LEARNING ARCHITECTURE THROUGH LIVE PROJECTS

Building community university partnerships for teaching & learning excellence & community enhancement

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Acknowledgements

“We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give.”
Winston Churchill

The Churchill Fellowship has afforded me a once in a lifetime opportunity to engage in a generative dialogue with distinguished academics and practitioners on a nascent aspect of architectural teaching based within community contexts, known as ‘live projects.’

In contrast to the placebo experience of the design studio, live projects offer aspiring young architects a truly transformative learning experience, allowing them to work directly with community stakeholders who would otherwise be priced out of access to architectural resources. For Universities keen to develop their relationship with their local communities, live projects widen access and inclusion as well as generate highly diverse as well as reciprocal learning opportunities.

I am therefore hugely grateful to the Churchill Fellowship for their support & generosity in would like to extend a special thanks to Julia Weston for her helpful advice and guidance throughout the travel period.

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Finally, I also owe the people that I visited during my tour a huge debt of gratitude, not least for their openness and willingness to share ideas, join in with and enrich our sense of common purpose and to also commit to developing collaborative projects in future. They are listed in appendix 1 of this report and I thank them all, most sincerely.

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Center for Urban Pedagogy, NYC
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MIT School of Architecture
University of Illinois, Chicago
STUDIO 804, University of Kansas
Washington Alexandria Architecture Consortium
Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative, Kent State University
Archeworks, Chicago
Design Corps, University of Texas at Austin
Tulane City Center, Tulane School of Architecture
MAAS Design Group
University of Montana Community Design Center
Public Architecture, San Francisco
University of San Francisco
Californian College of the Arts (CCA)
Engage at CCA
City Lab, UCLA
Harvard School of Architecture
Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI), Los Angeles
Contents

Executive summary

Background: Rationale for Churchill Fellowship Travel

Dialogue & knowledge exchange:

Dialogue 01: Brian Mc Grath, Parsons New School, New York City
Dialogue 02: Laura Briggs, Parsons New School, NYC
Dialogue 03: William Morrish, Dean of the School of Constructed Environments, Parsons New School, NYC
Dialogue 04: Sam Holleran & Mark Torrey, Center for Urban Pedagogy, NYC
Dialogue 05: Susan Piedmont-Palladino, Washington Alexandria Architecture Consortium
Dialogue 06: Terry Schwartz Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative
Dialogue 07: Susanne Schnell Archeworks, Chicago
Dialogue 08: Barbara Wilson / Design Corps, University of Texas at Austin
Dialogue 09: Emilie Taylor / Tulane City Center, Tulane School of Architecture
Dialogue 10: Steve Juroszek / Chris Livingston / Tom McNab / Ralph Johnson / University of Montana Community Design Center
Dialogue 11: John Peterson, Public Architecture, San Francisco
Dialogue 12: Seth Watchell, University of San Francisco
Dialogue 13: Tim Smith, Californian College of the Arts (CCA)
Dialogue 14: Megan Clark, Engage at CCA
Dialogue 15: Tim Higgins, City Lab, UCLA
Dialogue 16: Matt Coolidge, Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI), Los Angeles

Short summary of key insights to emerge from the Fellowship enabled visit to the USA


Dissemination & ongoing engagement strategy: Live Projects Symposium 2012

Appendix
The experience of engagement will become the pathway to a fresh interpretation of the 21st century. This conception rests on the rethinking of the core of the academy, namely, the nature of scholarship itself.

(Judith Ramaley, 2005, p175)

... the academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic and moral problems, and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I call the scholarship of engagement.

(Ernest Boyer, 1996, p.11)
LEARNING ARCHITECTURE THROUGH LIVE PROJECTS: Building community-university partnerships for teaching & learning excellence & community enhancement

Executive Summary

What is the value proposition of Live Projects located within community contexts?

Introduction
I set out on my Churchill Fellowship study tour with the explicit intention of forming ongoing connections with exemplary design project educators across the USA. Having spent months reading books and articles and trawling websites looking at various University and Community Design Centres, the opportunity to visit the centres proved transformative, as hopefully this report will testify. Meeting the educators behind the centres, enabled the kind of dialogues where complex and critical issues were not only shared but also developed and where a commitment to establishing a live project network and a series of forthcoming collaborations and events was pioneered. These kinds of constructive & generative exchanges simply do not happen without face-to-face contact.

Education Context
What, where and how we best teach young people to become architects is the subject of endless debate in both schools and in practice offices. With many architecture students graduating into a diminished UK construction sector, architectural educators are forced to rethink the education value proposition, looking to enable aspiring young architects to define and even design the profession of tomorrow. So what is it that makes ‘live projects’ so important in enabling students to gain the right set of skills to become the practice-ready professionals of tomorrow? What are the key distinctions between what we can learn in a studio context where we enjoy certain freedoms in relation to creative and intellectual risk and what we learn when we are faced with real people and real-time constraints within the conflicting pressures of meeting budget, time, material and user needs? Simply by asking these questions it seems that what we mean by architectural ‘knowledge’ or ‘expertise’ begins to unravel – which is fascinating – since the many inherited paradigms we as educators are working with are long overdue and overhaul. This is in essence the subject of my doctorate research and the Churchill Fellowship has provided a unique and transformative opportunity to share ideas and pedagogic best practice with a variety of exemplary live projects taking place in architecture schools across the USA. By critically examining the assumptions around what can and cant be learned within a placebo studio environment, the importance of developing collaborative and user engagement capabilities underpinned all of the discussions and presentations I had in the USA.

