

Metropolitan universities are increasingly being challenged to focus more research, teaching, and service resources on the problems of low-income urban communities. This article describes how students and faculty at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign are using participatory action research methods to enhance the capacity of community-based organizations in East St. Louis. The article documents their accomplishments and the institutional, environmental, political, racial, and class barriers that successful university/community partnerships must overcome.

Creating a Community/ University Partnership That Works:

The Case of the East St. Louis Action Research Project

Description of the Project:

The East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP) is a four and a half year-old community assistance project of the School of Architecture, Department of Landscape Architecture, Department of Urban and Regional Planning and the Cooperative Extension Service at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. ESLARP's goals are to: 1.) assist East St. Louis, Illinois residents in devising workable solutions to the critical environmental, economic and social problems confronting their community; 2.) enhance the planning, design and development capacity of East St. Louis community-based organizations and municipal agencies; 3.) develop the participatory planning and design skills of the next generation of community development professionals; and 4.) contribute to the further development of a science of American democratic planning arts. ESLARP has pursued these goals by involving architecture, landscape architecture and urban planning students and faculty in a series of increasingly challenging planning and design projects completed, in collaboration with East St. Louis community-based organizations, using a participatory action research approach.

ESLARP was launched in the Fall of 1990 when eleven graduate students from the Department of Urban and Regional Planning worked with a single faculty member to

create a community stabilization plan for a small residential neighborhood in East St. Louis. Last Fall, more than two hundred and fifty students from four academic departments worked with five faculty members to complete more than a dozen planning and design studies for three East St. Louis community-based organizations. Among the projects completed were: an evaluation of the city's newly established farmers' market, an impact study of land installment contracts on neighborhood stability, a market analysis of local housing demand, an assessment of municipal land resources, alternative designs for affordable housing and a master plan for the city's poorest residential community. Growing student interest in these and other projects has made ESLARP one of the largest service-learning projects on the Urbana-Champaign campus.

ESLARP has been funded since 1990 by an annual allocation of \$100,000 in State Funds provided by the University Provost. The School of Architecture, Department of Landscape Architecture and the Department of Urban and Regional Planning use these resources to pay for student and faculty project-related expenses. ESLARP received additional funding in 1992 when the University's Cooperative Extension Service agreed to hire a Community Educator and an Administrative Assistant to provide on-site assistance to East St. Louis organizations participating in the project. In 1993, the Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts, the Associate Vice-Chancellor of Continuing Education and Public Service and the President's Office committed additional funds to hire an on-campus Project Coordinator to manage this expanding effort, bringing the University's annual support for the project to nearly \$250,000.

Origins of the Project

In 1987 State Representative Wyvetter H. Young (D-East St. Louis) challenged Dr. Stanley O. Ikenberry, President of the University of Illinois, to demonstrate his administration's commitment to the State's low-income, minority communities at a legislative budget hearing. President Ikenberry responded to this challenge by directing the chairpersons of the University's planning and design departments to offer technical assistance to East St. Louis organizations involved in local community development projects. In 1988, he reallocated \$100,000 in University funds to support the activities of the East St. Louis Revitalization Project. The University's quick response was influenced by several factors. Representative Young was, at that time, the Co-Chairperson of the State Legislature's Higher Education Finance Committee, which exerted considerable influence over the University's budget. In addition, the University had become concerned about criticisms made by some civil rights leaders suggesting it was insensitive to people of color given its high drop-out rate for minority students and continued use of a fictional Native-American leader (Chief Illiniwek) as the "mascot" for its athletic teams. Finally, the Chicago-Tribune had run several stories and editorials questioning the University's increasing emphasis on basic research at the expense of its teaching and service activities.

