DESIGN ACTIVISM

FOR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES AND LANDS

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis investigates the role landscape architects as leaders and challenges actions in transforming the planning and design approach of marginalized communities and lands. I propose an Asset Based Design approach, integrated with Ecological Design and practiced through Design Activism. A Transformational Landscape Design [TLD] framework has been developed to activate social and ecological assets. The main driver is Design Activism. The completion of a comprehensive literature review, its analysis, and a final synthesis with knowledge gained through the study of three specific precedent projects, allows the [TLD] framework to be applied, and hypothetically test a real marginalized community. El Rio Villas is selected as the farmworker community on public housing.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis work to my heart-sister, Leslie Bowman Marcus, to my family including:

sisters Elizabeth, Elena and Cecilia along with
my dearest parents:

Clara Bustamante Crow and Oswaldo A Bustamante. Finally, I dedicate my work to all those

who have taught me Compassion, Service, Humility, Laughter, Gratitude and most of all to:

“Make It Happen!”

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Traditional marginalized farmworker communities and marginalized lands of the Western United States illustrate how we inadvertently plan and design built environments of disconnection. For thirty years of my life, I have lived and have been connected to the rural lands of Yolo County, Northern California. Yolo County is a very rich agricultural region located in California's Central Valley and the Sacramento River Delta just west of the state capital, Sacramento [Yolo County 2013]. Through my thesis research work I have undergone, and through the types of projects I have been inspired by, I have begun my efforts to become an advocate for change – joining the voices of the marginalized communities and lands at the design table in Yolo County, California—that is, specifically members of farmworker communities.

Farmworker labor brings to mind fields of bent backs and hands tinted by the juice of tomatoes, grapes, blood, soil and sweat. I look at the places where these weary and soiled laborers' bodies rest and the same questions persist: Why are farmworker communities disconnected from the core of a town or city? Why do these enclaves seem to be planned superficially, without any relationship to the land-ecology network or worse yet to the local social network? The women and men who place the fruit from the rich agricultural lands into crates that are hauled away by semi-trucks, to feed the county, state, region and world, are housed in spaces of disconnection. These communities are sited on brownfields, neglected lands, or on unincorporated zones of rural counties. Although farmworkers' lives and struggles are an integral part of the greater bioregion's life and bounty, farmworker communities are poorly planned and separated from the wealth of resources in the areas in which they are located. In truth, these places are interlinked with amazing natural protected lands, and while they have their own rich, socio-cultural resources within the farmworker communities, they are disconnected from nearby wealthy city centers. These farmworker communities are impacted by and affect ecologic, economic and socio-cultural systems. Farmworker communities are part of the whole landscape where all people live, work and play. The social and physical assets of these communities and lands have been ignored for too long.

1.1 PLANNING AND DESIGN OF DISCONNECTION

As a longtime resident of Yolo County, California, I observed the outcomes of rural land use planning over time. Perhaps by default of socio-political norms, planners and developers have segregated farmworker housing from the core of our communities—usually on marginalized lands—thus creating a detrimental environment and unsustainable city plan.

It is important to consider the term sustainable, when defining a new planning approach for marginalized communities, as I seek to do in this thesis. Sustainable is, “conserving an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources” it also is defined as, “able to be upheld and defended” [Oxford Dictionary, 2013]. If a community is planned without connection to resources, without access to transportation, without acknowledgement of its natural and social resources, climate and topography, then sustainability is difficult to achieve. In the case of marginalized communities, there is depletion not only of natural resources, but also of human well-being and quality of life. A balance is not reached; inequities and unsustainability are produced. Social services at county, state and federal levels are called to intercede and assist these communities, after city planning has failed the entire community and region. As landscape ecologists point out, all things are interconnected. Consequently, we are all greatly, and potentially adversely, affected by these choices and this neglect in planning and design.

To amend the disconnection of planning and design from marginalized communities, an understanding of complete bioregional thinking is essential. Bioregional systems are interconnected, woven into a complex local and regional, cultural, political, ecological and economic landscape. [Thayer, 2003] Human dwelling places are dynamic systems of inter-dependence, and are linked to a larger ecological and economic sustainability of place. In segregated or marginalized communities, the fabric is torn. However, this complex community network can be re-connected to the core and expanded to the greater bioregion. Communities do not exist in isolation even if we cannot see the impact of our actions

or inactions [Whiston, Spirn 1984]. More now in 2013 than ever, landscape architects are called to address the missed opportunities and to re-activate the land, the social community, and the multiple connections inherent between them.

Humans and the land have been essentially interlinked prior to, and into the development of civilizations. By this essential connection we adapt to place, we are informed about cycles of life and decay, we are inspired to create functional tools, and more specific sustainable behavior by our simple observance of the natural environment. Significantly, political and economic structures rely on the land and social assets. Marginalized communities are fragmented from the whole, a non- integrated community. The essential connections between human and non-human life remain. Humans depend on the land and its resources. These fragmented community plans have been too long left undone by poor choices or worse, by deliberate politically driven neglect.

