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Agnotti, T., Doble, C., & Horrigan, P. (Eds.). (2011). *Service learning in design and planning*. Oakland, CA: New Village. 320 pp.

Review by Brian Orland

This review was written at a project site in Tanzania while students participating in a community design–oriented study abroad program wrote reflective essays just a few yards away. Receiving this book to review was timely, a reminder to reflect on the delivery of our own program. *Service Learning in Design and Planning* will be immediately useful and inspiring to faculty conducting or considering service-learning programs. It provides road maps for a multitude of approaches to service-learning, each path different but achieving a level of student engagement and transformation rarely found elsewhere in the curriculum. It challenges the reader following a service-learning pedagogy to consider a broad array of tools, techniques, and approaches and to be more critical of their own activities. It also repeatedly demonstrates the benefits to students and communities of these often-heroic programs of university-community engagement.

Service Learning in Design and Planning does not aim to develop theory or share empirical insights into the nature of the transformations it brings about. Instead the editors' aims are twofold: to help spread enthusiasm for community-based service-learning among other design and planning educators and to inspire both students and educators to explore and eventually erase the boundaries that exist between communities and design and planning programs.

The first two sections of this edited volume, "Beginning to See the 'Other'" and "Learning to Reflect and Evaluate," eloquently address the transformative outcomes of service-learning in design and planning programs. As is typical in edited volumes, each author or group of coauthors has their own unique story to tell, and each is unaware of the others in the same collection. As a result, the insights in each chapter have their own style. Although there is no explicit coordination between the chapters of the first section, a strong theme does emerge: The sharing of stories is central to the process of breaking and erasing boundaries. Sally Harrison's students in North Philadelphia learned the story of how focal corners of that community came to be centers of drug dealing and prostitution. However, in doing so they also learned how to work with the community to create an alternate story that could restore and

revitalize. As she puts it, the narratives "make the unimaginable, the imaginable" *(p. 32).*

In her chapter, Jodi Rioser proposes a strategy for developing such narratives. In most cases the service-learning classes we conduct consist of privileged individuals, students and teachers, representing powerful institutions. The communities being served are defined by often-extreme differences of race, class, and income. Rios calls for the "beloved community" *(p. 43)* espoused by Martin Luther King, Jr.: Identify the differences and call them out, examine whether the poor have themselves to blame, and ensure that all voices are heard in the resulting narrative. In the following chapter, Jeff Hou describes the four essential functions of narrative as boundary-erases: It is the mechanism by which community and university partners recognize their differences, similarities, and challenges; it is the third-party means by which they negotiate their differences in order to achieve solutions; it is the medium used to improvise and communicate solutions or responses to community challenges; and it is the primary tool in transforming the people involved in all parts of the narrative. The different narratives of the beginning of the process become the shared narrative of the outcome.

The two remaining chapters of this section have related goals that concern evaluating the professional education outcomes of service-learning experiences that attempt to erase boundaries: Do students develop adequate and appropriate professional skills? In both cases the authors hoped to achieve deep learning outcomes beyond the metrics of professional accreditation or licensure, such as how racism or community values affected student learning as reflected in the designs and plans the students developed with their community partners. Instead, both groups found that the disciplinary focus of student work essentially submerged their consideration of multicultural values. They also reported that the emphasis placed upon design communication, the production of plan and perspective drawings, was so great that higher order questions, such as the consideration of racism as a shaper of design outcomes, received little attention from students. One group of authors speculated that single semesters of class immersion were not enough for students to grasp the bigger goals of the community-based programs of which they were a part. In both cases the authors pointed to the critical importance of including a structured reflection phase in projects to reveal the values of both communities and students. Reflection and evaluation is the topic of the next section of the volume.

The chapters of "Learning to Reflect and Evaluate" describe case studies with strong reflective components. Unfortunately, most of these incorporate only limited descriptions of student, community, and faculty reflections. On the other hand, the section does include useful descriptions of several comprehensive course and outcome evaluation programs. "Transforming Subjectives," by Susan Harris and Clara Irazabal, provides a useful framework for evaluation of projects in terms of their contribution to service or to learning. The classification of projects as high- or low-service, high- or low-learning prompts critical evaluation of who benefits most from each of the projects. A chapter by Lynn Dearborn is an important contribution in that it moves beyond anecdotal and qualitative reporting of student evaluations to a substantial quantitative appraisal of a long-running service-learning program. The outcomes reveal that alumni of the East St. Louis Action Research Program experience personal development, express increased levels of civic responsibility, and perceive that more professional directions are available to them. Involvement in the program results in "aha!" moments that fundamentally affect students' choices of where they will live and how they will practice.