Itinerary Summary
Beginning with 3 days at the ACSA conference on Performative Practices, I visited the following schools ‘live projects’ programs over a six week period; Parsons New School NYC, Archeworks Chicago, University of Illinois Chicago, NYC Center for Urban Pedagogy, Virginia Tech’s Washington Alexandria Architecture Center, Cleveland Urban Design Collective (Kent State University), Tulane School of Architecture in New Orleans, Design Corp (University of Texas, Austin), CCA’s engage, Public Architecture, University of San Francisco, University of Montana CDC, Public Architecture, Berkeley, University of California, The Center for Landscape Interpretation and Design Lab at UCLA as well as having numerous skype calls or conference dialogues with a wide variety of live project educators across America including Yale, MIT, Sci-Arc and Rhode Island School of Design.

The Oxford Context
I have long been interested in making architecture a more inclusive profession and process. Before becoming an academic, I ran a small, inclusive design practice called Design Heroine that focussed upon
co-designing with clients and stakeholders. Our clients ranged from public sector programs such as Building Schools for the Future (where we enabled pupils and teachers to design their new school) to corporations looking to create social learning facilities within their offices.

Since becoming a design educator, I have been developing and implement teaching programs that offer students the chance to learn from and within community-engaged contexts. In September 2010, I established a community-based collaborative project involving a ‘pilot’ cohort of 5th year diploma architecture students who were tasked with developing team design solutions aimed at transforming public services in Oxford, creating design solutions substantiated by user-research, community co-design, prototyping, strategic planning, business metrics and entrepreneurship. Divided into small teams, the students were partnered with public sector/charitable agencies in Oxford through a key contact at Oxford City Council Planning Department. The community agencies ranged from Oxford Probation Service to Oxford Academy School in Blackbird Leys. Through a process of action-oriented (Cole et al, 2005), community-engaged design-research (Holland, 2005) students were tasked with co-designing strategic, spatial solutions with both end-users and the service providers. The “live projects” ran for semester 01 and constituted part of the students formative portfolio work within the 5th year Design Studio P30001 module.

The anticipated outcomes were met - for example - the students had to develop real-time design solutions, working within a number of constraints (social as well as economic) that allowed them to ‘road-test’ their architectural education in a ‘live project,’ (Thomas & Busby, 2003) where the their decisions impacted on the lives of others, and not their grades. This level of responsibility proved profound for many of the students involved. In pedagogic as well as practical terms, the students have experienced developing their threshold knowledge (Meyer & Land, 2003) and moving beyond the mimicry associated with the placebo (Margolin, 2002) studio environment. By working within an immersive learning situation (Dede, 2009) with community partners they have been able to access ambiguous and troublesome knowledge (Meyer & Land, 2003) that can be hard to develop within a design studio setting, such as consultation techniques, risk analysis and so on.

In synchronicity with Oxford Brookes Strategic Outcomes (Strategy 2020) the live projects learning experience whereby students participate in a reflective collaborative research-led, highly community linked learning process (see samples of student blogs) has enabled them to develop and expand both discipline specific and interdisciplinary graduate attributes, and offered an outstanding student experience, one that they have used to enhance their architectural capabilities. By working within a community context, students have been encouraged ‘to build collective capacity for interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary research, engaging in regional and local issues and conditions in keeping with specific institutional mission and strengths.’ (Holland, 2009)

The unanticipated outcomes also proved hugely beneficial to my professional development as an educator. Firstly, the community-based live projects required ethics approval that involved a rigorous application process, which was not initially successful. The key concern of the ethics committee was that the students’ involvement in the project should not form part of their summative assessment work.

The second unanticipated outcome was that many of the projects proved so successful that they have since attracted funding and are now going on site (being constructed). This includes the Oxford Hub Project and Oxford Academy School. For the students involved, this provides a major opportunity to gain the kind of ‘real’ project experience needed for them to gain their professional registration papers (via the RIBA/ARB validation process). In addition, in a time where there are limited practice office placements available during the summer months, these students are gaining experience of far more value than those working as ‘CAD jockeys’ within large practices on unpaid internships.

The importance of the Churchill Fellowship
In affording me the opportunity to engage with 16 different live projects at a diverse range of Architecture Schools in the USA, the Churchill Fellowship has enabled transformative dialogues that encompassed ALL of the issues outlined above, which has had a hugely positive impact on both my ongoing teaching and research. As a direct result of the Fellowship, the live project educators have each committed to building the inaugural Live Project Symposium, which will be held at Oxford Brookes in Summer 2012. This two day symposium will also seek to develop a co-authored charter on best-practice in ‘live projects,’
since one of the key findings so far is that the field of live project architecture seriously lacks any established critical pedagogy, further increasing the importance and potential value of this fellowship. More details are provided in the later section of this report entitled, ‘Dissemination and engagement strategy.’

References
Holland, B. A. Gelmon, S. B. (1998) The State of the "Engaged Campus": What have we learned about building and sustaining university-community partnerships? AAHE BULLETIN VOL 51; NUMBER 2, pages 3-6, AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
Brookes Strategic Vision 2020 http://www.brookes.ac.uk/about/structure/mission2020
Students were required to keep reflective diaries of their live projects – a full list of their blogs is available in the appendix

www.oxfordhub.org
www.oxac.org
http://www.architecture.com/EducationAndCareers/Validation/UKvalidation.aspx

Selected samples of student blogs:
http://natashalofthouse.blogspot.com/
http://willjgamble.blogspot.com/
http://ds2-probation-centre.blogspot.com/
http://sammitson.blogspot.com
http://findrichardfisher.blogspot.com/
http://lauraenorton.blogspot.com/
http://yutingcheng.blogspot.com
http://nickyaddrison.blogspot.com/
http://fireandpolice.blogspot.com/
http://dhirenpatellds2.blogspot.com/

My blogs:
http://harianethamisschurchill.wordpress.com
liveprojectsarchitecture.wordpress.com

ACSA Conference:
www.acsa-arch.org/conferences/2011teachersseminar.aspx
Dialogue 01: Brian Mc Grath, Parsons New School, NYC

“Research credits for program design.”

