest interim design that included key priorities to deter illegal dumping from vehicles, develop a walking path for residents to exercise, and develop a sign to convey ownership. Two residents, impatient to address illegal dumping, collected donated plants to obstruct access to the site. This inspired a linear garden where weeding a bed prompted participants to talk about the neighborhood; resident Willie Beard told students why she chose to stay in East St. Louis and work so hard on this project. Students were inspired. Residents were ready to take action, no matter how small. One day residents and our team redesigned the walking path, on site, redirecting it to avoid

the cost of having to clear a soggy wooded area. We got small grants and in-kind contributions and with the community constructed a gravel path. Residents named the site Pullman Porter Park, in honor of the Pullman porters who'd served for decades on the adjoining railroad line. They decided to create a commemorative sign to which students responded by conceiving a series of design options. The design favorite, picked by the residents, was a vibrant sign depicting the Pullman porter history. Working together, residents and students posted it at the park's entry. With the park's full realization much further in the future, the Building Small project had provided residents with a garden, walkway, and sign and moved them one step closer to their goals.



**Figure 4. Students dividing donated plants and weeding during a workday at Pullman Porter Park.  
Photo by co-author Lawson**

#### **8.4 Reflection**

We encounter several questions about Building Small interventions. A simple gravel path or sign may be considered overly mundane for the academic design studio review so it is important to document the process and demonstrate how the small connects to the big or larger design project underway. Some practicing professionals question whether the learning outcomes – multicultural competency, maintenance, and a sign – are too far removed from appropriate professional training for landscape architecture. But building is legitimate. It pushes students from thinking of design as a drawing exercise into considerations of siting, materials, construction, use and sustainable maintenance. This is the core of landscape architecture.

### **9 DRAWING-OUT-THE-SACRED, UPSIDE-DOWN** **Contributor: Randy Hester**

## 9.1 Description

Drawing-Out-the-Sacred, Upside-Down is a form-seeking technique encouraging back and forth communication about values and spatial qualities. It leads to explicit decisions about landscape design, made jointly by users and designer through face-to-face transactions. Drawing-upside-down has practical and symbolic implications. Literally, it communicates ideas pictorially to collaborators (instead of to the designer herself), inviting them to correct the spatial dimensions or qualities, enabling them to take the drawing materials from the designer to draw their own alternatives. This generates an exchange of genuine transactive creativity. Because I don't draw well upside-down, the upside-up-drawing is not professionally intimidating, making it easier for laypeople to design themselves. The drawing says, "We are the designer, engaged in mutual form-making." This establishes the basis for spatially-precise, value-laden critical exchange. If the process has already legitimized sacred landscapes, fears about marginality and improbable visionary dreams can be spatially articulated (Hester, 1985). The designer is no longer a singular expert or mere facilitator but is free to elaborate, teach and counter-argue graphically; a graphic debate is seldom as mean-spirited as an oratorical one. Previously unimagined ideas take form as design that touches the heart both because community members are drawing their own precise ideas and because their ideas are grounded in valued places that are sacred to them.

## 9.2 Instructions

Clear objectives and pre-meeting preparation are key. The landscape architect must distinguish this event from placating institutionalized techniques that satisfy the law but are seldom transactive. The setting should be comfortable, open to everyone in the community, with a large table, preferably round, drawing materials spread about. I provide well-worn sketchbooks, a variety of layperson-friendly pens and pencils, food and drink.

A community leader should introduce the goal of the meeting in context of previous decisions; new-comers need introductions and elaborated context. Work might begin with "Ok, at our last session, places for picnics was a top priority, so tonight we need to design exactly what these picnic areas should be." Ms. Lopez interrupts, "The parking's got to be closer to the tables." In response, I upside-down-draw what I think she says. "No, no, not so close." I hand her the sketchbook, but her neighbor takes it, drawing an alternative. We are off to a good start.

## 9.3 Case Story

When the Master Plan for Parque Natural in Los Angeles was approved, sub-committees formed to resolve contested details. Ms. Lopez had successfully argued that a zocalo and paseo were essential as the soul of Parque Natural (Sorvig, 2002). Now she focused on culturally inclusive details. She only wanted "Mexican" picnicking. One upside-down-drawing I did of picnic tables spread out for privacy drew gentle laughter from the group. Ms. Chavez corrected me, "No, Randy. Put all those tables together. My whole family, all 50 of us, is coming for that picnic." She didn't want to draw at first, but she produced an elegant plan-axometric of tables, coolers, grills, ovens, extra chairs and tables "all brought from home." I asked about trash cans. Mr. Chavez drew trash cans. Then he moved trees around, "to hang the piñata." Recalling a park nearby, I upside-down-drew picnic tables adjacent to a flat grassy area and added old men kicking soccer with children. Applause. After back-and-forth drawing the group settled on a revision, largely reflected in the park today.