Six architecture, landscape architecture and urban and regional planning faculty worked with nearly two hundred students during the 1988 and 1989 academic years to complete a series of research projects addressing problems facing East St. Louis. While a few of the planning and design projects completed during these years produced useful ideas for local leaders, most collected dust in the University's City Planning and Landscape Architecture Library. In the Summer of 1990, a new member of the University's planning faculty conducted forty interviews with East St. Louis leaders to evaluate the project's effectiveness. The overwhelming majority of those interviewed were unaware of the University's efforts and ques-

tioned the contribution academic planners and designers could make towards improving conditions in the city. As one community leader said, "The last damn thing we need is another academic study telling us what any sixth grader in town already knows. Hell, just send us the money and we will take care of our own problems!"

The interviewees' attitude towards university planners and designers was not arrived at through academic study but through intimate involvement with scores of university-based consultants during the War on Poverty, Model Cities, Planned Variations, and Community Development Block Grant programs. Those interviewed criticized past university planners for focusing on the redevelopment needs of the city's Central Business District (CBD) and waterfront at the expense of its residential neighborhoods. They also challenged the methods these consultants used, which often ignored the rich reservoir of knowledge and insights local residents and business people possessed regarding community dynamics. In addition, they questioned the consultants' commitment to working with the community to implement the proposals contained in their revitalization plans. Most respondents viewed university-based planners and designers as "carpetbaggers" who used inner city problems to justify research grants that did little, if anything, to improve the quality of life of the communities they were studying. Quoting one interviewee, "There's not a single improvement that has been made in East St. Louis that came from the efforts of one of these university consultants."

Management of the Project

The East St. Louis Revitalization Project funded a wide range of student and faculty research and planning and design initiatives during the 1988 and 1989 academic years. While several of these projects were completed at the request of local officials, community groups, or municipal agencies, most of these projects had no clients. As a result, few of the proposals included in these studies, plans, and reports were ever implemented. Those that were executed were spatially dispersed so they produced little, if any, visual impact on residents, investors or visitors. These facts, in combination with the results of the 1990 survey and the success of a participatory neighborhood planning project completed in the Fall of 1990, led the participating faculty to reorganize the project.

The faculty decided to concentrate their efforts on assisting leaders in a single residential neighborhood to stabilize their area. Such an approach, they felt, would demonstrate to frequently disappointed community residents, local officials, and outside funders the possibilities for successful community development in East St. Louis. It would also establish the effectiveness of the University's new technical assistance effort. Towards these ends, the faculty organized a set of parallel workshops in architecture, landscape architecture and urban planning to assist local leaders in developing a comprehensive stabilization plan for a second neighborhood. A follow-up series of parallel workshops was then created to formulate a strategic plan for implementing the proposals contained in the original stabilization plan. Graduate planning students were then recruited to draft funding proposals to support the recommended projects while graduate architecture and landscape architecture students were asked to produce working drawings and construction documents needed to install the proposed landscape improvements and build the proposed building structures.

The faculty involved in the project organized themselves, participating graduate students, and local leaders into a planning team that functioned as an autono-

mous work group that assumed management responsibility for the project from the department heads of the three participating units. This ten-person planning team meets every week to evaluate recent project activities, discuss current planning problems and identify future funding and technical assistance needs. The initial success of the planning team's early program development activities enabled the participating faculty to convince their respective department heads to combine the resources they were receiving for the project into a single unified program budget. This group, with the support of their department heads, was also successful in increasing the University's annual support for the project from \$100,000 to \$250,000 at a time when many department budgets were being cut.

The participating faculty also worked to increase resident involvement and influence in the project's planning process. Leaders of the neighborhood groups with whom the University was working were invited to participate in the planning team's weekly meetings. For the past year, local leaders have been responsible for developing the agendas for these meetings. In the spring of 1994, the planning team organized a two-day retreat involving local leaders, participating students, project faculty and several outside resource persons to evaluate the effectiveness of the University's project. Two local leaders collaborated with two faculty members in developing the agenda and facilitating the sessions at the retreat. Twenty-five of the forty participants in this event were East St. Louis leaders or agency representatives. This past summer, the project faculty asked local leaders to develop a list of projects they wanted the University to complete during the current academic year. Faculty worked with these leaders to determine how the various East St. Louis-oriented workshops offered by each of the participating academic units could be structured to complete as many as possible of the community's suggested projects. The East St. Louis leaders also participated in the Fall 1994 Search Committee that was charged with recommending a full-time Project Coordinator for the East St. Louis Action Research Project.