My first meeting with Brian McGrath focussed upon how much research, strategic thinking and original concept work goes into the ‘design’ of live projects, and how this should in effect be considered research returnable. For any academic, the pressure to combine teaching and research more often results in a conflict between the two. When designing teaching programs, much of the content is informed by the curriculum criteria provided by the Architects Registration Board (ARB) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and in the US, the American Institute for Architecture (AIA). As well as meeting these criteria, educators generally seek to develop engaging and effective teaching programs that respond to the needs of changing practices and global shifts. Developing these kinds of tenacious and responsive programs involve huge amounts of research and design. Both Brian & I agreed that these endeavours be formally recognised by the academic ‘accreditation’ community (in the UK, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), in the USA, the Higher Education Research Institute) would amount to an education revolution, allowing educational content to be industry as well as community responsive.

Another area of discussion focussed upon the challenge of working on live projects in emerging economies. Parsons New School run a range of ‘live projects’ based in both the USA and abroad, and Brian has been instrumental in developing a Bangkok based live project endeavor that seeks to enable the ongoing development of the ‘creative economy’ in Thailand, as part of his Global Exchanges course – that shares much in common with Oxford Brookes CENDEP program run by Professor David Sanderson. Both David and myself are now co-authoring a paper on the subject, which has been further enhanced by this discussion with Brian.

Links:
http://www.newschool.edu/parsons/constructed-environments-school-sce/
Research Excellence Framework (UK) http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/
Higher Education Research Institute (USA) http://www.heri.ucla.edu/
Laura Briggs leads an award winning, socially responsible and sustainability innovative program known as Em-powerhouse Solar Decathlon that challenges 20 collegiate teams to design, build and operate solar-powered houses that are cost-effective, energy-efficient and attractive.

Based on Laura’s experience of Live Projects, Laura felt that much of their ‘value’ comes from “students learning to negotiate,” an indispensable skill for the practicing architect. One of the key aspects of the Solar Decathlon is to give the students the chance to get involved in each part of the project, not just the design bit, giving them a comprehensive view of the whole process. In Laura’s view live projects enable students to develop a ‘design empathy,’ in other words an appreciation of the experiences of the user (Leonard & Rayport, 1997) which is an essential skill for any architect and difficult to ‘teach’ within a studio environment.

Links:
http://parsit.parsons.edu/
http://www.newschool.edu/parsons/faculty_program.aspx?id=48648
In dialogue with the Dean of Parsons New School Department of Constructed Environments, William Morrish considered the issue of resourcing live projects, given the economic climate and the stark realities of funding the build costs of live project work. What are needed are endowments to underpin the efforts and cover management tasks, not to mention the hidden costs. As Bill explained, ‘the students and faculty build a beautiful small addition, but what have we learned? Was the project a catalyst for the community as well as the students?’

He raises an interesting point; balancing the needs of the students with the needs of the community is a complex one. Perhaps the answer lies in how we attempt to define the problem.

American Architect and educator Louis Kahn (1901–1974) strongly believed that architecture could make a ‘valuable’ contribution to society and that well-designed buildings could influence and improve the quality of people’s lives, and once said, ‘A good question is always greater than the most brilliant answer.’ My interpretation of this relates directly to the brief forming stage of the architecture process. If we enable students to learn how to ask the right questions of community stakeholders, rather than simply impose a preconceived solution, we will go some way to addressing the issue of ensuring that communities benefit from a bespoke and meaningful design response.

http://www.newschool.edu/parsons/constructed-environments-school-sce/
Dialogue 04: Sam Holleran & Mark Torrey, Center for Urban Pedagogy, NYC

“Community design ‘solutions’ beyond the building.”

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a non-profit organization that uses design and art to improve public participation in shaping the places where we all live. They do this by creating visually based educational tools that demystify urban policy and planning issues and aim to increase public understanding of how these systems work.

Unlike the University linked Live Project facilities (generally known here as Urban Design Centers) CUP is an independent organisation established by an inter-disciplinary team that originally included planners, artists and an architect.

Their interdisciplinary practice ‘model’ is worthy of closer examination for three key reasons. Firstly, the RIBA Building Futures report (2011) identified a significant increase in the number of smaller architectural firms becoming increasingly inter-disciplinary.

Secondly, I am particularly interested in how a University linked Live Project office might involve students from other disciplines, not just architecture students. CUP’s practice model is, in their own words, ‘one part design and art professionals, one part community organizers and advocates, and one part CUP staff helping the designers and advocates to speak the same language.’

Thirdly, it is my assertion that every Live Project office needs a public engagement strategy – one that makes stakeholders and end users feel that they can make a creative contribution and get a handle on
the issues. One of the key strengths of CUP is the 'tools' they develop to help communicate complex issues—from the juvenile justice system to zoning law to food access—breaking things down into simple, accessible, visual explanations. The tools they develop are so successful they are often used by local service providers across New York City and beyond to help their constituents’ better advocate for their own community needs. These tools therefore offer students fantastic exemplar for engaging community stakeholders, and are very much ‘designed’ using the same creative instincts they are developing as architects.

During the discussion with Sam Holleran and Mark Torrey, we discussed the difficulties architects face in thinking that the design ‘solution’ always needs to manifest as a building. Sam explained that many of the publications tackle issues around use of public space and planning in a very direct way, “by producing something beautiful as well as informative, our publications are like Trojan Horses, getting to the heart of the matter without assuming a directly critical position,” a strategy that resonates with the kind of design communication challenges facing architects when trying to evidence the value of their processes as well as their products.

http://places.designobserver.com/feature/bodega-down-bronx/12257/
http://places.designobserver.com/feature/the-water-underground/13448/
http://www.anothercupdevelopment.org/

“Professional growth, process, synthesis & social responsibility.”

