

ABSTRACT

Democratic design is viewed by some within the profession of landscape architecture as an important alternative to traditional design practices and an essential tool to strengthen democracy itself (Liu and Hanauer 2011). However, it is unclear what skills democratic designers will need in the future, but it is important to try to predict the necessary skills in order to develop curricula to prepare practitioners to be successful. The skills are likely to be some combination of ones historically employed by community designers, landscape architects and the people who have recently produced ecological, cultural and technological innovations in the profession (McNally, 2013). Although not easily comparable, there are studies on these three groups gathered for different purposes and at different times, but in similar enough formats to identify emerging patterns of overlap and exclusion and draw speculative conclusions.

This paper attempts to define the skills landscape architects will need to be effective in democratic design by reviewing these studies. First, the skills historically considered important for participatory design are reviewed. Second, the ideas introduced by landscape architects and environmental planners that significantly impacted society in the recent past and the skills shared by the people most responsible for those innovations are compiled (Hester, 2001; Litton et al., 1992; Hester, 1990). Third, these skills are compared to the skills listed as essential in the 2004 Landscape Architecture Body of Knowledge Study Report (ASLA Report) (ASLA, 2004). The skills shared by those who introduced the ideas that have most impacted society, the ASLA Report skills and the historic skills of community designers were analyzed and merged to create a list of skills most essential for participatory designers.

The merged skill sets include the following: 1. Core skills in design/planning, 2. Participatory design theory, group processes and techniques for collaborative design, 3. Political organizing, empowerment and changing power structures, 4. The functions of community as people, place and ecosystem, 5. Environmental justice, need-based programs, micro social patterns and macro trends, 6. Development of a vision for society, courage of convictions and civic ambition and 7. Mastery of multiple disciplines, employing oppositions to maximize outcomes. This paper discusses the seven skills relative to the skills called for in the ASLA 2004 Study Report, those of participatory designers and those of innovators. In the context of debates about design versus participation, it suggests ways to learn important skills missing from present curricula. The paper concludes with suggestions about how to proceed from these speculative conclusions to better define the skills that democratic designers will need.