Community Development Strategy

The residents' intense resentment towards past university-based assistance projects led the faculty to search for alternatives to the traditional "professional-expert" model of community consultation which frequently restricts resident involvement to an advise and consent role late in the planning process. The faculty drew upon three separate social change methods that had emerged in the 1960s to craft a highly participatory approach to the project, which they referred to as an "empowerment" model of community planning and design. This model integrated the values and practices of participatory action research, direct action organizing, and education for critical consciousness into each step of the planning process to build the research, planning and development capacity of local organizations.

Influenced by the philosophy of participatory action research, the faculty challenged local residents to establish the project's research priorities by selecting the issues to be addressed. They ceased treating local residents as mere research "objects" by involving them as co-investigators, co-planners and co-designers at each step in the research process. Whenever possible, the faculty looked for opportunities to work with local residents in implementing the suggestions and recommendations emerging from this planning process. When these interventions produced negative or unanticipated results, they encouraged residents to re-examine their initial structuring of their problem to see if it might be "re-framed." As they did so, the

faculty sought to make explicit the “taken for granted” assumptions about the planning context that Argyris and Schon argued might result in patterns of repeated problem-making. By creating a safe learning environment in which novel points of view are valued, honest dialogue is encouraged and public testing of statements is the norm, the faculty encouraged local residents to speak about certain “undiscussable” shortcomings of their community which often made fundamental change difficult to achieve. In doing so, the faculty encouraged participants to shift from single-loop to double-looped learning so they could be empowered to redefine issues they faced when chosen action strategies failed to produce desired results.

While appreciative of the role rigorous research and investigation play in the planning process, the participating faculty were also acutely aware of the power which the East St. Louis and St. Clair County Democratic Organizations wielded in the community. The faculty believed it would be impossible to change local development policies controlled by these political machines in the absence of a strong base of independent citizen support. They decided to use each of the research activities required by the comprehensive planning process to build the membership base of the neighborhood organizations with which they were working. As previously uninvolved neighborhood residents became active in this planning process, the faculty worked with local leaders to identify potential new leaders. They then assisted existing neighborhood leaders to design activities that would develop the leadership skills of these new members. Potential leaders were systematically assigned to increasingly challenging organizational tasks to enhance their issue selection, campaign planning, membership recruitment, public speaking, and mediation and negotiation knowledge and skills. When necessary, the faculty also cooperated with local leaders to develop direct action campaigns to put political pressure on municipal officials who opposed neighborhood-initiated improvement projects. The faculty also helped local leaders become skillful in the use of Alinsky-inspired community organizing techniques to gain the attention and support of local officials.

When neighborhood leaders encountered opposition from local elites, the faculty used these experiences to encourage the residents to discuss how the local political system worked to allocate resources and to shape ideas regarding equity. The faculty encouraged residents to “test” these understandings of the local political system by evaluating the extent to which their “theories in use” successfully guided them in identifying the pressure points of the local political system. Local residents were challenged to reflect upon the accuracy of these “taken for granted” assumptions to develop their own critical consciousness of the planning process. The adult literacy work of Paulo Freire was used to help local residents dialogue openly about the larger societal forces that were structuring their lives and the strategies that could be used to reshape these forces.

