Organizational Capacity Building Through Empowerment Planning: Lessons from East St Louis, Memphis, and Sicily
Session Participants

• Vicke Forby Kimmel
  CEO, EPDC, (ESL, IL)

• Katherine L. Pennington
  Associate Professor
  University of Memphis

• Antonio Raciti
  Assistant Professor
  University of Memphis

• Kenneth Reardon
  Professor
  UMass Boston
Checking Your Biases at the Curb!

Please take a minute to complete the following sentence (5 times)

East St. Louis, Illinois is: ____________________________?
East St. Louis, Illinois is: ____________________________?
East St. Louis, Illinois is: ____________________________?
East St. Louis, Illinois is: ____________________________?
East St. Louis, Illinois is: ____________________________?
Is it realistic that any place accurately described by these negative statements could possibly have endured to the powerful economic, political, and cultural forces that have affected it since 1812?
How do we structure a research, planning, and design process that will discover the hidden strengths of this place? What methods, techniques, tools, and instruments are available to us?
People Data Techniques

- Check your Biases at the Curb Exercise!
- Social history interviews (youth and seniors; past progressive actions)
- Asset mapping
- Visioning exercise
- Shoot your neighborhood, not your neighbors (Cameras Not Guns!)
- Door to door survey (residential canvass)
- Movers and shakers interviews
- Focus groups
- Neighborhood summit
  - Blue Sky Brainstorming
  - Resident Site Planning
  - Mayor for The Day
- Collective Sketching Exercise: Rip Van Winkle is Alive and Well in the Smart Growth Movement – REALLY!!!
- Action planning teams
East St. Louis, Illinois
From All-American City to Beirut by the River

• In 1959, ESL was designated an All-American City by NML and Look Magazine
• Between 1960 and 1980, the city’s lost 3/4s of its businesses – 12,000 well-paid industrial jobs
• By 1990, unemployment was 31%, poverty was 42%, and ESL had the highest violent crime rate in the US
• Prompting a HUD Official to refer to ESL as “America’s Soweto”
Just Another “Rust Belt City”

- Devastated by a combination of deindustrialization, suburbanization, and public and private disinvestment
- Whose residents suffered from what William J. Wilson called a new and more virulent form of American poverty
- Dominant urban policy approach towards severely distressed communities was Roger Starr’s “urban triage” or “planned shrinkage” – withdrawing resources from communities thought to represent “terminal cases” of urban decline (Necropolis)
“Wherever human beings are concerned, trend is not destiny.”

Rene Dubos
Birth of the East St Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP)

- Emerson Park women decided to transform the area surrounding their children’s child care center – Result: Shugue Park
- Undertook the development of a comprehensive plan that won an AICP National Award but generated no local investment
- Residents and students launch volunteer cleanup of illegal dump sites without funding
- Moved on to organize volunteer scrape-up, paint-up of elders’ homes
- Established a linked deposit program to support moderate rehab of “at risk” homes
Building Upon Initial Successes

- Formed a Habitat-like “infill housing” initiative
- Established the ESL Farmers Market
- Secured an extension of the Metrolink into East St. Louis
- Completed the Parsons Place Development Project
- Established Youth Build Charter School and Neighborhood College
- Re-opened the Katherine Dunham Centers for Arts and Humanities
Citizen Participation Techniques

- Formed a representative Steering Committee of local stakeholders
- Initiated an aggressive community media campaign
- Undertook several physical conditions surveys
- Conducted movers and shakers interviews
- Pursued door to door interviews with residents
- Organized monthly data analysis meetings
- Culminating in a well-attended Neighborhood Summit
Social Inventions for Citizen Participation/Empowerment

Adoption of “Ready, Fire, Aim” approach to community planning – undertaking meaningful action projects throughout the planning process to overcome residents’ skepticism regarding the possibilities of change.

Paint-up, scrape-up work weekends
Construction of Illinois Avenue Playground
Development of the ESL Farmers Market
Establishment of the ESL Neighborhood College

- We are not even the flea on the tail of this dog – Richard Settle, EPDC
- We want similar training as your graduate students are receiving
- Decision to create the neighborhood college
- 200 ESL residents complete 8 non-credit courses on the fundamentals of bottom-up, bottom-sideways planning
- Classes cover community organizing, non-profit management, grantsmanship, resident-led crime prevention

First class on direct action organizing – 15 expected, 35 attend.
Key Outcomes of this Social Invention