In contrast, bioregional thought and practice promotes and stems from respect of local place knowledge and stewardship of place [Thayer, 2003]. Professional mentors and academic leaders of landscape architecture have stated there is a need for a voice, for leadership roles, and for practices that incorporate closed-loop systems thinking. Developing design opportunities with marginalized people and lands can be pivotal opportunities for Landscape Architecture to lead with a meaningful active voice. Closed-loop systems are one type of process of ecosystems sustainable function. Each organism within the ecosystem depends on the other and no waste is created. The cycle action produces no depletion of resources due to the regenerated use of one organism's waste as food for another organism within that ecosystem. Ecosystems have energy flows and cycling of materials. Similarly, community design can aspire to mimic the ecosystem closed-loop process to reach a sustainable community plan.

Examples of closed-loop system adaptations in landscape design are the application of natural drainage systems for urban storm water runoff and opportunities provided for grey water reuse. Rain gardens, bio-swales, and specific planting designs are applied to carry on these adaptations from ecological processes. Both of these design opportunities allow water to be absorbed as irrigation or return cleansed to the hydrologic cycle. These types of applications, responding to particular temporal issues, waste issues, water scarcity issues all lead to transforming contributions in addressing the development of communities for marginalized people and lands.

There are important opportunities found in rural-urban zones or farmlands. Distinct issues affect a local area, which are then interlinked from the local to the regional zone, and return back to the local site. For example, access to fair and safe housing can be an issue that cycles throughout local-regional-local zones. A few factors that are implied in providing fair housing are both health and physical safety. For instance, when rural farmworkers cannot access fair and safe local housing, they are pushed to the periphery of towns and into larger cities. These cities then may face issues of overcrowding and an increased burden on social services for these new inhabitants. Unscrupulous landlords may allow conditions of overcrowding which then become issues of health, safety, and justice. In this case the farmworker may need to commute longer distances to the field if fair safe housing is not provided in the local farmland community. This cycle continues to manifest itself into greater issues that are ecologically, financially and psychologically costly.

The ecological health challenges confronting humans and other living systems of place can also be transformed through ecologically sensitive design. For example planting plants that are diversely complex and support native habitats, enrich the human experience and can enhance human health. The opportunities that urban centers provide have extensive consequences for the region.

1.2 CRITICAL STANCE

The development of marginalized communities in farmlands parallels the degradation of the land. By observing the condition of the land and where these communities normally exist, the footprint of thoughtless action is visible. In some rural counties in California, communities are found along major highways, farmland back corners, or on brownfields certainly disconnected from the core of town. Yes, some communities are located near the employer's fields. This would be efficient and safe if the landowner then provides access to fair priced utilities, or the transportation to basic services at a city's core. No action that we take is temporary in its consequences when one takes a whole systems approach. As landscape architects, I argue that we have a pivotal role to play in offering a new framework for planning and design that is specific to marginalized communities. An overarching motivation for my work is to identify responsive ways that Landscape Architecture can actively contribute to the development of planning and design for marginalized communities and lands. Through this thesis, I draw from other approaches to propose a design framework I am calling a Transformational Landscape Design [TLD] Framework. The concept of transformation is essential because it implies a deliberate thoughtful shift from a one-dimensional approach to an enhanced, comprehensive and integrated approach. This holistic perspective in thinking, and actions in planning, and in design becomes evident through a deeper and more meaningful transformation of the site.

1.3 INSPIRATIONS AND GUIDANCE

My personal inspiration for change in Landscape Architecture is derived from the work of activist designers whose ideas and precedents have informed and influenced this thesis. These designers and planners use design as a tool of social action and transformation, known as "Design Activism." [Oppenheimer-Dean, Hursley, 2002; Bell, 2001] Practicing design from a Landscape Architecture perspective can positively impact Design Activism. Landscape design requires a knowledge and comprehension of human and ecological factors that impact and influence each other as a dynamic and sound design. Furthermore the deliberate inclusion of human and non-human factors in design enables an integrated holistic approach.

The work of specific designers including: Garrett Eckbo, Ian McHarg, Sym van Der Ryn, Richard Haag, and Randolph Hester illustrate the initiation of a type of design activism on behalf of communities and lands. Economic and political norms challenge designers as they may place barriers and block the vision of design transformation that I propose. These designers' perseverance through challenges of all types gives me great inspiration and will to proceed.