Accomplishments of the Project

The project has made significant progress towards accomplishing its original goals during the past four and a half years. In doing so, it has earned the respect of neighborhood activists, service providers, elected officials and community development professionals. The project has also won numerous national awards from the American Institute of Certified Planners, Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, National Universities and Colleges Continuing Education Association, and Planners and Designers for Social Responsibility. In the Fall of 1994, a representative of the project was invited to present a formal lecture on participatory plan-

ning and design at the Annual Meeting of the Italian Planning Association in Venice, Italy. More recently, the project was cited as an outstanding example of grassroots development by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and the United Nations Volunteers and a project representative has been invited to participate in the upcoming UN World Summit on Social Development to be held in Copenhagen in 1995.

This recognition is based, in large part, on the project's success in assisting neighborhood leaders in creating active citizen organizations that can mobilize local, regional and campus resources to implement needed neighborhood improvement projects. Some of the project's most significant accomplishments are summarized below.

- Completed comprehensive stabilization plans for three residential areas of the city in which 40% of the city's residents live.
- Created 5-Year Community Development Block Grant proposals to fund emergency infrastructure repairs for these areas.
- Established the city's first community-controlled neighborhood development corporation with full-time professional staff.
- Assisted local volunteers in completing the following community development projects:
 1. First neighborhood-wide clean-up of illegally dumped trash involving over 200 neighborhood and University volunteers.
 2. Rehabilitation of a picnic pavilion, play equipment and installation of new trees and shrubs at Williams Park.
 3. Development and construction of a 23,000 square foot toddlers' play ground, called the Illinois Avenue Playground, complete with sand box, double-dutch platform, tire maze, adult seating area, sidewalks, pathways and planting beds.
 4. Expansion of the Wesley Bethel United Methodist Church's HEAD START Playground.
 5. Exterior painting and minor repair of the homes of eight low-income elderly residents.
 6. Initiation of a crime prevention block watch in the Winstanley/Industry Park neighborhood.
 7. Acquisition and development of a 100,000 square foot retail vendors' market that housed fourteen minority businesses this past Summer.
 8. Construction of a new picnic pavilion at Virginia Park.
 9. Tests of the organic and heavy metal content of proposed community garden sites in East St. Louis.
 10. Provision of small business training for nineteen residents interested in starting businesses at the farmers' market.
- Assisted residents of the Winstanley/Industry Park neighborhood in establishing a 501(c)3 community development corporation.
- Helped the Winstanley/Industry Park Neighborhood Organization secure nearly \$340,000 in current funding for housing improvement, small business development and credit counseling programs.
- Aided the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District in planning and executing an aggressive crime prevention campaign in two of the

- neighborhoods where the University has helped local residents establish active neighborhood organizations.
- Offered sixty East St. Louis High School students the chance to learn about personal, professional and service opportunities in the design professions through an annual Summer School Program in Planning and Design.
 - Increased graduate student interest in career opportunities with community-based organizations serving low-income minority neighborhoods.
 - Provided nearly 600 students, at all levels of training, with service-learning opportunities with East St. Louis-based organizations.
 - Developed an interdisciplinary approach to teaching community planning and design involving students and faculty from architecture, landscape architecture and urban and regional planning.

The project is unique among university-based community assistance projects in the extent to which its agenda has been determined by local residents, its proposals have been implemented, its planning and design approach has become increasingly interdisciplinary, and the number of community and campus participants has consistently risen. It may also be unusual in that it is a long-distance collaboration between a university and a local community that has lasted for nearly eight years.

Challenges of the Project

The project has succeeded in spite of many institutional, environmental, political, racial, and class barriers it has confronted. The following section briefly discusses several examples of each of these type of barriers.

Institutional Barriers

Recent criticism of the university, as an institution, have made many faculty and administrators fearful of any project that involves considerable risk. Community assistance projects in low-income urban communities that have experienced decades of private and public sector disinvestment are, by definition, high risk ventures. Projects focused on the needs of low-income minority communities appear even riskier to faculty who fear criticism from racist whites and nationalist African-Americans. The complexity of the issues faced by most low-income, minority communities discourages faculty whose work schedules are organized around relatively short academic semesters to initiate projects in these areas. Promotion and tenure processes offering little recognition for public service activities serve as another serious institutional barrier to faculty involvement in efforts like the East St. Louis Action Research Project.