- $40 million in improvements
- Ended population and income losses
- Encouraged organizing in other East St. Louis neighborhoods
- Popularized “empowerment approach” to resident-led revitalization planning
- Led to successful replication in other severely distressed urban communities
- Provided a transformative professional education for hundreds of planning and design students who have gone on to become key “opinion leaders” in the fields of affordable housing and community development
South Memphis, Tennessee
South Memphis: The South’s First Garden City?
What Happened to South Memphis?
South Memphis Circa 1990

• Unemployment approaching 30%
• Poverty exceeding 60%
• Vacant properties at 30%
• Abandoned industrial, commercial, and residential buildings at 25%
• Highest school suspension and expulsion rate in the city (43% of high school students finish)
• High violent crime rate

• Extraordinary upswing in citizen organizing: open spaces, youth, housing, etc.
• Increasingly engaged African American faith communities
• Growing connections between local community and nearby universities
• Rich cultural life: STAX – Otis, Isaac, Sam and Dave, Rufus, Karla, Mavis, Booker T.; and Hi-Records – Willie Mitchell and Reverend Al Green
St. Andrews AME & the Reverend Robinsons

- Resurrected Ernestine Rivers Child Center
- Created a Family Life Center: health, wellness, education and jobs
- Established Circles of Success Learning Academy
- Organized The WORKS Inc. CDC – Counseling, Rehab, Construction, ED
Success, YES! Moving the Dial, No!

- Significant economic and community development successes
- Congregations grows from 150 to 1700
- National recognition
- Still, overall community conditions continued to deteriorate
- The pastors felt the need to increase the scale of the church’s efforts
Determining the Need - Mixed Methods

Patrick Geddes (Father of Modern Town Planning)

“Survey Before Plan”

- Oral history
- Archival research
- Demographic analysis
- Community mapping
- Neighborhood documentation
- Physical conditions surveys
- Movers and shakers interviews
- Focus groups
- Resident interviews
- Listening posts
- Community visioning
- Neighborhood summit

All used to gather data and build the base
Overall Development Goal

Transforming South Memphis into the region’s premier neighborhood of choice by dramatically improving the overall quality of life through a resident-led and managed comprehensive community development strategy
Specific Development Objectives

- Improve access to **primary health care** services (No local providers, 60% uninsured)
- Insure access to high quality, affordable, and culturally appropriate **foods** (No full service market for 3 miles)
- Expand quality **housing** options, especially for low-income renters (Recent emphasis has been on home ownership)
Development Objectives II

• Expand living wage employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for local residents ($156 m in HOPE VI, < 20 jobs)

• Support resident efforts to reduce the incidence of violent street crime (Address lack of treatment, jobs, and re-entry programs)

• Enhance the beauty, safety, and functionality of the public realm to encourage investment

• Promote alternative transportation options for local residents
The Peoples’ Plan for Building a More Vibrant, Sustainable and Just South Memphis

- Involved nearly 1,000 residents
- Endorsed by more than two dozen local institutions
- Won State APA Award for Excellence
- City Council voted 13 to 0 passage of the plan
- Adopted as city-wide best practice
## Health and Wellness Initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immediate Projects - Year 1 and 2</th>
<th>Intermediate Projects - Year 3 and 4</th>
<th>Long Term Projects - Year 5, 6, and 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer Sports Leagues</strong></td>
<td><strong>Substance Abuse Treatment Initiative</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primary Health Care Clinic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate with Memphis City parks Commission, youth recreation organizations, local schools, community churches and area corporate and community philanthropists to establish a major new summer basketball league for South Memphis boys, girls, men and women at Southside Park-Memphis' own Rucker League!</td>
<td>Develop a new substance abuse prevention, interventions, and treatment program in the community designed to address the most serious addiction problems confronting South Memphis residents. The Community's extensive network of faith-based organizations will be used to educate local residents on the basics of addiction and treatment.</td>
<td>Mobilize students, faculty, and staff from the city and region's hospitals and clinics to work together to establish a cooperatively managed primary care facility in South Memphis offering medical, dental, and psychological services on a sliding scale.</td>
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<td><strong>Human Services Directory</strong></td>
<td><strong>Farmers Market Project</strong></td>
<td><strong>Community Health Insurance Project</strong></td>
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<td>Prepare a comprehensive directory of human service programs available to South Memphis children and families. This directory would be available online and in hard copy. The directory will be updated, on a regular basis, by graduate students from The University of Memphis' Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning.</td>
<td>Conspire with local farmers, public health officials, and economic development specialists to create a high-quality retail vendor food market to provide local residents and workers with access to high quality, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods. The farmers market would also be used as a venue for public health events.</td>
<td>Establish a low-cost health insurance program to complement the coverage made available through Tennessee Care along the lines of Tompkins County Health Care Plan that provides a wide range of coverage for basic services for families at a cost of $165.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Neighborhood Wellness Campaign</strong></td>
<td><strong>Healthy South Memphis on the Move</strong></td>
<td><strong>Café Reconcile in Memphis</strong></td>
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<td>Initiate a community-based health and wellness program in which peer health advisors instruct local residents on topics related to diet, exercise, family planning, parenting, conflict resolution, and other topics central to creating healthy children, families, and communities. Behavioral shifts towards healthy living will be supported by the organization of mutual support networks. Improvements in the health referral system will be carried out.</td>
<td>Recruit, schedule, and market the public health education, screening, and direct service activities of the city and region's largest health care providers by bringing their mobile health clinics to the site of the soon-to-be-established farmers market site on a regular basis. Increase the number of local residents referred to and seen by local health providers on a regular basis as a cost effective alternative to the use of local emergency rooms.</td>
<td>Collaborate with local chefs, eateries, and the U of M Hospitality School to establish a healthy eating outlet serving tasteful food at reasonable prices that will employ and train individuals recently released from jail and prison who, following an intensive three month period, can be employed by other fine dining restaurants. This program is based upon a very successful eatery in the Midtown section of New Orleans.</td>
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South Memphis Farmers Market Key Collaborators and Partners