Susan Piedmont-Palladino is an architect and Professor of Architecture at the Washington/Alexandria Architecture Consortium (WAAC), Virginia Tech’s urban campus. The Center has operated as the urban extension of Virginia Tech’s College of Architecture & Urban Studies since 1980. There are approximately 200 students enrolled in the WAAC program each year.

In the words of WAAC founding director, Jan Holt, ‘construction and design are inclusive of all cultures, originating in the common unity of the human condition and, like all endeavours, are the product of desire and reason, of dream and detail.’ The centre emphasises the importance of professional growth, process, synthesis and social responsibility.

The dialogue with Professor Susan Piedmont-Palladino immediately focussed in on one of the challenges facing Live Project facilities such as WAAC – that of doing work for ‘free.’ Susan explained that it was not uncommon to receive calls from private firms looking to get students working on preliminary design proposals as a ‘learning opportunity.’ Although live projects aim to enrich communities by providing access to architectural services that it could not otherwise afford, the downside is that this kind of ‘free’ work could devalue these stages within professional practice.

Another concern that Susan put forward is the, ‘mismatch between academic time and real time,’ where projects often outlast the students’ course timeline, preventing them of seeing the project through to completion.

In the UK Part II graduates often find it hard to be given the kind of whole project participation necessary to complete their part III professional registration, which is why whole project participation within a live project endeavour could have huge implications for the context in which students could qualify as architects.

Finally, the discussion turned to the importance of encouraging students to see beyond the architecture-as-building paradigm, and instead using their design intelligence to envision other outcomes. As Susan neatly put it, ‘we need to learn to differentiate between whether the problem is an architectural one, or a policy issue?’

http://www.archdesign.vt.edu/
http://www.waac.vt.edu/
Dialogue 06 // Terry Schwartz // Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative

“Seeing how every line on the page impacts on someone’s life.”

Terry Schwartz is the director of Kent State University’s Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative, the combined home of Kent State’s graduate program in urban design and the public service activities of the Urban Design Center of Northeast Ohio (UDC). The CUDC is a community service organization with a professional staff of architects, planners, urban designers, and landscape designers committed to improving the quality of urban places through technical design assistance, research and advocacy. Supported by the College of Architecture and Environmental Design at Kent State University, the CUDC offers urban design expertise and applied research in the service of urban communities, design professionals, and public policy efforts. Her work at the CUDC includes neighbourhood and campus planning, commercial and residential design guidelines, storm-water management and green infrastructure strategies.

During our discussion, Terry talked about the importance of the Kent Architecture department recognising the students’ work within the CUDC. At present, the system allows students to gain 1-2 credits in recognition of their participation. We discussed how this could be expanded, possibly within a post-graduate masters program. The credit recognition is arguably an important part of the overall engagement strategy, not only because it encourages students to take their work seriously, but perhaps most critically, because it encourages the students to contextualise their live project experiences within an academic framework and engenders reflective learning.

In addition to this students are encouraged to see the live project work they do within CUDC as a distinct from the standard architecture school fodder, and closer to ‘professional’ work experience. This is helped by the off campus location of the CUDC, which is situated in the heart of the city. The centre itself resembles a professional design practice as opposed to a school-based design studio, further making the distinction between school and work, engendering a sense of professionalism in the students. Given the current ‘crisis’ in the profession, the number of low or unpaid internships for architecture students is on the increase, which coupled with the cost of education actually makes it financially impossible for some students to gain any experience in practice offices, since part-time paid work is essential to their survival. Facilities such as the CUDC therefore have a crucial role to play in providing essential professional experience for architecture students who are disadvantaged in this way. That the availability of essential
training should decrease at a time when the profession is being paid less than ever, yet the cost of education is rising yet higher is a painful irony not lost on most students.

As Terry suggested, the traditional practice of architecture is all but ‘extinct’ and the new models of practice that are increasingly diverse. The ‘polarised’ profession – where some architects make the world rich list whilst over a third of UK architects are under-employed suggests that this ‘extinction’ might not necessarily be all bad. A rethink on what we do, and why we do it and by implication for WHOM we do it is clearly in order – not least because professions are supposedly defined by their service to the public interest – which should surely include our own members not just clients and users.

Putting the CUDC work into context, Terry explained that one of the key distinctions between the work the students do in school and some of the projects they are involved in at the CUDC is that aesthetic isn’t always the central ambition explaining that, ‘the best way is to do some ugly stuff sometimes.’ This comment reminded me of Jeremy Till’s reflections upon the ‘invisible ethic’ in his book, ‘Architecture Depends’ - possibly the most important text on architecture published in the last decade – in which he asserts that architects have a tendency to confuse ethics with aesthetics. The issue of ethics is central to the debate on the value of live projects, a key theme worthy of further investigation.

http://www.cudc.kent.edu/index.html
http://www.kent.edu/CAED/index.cfm
Dialogue 07 // Susanne Schnell
Archeworks, Chicago

“Partnership not ownership when collaborating with Universities.”

Archeworks is an alternative design school with a difference. In place of a traditional curriculum, students work in multidisciplinary teams with non-profit partners to create design solutions for social and environmental concerns. Archeworks is dedicated to envisioning and advancing a better quality of life for communities through socially responsible and environmentally conscious design solutions that address the greatest urban challenges of the 21st Century. Archeworks envisions future communities, driving dialogue, policy and city design, whilst inspiring a collaborative process. The outputs include innovative prototypes that shape healthy, beautiful and sustainable cities and places.

