SOCIAL JUSTICE

The New Green Infrastructure

In 2004, only 7.84% of professional landscape architects surveyed for the Landscape Architecture Body of Knowledge Study Report rated a mastery of determining user values through engagement an essential communication skill to the profession. In the world of social media, mobile technology, and rapid online public response, is this still true today? Learn how other professionals have explored, tested, and succeeded at participation as part of the design process to address society’s pressing issues of environmental and social justice.

Social Justice

The belief that every individual and group is entitled to fair and equal rights and participation in social, educational, and economic opportunities. Social justice addresses an agenda for increasing understanding of oppression and inequality and taking action to overcome them.

Environmental Justice

Environmental justice addresses issues of 1. Unequal distribution of resources such as clean air and water, healthy food, homes, parks, places to walk and sit in public, etc.; 2. Inaccessibility to public goods and resources because of transportation, cost or discrimination; and 3. Exclusion from facilities and full participation in decisions about one’s community largely because of poverty, prejudice, race, income, recent immigration, or other marginal status. Landscape architects increase or diminish environmental injustices by nearly every act of planning and design, either knowingly or unwittingly.

Learning Objectives

1. Learn to communicate with public and private clients about how equitable design can boost their bottom line.
2. Learn tools for community engagement in the political and design processes.
3. Learn how to make money while serving an environmental justice agenda.
4. Explore “best practices” for incorporating social justice and equity into project work.

Categories

Instructional Level: Intermediate

Primary Topic: Social and Environmental Justice

Secondary Topic: Community Engagement
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Presentation Summary

Key Principles of Practice-Based Environmental Justice

1. Develop a familiarity with the place and people. Make a long-term commitment to the community.

2. Every community, no matter how poor, is rich in resources.

3. Develop a conscious partnership.

4. Practice the highest standards of environmental awareness.

5. Educate for understanding of the development process. Make a commitment to residents’ education/training.

6. Advocate for funding and development. Go after unconventional funding sources.

7. Establish clear guidelines for compensation.

8. Follow through.

5 Key Domains of Skills Required for Participatory Design

1. Representing People

2. Exchanging Professional Knowledge and Local Wisdom Spatially

3. Coauthoring Design

4. Empowering People to Represent Themselves

5. Visualizing Deep Values: Community, Stewardship, Fairness, and Distinctive Place
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12-Step Process to Design for Environmental Justice

1 LISTEN
Begin the process by listening to residents for several weeks. Get a list of opinion leaders and interview them informally about their community’s problems, or simply let them talk. Write or draw notes on a big map of the community and you will have a spontaneous record of the conversation. Mark important places on the map. Get people to define the community boundaries and describe their patterns. This is your opportunity to get their opinions instead of introducing outside bias.

2 SET COMMUNITY GOALS
Community-wide goal-setting is essential to determine needs and priorities for a project. Whereas listening focuses on opinion leaders, the goals should be representative of the whole community. Community surveys that include both open-ended and detailed, multiple-choice questions can be a great tool for collecting information about community goals and priorities, as well any unique concerns.

3 INVENTORY & MAPPING
Community goals will help drive mapping exercises and create an inventory of community assets, problem areas, and activity patterns. Developing maps with community members helps the designer acquire knowledge about subtleties that won’t be obvious to the

4 INTRODUCE THE COMMUNITY TO ITSELF
After gathering, analyzing and mapping the inventory, the designer has a unique perspective on the neighborhood. Analysis will combine the objectivity of an outsider with insights into the emotional intimacy of residents and an awareness of daily patterns and social nuances. Sharing this perspective with residents can make people aware of their community as never before.

5 GET A GESTALT
The next task is to extract the salient issues that describe the situation simply yet completely. This relies on the designer’s perceiving the soul of the community, thinking of the problems as a whole, comprehending the archetypes and idiosyncrasies and combining all of these into a gestalt of lifestyle and landscape.

6 DRAW ANTICIPATED ACTIVITY SETTINGS
At this point, the designer can begin to give form to the socio-spatial archetypes and idiosyncrasies important to the community. First, list all the major activities anticipated: (1) existing uses (2) desired uses (3) uses necessary to meet goals. Thumbnail sketches of each activity and its associated setting should be drawn to show the nuances of activity settings and interaction patterns.
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7 LET ARCHETYPES AND IDIOSYNCRASIES INSPIRE FORM
This step transforms the information gained from the activity-setting drawings into performance standards. For what and whom does each setting need to function? How, where and when is it expected to function, given the patterns and nuances of the particular community? These performance standards help to generate designs and act as hypotheses for pre- and post-construction evaluations.

8 MAKE A CONCEPTUAL YARDSTICK
At this point, the gestalt has no substance and the activity settings have no context. For either to be useful, they must be combined as a conceptual yardstick for evaluating plans. Start by comparing the performance standards of each activity setting to those of every other one to determine compatibility between activity settings within the context of the gestalt and previously set goals. Mark where conflicts may exist and test potential arrangements of activities within the dimensions of the site. The result of this step is a conceptual plan that maximizes the desired activity patterns of the residents within the constraints of the community.

