



## **PARTICIPATION ENCOURAGED BY LAW – INTERVENING NEIGHBORHOODS, MUTUAL LEARNING AND EMPOWERMENT**

**Sandra Viña**<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Neighborhood, community and city development have become a matter of growing interest in terms of investigation and practice throughout the last decades (see e.g. Thackara, 2005; Fuad-Luke, 2009; Augé 1995; Carmona et. al, 2003; Gehl 2010). However, one of the challenges of city design deals with the application of participatory design and user-centered design approaches and, in making governments to accept the importance of user involvement in design activities and community development.

The paper aims, above all, to discuss how a political top-down decision in the higher educational system of Venezuela could bring about new perspectives, discourses and ways of doing in the field of architecture. In 2005 the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela decreed a new law: the community service for higher education students. The law aims to regulate community service work for students of higher education that, at undergraduate level aspire to practice any profession. The community service work is understood by the activities students should develop in communities by applying the knowledge acquired during their studies for the benefit of neighborhoods. The new discourse focuses on local development and neighborhood empowerment based on social design and participatory approaches. The paper illustrates three intervention cases which are part of the service community work by students of architecture and urbanism of the Central University of Venezuela (UCV). The cases illustrate the relation of the local macro-micro level changes especially in the field of design and architecture and their relation to community development, empowerment, and social design.

The three case studies shed light to design interventions as a tool to reflect and build dialogue through participatory means. It facilitated mutual learning between ordinary people and students of architecture about concepts and practices of architecture and cultural heritage. The design interventions offered locals a possibility to reflect about their local environment and the importance of social and cultural events as part of their identity and value in the society. It empowered people from the neighborhood to deal with local knowledge and local development.

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<sup>1</sup> Aalto University, Department of Design. Helsinki, Finland. – [sandra.vina@aalto.fi](mailto:sandra.vina@aalto.fi)

## 1. Introduction

Neighborhood, community and city development have become a matter of growing interest and research in terms of investigation and practice throughout the last decades (see e.g. Thackara, 2005; Fuad-Luke, 2009; Augé 1995; Carmona et. al, 2003; Gehl 2010). However, one of the challenges of city design deals with the application of participatory design and user-centered design approaches and in making governments to accept the importance of user involvement in design activities and community development. The aim of this paper is above all to discuss how political and top-down decision-making can help to generate new perspectives and ways of doing in the higher educational system of Venezuela, the field of architecture in particular. The new discourse seems to be focusing on local development and neighborhood empowerment based on social design and participatory approaches. This paper shows through three design interventions how mutual learning between future professionals and local people develops; reflections on the notions of architecture; and, community empowerment. The three intervention cases are created by students of architecture and urbanism of the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), they illustrate the relation of the local macro-micro level changes especially in the field of design and architecture and their relation to community development, empowerment, and social design. The paper also presents how top-down decision-making can help to discover new methods, methodologies, approaches and experiences in the area of design for social well-being. According to John Thackara “we need to design macroscopes, as well as microscopes, to help us understand where things come from and why” ... “Macroscopes can help us understand complex systems” (Thackara, 2005, p. 6). Thus, a zoom is required to look how changes take place at all levels of social change and communities collaboration.

Generally, the regeneration of a city looks into ways to rebuild and redefine the city image through new urban entrepreneurialism or city marketing (Paddison, 1993). However, the new renaissance of cities is connected with the social and cultural aspects of regeneration, thus questions of heritage, tradition and authenticity are putted forward. In late 1960s a reaction against modernist environments took place and new policies came into existence that protected historic areas, and thus preservation became an integral part of urban planning. Cultural and historic buildings and environments were observed to serve and support urban life and activity in contrast to modernist environments. These experiences also gave light to the uniqueness of places, styles, their history, and a great concern about contexts, continuity of local patterns and typologies. (Carmona et al, 2003).