During the dialogue with Archeworks Executive Director, Susanne Schnell we discussed the importance of developing community based live projects that are multi-disciplinary and involve students from a wide range of backgrounds. One of the characteristics of Archeworks is that it is entirely independent of any architecture school, and in essence is about to set the programs in response to the community needs any expectations regarding outputs or assessment criteria – imposed by the school pedagogy or the professional validation requirements of the US equivalent of the RIBA.

We also reflected upon how this ‘freedom’ allows the project pedagogy to in essence be co-designed within the live project process – as students and community participants establish their aims and aspirations collaboratively.

Finally, the discussions also reflected upon how many of the US Live Project/Community Design Centres are defined by strong leaders - Dan Pitera from the Detroit Collaborative Design Center and Terry Schwartz from Cleveland Urban Design Center came to mind – who are clearly producing pedagogic frameworks within which their centres sit, yet there remains a need to map and critique these frameworks in order to establish what the defining characteristics of live projects actually are.

http://www.archeworks.org/
http://www.udmercy.edu/catalog/undergrad01-03/DetColDesCenter.html
Dr Barbara Wilson, is directing this summer’s Design Corps Program, based at the University of Texas at Austin (UTSoA). This is the first Public Interest Design (PID) summer course hosted in Austin, connecting advanced students interested in the built environment and public service with leading practitioners in public design, and equipping them with the tools they need to create beautiful, sustainable, and community-enhancing spaces.

During my visit to Austin, Barbara and I visited some of the students urban interventions located in the alleyways within the East of Austin. Given the temperature in Austin during July, it was impressive that so much work had taken place. As Barbara explained, one of the key objectives of the Design Corp is to assist participating students to develop tools that join the dots between the practical and ethical implications of authentic public service design, encouraging them to consider how design can impact upon social as well as economic well-being at the scale of the individual as well as the community. As Barbara explained, ‘Sustainability extends beyond simply selecting materials carefully, it includes thinking about issues such as affordability, economy of scale as well as cost and also the issue of maintenance for the community custodians.’

One of the aspects of the alleyway project that interested me was the way each which each of the interventions were designed to offer each community member a unique design treatment whilst maintaining an overall cohesive aesthetic. This idea is something that is at the core of developing effective custodianship within community-based design projects and as issue that I aim to explore in more detail within my tools and methods chapter within my PhD research.

http://www.soa.utexas.edu/csd/PID/publicdesign.html
http://www.soa.utexas.edu/

“Co-designing for individuals and for the community as a whole.”
Dialogue 09 // Emilie Taylor // Tulane City Center, Tulane School of Architecture

“Listening to the stakeholders is the most important part of the design response.”

Design Build manager Emilie Taylor works at the Tulane School of Architecture as a lecturer and as senior program coordinator at the Tulane City Center. She is responsible for both directing projects and developing the community partnerships that provide opportunities for faculty and students to engage ‘real issues’ in the community using design as the vehicle for these interactions.

During our dialogue, we visited a range of the Tulane City Center and other agencies live projects across New Orleans, mostly within areas that had been particularly hard hit by Hurricane Katrina. The projects were incredibly varied and not all of the projects we visited seemed to respond successfully to the stakeholders needs. As Emilie pointed out, ‘after Hurricane Katrina, there were a few design equivalents of ambulance chasers dashing into New Orleans who were very keen to help address some of the huge problems that the city was facing in the aftermath of the storm. Not everyone got it right in working out what kind of resources were most needed by the community.”

We also talked at length about the difficulty of managing students as well as community members’ expectations. It was agreed that often students have a very strong desire to make a tangible and conspicuous impact within a community. However sometimes the solutions need to be more sensitive, or often the timing of the project realisation extends beyond their academic schedule, leaving them unable to enjoy completing their projects.

In terms of community members, many of them have high expectations about what can be done that does not always match the resources available. Timing/duration is an issue that both groups find hard to negotiate. As a live project educator, Emile explained that managing the expectations of all participants and stakeholders is the most demanding aspect of the role. However, we also discussed why community design centres seem so successful at attracting community projects, which is Emilie’s view is due to the, ‘city’s need for nimble responses to difficult situations.’

Another subject for discussion was the issue of students’ accreditation for working on live projects. In the absence of a salary, this kind of learning ‘credit’ is hugely important in terms of both recognising the work of the students and also cementing their commitment to the project itself.

http://www.tulanecitycenter.org/home/
Montana State University School of Architecture is situated within a very unique rural context – offering an excellent cross comparisons to all the other live projects I am visiting – all of which are all situated within urban sites. Another defining characteristic of the Montana Architecture School program is that live project are offered within a range of different architecture courses. Interim director, Steven Juroszek arranged a group workshop for my visit enabling many of the staff involved in live projects to attend and share their experiences.

The most established and formalised is the University’s Community Design Center directed by Tom McNab. Now in its 36th year, the Community Design Center works with non-profit organizations and government agencies to provide visioning, planning, and conceptual design – what we might typically describe in the UK as feasibility reports or RIBA workstages A-D. The CDC’s aim is to foster a collaborative interdisciplinary community/university partnership that serves the people of Montana in research and design of the built environment whilst developing the consultation and community-design capabilities of 4th year students.

In addition to the CDC, a number of live projects feature in other areas of curricula. The technology course run by Chris Livingston, is an excellent example. Past projects include a project built on campus for the University’s agriculture course and a food bank extension in town. Both projects were not without their challenges, and Chris’ experiences constitute invaluable knowledge regarding the difficulties and issues that can arise when running live projects, and the dialogue about the potential of this experiential insight is ongoing.

Finally, assistant professor Bruce Wrightsman established and ran a live project within the Gallatin National Forest known as the Blackmore Pavilion in 2009. On visiting the site, it seemed an entirely idyllic facility, delivered to an incredibly high standard although the students had run into considerable obstacles during the summer construction phase including extreme weather conditions. Local contractors and joiners were involved to support the project however their participation was highly facilitative & demonstrative and enabled the students to gain excellent hands-on skills as well as crucial construction team experience.