Along with Design Activism, there is a need to understand a key concept in the field of Community Planning and Development, and that is Asset-Based Community Development, also known as ABCD. [Kretzman & McKnight, 1993] Crucial to the development of my ideas for a new landscape design framework, ABCD importantly integrates asset-focused approaches into community planning and development processes [Kretzman & McKnight, 1993]. Through asset-based actions, ABCD responds directly to a community's identity and strengths by working directly with communities and helping them to identify and build upon their assets, to nurture and improve their neighborhoods and social ties. This asset-based approach is significantly not need-based. Rather than focusing on deficits, it focuses on the skills, strengths and abilities that members of communities already possess and developing ways to cultivate them. In this, way, communities that have been perceived and labeled as "impoverished" are recognized as having diverse assets that are critical for their metamorphoses [Kretzman & McKnight, 1993].

ABCD philosophy can be adapted to *landscape design approaches* of inclusion and integration. An Asset Based Design approach to landscape architecture, I believe, is initiated by the inclusion of marginalized communities and land-knowledge in strategic thought and in responsive action. The co-founders of Design Corps have coined the practice of design activism as incorporating an "Asset-Based Design" [Oppenheimer-Dean, Hursley 2002; Bell, 2001]. Perceptive and cognizant landscape designers can develop methods that integrate assets of a site, especially the social and physical-ecological assets. Collaborating with community members directly, designers can then respond with built environments that are beneficial and least harmful to the local and extended bioregion and human network.

I argue that an Asset Based Design approach, along with a Transformational Landscape Design framework specific to Landscape Architecture practice, is a holistic and inclusive approach that practitioners can advocate and use to create a strong, professional paradigm, for transforming neglected and abandoned communities. For example, the same community design solutions that emphasize a car-dominated, disconnected from the site ecology response can be re-envisioned to incorporate these assets found on the site. This holistic and inclusive approach is informed and affected by acknowledging and supporting diversity in social, historical, cultural, ecological processes, and land-based assets.

Assets are sometime obvious and sometimes concealed. Both obvious and concealed assets are essential for the development of the site analysis and community projects. Obvious assets are those that community members are aware of and have been acknowledged in some way. In contrast, concealed assets are those that may not be readily sensed or be known. Yet they exist and have value and function. These assets can be found in a site's soil and related regional soil ecology, in a buried creek bed, or in a previously unheard community member who has skills to bring to a community development project or an effort that enhances the built landscape. Perhaps this community member practices sustainable gardening learned through his or her indigenous heritage, for example. Inclusion of obvious and concealed asset systems, including local socio-cultural knowledge, can become the qualifying values for the transformation of an integrated and holistic site analysis and realized outcomes.

Past planning and design practices can be re-visited and re-adapted into Transformational Landscape Design approach that connects and focuses on awareness of all assets in a given community. In rural counties throughout the Western United States, civic planners, aided by federal grants, county and city taxes have an opportunity to re-think farmworker communities that are in need of renovations or affordable housing, services and/or amenities for the community. Such situations provide a great opportunity to re-plan, and re-design with a new approach.

1.4 THESIS QUESTIONS

To specifically address my thesis inquiry, I have chosen a hybrid approach. A research-critique combination of the profession is appropriate. In a way, my thesis is the beginning to a greater effort I wish to undertake as a designer. Through my questions and work developed here I plan to expose the fragility and the great potential marginalized communities and lands provide for exploration and enhancement of Landscape Architecture in its evolution.

How can the considerations of a site's assets— including both ecological processes and socio-cultural layers, challenge and inform the planning and design of farmworker communities?

a.] How can an Asset-Based Design approach enable a greater consideration of ecological functions on a site?

b.] How can an Asset-Based Design approach promote greater sensitivity toward the specific cultural values and sensibilities of those who dwell in a given site?

1.5 METHODS

A key aim of my thesis is to develop Transformational Landscape Design [TLD] framework specific to marginalized communities and lands that acknowledges and builds upon their assets for a more effective, holistic and socially just design agenda. To address the many opportunities we have to achieve this through landscape architecture, I define certain terms and key concepts that inform and direct the TLD framework that I propose. These terms include sense of place, asset-based design philosophy, ecological design, and design activism. These terms are also considered through the literature review. In order to pursue my investigation, I proceed with developing the design framework named, Transformational Landscape Design [TLD] Framework, test it, and promote a transformation in Landscape Architecture philosophy and practice.

1.6 CONTENT ORGANIZATION

In this thesis, I consider and address my thesis questions through the following:

- Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant literature, including a review of the key terms and concepts that are discussed in the literature and key to my design criteria;
- Chapter Three explains the development of the Transformational Landscape Design framework along with an analysis of three specific precedents, which serve to refine the ABD framework and support the main thesis inquiry;
- Chapter Four, as the application and analysis of the TLD Framework in the context of a specific marginalized community in Yolo County, Northern California; and
- Chapter Five includes the final insights, reflections and conclusions with recommendations for the future pilot project.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In my development of a responsive and thoughtful Transformational Landscape Design framework, it is important to understand the work that has been undertaken by past scholars. This literature review, the following precedent cases and the development of the Design Framework are key parts of my methodology. The literature review will address the following concepts: sense of place and quality of life, asset-based philosophy, ecological design, and design activism. In conclusion I will discuss how the literature informs main thesis question.