The two chapters in the next section of the book, "Crossing Boundaries," describe programs in Costa Rica (Schneekloth and Shannon) and Guatemala (Winterbottom), each an inspiring example of its kind. In both cases the level of engagement of students with community, of students with serious context-sensitive design, and of commitment of faculty to broad learning objectives is exemplary. The authors point to an advantage of the overseas location: Students are engaged every day, all day, and largely free of other distractions. Although the program I codirect in Tanzania is light on community engagement for want of Swahili language skills, we observe the same deep commitment and energy of students taken away from their usual world. Schneekloth and Shannon note also that the practices of placemaking, central to design and planning, may be easier to observe in developing world communities where place is a direct outcome of daily living and people retain the skills and abilities to create place. Many of the U.S. neighborhoods where service-learning programs take place may be in their second or third round of adoption and abandonment by successive waves of immigrants: I recall a Greek Orthodox church standing alone amid largely abandoned East St. Louis streets. The communities where we work in developing countries are frequently still in their first rounds of building and placemaking. These same authors

make a valuable point, however: Even without language gaps, the poverty and opportunity gaps between students and developing world communities are better described as eased rather than erased by the collaboration of students and community.

The final section, "Confronting Academic Boundaries," discusses the various benefits and challenges, real and perceived, that affect service-learning in design and planning education. The four chapters reach similar conclusions: that the pedagogical approach of service-learning is highly successful, often life-changing; that curriculum issues such as satisfying accreditation standards can be a struggle; and that inherently interdisciplinary work does not always result in work recognizable as having disciplinary rigor. These will all sound familiar to those pursuing service-learning. The case studies throughout this volume consistently report on the value of the experience to students, supporting the ideas of Dewey, Freire, and others on experiential education. Although the challenges do need to be addressed, it is worth pausing to consider the value of this particular "product" in the larger institutions where we work. The applied and integrative capstone nature of service-learning experiences would surely appeal broadly across the university but remain locked up largely within professional programs where the schedule is deliberately designed to accommodate the intensive workshop classes that do not fit the standard 60- or 90-minute rhythm of the university timetable. Although undoubtedly an issue, class scheduling would be far from an insurmountable obstacle if interdisciplinary service-learning were an institutional goal. Similarly, claims that accreditation standards cannot be met are also overstated. Questions on just this topic that I posed to the accreditation bodies for landscape architecture (LAAB) and architecture (NAAB) resulted in the response that the specifics for addressing standards were in the hands of the institutions, which had broad discretion in advancing creative curriculum offerings. And in the same vein, criteria for faculty promotion and tenure as well as mentoring of new faculty are generally in the hands of the home unit. If service-learning pedagogy is valued by the unit, the values of its products in both student learning and faculty scholarship will be promulgated in departmental guidelines and addressed in mentoring. The battles in these areas will not be easy, but at least they will often be fought on home turf.

Edited volumes inevitably suffer from some duplication of message between the various offerings, and in this case there is resounding agreement between the authors on the value of service-learning. There is also strong agreement on the value and neces-

sity of the basic structure of orientation, experiential immersion, and reflection. With generally engaging and accessible writing throughout, the book has great value as a primer on how to conduct service-learning in design and planning schools, but for this reader there are two elements of the book that would have benefited from further development. First, although the authors repeatedly settle on the reflective component as the key transformative element of their programs, none takes that topic to any depth. How should reflection be conducted, and what theory or empirical evidence guides those choices? For our own program we rely on brute force—reflective essays, reflective colloquia, reflective journals, and reflective surveys—in the absence of knowing of any better approaches. What we learn from these practices takes us deeper into our students' feelings and motivations than any classroom work and places a great responsibility on us to protect and value what they share as we help shape the insights they gain. We need to prepare ourselves to understand that responsibility and how to engage it wisely. Second is the need to better understand what is required of service-learning program leaders. This is not just fieldwork but fieldwork with the added need to nurture and support a group of students and community partners in an unfamiliar setting with unfamiliar challenges and hazards. It is design and planning where resources are slim and the designers and planners are not in charge of their directions. It is time away from the support structures of campus and library when the promotion clock is ticking.

In the spring of 1990, in a parish office in East St. Louis, the Reverend Gary Wilson confronted Ken Reardon, Mike Andrejasich, and me in the early days of the East St. Louis Action Research Project, saying, "Your students get their degrees and go off to fancy jobs, you faculty get promoted, and all East St. Louis gets are these blue binders." He was right. Our single-semester reports were unlikely to result in much; the projects they represented were complete as far as we were concerned but were not yet started for the community. Like many other programs with service-learning aspirations, we learned the necessity of long-term commitments and partnership. The Reverend Wilson was also wrong, however. In ways not immediately tangible to either partner, both community and university had gained in their ability to understand "other," and both had begun to reflect on and evaluate those experiences. True reciprocity may be unattainable except in rare circumstances, but the reflective component of service-learning transforms students in ways that other pedagogical strategies cannot approach.

While not revealing any new truths about service-learning in design and planning, this volume does remind us of the many questions to be addressed by faculty program leaders and administrators. Service-learning programs are challenging to develop and conduct and frequently lead to the question asked in one chapter: "Why bother ?" The answer, of course, is that experiential learning is unparalleled in its power to inspire students to the idealism that drives social change. Or, in words attributed to Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

About the Reviewer

Brian Orland is distinguished professor of landscape architecture at the Pennsylvania State University. He holds degrees in architecture (BArch, Manchester University, 1976) and in landscape architecture (MLA, University of Arizona, 1982) and is registered as an architect in the U.K. His teaching and research interests are in environmental perception, the modeling and representation of environmental impacts, and the design of information systems for community-based design and planning.