With such a wealth of experience, the group discussion covered a lot of ground and included topics as wide ranging as risk versus health & safety, reflective practice, educator versus facilitator, client feedback versus design crits amongst others. The aim is to continue developing many of the ideas and shared interests discussed in the long as well as short term.

http://www.arch.montana.edu/
http://www.arch.montana.edu/pages/outreach/outreach_local.php
http://www.flickr.com/photos/deivand/4651483868/
Dialogue 11 // John Peterson // Public Architecture, San Francisco

“Working with multiple stakeholders towards a common purpose.”

Public Architecture is a national non-profit architecture office based in San Francisco. It engages architecture firms with other non-profits and manufacturers to commit to designing for the public good through its nationally recognized 1% program, which acts to bring about positive community change through public-interest design initiatives and pro bono design service grants.

The 1% program refers to the proportion of investment made available for social projects that is taken from private clients fees that are keen to make a social investment and contribute to the environment of people who typically find architectural services beyond their reach. The result is a highly exciting practice, that delivers innovative and beautiful design to a diverse range of community stakeholders, not just those that can afford it.

As John Peterson (founder and President) describes it, this is a new model for architectural practice – one where foundations, corporations, and individuals grants and donations are also involved in moving beyond the economic constraints of conventional architectural practice, to make good design accessible to all.

This model of practice - one where community engagement is an embedded priority that does not compromise the architectural process or outcome - is hugely important in terms of demonstrating the value of live project experience in design school. This is contrary to the widely held conviction that engaging the community in the design process compromises the creative ambitions of the architects, often resulting in a less ‘architectural’ or aesthetic outcome (Reyner Banham’s ‘Black Box’ extrapolates on this theme).

Both John and I discussed the lack of any formal, school-based training in community consultation and engagement in schools, yet how we are lead to believe that our ‘profession’ is one that is duty bound to operate in the public interest.

http://www.publicarchitecture.org/home.htm
“Enabling students to impact positively on the world around them.”

The Architecture and Community Design Program at the University of San Francisco has an inspired manifesto. The program draws from the university’s diverse resources and faculty to form a unique interdisciplinary curriculum of study, which reflects the university’s mission and commitment to building community for a more just and humane world. This interdisciplinary program emphasizes the critical role of design in negotiating between individual and collaborative acts of making and the larger framework of political, social, and cultural issues. It seeks to engage and encourage students to understand the contemporary metropolis through a breadth of analytical approaches and design strategies. Through this process students are trained to become impassioned readers, interpreters, actors, and designers of their cities, institutions, and communities.

When researching the different Live Project Architecture programs USA, it was hard to find schools where community engagement is either mandatory or accredited. University of San Francisco is exceptional in making this commitment on both levels. Upon meeting Seth Watchell – who has been leading the architecture school’s community engagement program for several years – the dialogue immediately focused upon the value to the student learner in terms of their own personal, intellectual and emotional development and how transformative this kind of ‘service learning’ can be. In Seth’s view, ‘young people are capable of doing phenomenal work,’ and yet we agreed that to some extent our experience as architecture students left us feeling less than capable when we entered the workplace. Based on his experience, Seth argued that Live Projects are hugely empowering for students, ‘who have only been adults for a couple of years and who have little sense of their own value and that they can already be both useful and make a positive and lasting impact on the world around them.’ Within a qualification driven education system, these kinds of learning experiences are key in developing the capabilities of students to ‘lead lives of consequence’ - something that has become a core objective at my own institution (see Oxford Brookes 2020 Strategy).

http://www.usfca.edu/artsci/artarcd/architecture_community_design/
http://www.usfca.edu/facultydetails.aspx?id=4294969774
Tim Smith is one of the key educators within the pioneering MBA in Design Strategy at the California College of the Arts. This unique course aims to enable designers from a broad range of disciplines, to become the next generation of innovation leaders for a world that is profitable, sustainable, ethical, and truly meaningful. The curriculum unites the perspectives of systems thinking, design and integrative thinking, sustainability, finance, entrepreneurship, and generative leadership into a holistic strategic framework. Students develop deep, practical experience in managing today’s interconnected markets, learn not only how to create innovative products, services, and policy, but, more importantly, how to help organizations develop new business models for the future and work towards creating socially responsive, culturally relevant, and technologically appropriate lasting value.

The uniqueness of this course provides some key insights into how ‘live projects’ might evolve. In comparison to the other live projects I visited, this course is truly multidisciplinary, attracting students from a range of creative backgrounds including filmmaking, architecture, fashion and product design. The ‘live project’ component, involves students working within rather than simply for, creative agencies on a specific ‘brief’ that results in either a bespoke product or a development strategy. As Tim explained, ‘the emphasis is on collaboration, prototyping and stakeholder engagement.’ Attributes that are directly comparable with the traditional architecture school based Live Projects I visited.

We also discussed what happens when projects appear to fail, for example when the relationship with the client or stakeholders breaks down. As Tim explained, ‘how the project is assessed is extremely important because the emphasis is on process, for example, how the students manage the challenges, rather than focusing entirely on measuring outcomes. In other words, the grade for the work is not dependent on whether the client or community stakeholder value what you do.’ The unforeseen challenge presented by real-time stakeholders provides a unique kind of learning. This kind of assignment ‘ambiguity’ has been recognised as the kind of learning experience that builds leaders and innovators – an area of research that I am also exploring in tandem with my live project investigations (see blog link below).

http://www.cca.edu/academics/engage-at-cca
Dialogue 14: Megan Clarke, Engage at CCA Californian College of the Arts Center for Arts & Public Life

“Collaborations that transcend discipline build collective capability.”