When we turned our attention to designs for the peripheral fencing (Figure 5), I upside-down-drew an egret gate arising from Aztec ground, a cultural landscape theme previously approved; a man who seldom spoke grabbed my sketchbook, exclaiming in Spanish. I didn't understand. He redrew the egrets, telling everyone that my design was impossible to fabricate in metal. When I countered with more graceful lines, he nodded. Soon we had a culturally sacred design to be produced locally (He is a metal fabricator). English and Spanish had been replaced by the language of pictures—a common language we all spoke and that allowed us to shape culture in precise spatial terms.



**Figure 5. Drawing upside down invited residents to take the sketchbook and make corrections in detailed design, first for the *zocalo* where they removed a water feature to create a space big enough for weddings and then in designing gates and fences with nature elements using metal they knew how to fabricate. Photos by co-author Hester**

#### **9.4 Reflection**

The first question is almost always, “How do you get people to draw/design with you?” People will draw with you if certain conditions are met. Does the designer really want my input? Does she care about what I know, what is sacred to me, my culture and our life-patterns? Will my drawing be okay? Will the design be better if I draw with the designer? Drawing-upside-down satisfies the first conditions. I use upside-down-drawing throughout our practice’s (Community Development by Design) community design process. That process begins with 1. listening, 2. goal-setting, and 3. citizen-involved inventory; the results of which, 4. introduce the larger community to itself, 5. get a gestalt, 6. draw activity settings; which create a design language of shared knowledge and expressions of sacredness between users and landscape architect; that enables 7. archetypes and idiosyncrasies to inspire form within 8. a realistic framework of potentials and constraints; whereby 9. a spectrum of plans is developed and 10. evaluated, 11. responsibility transferred for construction and 12. post-construction evaluation (Hester,1984). If you start drawing upside-down for one-on-one listening, each step in the progression builds a stronger working relationship and a common pictorial language of landscape architecture, place values and vernacular culture. After months of working together with sketches, almost everyone will draw as needed to communicate, enabling people to freely offer ideas, argue with the expert and expect the expert to argue back, all with pictures. The technique creates a language older than words, overcomes language barriers and provides marginal, less vocal participants a “voice.”

A drawback is that the technique works best in a group of less than 20 people. This can be resolved by working in small groups, then reporting to each other via a modified nominal group process. This requires several upside-down-drawers. Often participants are interested in different aspects of the plan and divide into small groups. Budget for repetition. Drawing upside-down taxes the designer who must learn to draw to communicate instead of impress, then facilitate, engage the reluctant, evaluate, criticize, elaborate, interject site and budget realities, call up precedents, imagine additional choices and design, all at once. To do all of these simultaneously takes a lot of practice or a partner to share tasks.

## **10 WHAT WE LEARNED**

We conclude that the four-part framework is an easy and effective way to present cases. Such a small sample cannot reveal trends, but speculation was irresistible. We had difficulty isolating a single technique from an overall process, writing more about preceding events or guiding principles and less about the technique precisely. This may be because any one technique is only a part of an entire process, can be used in various stages of participation or has not been adequately articulated by us. Can we better focus? Can we be more explicit in instruction? Can we offer more precise design outcomes related to transactions?

In some cases old methods are being reinvented; in others new approaches are created to cope with changing publics, environmental issues, cultural conflicts, forms of civic life, participation law, media and ways the publics want to participate. There is focused effort to maximize the combined benefits of face-to-face collaboration and new technology that allows remote fact-finding, data mining, simulation and instantaneous opinion polling. The invisible complexity of climate change and anonymous new immigrants seem to be areas of particular innovation. Other test techniques innovate around long-standing issues of inclusion, environmental justice and degree of difficulty facing marginalized communities. Regulated public-institutional participation makes civic engagement less creative, less just and less visionary but more profitable, paradoxical and troubling. Frustration with institutionalized participation is a motivating force for many new techniques. Emerging methods attempt to mend, mitigate, supplement, confront or replace public hearings and bureaucratized workshops and charrettes that often serve to placate rather than create. Can a catalogue of techniques help address these issues?