**Initial Consultations**
- Ag Extension
- CY Farmers Market
- Downtown FM
- Grow Memphis
- MLGW
- MRDC
- St. Andrew AME
- The Works CDC
- U of Memphis

**FM Advisory Bd.**
- Residents
- The Works
- St. Andrew Enter.
- U of Memphis
- Grow Memphis
- HMCT
- CY Farmers Market
- MRDC
- Tate Seniors

**Co-Conspirators**
- M&SC Health Dept
- FM Vendors
- Food Policy Council
- OPD/LUCB
- Market Goers
- Knowledge Quest
Farmers Market Steering Committee

The People and Organizations that made the SoMe Market happen

Sponsoring Organization(s)

Representatives of an established Farmers Market

Residents

Representatives from local non-profits and churches

Representative of Food Policy Council

Representative of Healthy Memphis Common Table
Community Impact of the Farmers Market

• Improvement of a highly visible location
• Increased community pride
• Creation of a safe public space
• Increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables
• Enhanced awareness of the nutritional importance of fresh foods
• Demand for additional food-related resources (A grocery - now!)
• Greater recognition of SoMe RAP
## Building Upon the Market!

### Other Developments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Image</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Parkway East Improvement Project (Approved for Spring ‘11)</td>
<td>![Roadway Improvement]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Art Commission - South Memphis Community-Builders Walk! ($85,000)</td>
<td>![Art Commission]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Illegal Stripping to Legal Scavenging - Tire Reclamation</td>
<td>![Tire Reclamation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attracting a Local Primary Care Facility</td>
<td>![Community Development]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery Store Development Initiative</td>
<td>![Grocery Store]</td>
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</table>
## More Recent Developments!

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<td>Funding for new building for Ernestine Rivers – 50 to 120 child.</td>
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<td>Freeing of space to allow Circles of Success Charter School to add 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, and 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption of South Memphis Park by Grizzlies and AutoZone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery store development initiative, incubator space</td>
</tr>
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<td>New rails to trails project connecting neighborhood to MRT</td>
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Building on the Market
Community Design Charrette
The Green Grocer
Inside the Green Grocer
Demonstration Kitchen
Community Visioning and Sketching Exercise (Guided Visualization)

- Assume an anatomically correct position!
- Please close your eyes!
- You are getting tired!
- Like Rip Van Winkle the Years Are Flying By: 3 years, 5 years, 10 years, 15 years!
- Your community has become everything you and yours neighbors have ever hoped for!
- In your mind’s eye, step out on your porch and do a 360 degree scan of the NEW SMART GROWTH VERSION OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD
- Focus on the image (people, place, interaction that makes your heart race and your face smile!) Take a mental photo and be prepared to share it!
Gallery of Transformative Ideas/Potential Signature Projects

Transformative Idea Bubbles!
Sharing and Building our Vision

I envision a beautiful food store?  
On this corner!  
On every corner!
Prioritizing the Projects

Transformative Idea Bubbles!
The People Decide – After Touring the Transformation Gallery

Transformative Idea Bubbles!
Catania
Simeto River Watershed
Catania
Ecological Cycles are today the consequence of 5-millenium-long complex interaction between humans and the powerful natural processes.
Ask “Regions” to change their waste management approach

Governor Salvatore Cuffaro
EU special commissioner for the “waste emergency”