ENGAGE at CCA is an innovative initiative combining the Community Arts Program's successful model of community engagement with the project-based learning approach of the architecture and design disciplines. Activated across academic programs, ENGAGE at CCA serves as a hub to connect interested faculty and students to community partners and relevant outside experts. The Centre’s ambition is to create community partnerships based on creative practice that serve the college and the diverse population of Oakland, San Francisco, and beyond. The program is woven across disciplines within the structure of the college and delivered through a variety of academic, professional, extracurricular, and experimental approaches.

CCA Engage is focussed upon integrating reciprocal, community-based learning into formal education for artists, architects, and designers nationwide. Program Manager Megan Clark is particularly concerned with this aspect of the program and describes her role as both a mentor and teacher – which touches on one of my main preoccupations with the changing role of design educators. Megan’s community engagement strategy is multifarious, and she has worked on a wide variety of Bay Area education programs as well as developing project-based curriculum and leading classes designed to actively engage young designers in their communities.

One of the most interesting aspects of our discussion focussed upon the importance of interdisciplinary live projects in providing a bespoke response to community needs. 'How an artist might participate with community stakeholders is hugely different to how an architecture student might engage.' In addition to the initial community interaction, students also imagine different outcomes. By getting architecture students to envisage solutions that aren't just about buildings is invaluable in helping them recognise how their design skills can be applied in a wider variety of ways.

http://center.cca.edu/
Dialogue 15: Tim Higgins, CITY LAB, UCLA

“Measuring impact beyond tangible outcomes demonstrates value.”

I met with Harrison (Tim) Higgins, associate Director and Researcher in Architecture and Urban Design at CITY LAB - located with UCLA’s architecture school - with a view to gaining an understanding of the commercial potential of community design centres. In the UK, many live ‘project offices’ as they were more traditionally known, closed due to a lack of economic sustainability. Given that many community clients do not have access to the financial resources needed to contract an architect, many CDC’s focus upon filling that gap, simply because students are in it for the invaluable work experience or course credits rather than any financial remuneration. However, live project offices still require space, have printing/facilities overheads and need (salaried) tutor involvement in terms of both office management and student/project supervision, which can result in a challenging outgoing for any architecture school operating within today’s genre of austerity.

CITY LAB’s model of engagement is therefore an interesting one. By essentially acting as a collaboration agency between exceptional students and commercial firms keen to outsource their R&D needs to aspiring entrepreneurs, the LAB has managed to generate sufficient revenue to become financially sustainable.

As Tim Higgins explained, the ‘land grant’ universities of the USA have an endowment that resources community design centres. For ‘private’ Universities, financial sustainability/autonomy is mandatory, which is this case opens up the possibilities as to what kind of ‘client’ they will engage with.

In addition, the academic context provides R&D investors with an exclusive product – the heavyweight endorsement of one of the world’s leading opportunities. This output ‘integrity’ attracts investment from public agencies, allowing CITY LAB to produce policy documents that can influence nationally as well as locally.

Financial investment and turnover is of course only one form of endorsement. As Tim Higgins identified, ‘the difficulty is in measuring impact,’ a preoccupation shared with many live project educators. However, one of the most inspiring aspects of CITY LAB is its ability to generate multifarious tangible outcomes – from films or policy documents to design software innovations – which exemplifies two keys issues; firstly that impact should not be entirely measured on outcomes and secondly, the importance of thinking beyond the building in terms of both CDC’s and the future profession as a whole.

http://www.citylab.aud.ucla.edu/people/
http://citylab.aud.ucla.edu/
http://www.aud.ucla.edu/
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land-grant_university
Dialogue 16: Matt Coolidge, Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI), Los Angeles

“Learning to recognise the latent value in each context.”

The key intention behind meeting Matt Coolidge, founder & director of the Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI) was to meet with an independent organisation that has an outstanding ability to leverage the learning capital inherent within the recognition, curation of and engagement with, public space and environmental heritage.

The CLUI is a dedicated research and education organization interested in understanding the nature and extent of human interaction with the earth’s surface, and in finding new meanings in the intentional and incidental forms that we individually and collectively create. We believe that the manmade landscape is a cultural inscription, that can be read to better understand who we are, and what we are doing. In terms of tangibles, the Centre publishes books, conducts public tours, and offers information and research resources through its library, archive, and web site. The CLUI exists to stimulate discussion, thought, and general interest in the contemporary landscape. Neither an environmental group nor an industry affiliated organization, the work of the Centre integrates the many approaches to land use – the many perspectives of the landscape – into a single vision that illustrates the common ground in “land use” debates. At the very least, the Centre attempts to emphasize the multiplicity of points of view regarding the utilization of terrestrial and geographic resources.

Similar to Archeworks in Chicago (dialogue 07) the CLUI operates independent of any University facility, yet provides a unique learning opportunity to architecture and planning students. Universities in effect can in effect ‘outsource’ to the CLUI, allowing the students to work with experts in the field around themes as evocative and pertinent as Erosion, Isolation, Preparedness and Petro-America. The community participation element is also an integral aspect of the ‘hands-on’ nature of the projects, further enhanced by a commitment to iterative dialogue through exhibitions, public presentations and publications.

In offering students the chance to take a ‘deep dive’ on a particular kind of urban analysis, they are afforded an opportunity to develop and test specialisms, as the profiles of the CLUI interpreters testify (see link below). In addition, the structure of the organisation - one where experts are largely practice-based rather than academic, offers students witness and examine models of independent practice at close range.

http://www.clui.org/
Short summary of the key insights to emerge from the Fellowship

“Research credits for program design.”

“Whole process learning.”

“Community design ‘solutions’ beyond the building.”

“A catalyst for the community as well as the students.”

“Professional growth, process, synthesis & social responsibility.”