Research in the contemporary landscape of urban politics or urban governance uncovers a decline in the community power, urban managerialist and collective consumption debates. The current post-political consensus appears to be absorbed with economic growth combined with an explosion of entrepreneurially oriented governing regimes (MacLeod, 2011). Nevertheless, what seems to be lacking in the current understanding of city development and community building is a stronger

discussion on how and why designers/planners and architects ought to utilize participatory design approaches, social design thinking and design interventions as part of their learning design process. Moreover, it is relevant to study the relation between macro level decision-making and changes in the micro level of the professional field, as urban planning and architecture in this case.

Throughout the presidency of Hugo Chávez Frías the constitutions and strategies of the country have changed. The shift moves towards the 21st Century socialism, which is a revolutionary socialism directly linked to the philosophy and the Marxist economy. The vision of the current government is to establish, promote and support participation and collaboration among different communities. In the year 2005 a new presidential decree was decided in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: the law of community service for higher education students which runs under the country's constitutional principles of solidarity, social responsibility, equality, cooperation, responsibility, participation, humanitarian assistance and otherness. This decree attempts to drive changes in the structures, functions, knowledge systems and knowledge sharing of communities, giving strength to local knowledge, empowerment to communities and local development. It focuses on the practice and implementation of interventions as driver of change, participation and for growing awareness about the new discourse.

At the macro level this nationwide change towards citizen participation through the presidential recognition of participatory approaches to drive social cohesion and well-being bring about the discussion of scale and social design in city design and local development. Participatory design deals with considerable challenges not only in new processes of formation and education but also in the paradigm shift of higher educational disciplines and governmental system. Participation encouraged by a presidential decree to students of higher education can be seen as design, social and participatory design moving into the public space, into the area of social innovation, social change and social well-being.

According to Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren (Proc. PDC 2010, p. 41) a major challenge deals with what is being design as an object or service; or, as a “sociomaterial assembly that deals “matters of concern””. The shift of design towards sociomaterial touches upon communities and the engagement with environments where user centered and user inspired design can develop. Taking participatory design to the streets and to public spaces has the fundamental difference of working with the public and communities rather than within organizations. Ezio Manzini's experiences, in the so-called developing countries, during his workshops appoints new attitudes and designs about daily life where objects are being replaced by fascinating events. The shift towards a more sociomaterial thinking includes the design of “activities and environments in which energy and material consumption is modest and more people are used.” (in Thackara, 2005, p. 6).

Within the law community is illustrated in the social context of national, state or municipal level where the institutions of higher education will actualize the

community service. Community is thus defined, in its widest sense, as a group of interacting people living in some proximity; or, sharing common values. The cases illustrate in this paper were explored through on site visits, interviews to students, community members and professors and, the analysis of students' reports. Each group focused on one community or concern within the area of San José situated in Caracas. The first group concentrated on a public primary school and worked with teachers, staff and children in order to make sense of cultural heritage and the service community work. The second group intervened the school of medicine of the UCV and involved various groups of students in the sector. Finally, the third group of students functioned as supporters, catalysts and promoters of their classmates' interventions and San José's cultural and social richness.

## **2. Demanding participatory democracy, social integrity and changes in the higher educational system**

The law of community service for higher education students decreed by the President of Venezuela Hugo Chávez in 2005 brings forth a great variety of experiences for students, professors, and the communities where the service community work is delivered. The decree is an incentive by the government of Venezuela to drive change in this decade. The vision of the government is to move to a social model that drives principles of self-development and independence through incentives and subsidies for the growth of productive and educational activities to overcome the traditional livelihood systems and, to increase social well-being especially in rural and low-income communities.