2.1 SENSE OF PLACE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Many researchers have worked to understand and define the concept of *sense of place*. The work of geographers, environmental psychologists, and designers contribute different focuses to its meaning. Some argue temporal and geographic factors, [Hay, 1998] while others define sense of place based on emotional attachments or dependent on rootedness along with temporal factors of experience or longevity in a place. [Steele, 1981; Gustafson, 2002] Research has also led to the inclusion of emotional relationships to place, and the inclusion of an analysis of adverse experiences and how these create substantial implications in transforming design approaches. [Manzo, 2003; Knecht, 2004] Sense of place can be defined in relationship to a built environment considering the greater natural environment of place. [Stedman, 2003] These definitions are varied and, their complexities do demonstrate the evolving definition of sense of place.

UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF SENSE OF PLACE

In developing a transformational design framework, I posit that sense of place is about the crucial relationship humans have to place, and equally importantly, how social and ecological agents can impact that relationship to place. This reciprocity of the social and ecological is abundantly rich, complex and vital for the survival and health of each. Equally the consideration of both is essential, not only to the way I understand sense of place but also, to the framework that I propose in this thesis. For my investigation and development of the framework, I have drawn from the literature

on the meaning of sense of place and define it as the intellectual and emotional knowledge connected to a particular place-environment. This knowledge inspires a sense of belonging and or, a connection for human beings to place and to other living organisms and bioregional systems in an interrelated reciprocal and dynamic partnership.

Social scientists recommend a practical and responsible approach to defining sense of place. [Relph, 2008] Issues of familiarity of place opportunities to observe, to assess conditions of place, to make choices, to have control of place and to access equitably the benefits of place are all integral to this concept of sense of place [Relph, 2008]. This can lead to fostering stewardship locally and a corresponding greater response to the bioregional challenges inherent in place connectivity. [Relph, 2008]

For my work, the evolution and understanding of human relationships to place in general and to nature specifically–that is, people's sense of place along with its correlation to an improved sense of well being, to a sense of mental and physical restoration, to enhanced quality of life, and an improved sense of stewardship—are all part of understanding of sense of place. These ideas are all part of the multi-dimensional meanings *of* sense of place. [Steele, 1981]

In the past thirty-five years, research on sense of place was conducted from a perspective that involved human intervention on and relationships to place/environment for good or bad outcomes. Researchers, including environmental psychologist Fritz Steele, focused on what humans brought to place and perhaps too what they left behind, as factors defining sense of place. At the same time, the exploration of a full understanding of place being a living system in its ecological, geographical, and geologic historical essence was also being questioned. Steele recognized the absence of planning with nature in mind and stated, "I believe that this concern will have to be revived in Western civilization, as space and resources shrink and our technologies reach the limit of their effectiveness." [Steele, 1981, (186)] He reached this conclusion regarding siting choices in cities,

through considerations of siting methods of past times and cultures. Steele recognized the need for a transformational shift and more precisely, an essential connection to spirit of place. Steele defines this term as the inherent qualities found in a place, qualities that live in place/nature, outside of human life [Steele, 1981] For example, in California In the period of the 1970s and 1980s the trend of an increase consumerism and building bigger homes within communities was being promoted. Some developers forgot about the 1970s oil crisis and counted on endless materials and pushing costs to the consumer base. The trend from previous decades thoughtlessly guided economics to develop suburbs and formulaic shopping malls that invaded the landscape. These developments ignored the spirit of place and the non-human life of place.

Qualities of a place are very distinct and can create place meaning. They may even evoke awe and wonder but they are also part of what I argue are the hidden assets of a place. Steele found the Chinese practice of siting to be both divine/spiritual and scientific in process and important in the choices made by planners and designers of the built environments. The Chinese, as other ancient cultures, used the land forms and hydrologic systems to inform community development [Steele, 1981] Today, some landscape designers regard siting with an awareness of qualities of a place and the dynamic functions of local place as designing ecologically and to some extent sustainably.

Although the majority of Steele's arguments in his book titled Sense of Place suggests that what humans bring to place is a main defining factor, of value, I believe that what place brings to experience is equally important. Given what landscape architects know now about ecological design, the value of natural processes, and how an awareness of such processes can enhance a sense of place, it is all the more important to fold this ecological awareness into an understanding of sense of place. Planners, designers and community members can be mindful of both dimensions of sense of place during the site analysis phase. For example, a marginalized community has a new opportunity to revisit their own particular community design with a new perspective and cognition of what is present and of value for the development of new ideas or needed renovations. Imagination, memory, history, dreams are all part of what can be evoked by a sense of place and experienced both in adverse and in positive

ways. The recognition of adverse experiences can greatly challenge designing for human needs beyond safety and shelter. Places of varied social interactions and interconnectivity become more essential. For designers and planners sense of place concepts becomes a meaningful tool to address the complexity of experiences. Community participation and cultural knowledge become a valued source as assets in the planning and site analysis process for quality results.