In most departments, junior faculty are actively discouraged from becoming involved in such efforts until they secure tenure and are promoted. By the time many faculty have achieved this status, they have become involved in a research program and set of institutional relationships that leaves little time for off-campus, service-learning projects. Concern regarding the publishability of qualitative research articles describing innovations generated by such projects also cause young scholars to question participation in these projects. A review of recent articles published in the *Journal of the American Planning Association* and the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* make such an attitude understandable. Budgetary pres-

tures also dampen interest in these projects which are viewed as increasingly difficult to fund given tightening state and federal budgets. Junior faculty are often encouraged by their senior colleagues to pursue research that is more readily fundable through a combination of public and private sources.

Environmental Barriers

The three-hour travel time between Champaign-Urbana and East St. Louis has prevented some interested students and faculty from participating in the project. The image of East St. Louis portrayed in the media keeps other students from becoming involved in the project. White students who have little experience working in low-income, African-American communities experience tremendous anxiety when visiting East St. Louis — even when they are told that not one of the six hundred students who have participated in the project has been the victim of a crime.

The lack of basic infrastructure, business services and municipal records present other obstacles to doing field work in East St. Louis. Until very recently, most city traffic lights did not function, the majority of street signs were missing and many public phones had been made inoperative by vandals. Such things are very important to students seeking to orient themselves to a new field work setting. The absence of local copy, blueprint and equipment rental stores further complicates the work of those involved in survey or construction activities. Student and faculty field workers often encountered problems locating even basic services, such as restaurants with sufficient seating capacity to accommodate campus volunteers. The city's inability to provide basic information such as current base maps or physical conditions data require the students to gather all of this information through field surveys, lengthening the amount of time required to complete basic planning reports adding to their costs.

Political Barriers

The role State Representative Young played in bringing the University into the community has been an important asset when dealing with most local residents and a serious liability when dealing with many public and private agencies in the region. Representative Young's years of militant advocacy on behalf of her constituents has endeared her to most members of the community while alienating her from the majority of white, middle-class males running the State's most important public agencies and corporate firms.

The instability of the East St. Louis municipal government represented another barrier to the project's success. The city passed three referenda in the past five years changing the structure of its local government from a mayor-council to council-manager to commission-manager form. In the three years since the adoption of the commission-manager form of local government, the city has been served by four different city managers. These and other personnel changes have made it difficult for the University and its local collaborators to establish meaningful relationships with the East St. Louis municipal government.

The local party organization's influence over local hiring, municipal contracts and service delivery has also affected the success of the project. On several occasions, neighborhood organizations which the University was assisting have been denied services or made to wait for services because of their refusal to broker these requests through the local party organization. Their refusal to use favored architects, planners, lawyers and insurance agents for neighborhood improvement projects,

regardless of their qualifications, has not been appreciated by local party officials. While municipal officials voiced public support for ESLARP's projects, they often failed to approve necessary plans or to provide modest amounts of project funds in a timely manner. Such delays, on occasion, have jeopardized the success of several of the community's self-help efforts. In the case of the Illinois Avenue Playground, the city failed to demolish an arson-damaged structure that had to be removed from the site before the playground could be built. This delay almost resulted in the cancellation of the project for which local residents and university students had mobilized over one hundred construction volunteers and solicited nearly \$15,000 in donated materials. In the end, the local community had to enlist an independent African-American contractor to complete the demolition without compensation. This contractor later told University officials how his involvement in this project had resulted in his exclusion from the city-sponsored housing demolition program.