At CELA we invite others to critically evaluate the format, techniques and observations made here. If deemed effective, a broad invitation will be extended asking others to submit their best techniques. The expectation is that some dozens of techniques would be published in a catalogue of participatory methods best suited for collaborative landscape design today. de la Peña

## 11 REFERENCES

- Alinsky, S. (1971). *Rules for radicals*. New York: Random House.
- Angotti, T., Doble, C. & Horrigan, P. (Eds.) (2011). *Service-learning in design and planning: Educating at the boundaries*. Oakland: New Village Press.
- Corsín Jimenez, A. (2013). *Three traps many*. Davis, CA: UC Davis Sawyer Seminar: Indigenous Cosmopolitics.
- Davidoff, P. (1965). Advocacy and pluralism in planning. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 31(4), 331-338.
- de la Peña, D. S. (2013). *Experiments in participatory urbanism: Reform and autogestión as emerging forms of urban activism in Barcelona*. (Doctoral Dissertation, U of California, Berkeley, 2013). Retrieved from: [http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/delaPena\\_berkeley\\_0028E\\_13352.pdf](http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/delaPena_berkeley_0028E_13352.pdf)
- Friedmann, J. (1973). *Retracking America*. Garden City: Anchor.
- Halprin, L. (1969). *The RSVP cycles*. New York: Brazillie.
- Hester, R. (1984). *Planning neighborhood space with people*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- (1985). Subconscious landscapes of the heart. *Places* 2(3), 10-22.
- (1990). *Community design primer*. Mendocino: Ridge Times Press.
- Hester, R. and Kweskin, C. (Ed.) (1999). *Democratic design in the Pacific Rim*. Mendocino: Ridge Times Press.
- Hou, J. (Ed.) (2010). *Insurgent public space: Guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*. London and New York: Routledge.
- (2011). Differences matter: Learning to design in partnership with others. In T. Angotti, C. Doble, and P. Horrigan (Eds.), *Service-learning in design and planning: Educating at the boundaries*, (pp. 55-69). Berkeley, CA: New Village Press
- (2013). Transcultural participation: Designing with immigrant communities in Seattle's International District. In J. Hou, (Ed.), *Transcultural cities: Border crossing and placemaking*, (pp. 222-236). London and New York: Routledge.
- Iacofano, D. (2001). *Meeting of the minds*. Berkeley: MIG Communications.
- Irazabal, C. (Ed.) (2008). *Ordinary places, extraordinary events: Citizenship, democracy, and public space in Latin America*. London: Routledge.
- Lab, El Puente. (2012). Proyecto piloto - Dispositivo móvil de actuación cultural. Retrieved in 2013 from: <http://www.elpuentelab.org/>

- Lawson, L. & Drake L. (2014). Building gardens and capacity with the community garden movement in New Brunswick, a report of the summer 2013 service-learning internship.
- Lawson, L., Spanierman, L., Poteat, V. P., & Beer, A. M. (2011). Educating for multicultural learning: Revelations from the East St. Louis design studio. In T. Angotti, C. Doble, and P. Horrigan (Eds.), *Service-learning in design and planning: Educating at the boundaries*. Oakland: New Village Press.
- Linn, K. (1968). Neighborhood commons. *Architectural Design*, 382, 379-382.
- (2008). *Building Commons and Community*. Oakland: New Village Press.
- Liu, K. C. (2005). When professional knowledge meets local wisdom. In J. Hou, M. Francis & N. Brightbill (Eds.), *(Re)constructing communities: design participation in the face of change* (pp.41-46). Davis: Center for Design Research.
- NCI, National Charrette Institute. (2015). NCI Charrette System (tm). Retrieved December 28, 2014 from: <http://www.charretteinstitute.org/charrette.html>
- O'Grady, C., (ed.) 2000. *Integrating service learning and multicultural education in colleges and universities*. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Palermo, F. (2000). *First Nations community planning model*. Halifax: Dalhousie University.
- Sandercock, L. (Ed.) (1998). *Making the invisible visible: A multicultural planning history*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sanoff, H. (2000). *Community participation methods in design and planning*. New York: Wiley.
- Sorvig, Kim. 2002. The wilds of South Central, *Landscape Architecture* 101, 66-75.
- Vidal, A., Nye, N., & Walker, C. (2002). Lessons from the Community Outreach Partnership Center program. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.
- Zoh, K-J. (Ed.) 2012. Green community design. *Proceedings of the 8th conference of the Pacific Rim community design network*. August 22-23, 2012. Seoul: Graduate School of Environmental Studies, Seoul National University.