“Seeing how every line on the page impacts on someone’s life.”

“Partnership not ownership when collaborating with Universities.”

“Co-designing for individuals and for the community as a whole.”

“Listening to the stakeholders is the most important part of the design response.”

“Enriching University facilities as well as local resources.”

“Working with multiple stakeholders towards a common purpose.”

“Enabling students to impact positively on the world around them.”

“Stakeholders present unanticipated challenges.”

“Collaborations that transcend discipline build collective capability.”

“Measuring impact beyond tangible outcomes demonstrates value.”

“Learning to recognise the latent value in each context.”
Fellowship Findings:  
Forthcoming paper & conference presentation

The key findings from the Churchill Fellowship travel underpin a paper I will be presenting at the Design Principles & Practices Conference, Los Angeles, January 2012.

http://designprinciplesandpractices.com/Conference-2012/

This Conference will address a range of critically important themes relating to design today. It is a place to explore the meaning and purpose of ‘design’, as well as speaking in grounded ways about the task of design and the use of designed artefacts and processes. The Conference is a cross-disciplinary forum that brings together researchers, teachers and practitioners to discuss the nature and future of design. The resulting conversations weave between the theoretical and the empirical, research and application, market pragmatics and social idealism.

The paper I will be presenting is entitled; ‘Testing models of community-engaged design scholarship: what can architecture students learn from community-based clients?’ Has been accepted for the DP&P conference that is focussing upon….and will consider the learning value of ‘live-design projects’ - a collaborative design partnership between Oxford Brookes Architecture school and three community service agencies. The structure of the paper will be based upon the key insights gained from each live project dialogue, which will then inform the evaluation outcomes.

The abstract for the paper is as follows:

This paper presents an early stage review of a Teaching Fellowship enabled community-based ‘live projects’ architecture program for graduate architecture students at Oxford Brookes University in the UK. The ‘live project’ students are given the opportunity to learn through a ‘co-creation’ process with community-based client organisations, whereby they are tasked with developing socially responsive, community focused architectural design proposals. The paper will consider:

1. The empowerment of communities through investigative processes that not only provide grounded qualitative-based data, but which also serve to provide ‘co learning’ opportunities between researchers and communities, in particular through the use of Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) techniques (Chambers, 1994).

2. Whose reality counts? The paper will examine some of the challenges facing the collaborative relationships between community members and researchers/professionals (Chambers, 1995, Bhabha, 2009) and the contrasting experiences of the students and the community partners.

3. Collaborative learning: the value proposition for students: The paper will briefly reflect upon the value to students of immersive, community engaged scholarship and the impact on their core skill development as the architects of tomorrow. (Savin-Baden, 2007).

4. Partnership tactics: Drawing upon findings from a Churchill Fellowship enabled tour of more established US live projects, the paper will also consider how real-time, long-term strategies for University-community partnerships can be developed and channelled into academic, practice-oriented programmes and what the pedagogic as well as practical implications are for these kinds of initiatives.

Key words:
community-engaged scholarship, live design projects, community participation, architecture teaching, experiential learning, practice-based learning, tactics, design teaching pedagogy

Throughout the USA tour I kept two blogs of the dialogues (see link below) that many of my students and colleagues followed. My new American associates are similarly engaged in the commentary it offers, and it has generated many further dialogues, giving a sense that the Churchill experience is still very much ‘live.’

All the design educators I met with shared the view that there is an urgent need to develop a pedagogic framework for live projects, one that ‘validates’ the learning experience within an academic framework, which in turn enables Universities to afford more resources to such enterprises.

Since arriving back in the UK, I have secured some teaching fellowship funding towards a Live Project Symposium, that my University has agreed to host in May 2012. This event will invite all the live project educators I during my fellowship travel in the USA – as well as invite participation from a wider academic, community and practice-based audience. The call for papers will be issued towards the end of September inviting delegates to present their own live project experiences and methodology. The conference itself will focus on emergent pedagogic themes that the dialogues during the fellowship travel have hugely influenced.

These include:
Community engagement, problem-based learning, community-engaged scholarship, co-design, architecture pedagogy, strategic community planning, peer-based learning, tacit knowledge, reflective practice, threshold concepts, architecture curriculum, assessment and validation, practice-ready skills, professionalism & ethics, diversity, critical citizenship, education futures, interdisciplinary teaching & learning, deep and surface learning, research-based learning.

The proposed dates for the symposium are: Thursday 24th- Saturday 26th May 2012, and it will be held at Oxford Brookes University, Headington Hill Campus. To make it a truly inclusive event, students and community partners as well as academics will have the opportunity to give presentations, exhibitions and workshops. The content for the symposium will be added to a live blog throughout the event, and in addition a double-blind reviewed journal will be produced (which will of course acknowledge the pivotal role played by the Churchill Fellowship in enabling the event).

The explicit aim of the symposium will be to generate a Live Projects Charter, one that is pedagogically grounded, and captures a set of best practice, curriculum aligned directives. In doing this, I will also be meeting the key objective stated in my original application, ‘to create a ‘toolkit’ publication for fostering CUP in UK universities, from which a resource-based network could develop, [combining] directives, strategies and case studies which would be supported by a web-based network I would develop using the resources available within my University.’

Finally, as stated at the outset, it is my conviction that community university partnerships are something that I passionately believe will form an integral component of all UK universities, enabling them to become more inclusive, responsive and diverse institutions committed to strengthening the social responsibilities and civic role of higher education. This Churchill Fellowship enabled project is therefore a crucial component in the realisation of this ambition.

Links:
http://liveprojectsarchitecture.wordpress.com/
http://harrietharrisschurchill.wordpress.com/
Appendix

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Further links:
Oxford Brookes 2020 Strategy http://www.brookes.ac.uk/about/strategy/about