The social model of the country is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century socialism, which sustains four axes: the regional democratic development, the economy of equivalence, participatory democracy and protagonist and, grassroots organizations. This vision is also a product of Karl Marx on the social dynamic and the class struggle. Also, the country supports independence from capitalism by promoting cultural independency; moral power; politics of liberation; and, the growth of the country must be in complete unity. The ideology structure of the revolutionary socialism lies in self-management and the idea of creative communities and sustainability, ideology by Ezio Manzini and the Design for Social Innovation towards Sustainability (DESIS). Thus, there is a strong link between politics and design; ideology and product; intellectual and practical knowledge. The current shift in Venezuela tries to move individuals and communities towards sociomaterial interactions; participatory and proactive approaches; and, puts emphasis on local culture and local development as foundation for social cohesion and wellbeing.

According to Tony Fry (Fry, 2011, p. 38) “what design brings into being not only influences the nature of the world we human beings inhabit but equally affects what we become as actors within that world as its makers and un-makers.” We can also think of individuals as being passive, active and pro-actives. Reaching social stability, wellbeing and harmonious conditions with nature and the built-environment requires proactive communities and “a radical mind that moves away from the notion

of perceptual growth towards a situation in which quantity is displaced by quality (itself redefined, elaborated and culturally infused).” (Fry, 2011, p. 64). The implementation of the service community work as a top-down approach to neighborhood regeneration and community building can help to re-establish values and principles in the country. The political vision also comes together with practical tasks that tackle the micro level, participatory and inclusive performances, and social design thinking that future professionals should gain knowledge of and consider for future design interventions; and, in the macro level a re-conceptualization of production and consumption of places, as it is articulated to what Fry describes as “responsibility for what is produced (contributing not just to sustaining the bio-physical environment but equally to skill and knowledge, and thus to a social ecology).” (Ibid.)

The law of community service for higher education students positions individuals, communities and especially students in a design effort that contributes to the transformation of Venezuela. I can suggest Fry’s ‘design as politics’ where “design-led changes is tremendously important, and will become ever more so – as a means to essential change.” (Ibid, p. 3) Fry proposes that “design has to be made overtly and proactively political. Design has to become a politics. For design to become politicized, it has to directly confront politics.” (Ibid, p. 7). Integrating the power of design as an agency of social transformation in the strategy of a country is already a huge step to a friendship where politics and design communicate.

Thus, one can regard designers, planners and architects as ‘actors’ of social change. According to Bruno Latour “An ‘actor’ in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it. ... To use the word ‘actor’ means that it’s never clear who and what is acting when we act since an actor on stage is never alone in acting. ... By definition action is *dislocated*. Action is borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated. (Latour, 2005, p. 46). In this sense, one of the challenges of the service community law relates to its fully recognition among teacher, professors, students and researchers. Some teachers feel that the service community project is an obligation rather than an opportunity to explore the design field and come about with new methods and methodologies for instance. Also, some students feel as ‘actors’ forced to behave in a certain way (interacting and exchanging with specific local knowledge and communities); performing in a stage not familiar or out of their preference (usually low-income communities); and not fully understanding the core story (design as agency of change).

The new opportunities of design in the public sector open doors to a great extent of emerging areas in design that can be explored. According to a survey done by Design Council in United Kingdom the 22% of the complete clients for design businesses are public administration, health and education. Moreover, there is a “rise in the number of design business doing work for public sector and non-profit clients over the past few years.” (Julier, *Proc. NORDES 2010*, p. 77). The rise of design expertise in the public sector can be seen as part of a package shift in the public sector in

which citizens become consumers of state services, (Julier and Moor, 2009), protagonist of participation in design and, overall helps to build platforms for students and professionals to collaborate and learn with ordinary people about real problems and design opportunities.