The state's increasing control over local government affairs has also complicated the University's work in the city. East St. Louis avoided bankruptcy in 1991 when the state legislature passed the Distressed Cities Act that provided \$30 million in long-term financing to restructure the city's \$85 million debt. The city, however, had to accept state oversight over its budget and financial affairs to secure this assistance. This situation, along with the federal court's decision to establish a private foundation to handle \$7 million in damages received from a Wall Street firm rather than provide these funds to the city, has made local residents very wary of state and federal agencies. Local residents viewed these state and federal government actions as racist and neocolonial and remain nervous about possible University domination of their local development efforts.

Racial Barriers

Nothing done in a majority African-American city such as East St. Louis is without its racial overtones. Many white students and faculty join the East St. Louis Project with unexamined attitudes towards African-Americans influenced by many negative stereotypes that are common in our popular culture. These negative images of African-Americans sometimes cause University students and staff to hold East St. Louis residents solely responsible for the problems their city faces without consideration for the structural factors such as technological change and corporate disinvestment that undermined the city's economy. East St. Louis residents who have worked hard throughout their lives to provide for their families, maintain their homes and contribute to the community deeply resent such attitudes.

Many white students and faculty participating in graduate education programs in the design professions have had little experience working in African-American communities. The negative messages regarding African-Americans that some of these individuals have absorbed makes East St. Louis field work a very anxiety-provoking experience for them. Many react to their fears by rushing through field work activities, such as door-to-door canvassing, that require personal contact with local residents. Community residents react to the impatience and inability to listen they observe in many university-trained field workers by withdrawing.

University-generated reports and plans describing local problems are often taken much more seriously by municipal officials than those produced by local minority professionals. These professionals, along with other citizen activists who have worked for many years on these issues, are frequently frustrated by the tendency of local elites to value the work of outside white professionals over that of local Afri-

can-American professionals. This problem is often exacerbated by the press which tends to overemphasize the role outside white professionals play when reporting on local community development activities. It is very difficult to get some members of the press to recognize the heroic work local leaders and professionals do every day to promote positive change given the strength of their unexamined notions of *no-blesse oblige*.

When the above-mentioned problems are addressed, open and honest communication becomes possible. However, the painful history of white/black relations in East St. Louis makes such communication very difficult. East St. Louis residents are very reluctant to criticize liberal whites involved in local community development projects because they fear such feedback will cause these individuals to withdraw resources from their community. Community leaders often feel compelled to accept ill-conceived proposals or inadequately designed programs developed by outside agencies rather than risk losing such assistance by criticizing the approach being taken. East St. Louis residents have watched generations of outsiders withdraw from community involvement in their city when they have attempted to enter into dialogue with these individuals in order to improve the strategy being taken to address a particular social problem.

Class Barriers

The final barriers I will discuss are those that emerge from class differences existing between the majority of university students and faculty and the majority of East St. Louis residents. While middle-class white students and faculty suffer their share of personal setbacks and disappointments, they are often able to secure the resources they need to live reasonably comfortable lives. This is particularly true in regard to their dealings with local institutions and municipal governments. Such experiences leave them ill-equipped to deal with a recalcitrant political machine committed to opposing independent political action by city residents. From the earliest days of the East St. Louis Action Research Project, local residents have counseled frustrated university students and faculty to show patience and faith when seeking to implement major development projects.

University students and faculty also become frustrated and immobilized by the slow pace of community organization around critical local issues. They fail to understand the fear residents, who are dependent on municipal agencies for employment, housing and services, experience when confronting local elites. Two of the four largest employers in East St. Louis are the municipal government and the school board, nearly one quarter of the city's families live in public housing controlled by the East St. Louis Housing Authority, and over half of the community's households receive government transfer payments administered by local social service agencies. Resident fears regarding possible political retaliation are routinely reinforced by public dismissals of municipal employees who fail to support the party on key issues.

Critical Reflections on the Project

In the Spring of 1994, the project's planning team invited neighborhood activists, local officials, graduate students and participating faculty involved in the East St. Louis Action Research Project to join them for a two-day program evaluation retreat at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Cahokia, Illinois. The participants in the Spring Retreat identified five areas in which the project needed to be improved.