Additionally, a consideration of a sense of place can remind us that design can be responsive to stressful and painful life experiences. Steele predicted in Sense of Place, that the missed opportunities in site design of social housing for the poor would create antisocial tendencies, depression, boredom and a social disintegration. [Steele, 1981] He also warned his contemporary planners and developers against wrongly assuming that social spaces were luxuries for the poor. Again, Steele had a strong conviction in defining sense of place with a very keen perspective on human social behavior and sensitivity toward disenfranchised groups. Years later, limited planning practices have persisted and are found in housing communities, specifically in those allocated for the poor and marginalized residents of urban and rural cities. These patterns of siting communities, fragmented from resources, transportation, economic centers, and disconnected from the land and ecological systems, are prime for transformation.

SENSE OF PLACE CONCEPTS

Sense of place research overall has explored people's fundamental connection to place on both the individual and collective levels. The research on sense of place in the last few decades has shifted into one that expands on well being of both human health and of the environment's ecological heath. [Manzo, 2008; Relph, 2008; DeMiglio & Williams, 2008]

Ecological health is not a new concept in the realm of social scientific research. Yet in this century, its impact and evident consequences on the concept of sense of place, intertwines with socio-political, economic and ecological knowledge of place and significantly at different scales, from local to larger bioregional and further global levels. Sense of place is fundamentally related to well being. The human connection to environment allows for a need to healthy and enjoyable places. Humans impact the health of the environment, and this cycles back to human health and sense of well-being. How humans live in within the environment, what is depleted, what is misused, what is not recognized, all may adversely impact the natural environments that are inhabited. Damming the waters of a river, and allocating the same waters to recreation and to power plants, depletes and pollutes the water that is needed by the bio-systems of the watershed and bioregions. This same water issue is transferred as a costly economic and geographic access to potable water that human communities depend on.

As designers of built environments affecting human and non-human life, we are professionally and ethically obliged to enhance well being which expands to the concept of quality of life and begins to challenge how the disregard of well-being, by choice actions, can impact other human rights. The United Nations defines this concept as, “Quality of life is the notion of human welfare (well-being) measured by social indicators rather than by 'quantitative' measures of income and production.” [OCHR. United Nations, 2013]. For the purposes of this thesis, then, I consider quality of life to be a basic standard of expectation for valuing our life experiences bound by place that supports well-being at both the individual and community levels. This can be considered a basic human right.

As designers of place experiences, how are individuals and communities experiencing the built environments and importantly, the overlying ecological systems? The term “sense” in the phrase “sense of place” implies the use of all our human senses through our daily and life-long encounters with the physical world that surrounds us. Research shows that sense of place, which often include some degree of attachment to place and longevity of experiences, are a crucial part of the relationships humans form with place. [Gustafson, 2000; Hay, 1998; DeMiglio &

Williams, 2008] Individual views and perceptions, and collective community ones, all are of equal importance and value, in the understanding of sense of place and of well-being [Manzo, Wright, 2013]. As in the human to nature relationship, what affects the individual has repercussions on the community whole.

Within a community framework, individuals can gain power to transform their lives, through a basic and integrated sense of place that includes both other community members and the physical environment itself [Manzo, Perkins. 2006]. A sense of place, when acknowledged and integrated into a design project, can respect and reflect the diversity within the collective. Inclusion of sense of place enables the collective to still form a powerful voice. Sense of place can be used to empower community members to act on behalf of their communities including claiming access to materials, thus challenging inequities in the distribution of resources [Manzo, 2006]. Sense of place can also be used to influence land use choices through active collaboration with designers and planners.

Planning and designing communities, cities, and bioregions with sense of place in mind, in turn, enables new and deeper senses of place to be forged that support human capacities to meet essential needs. Positive impacts on economic sustainability, physical and emotional health, and on sensory fulfillment found through experience of place are accomplished. An integrated and balanced well-being, determines the enhancement of a person's quality of life. [UN-Habitat 1997]

A sense of place is especially important for marginalized people, communities and places because it may be a source of empowerment and it may inspire member's to take positive action on behalf of their community. For example, farmworker communities placed on neglected lands have great potential to be re-imagined, re-designed, restored with a new understanding and with a new perspective of a sense of place defined with its complexity and its uncovered resilience.

For marginalized communities, people, and lands sense of place is significant to incorporate and value when design is a tool to enhance quality of life. Understanding the concept of sense of place allows landscape architects to be specifically responsive, especially when projects for disenfranchised people are developed.