This new opening to students of higher education shows the idea of design moving towards an innovative and distinguished practice, which also become embedded into governance. We can steadily recognize then, that the local government and authority of Venezuela are moving forward greater systems of innovation based on building synergies between communities and social design approach. The shift of design practice and design initiatives in the public sector is also visible in the Reforming Higher Education by the UNESCO in 2009:

*“Higher education itself is confronted therefore with formidable challenges and must proceed to the most radical change and renewal it has ever been required to undertake, so that our society, which is currently undergoing a profound crisis of values, can transcend mere economic considerations and incorporate deeper dimensions of morality and spirituality.”*

Design education and governance as actors of social integrity, social change and social well-being touch upon the shift of higher educational paradigm. Young-Gil Kim proposes (Kim 2010, p. 76) that “revolutionary change of educational paradigm with scientific development from the industrial era to the knowledge age of the twenty-first century, toward a trans-disciplinary education which integrates rather than isolates the academic disciplines.” Also, the shift integrates three essential attributes of the twenty-first century education: “*globalization, humanization, and futurization*”. (Ibid. p. 75) *Globalization* refers to “the movement from finite-borders to infinite-borderless”, *humanization* defines “human advancement beyond materialism”, and *futurization* puts “an emphasis on future-eternal values rather than immediate results.”

### **3. Law of community service for higher education students**

In 2005 the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela decreed a new law: the community service for higher education students. The law aims to regulate community service work for students of higher education that, at undergraduate level aspire to practice any profession. The law is ruled by the constitutional principles of solidarity, social responsibility, equality, cooperation, responsibility, participation, humanitarian assistance and otherness. The vision of the current government is to establish, promote and support participation and collaboration among different communities. The geographic scope of the community service comprises areas in the national territory that each institution of higher education determines.

The community service for higher education students is understood by the activities these students should develop in communities by applying the knowledge acquired during their studies for the benefit of communities and, to cooperate to achieve social well-being according to the establishment of this law in the Bolivarian Republic of



Venezuela. Students of higher education should apply their scientific, technical, cultural, recreational and humanistic knowledge during the service community interventions.

The law defines community in the social context of national, state or municipal level where the institutions of higher education will accomplish the community service. The community service can be eligible after the actualization of, at least, 50% of the total academic load; the community service consists of 120 hours of work and it is mandatory for obtaining the degree of higher education. The community service aims to: 1) nourish solidarity in the student and the responsibility with the community as an ethical and citizen norm. 2) Create an act of reciprocity within the society. 3) Enrich the higher education activity through the service-learning period and apply the knowledge acquired during the studies years. 4) Integrate institutions of higher education to communities in order to contribute to the development of the Venezuelan society. 5) Educate through the service learning the national social capital.

The law also brings about changes in the area of teaching and training, it touches upon the role of professors in particular, as they are required to be pro-active in the search and understanding of communities and their requirements. Professors work as mediators between students and communities, and they are responsible for teaching new approaches and topics of interest. Overall, they can drive social change. Moreover, professors and the administration of higher educational institutions are responsible to develop seminars, workshops and/or courses that deal with the topic of communal reality. These aim to educate the academic staff and students about their responsibilities, the viable execution, coordination and objectives of the community service.

The projects execute during the community service should be elaborated answering to the necessities of the community, offering solutions of methodological scope, and considering municipal development plans, at state and national levels. There exists various ways how to originate a community service project, the following entities can be the drivers: 1) The ministry of higher education; 2) Institutions of higher education; 3) Students of higher education; 4) Trade associations; 5) Public institutions; 6) Private institutions; 7) Organized communities. Each community service project should deliver a report where the problem is illustrated, how is approached and solved. The report also should include a justification, objectives and a methodological focus together with any specific requirement demanded by the educational institution.

#### **4. Context of design interventions and methodology**

Following I present three case studies accomplished during the year 2010-2012 by one of the service community classes of the School of Architecture and Urbanism of the Central University of Venezuela. This class was selected because the projects and design interventions were happening during my stay in Venezuela and they were dealing with social and participatory approaches. The projects were examined by the

realization of interviews to students, professors, and people from the community where the service was delivered; on site visits to the community was helpful to understand the conditions of the neighborhood; and, a study of students' reports also assisted for this investigation.