1. Establishing a more balanced approach to project training. The majority of urban planning students participating in the East St. Louis Action Research Project complete a Community Development Seminar (3 credits) that introduces them to the basic theories and methods of participatory action research, community organization and critical theory which are the foundations of the University's empowerment planning activities in East St. Louis. They complete this course the semester before they enroll in the Community Development Workshop (6 hours) which involves them in intensive planning and design activities with East St. Louis-based organizations. This workshop and others offered by participating architecture and landscape architecture faculty provides students with additional training in these fields and a forum where they can critically reflect on their field work experiences. Community residents, on the other hand, have not been offered the same opportunity by the University to participate in a similar pre-field preparation course or weekly workshop classes. Many retreat participants felt this approach to training had led to an ongoing power imbalance that had maintained the community's dependence on University assistance.

2. Encouraging critical reflection by resisting the temptation to act quickly. The common assumption, held by many local residents and officials, that nothing could be done to improve conditions in East St. Louis' residential neighborhoods led faculty to emphasize the importance of action. Students and faculty working in East St. Louis have carried out an aggressive physical improvement campaign featuring a series of increasingly ambitious projects. The volunteer recruitment, fund raising, technical planning and design requirements of these efforts have left little time to evaluate their effectiveness or plan future directions. Since these projects are tied to university semesters, time pressures always exist to complete these efforts before the end of the semester, after which student assistance will no longer be available. The organizational effort needed to complete the Illinois Avenue Playground or the East St. Louis Farmers' Market allowed little time to recruit previously uninvolved residents in the planning and evaluation of these initiatives. The exclusion of these citizens from critical leadership activities hampered their development, reduced their sense of ownership over these accomplishments and reinforced a hierarchical approach to decision-making and management.

3. Using student resources to build local capacity. The East St. Louis Action Research Project has been remarkably successful as a service-learning project. Increasing numbers of undergraduate and graduate students have been attracted to the project by opportunities to learn new skills, expand professional contacts and serve the community. On several occasions, the project has attracted many more student volunteers than the community was prepared to accommodate. Local leaders and participating faculty responded to these situations by initiating additional research, planning and design projects to incorporate these individuals even when the community was unable to mobilize local volunteers to work with these students. These decisions placed additional burdens on the local leaders and campus faculty involved in the project. Students participating in these efforts created fewer useful plans and designs given the lack of local community input and voiced frustration when asked to complete projects for which there did not appear to be any immediate community demand.

4. Evaluating ESLARP as an empowerment planning project. Planning and design practitioners are often criticized for a failure to adequately document their activities, which makes systematic evaluation and widespread replication difficult. This criticism could also be applied to the students and faculty involved in the

East St. Louis Action Research Project. These individuals have been so immersed in the process of developing the project they have made only a modest attempt to document their activities. While they have conducted an annual program evaluation retreat, with outside facilitators, in recent years, they have not systematically surveyed participating residents, officials, students and faculty regarding their assessment of the project. Only recently have they entered into negotiations with a Ph.D. candidate in urban and regional planning from Cornell University to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the project's success as an empowerment initiative.

5. Creating an interdisciplinary approach to community planning and design. One of the things students most value about ESLARP is its interdisciplinary nature. Students participating in the project work very closely with other design professionals and community residents to solve a wide range of messy planning and design projects. Students involved in the project participate in a common orientation to the community, cooperate in collecting physical conditions and resident preference data, sit in on each other's project reviews, and present their work together at community meetings. While participating faculty from architecture, landscape architecture and urban and regional planning engage in joint project planning and lecture in each other's classes, they have not attempted to develop a more integrated and interdisciplinary approach to planning and design. Even a failed attempt at such an effort would generate many valuable insights regarding the limitations and complementarity of these three design professions.