It is important to be cognizant of sense of place in landscape architecture practice and research. Anne Whiston Spirn, in her work in The Granite Garden, highlights the impact of both geologic and human-social forces on the land. [Whiston Spirn, 1984] Whiston Spirn considers how humans falsely believe that they can "control" nature. The fact is that geologic time and processes occur intermittently in beyond our own human lifetimes, creating distortions in perspectives. Geologic time is essential in recognizing ecological values and transformations. As our lives cycle through, an underlying evolution to nonhuman life is occurring. We can impose our limited "control", as "geologic agents" by digging and mining, manipulating, and exploiting the land [surface or below ground]. Humans' endless search and misuse of resources contributes to the impact. We can affect the geologic forces below the surface—literally and physically causing shifting grounds [Whiston, Spirn, 1984]. As we create new pavement for roads, we build a new ground, as we level rolling hills for farmlands, and as we dredge and infill wetlands and bays for new grounds for coastal living we may trigger and accelerate the existing grounds to shift, and ecologies to become compromised and even endangered. [Whiston, Spirn, 1984]

Human actions have consequences that illustrate the immense impact these actions can make almost instantly within the long geologic timeframe of formation of the lands and waters we depend on. An example is the use of fossil fuels; exploitation of these resources depletes the world of biodiversity in enormous scales. Impacted biodiversity, caused in one human lifetime, may never recover and perhaps become extinct. Human impacts influence the definition of sense of place. Do we really have a sense of the places where we build, live, and that we depend on for our built

environments? Knowledge of the bioregion, its geologic history, its ecological story-telling and its socio-cultural traces can inform and enhance our sense of place, our mutual well being, and enhance the quality of life for individuals and the collective.

2.2 ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Concepts of asset-based approaches in the field of community development serve to inspire and expand the potential of collaborative and democratic approaches in working on complex social and environmental problems. Designers and planners can be inspired by, and learn from both the accomplishments and downfalls of this philosophy. Landscape architecture directly impacts the processes and solutions concerning many social issues and it does so particularly successfully by engaging members of the community in the design process and recognizing their assets. Planning and design professionals often strive to meet challenges of designing shelter and safety, a sense of enjoyment, and opportunities that provide just access to the environment. Through landscape architecture practice we are also called to lead the client-users in addressing the multiple issues that they confront with hope and inspiration of the possibilities.

ABCD philosophy promotes a re-focusing of the community inward in order to better identify its assets. From this place, informed citizens, individuals and the collective can begin to identify their goals and desires. Newly learned or uncovered skills for problem solving, and networks of mutual support begin to unfold from this inside-out approach. [Kretzman, McKnight. 1993] No longer are communities and their residents guided to look outside first, to address an issue or problem.

Furthermore, the ABCD approach argues, “significant community development occurs when local community people are committed to investing in themselves and their resources in the effort.”[Kretzman, McKnight. 1993 (4)]. This mutual appreciation and awareness by residents builds and

enforces the choices that bind the whole. It allows communities with grave issues of disconnection to act—as the local politicians struggle with bickering over budget crisis and the political shifting wave of which party is next in control [Kretzman, et al, 1993; Hester, 1999].

In this thesis, then, I draw on the literature of Asset-Based Community Development [ABCD] to call for a new framework for landscape architecture practice that recognizes and honors a community's assets. The premise of this approach, spearheaded by John Kretzman and John McKnight from Northwestern University, is to exchange the typical focus on needs and deficits of a community, and replace it with a list of all the assets present in the community and vital to its development. The outcome of this more positive approach is that the community then becomes aware of its capacities, skills, strengths and empowerment. [Kretzman and McKnight. 1993]

Building on the literature on asset-based community development, I advocate in this thesis for the Transformational Landscape Design framework that considers the assets of a community to inform socially responsive and just design. An Asset Based Design approach applies a comprehensive analysis of place, including social and physical resources of the community and region, derived by the specific community alongside expert consultants and designers. This approach responds to users' desires for the site and enables an integrated, yet flexible and thoughtful design. The key strength of this design approach is that each member of a community is an asset whose experience of place is valuable. An appreciation of their skills, knowledge, strengths and values are important in the design and planning process. Equally, the local and regional values of the land are vital assets. Bioregional processes and land histories inform and enhance the experiences that cannot be neglected. The awareness of all these assets plays a pivotal role in the re-connection that is required for a holistic and viable design. An asset-

based list is created in this process to study and address the potential opportunities. It is inclusive of all systems, human-made and ecological, at a local to bioregional to local scale, and time.

The following are relevant key elements of ABCD process from this review that informs and may be adapted with the new Transformational Landscape Design framework:

- Attention and acknowledgement of assets, of what exists, identify who is willing and committed to causes
- Inside-out focus, to identify local desires and goals, to define investment and creativity, to foster hope, an build sustaining empowerment
- Relationship driven emphasis and rebuilding connections that are broken
    - Identify who is the community, who do they know and who are the significant others to know.
    - Identify whom community members work for, to identify whom to recruit as experts and consultants. They may become volunteers for the efforts and future stakeholders.