The three intervention projects were accomplished in the area San José situated in central-north part of Caracas. San José has a population of approximately 40.000 inhabitants, and it was founded in 1889. The realization of the community service in this community originated in response to the specific necessity of saving San José's flower market in 2009, which was threat to be demolished by governmental entities in order to construct the main stop of the Bus-Caracas. Under this circumstance the community of San José approached the school of architecture and urbanism (UCV). The school organized a forum where experts, intellectuals, people from the community affected and the municipality discussed matters of cultural heritage and how it relates to the possibility of destroying the flower market. The decision to demolish the flower market was dropped, bringing forth dialogue about the essence of the flower market as a cultural heritage and, its meaning to the community.

In first place the community of San José wanted students of architecture and urbanism to design a new building for the flower market. However, the current value of the flower market does not reside in the edifice as such but in the activities generated and social dynamic in it, also the essence of flowers as being ornamental and medicinal. Nonetheless, the service community class began by examining the case of San José, not only the flower market but the entire neighborhood, they focused on the notion of patrimony starting with an open discussion of what cultural heritage means not only in the architectural or physical level but also in the immaterial one. This can also be translated to the soft assets and hard assets describe by Thackara (2005, p. 79). "Hard assets include natural beauty and features; shopping facilities; cultural attractions; and building, museums, monuments and the like. Soft assets are all about people and culture: skills, traditions, festivals, events and occasions, situations, settings, social ties, civic loyalty, memories and the capacity to facilitate learning of various kinds."

After the concept of heritage was discussed the class made an excursion in the community of San José with the professor and the local tutor. This is the first real contact with the community, students were invited into peoples' houses and key places in the area were visited, the local tutor told stories about the community and he explained the importance of places to the community and outside of it. After meetings of discussion to evaluate and understand the essence of San José and map how design interventions can be useful in the community, the community service group decided to create a series of interventions that could inform the general public about the existence and importance of the flower market and other valuable assets and, disseminate San José's tangible and intangible cultural heritage in various ways. They came up with the idea to study and construct with the community the concept of San José's cultural heritage. The class of students divided into four groups in order to go deeper into the topics of hard and soft assets that fully consider the local

culture and local development of the neighborhood. Simultaneously, each group selected particular communities within San José in order to develop the concept of their design intervention. One of the four groups designed a new building for the flower market; they delivered three-dimensional drawings and a small-scale model together with a description about the work. This case is not presented here because it is considered to be an ordinary project within the professional career of architecture and urbanism in Venezuela. The focus of this paper is about the use of design interventions as tools of reflection and for comprehending new discourse and approaches in the professional field of spatial planning.

The methodology utilized by the professor in the service community class consists of participative, reflective and socially oriented approaches. The methodology also resides in handing down the information gathered and created by one group to another. The projects in the service community class are encouraged to be continued by a following group, in this way there is not need to start from scratch, making it possible to achieve a proper design intervention and connection with the community. Information and experiences are recycled and used later by different students in the community service class. This methodological approach has a re-interpretative character as different student groups have to make sense about the project and find (new) ways to sustain it. Also, it drives community service projects ahead, towards concepts and happenings into communities that cannot be actualized in only 120 hours. The cases illustrated in this paper are initiators and others followers. The course holds a total of four generations of work; so, four communal service classes took place in the community of San José dealing with aspects of cultural heritage and social wellbeing in the neighborhood.

#### **4.1 Case I: medicinal garden for the school of medicine, San José**

This case was carried out by two groups in two different classes. The initial group started the community service in San José in 2010. Currently, the second group is finishing the actual design intervention, which is the beginning of a new initiative in the area. The first group interviewed the director of the school of medicine and other professors in order to map out the problems and necessities in the school's facilities. The group decided to retake an old project about a medicinal garden in the abandoned internal garden of the school of medicine proposed by an architect in the year 1997. This group generated besides the final report also a catalogue where the design idea was illustrated, this worked as a tool to present their idea to the community. It included a selection of medicinal plants, budget plan, concepts, improvements from previous plan, and further development. One student of architecture donated to this group a series of modular structures made of cement, which were meant to function as plant pots and furniture for the medicinal garden. These were the material gathered for the next group to continue.

