

## **The future of the service-learning studio in planning education**

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### **PANEL**

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Universities fulfill their social role through three fundamental areas: a) advancement of knowledge, b) education of future professionals, and c) service to the communities in their sphere of influence. One of the ways that universities respond to these areas but particularly with respect to service to communities is through studio-based service learning. This is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic culture and responsibility, and help strengthen the communities

they serve. Usually studio-based service learning involves learn-by-doing problem-solving pedagogies initiated in the studio and extended to interact with the community and “real world environments”. This panel’s main goal is to discuss the pedagogical aspects of service-learning studios, their role, and, given pressures on department budgets and skill sets of professors, their future in planning education. Studio-based service learning has a long established place in the pedagogic traditions of planning programs evolved from physical planning based professions notably architecture, landscape architecture and geography (Dalton, 2001; Frank, 2006). These studios involve problem-solving learn-by-doing pedagogies that are student-centered and focus on quasi-real world projects, community engagement, creative thinking, group work, and practical outcomes (Higgins & Morgan, 2000). They replicate the notion of action-research (Sanoff, 2000) and follow a typical planning/design process from information gathering and analysis to final project/plan with varying degrees of community involvement. They bridge the gap between theory and practice, integrate learning from other classes, involve some degree of interdisciplinarity, and teach students social equity and ethics--fundamental values in planning. The studio prepares students for professional life where practical skills, creativity, collaboration, communications, and public engagement are crucial (Higgins, Aitken-Rose & Dixon, 2009). From the student’s perspective planning studios, particularly those dealing with clear problems and a “client” (a community group, an NGO, a public entity, or a private firm) have proven to be more engaging, rewarding, and efficient in reaching educational goals. From the community’s perspective they provide a means to have their needs and desires heard, to multiple models or options to address them, and yield a sense of satisfaction for participating in an educational process. From the client’s perspective they provide an efficient way to engage the community and feel it’s pulse, and can initiate wider, longer-term professional processes. Finally for the planning field studios connect theory, methods, and practice, prepare students better for professional life, and contribute to popularizing the profession among communities. However, as noted by Higgins, Aitken-Rose & Dixon (2009) and our academic experience indicates, the studio culture in planning is threatened. First, planning’s move towards the social sciences resulted in a shift of interest towards research, policy, and decision-making.

Secondly, academic culture and accreditation boards increasingly require educators to have doctorates and to engage in scholarship and publication, resulting in a move away from faculty with professional experience. This culture tends to promote the predictability and comfort of traditional teaching and research over experimental and risky studio-based, community embedded projects. And thirdly, increasingly tighter budgets put pressure on studios as they are time intensive, demand a constant search for "real" projects, need more space and faculty time, and serve less students than lecture-type classes. Threats to traditional studios increase as programs try to accommodate to students' individual circumstances, to develop more flexible curricula, and to embrace long-distance teaching. This panel will discuss the importance of studios in planning education in quite varied programs and different institutional contexts around the world. We have reached out to scholars who come from diverse institutional and country contexts and represent a wide spectrum look at the various facets of studio-based service learning in communities. Panelists will address how their teaching and studio involvement have provided connections between theory and practice, between the different courses in the curriculum, and between the students and the real needs of a rapidly changing profession. This panel looks into contributing to a typology of common pedagogical questions affecting service-learning studio teaching and its importance in a planner's education.