

Design in the Public Interest –The Dilemma of Professionalism

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Abstract

Imagining America's 2008 *Curriculum Project* comprehensively documents the current state of engaged scholarship in the arts and proposes guidelines that embody the key values and principles derived from the breadth of their study. While design can be broadly considered to fall under the mantle of the arts, key distinctions make community-engaged design practice unique and in some ways problematic. Based on reviews of literature, professional codes, and contemporary practices, this essay addresses similar themes to the Curriculum Project but in design, focusing on traditions of professional organization and oversight that both raise expectations for civic responsibility and simultaneously present roadblocks to deeper engagement.

Part One is an overview of concepts of professionalism in design, taking the field of architecture as a case study of the complexities encountered across design disciplines. It concludes with an overview of emerging trends in academic and professional practice, such as non-profit community design advocacy projects like Design Corps, and numerous practices engaged in what the Cooper-Hewitt Museum calls "Design for the Other 90 Percent." Part Two focuses on the design process itself, arguing for approaches that favor *Design Engagement* rather than *Design Assistance* and offering principles that can foster community collaborative design practice, specifically: acknowledging mutual value and values; re-defining problems and opportunities; mutually defining risk, success, and failure; creating and renewing structures for communication; and getting serious about feedback, evaluation, and reflection.