2002 WASTE MANAGEMENT REGIONAL PLAN
Call for tender for 4 privately-owned waste-to-energy facilities
No! Let’s Stop Them!!
Bronte
Adrano
Biancavilla
S. M. di Licodia
Paternò
Motta S. Anastasia
Centuripe
Catania
Informal Mobilization

The March of 5000 in Adrano

Coalition for the Sustainable Development of the Simeto Valley

Formal Organizations

Successful Anti-incinerator Campaign
Not just legal action but broader community organizing and political strategy
The reason why somebody can decide to build an incinerator on our river is because there is not a better vision of the future.
10-year-long Community-University Partnership
Collective Reflective Practices

The “Casa delle Acque” fall retreat
November 2010

Stakeholders
Support the local economy through policy design

Community members
Historic preservation
Environmental issues

Researchers
What strategy makes the most sense?

Grass-roots groups
Improving the area
Strengthen the sense of community
Community Mapping Initiative
The large collective maps
Mapping activities have been carried out:

- In 10 different locations, in the **countryside** and in **4 small towns** along the river;
- improving the tools used each time;
- involving more than **500 individuals**; among them: representatives of **22 community groups** and non-profit associations and **City Officials** from three of the four small towns.
Community meetings

Individual Interviews

Progetto di Mappatura di Comunità

mental mapping
HOW?

- Produce “papers” more difficult for local politicians to ignore
- The follow-up projects are identified as part of something bigger
- Create a portfolio of community projects ready to be funded by EU (with and without institutional partnerships)
- Enlarge the base supporting the partnership
- Networking and involving other association in the steering committee of the initiative
- Help the community know and then love their place
- Community mapping = educational campaign

Community Mapping Initiative
The Design Contribution

- Implementing pilot projects included in the community map
- Expand possibilities for local firms and designers
- Make it “happen”!

COMMUNITY/UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP
LONG-TERM RECIPROCITY

Landscape Architecture
Community Design

VIVISIMETO
The Community Design Experience in “contrada Nicoló”, Paternò
Co-creation of design proposal for a riparian garden
Final draft of the design
Inspired by a NEW model of “development”
PARTICIPATORY PRESIDUIM
(hundreds of association + businesses + inviduals)

LABORATORY
(technical support)

ASSEMBLY +
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
(majors + representatives of the presidium)

PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE
“THE SIMETO RIVER AGREEMENT”

General Legal Framework

Signed on May 18th, 2015
Simeto River Agreement
Implementation Strategies

**MOBILITY**
Accessibility / Security / Connection / Enhancement of existing structures / Sustainability

**CULTURE**
Historic-Environmental Assets / Public Spaces / Historic Centers / Identity

**AGRICULTURE**
Agro-District / CSA / Training and Education / Ethics

**WASTE**
Zero-Waste Strategies / Growing Strategy for Municipal Management / Participant Observatory

**WATER**
Participatory Observatory + Regional Management Authorities
WELCOME TO SICILY!

study abroad program

June 6-18, 2017

Set in the beautiful Simeto Valley, in Eastern Sicily, UofM students and faculty will engage with Simeto residents and officials in an action-research project aimed at revitalizing a declining baroque community through advanced community development strategies. The main challenge is to preserve the existing cultural richness and authenticity while addressing economic and population decline.

In this class we will use various research activities (ethnographic research, spatial analysis, box-practice research, etc.) to contribute to a participatory community process that is committed to environmental sustainability and social justice.

This engaged-learning experience is part of an ongoing collaboration between the University of Memphis and the Simeto Community, within the framework of an internationally-renowned community development plan for the Simeto Valley, called the SIMETO RIVER AGREEMENT. Within the broad framework offered by this Agreement, the class offers students the opportunity to link economic sustainability with socio-cultural and environmental dimensions of development.

Students are eligible for 3 credits via exam or by exam.

The cost is $3,500 (with fee: $1,000), $600 credit by exam fee. Scholarships are available up to $2,000.

To Apply go to http://www.memphis.edu/studyabroad/ click on “find a program” search for “Environmental Planning” click “Apply Now.”

At the end of your application for the program, you can apply for the Study Abroad Scholarship (or go to http://www.memphis.edu/studyabroad/ and click on “scholarships”). The deadline for applying and requesting a scholarship is March 1st.

For more info contact the instructors:
Dr. Antonio Raddì (raddi@memphis.edu)
Dr. Laura Sant (lsanto@memphis.edu)
Dr. Katherine Liechies/Petrangeli (mili@memphis.edu)

To Discuss Summer Financial Aid, Contact the Study Abroad Financial Aid Office, JoAnn Didden (jaddie@memphis.edu) / 409 Wilder Tower.