      [Kretzman, McKnight. 1993]

As important as recognizing a community's assets, landscape architects must be cognizant of the specific assets that they bring to a project, not the least of which is the technical expertise. For example, Mark Francis, landscape architect, professor and author promotes the notion of "proactive practice" which promotes the assets that landscape architects personally bring to a community through participatory design processes. He advises designers to be vision-driven, problem-solving, address issues of social and environmental sustainability. He reminds designers that the profession responds to the community and the environment, and that our personal commitment must persist and be supported by research.

Francis states that our core values consist of collaboration, design negotiating, leadership and strong compelling graphic and verbal skills. Francis adds community understanding and sensitivity to social and environmental justice as elements that form these core values. [Francis, 1999]

Similar advice has come from landscape architect and founder of University of Washington's Landscape Architecture program, Richard Haag. During a tour of Gas Works Park in Seattle, Haag described the battles that the community and he, as lead designer, faced against doubters and city officials, as they prepared to embark on an ecologic design innovation journey in creating Gas Works Park [GWP] in the 1970s. Haag, reminiscing on the GWP project, shared this with our 2010 landscape architecture class. He commented, the importance of articulating our core values, it requires courage—to voice issues and ideas, to initiate dialogue, to make things happen, to persist, persuade and to reflect on outcomes—leaving room for evaluation and flexibility to change that leads to transformation [Haag, Lecture: Gas Works Park Tour. 2010].

Recognizing one's own assets allows landscape architects and those in the allied professions to acknowledge and respect the assets of others—without exclusions. In working in marginalized communities and lands, this aspect of the profession is instrumental for the poor design strategies' transformation to occur. This transformation can occur for both the voiceless of our social and environmental systems, and for our own profession in need of enlightenment and leadership capacity.

2.3 ECOLOGICAL DESIGN

In this thesis I advocate for an approach to design that recognizes a community's assets, in the spirit of asset based community development and design activism. At the same time, I seek to expand the understanding of a community's assets to include the biological diversity and natural processes that are present in a given community or neighborhood. This is where the literature on ecological design has informed my framework.

To better understand and appreciate ecological design and considering its relevance in the concept of sense of place perceptions, an understanding of the bioregion is necessary. Bioregions are the larger environments of non-human life that local sites are connected to [Thayer, 2003]. Local consequences of place have origins and corresponding impacts on greater bioregions. Place-based response and action can be supported by an integrated sense of place. Issues of social and ecological justice can be mitigated through a flexibility of sense of place and a complete assessment of place character. Importantly, assets and functions at various scales play important roles in well-being and sustainability for the environment and the social networks that exist simultaneously.

Fragile planning patterns may not acknowledge the existence of the greater bioregion or "life-place". [Thayer, 2008] The bioregion is a network of places where life exists, impacts and is impacted by the scales of place. By its unique nature—a "life-place" makes boundaries with geology, hydrology, climate, and ecology impacting both human and non-human life. [Thayer, 2008] Limited planning and design practices can be modified to incorporate the community's social value and inherent land value. These transformative actions begin to address an important fact; there is no one solution for planning and design development. Each community has the potential to become uniquely responsive with an awareness of its impact on other bioregional systems and those system relationships to a particular place. Informed responses to the influences of the land can contribute to the well being of the whole; which includes social and ecological networks.

Generally speaking, ecological design promotes thoughtfully and actively shaping the forms and operations of complex environments, simultaneously fostering stewardship for the existing ecological processes. Along with this principle, designers are challenged to respond to social conditions of place that can mimic ecological resilience. In a land matrix, the edges sustain and enrich biodiversity occasions. Similarly, in planning communities for farmworkers, or any other social sector, we are challenged to apply principles of inclusion and connection. Understanding the dynamics, viability, progressions of life cycles, and applying these to human-built environments, activates and invigorates the potentials of expression, experience, healthy duration, and stewardship of humans to the bio-systems of place. Places included are where we inhabit and impact on a continuum.

ECOLOGICAL INTERSECTIONS

The remarkable adaptability and iterations of ecological systems and processes are abundant. Ecology by definition is a branch of science that focuses on the interrelationships of organisms and their physical surroundings. [Rottle, Yocom. 2010] As landscape architects we have a unique opportunity to consult with varied disciplines: ecologists, biologists, engineers, and our client-users as we prepare to imagine, plan and act to form environments. These same built environments intersect and overlap with many biological, geological, topographic, hydrologic, and multiple other ecological systems in the landscape. [Thayer, 2003] The intersections may also be political, economic, industrial, and more.

In ecological design, actions must incorporate the existence of, and responsibility to ecology. Ecological design promotes actively shaping the forms and operations of complex environments, simultaneously fostering stewardship for the existing ecological processes. Opportunities occur where designers are obliged to enhance and, or increase the bioregional ecological integrity, while constantly adapting to the local site relationships [Van Der Ryn, Cowan.1996].