Thus, the follower-supporter group was from the beginning clear of their aim: revitalize the internal garden of the school of medicine by making a medicinal garden with and for the community. The personnel and students of the school of

medicine of the UCV responded actively and supportive to the second group. The only challenge was the lack of economical resources to construct the garden. Thus, students of medicine collected money by asking people from the community to collaborate. (see picture 1).

#### 4.1.1 The design intervention

The effort of both groups to complete the medicinal garden can be broke down in two phases; the investigation and design phase and, the implementation and maintenance respectively. The first group set the problem and how to solve it, delivering an informative brochure about the area of San José, and an accurate plan about medicinal plants and a budget plan for the construction of the medicinal garden. Moreover, the cement modular structures were available for the construction phase. The second group thus, dedicated time and effort to make and sustain the medicinal garden.

In the participatory opening of the medicinal garden (see picture 2) the cement structures were placed; and the ecological brigade of a nearby school came to plant the plants together with the local tutor and students of architecture. Every Tuesday, Thursday and Friday students from nearby primary and elementary schools will visit the garden to learn about agriculture, gardening, medicinal plants and to maintain the garden. The space will also be used for other recreational activities.



Figure 1. Intervention for money collection.



Figure 2. Participatory opening of medicinal garden.

#### 4.2 Case II: planimetric survey of O'Higgins school

This group contacted the Bolivarian Primary School “Bernardo O’higgins”, where they wanted to accomplish their community service project. They taught children in the school about cultural heritage and they studied together the colonial architecture of the school building. It was built in 19<sup>th</sup> Century and was the house of the Dr. José Izquierdo who was the funder of the School of Medicine of the UCV in about 1910. Thus, the house was designed to serve as a familiar residence rather than a school.

The methodology applied consists of interviews to the personnel and documentation of the building with the help of children. Questions helped students, teachers and personnel to reflect upon the notion of cultural heritage and its value in the area.

#### **4.2.1 The design intervention**

The group approached the service community project from an architectural point of view, starting to observe, document and illustrate the colonial elements in the architecture of the school building. The group created documents where specifications, functioning and valuable elements of the house were illustrated. Their report also includes a historic review of the building, its current conditions and ways to improve it. They illustrate the house and how its different constructions through years have transformed the essence of colonial architecture into a mixed of styles and uses. Thus, its status as cultural heritage has been damaged. The group aimed to create awareness to the community about the school's value as part of Venezuelan cultural heritage. A floor plan and architectural drawing were also created and delivered to the university and the school Bernardo O'higgins.

The design intervention was based on educational material; the group gave a lecture to children about the history of the house, the function of spaces, Venezuelan colonial architecture, its value as cultural heritage and in the sector San José and, ways to preserve its value. The group also supported local events by documenting them. For further development teachers of the primary school suggested students of architecture to develop a game around a small-scale model of the school that can be utilized as educational material for children, as they can exercise and learn aspects about Venezuelan colonial architecture and its significance.

### **4.3 Case III: Disseminating information on capital and social assets**

This group aimed to disseminate the values of San José's cultural heritage, both tangibles and intangible. The community of San José did not fully recognize their immaterial cultural values. Thus, the group was challenged to utilize design interventions to make local people understand and realize their intangible cultural assets. For this they appointed the identity and cultural assets of San José through residents' testimonies. The specific programs of the group were, first of all, to ensure a positive impact into the community through events developed with and for the community.