9 DEVELOP A SPECTRUM OF DESIGN PLANS
Generate alternative design plans generally guided by the conceptual plan. But be free! Seek the problem instead of solving it. Although the conceptual plan is in the back of your mind, pursue new ideas. Go back to the gestalt, choose key points, try to see those points in a new, clear light; and generate sketch plans that symbolically address one or more of these.

10 EVALUATE BEFORE CONSTRUCTION
Having set goals, a gestalt, and detailed performance criteria, it is easy to write a list of evaluation standards by which the designer and the community can judge the alternate plans before moving forward with any one. Present each of the alternate design plans to the community. Then the design team should meet with community members to evaluate the plans based the list of standards and come to a consensus about which plan to move into more detailed design.

11 TRANSFER RESPONSIBILITY
After the plan is approved by community leaders, promote the final design through media outlets to build community support for implementation. As a general rule, the more responsibility the community accepts, the better. The designer must be certain that the procedure will lead to the desired end and that the policies necessary for the new spaces to work are implemented.
EVALUATE AFTER CONSTRUCTION

Post-construction evaluation is relatively easy if the community has set goals and if the designer has carefully recorded gestalt, the performance criteria, the hypotheses about how the project is to perform, and the cost-and-benefit tally sheet. If these are made public, residents can monitor the effectiveness of the physical changes and progress towards their goals. They can pressure local officials or establish work groups if progress is not made, and they can initiate informed changes to the plans as their goals or the local situation changes. In addition, the designer can learn much from post-construction evaluation if the hypotheses have been recorded.
Kurt Culbertson - Chairman and CEO | Design Workshop, Inc.
Kurt Culbertson is Chairman and CEO at Design Workshop, Inc. Kurt is a leader in the field of evidence-based design and the application of metrics and performance measures to landscape architecture, urban design and planning projects. This cutting edge approach which addresses not only environmental performance but the community and economic performance of the built environment, has been highlighted in numerous publications. His work has been recognized through professional awards by the American Planning Association and the American Society of Landscape Architects. He is an ASLA fellow, a member of AICP, a recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship, and a fellow of Dumbarton Oaks.

Anne Whiston Spirn - Professor of Landscape Architecture and Planning | Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Anne Whiston Spirn is an award-winning author and distinguished landscape architect, photographer, teacher, and scholar. Her work is devoted to promoting life-sustaining communities: places that are functional, sustainable, meaningful, and artful, places that help people feel and understand the relationship of the natural and built worlds. Since 1987, Spirn has directed the West Philadelphia Landscape Project, an action research program integrating research, teaching and community service, which was cited as a Model of Best Practice at a 1999 White House summit for leading scholars and artists in public life. Spirn’s book-in-progress, Top-Down/Bottom-Up: Rebuilding the Landscape of Community, describes this research-in-action and its lessons for building safer, healthier, and more equitable and sustainable communities.

Randolph Hester - Professor Emeritus of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning | UC Berkeley
Randolph (Randy) Hester Jr. is a landscape architect, professor and sociologist based in Berkeley, California (he may now want to say he’s from Durham, North Carolina. His practical work and teaching has focused on applying sociology to the design of neighborhoods, cities and landscapes. Hester is a strong advocate for community participation in the development of what he calls ecological democracies and sacred landscapes – spaces that grow out of a true understanding of the needs of a local community and the potential of its resources. His approach has excited communities across the US and abroad, and inspired countless students to actively engage the social and environmental context of their work.

Diane Jones Allen - Principal Landscape Architect | DesignJones LLC
Diane Jones Allen, D. Eng., ASLA, PLA examines the relationship between community design, urban planning, and environmental justice through her design consulting, research, and current teaching as an Instructor at the Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture at Louisiana State University, and pass teaching as a Tenured Associate Professor at Morgan State in Baltimore, Maryland. Prior to teaching, Jones Allen practiced for over a decade as Principal Landscape Architect with TerraDesigns Inc. in New Orleans, LA. She is currently Principal Landscape Architect with DesignJones in New Orleans, Louisiana. Jones Allen holds Doctorate in Civil Engineering from Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland, a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Washington University in St. Louis, MO, and a Master of Landscape Architecture from the University of California, Berkeley.

Kathleen King - Landscape Designer | Design Workshop, Inc.
Kathleen King is a landscape and urban designer at Design Workshop’s Denver office. She earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Michigan and a Master of Landscape Architecture from the University of Colorado at Denver, where she continues to serve as a research mentor. She has a strong interest in the role of community engagement and emerging social media technology in urban design and planning processes. Kathleen’s projects emphasize the possibility of public spaces to be reflective of the people who use them while providing long-term benefits for cities, their environments, businesses, and character.
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Resources and Reference

Recommended Reading


   http://www.annewhistonspirn.com/author/essays/