Final Note

The empowerment approach to planning adopted by the University of Illinois in East St. Louis expanded the planners' role to include that of community organizer. This decision frequently placed the University staff in conflict with local party officials who have sought to retain their power by discouraging community involvement in governance. University planners justified their support of local citizen organizing efforts based upon the advocacy planning ideas of Paul Davidoff who eschewed the notion of a unitary public interest in favor of competing self-interests. Davidoff believed the quality of local planning would improve when local constituencies created their own plans that could be publicly scrutinized and debated. He felt planners had a special obligation to assist marginalized groups in formulating plans that would give them a voice in important planning processes affecting their communities. While many acknowledge the special obligation of the profession to advance the interests of the poor within public planning processes, the majority of planners working for municipal agencies serving many economic classes have limited time and resources to devote to the special needs of the poor. In this context, University planning departments may be in a unique position to mobilize their student and faculty resources to respond to this need.

The expanding number of university/community partnerships emerging throughout the country is encouraging to followers of John Dewey who believe that optimal learning is achieved when students are challenged to solve critical social problems through an integration of theory and practice. The increasing number of university-based community assistance projects being developed offer scholars the opportunity to examine the effectiveness of various approaches to participatory research and reciprocal learning being pursued by these educational partnerships. The important role these efforts have assumed in many low-income minority communities makes their systematic evaluation an important research priority for social sci-

entists interested in the public service mission of the academy. The prospect of these projects becoming even more important to inner city communities in the future in the face of likely reductions in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's budget further highlights the need for this research.

Suggested Readings

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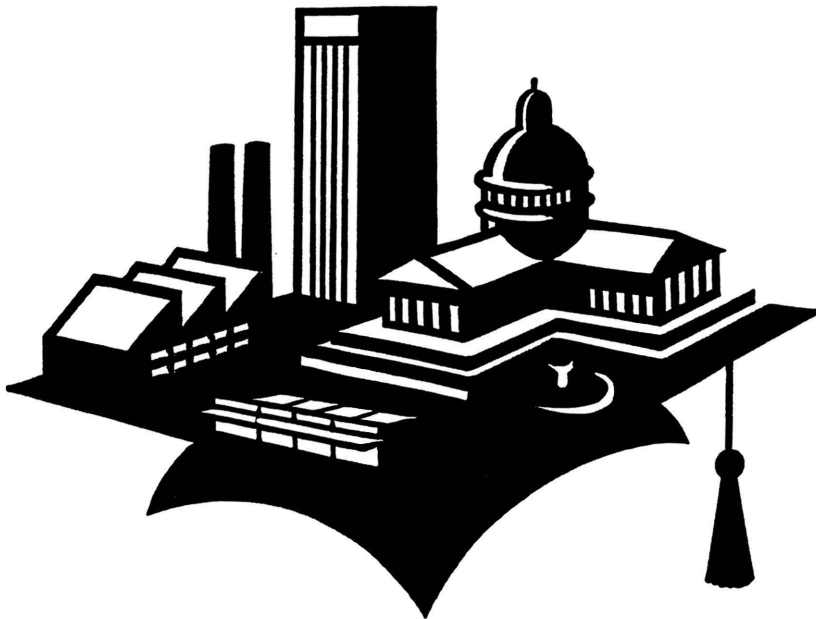
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**The Executive Advisory Board on Higher Education
of Baltimore County**

Mission Statement



"Mobilizing Higher Education in Service to Society"

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The EAB also serves to inform the higher education community of the needs of business, government, and community and, using the resources of member institutions, to throw light on crucial issues and assist in the solution of problems. The EAB functions as an information clearinghouse, catalyst, and broker. Its duties include hosting conferences and seminars, creating databases and publications, and providing information and advice.

The EAB aims to promote the region as offering excellent educational resources attractive to new businesses and to serve as an environment-scanning, leading-edge agency to further the development of new technology and new ideas. The EAB makes recommendations to the County Executive and the County Council and provides assistance to agencies of the County government, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and the general public.