#### **4.3.1 The Design Intervention**

The group delivered a series of design interventions, results and products. 1) Visual tools: informative brochures communicated historical reviews and current perception of tangible and immaterial local patrimonies; game cards for children were designed, they promoted the search for local heritage in San José. Also, posters representing the current areas of work by the community service class were illustrated. 2) Recreational games: this helped students of the community service to reach the younger people in the area to communicate in a didactic and recreational way the

values in it. 3) Supportive actions: facilitated to have a real contact with the community, it consisted of documentation and communication of local events through different social networks in the Internet (blog, facebook and twitter) emphasizing the cultural and social dimension of San José. Moreover, this group helped to clear out the site and uproot the old plants for the construction of the medicinal garden (case I). The group also organized educational and playful material including a workshop. They appropriated traditional games, which were adapted to topics of cultural patrimonies and aimed to inculcate children about the integrity and preservation of cultural and social capital. The group also created a mural in the public library of the community.

## **5. Design interventions as drivers of reflection and action in the higher education system – towards integration, participation, social well-being and new ways of doing and learning**

This paper aims, above all, to discuss how a political top-down decision in the higher educational system of Venezuela could bring about new perspectives, discourses and ways of doing in the field of architecture. Based on the cases presented previously one can position architecture and urbanism moving towards the re-arrangement of activities and surroundings focusing on social matters, local development and local knowledge in neighborhoods for example. In the three cases presented, students of architecture reflected through their design interventions that the role and notion of architecture is not only the profession of designing buildings, as it is often understood, but architecture as the structure or design of anything. The art of architecture and its wide range of meanings consist of the arrangement and organization of things. This can be the re-structure of the discipline itself; organization of spatial arrangements; or sociomaterial assemblies that deal with relevant issues for the society and culture as shown in case I, II and III. It includes the architecture of communities, open areas and other artificial constructions and environments. Usually, architecture deal with aspects of aesthetical effect, however, the current shift in the field of architecture is towards social and participatory design, being humans and their interactions at the heart of design. It also is viewed from the perspective of human activities and environments rather than material consumption and style.

Taking design to the streets, so to speak, have the powerful character of design intervening with the public, with communities, ordinary people, and entities. Conventional ways of learning are usually interactions in the classroom and based on individual work rather than teamwork and in real context situations and with real people. The implementation of the service community work is a new way of teaching and learning; it provides professors, students and researchers to make sense of the field of study in a wider perspective as it explores new functions, capabilities and relevance to the society and, neighborhoods in particular. At the macro level, the community service for higher education students not only serves to re-conceive the role of disciplines as such, but also contributes to build new ways of exchange between future professionals and “ordinary” people. The community service focuses



on the public sector rather than the private; common people and communities rather than investors and clients; usually low-income neighborhoods rather than wealthy communities; and it is based on social and collective responsibility rather than individual and commercial benefit.

At the micro level, the community service for higher education students in the field of architecture bring forth new way of doing and acting which is based on design interventions, an approach and tool that facilitate designers to directly interact with the public, and try out ideas. Helping to improve people's everyday life in neighborhoods through design interventions is a new way to perceive and experience the world, especially in regards of the study field. The three case studies have shed light to design interventions as a tool to reflect and build dialogue through participatory means. It facilitated mutual learning between ordinary people and students of architecture about concepts and practices of architecture and cultural heritage. The design interventions offered locals a possibility to reflect about their local environment and the importance of social and cultural events as part of their identity and value in the society. It empowered people from the neighborhood to deal with local knowledge and local development, as seen in case II. Also, students learnt besides the regular research and design process also the implementation and maintenance of the design work. In case I students dealt with logistics, budget plan, making and community building. In case II students learnt how to deal with new topics and practices in architecture as it is the realization of planimetric study. This serves as a justification and starting point to the school Bernardo O'higgins to request the municipality the renovation of the building. Also, this group learnt the importance of architectural education to audiences not familiar with the topic. Moreover, the case studies illustrate the significance to communicate information about design through design. Above all, design interventions in the area of community service work make small-scale architecture and significant ideas palpable, visible and able to be experienced and evaluated. There is a long journey to fully understand the role of social design and participation in architecture in the southern hemisphere. Decision making in relation to the macro-micro perspective, local and global experiences can help to make sense of new discourses and practices in the conventional professional field.

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