Ecological design has a significant intersecting role with human health and well-being. [Rottle & Yocom, 2010] Ecological design practice is strengthened by our goals and objectives, as planners and designers to learn from ecological systems, to mimic, and attempt to replicate the processes and forms that heal and enhance life for all human and non-human networks. [Rottle, Yocom. 2010]

The existing ecologies on a site cannot be compromised—parallel to our attitude toward marginalized lands, and the established social communities that dwell there. For too long our actions of urban planning have compromised systems to the point of degradation that places species and viable ecological processes in precarious points of extinction. [Rottle, Yocom. 2010; Thayer. 2003] The fact that marginalized communities exist in the midst of abundant and wealthy economic and degraded ecological landscapes shows this two-fold compromise. Sustainability and resilience approaches are needed to promote environmental and social justice.

Design transformation can be initiated through adopting resilience theory. “Planning and design of cities, […], like natural ecosystems, are complex and adaptive to the myriads of flows constantly moving within and through them. These flows include natural elements, such as solar radiation and weather, and human elements such as transport, trade and resource use.” [Rottle, Yocom. 2010 (72)] Designers’ work has the potential to imitate the ecological healthy resilient dynamics.

Landscape architect scholar and design activist, Ian McHarg’s knowledge and appreciation of ecology supported his development of designing with an ecological consciousness, lessening the potential for degradation of the land and its viable ecologies. [McHarg, 1969] McHarg’s site analysis practice was innovative. His work remains perhaps one of the most pivotal in ecological landscape architecture.

Notably, McHarg developed his practice during the era of the Civil Rights Movement. Urban centers, at this time, also struggled with an increase in diverse pollution conditions across scales of bio-systems. His respect for nature remains inspiring and leads us through today. McHarg illustrated ideas of designing with nature, and revealing for designers and users that nature is process—in constant flux and yet abiding to natural laws and capable of interaction with all environments. [McHarg, 1969] This awareness and advocacy are powerful tools, as we designers continue to plan and form infrastructures that impact lands, the atmosphere, and corresponding bio-systems. Landscape architecture work is dynamic and occurs in a three-dimensional landscape, affected by time and spatially, never initiated on a *tabula rasa* or clean slate. Our work intersects multiple life systems and this implies a greater vision and ethics in our evolving practice.

BIOREGIONAL PHILOSOPHY

In order to understand the value of ecology as an essential factor in landscape architecture and to promote design inspired and informed by ecology of place, an understanding of bioregional philosophy is important. Life exists on various biological levels and scales of distance and time in the landscape. This understanding yields bioregional thoughts, philosophy and practice. Ecological design promoters, and active landscape architects like Robert Thayer and Nancy Rottle, remind us that this practice is necessary at the rural-to-urban-to-regional-to-global scales [Rottle, Yocom. 2010; Thayer, 2003]. Bioregionalism advocates such as Thayer, recommend that planning professionals revisit natural boundaries of place, and shift their vision by not relying solely on political ones for planning and design [Thayer, 2003]. Thayer recognizes that a bioregion is inherently longitudinal, lateral and multi-dimensional in its layering of potentials. Therefore, as landscape architects, we have a leadership role to bring this awareness to our client-users, politicians and educators. Our canvas is the bioregion, at local to broad regional, back to local scales. Likewise, outcomes from our plans and design actions, can exhibit global impacts; those impacts are reciprocal [Thayer, 2003; Rottle, Yocom. 2010].

Design has the ability to mimic ecology. Through our understanding of landscape dynamics, we are challenged and inspired to be relevant in our design solutions. Dynamic elements include form—spatial order, function—flow networks, processes—transformation over time and scales, operations—regenerate, remediate, reveal, integrate, and legibility of the landscape [Rottle, Yocom. 2010; Dramstad et al. 1996]. We can recognize that as with ecology, our role does not stop at the implementation of the design; we are able to create maintenance guidelines, stewardship workshops, select an appropriate operation that may enhance the site, such as, protection, conservation or reuse of land or materials. [Rottle, Yocom. 2010] By the types of action we promote and lead our client-users to learn and adopt, we build frameworks that showcase the iterative processes and interrelationships from one life form to the other [Rottle, Yocom. 2010 (70)]. We complete the loop that is vital for human and ecological well-being and co-existence. For example, harvesting grey water from sinks and drinking fountains for irrigation, or collecting wastewater from irrigation canals or sewage, in rural farmlands, can be reclaimed in sustainable ecological design methods. These waters can be collected, bio-filtered, and absorbed by plant root systems cleansing off biofuel residue and other toxic by-products, before re-entering the local water table or progressively flow to the regional watershed.

CATALYST FOR DESIGN TRANSFORMATION

In order to begin a design transformation in community planning sustainability strategies of community economies, policy-making, and ecologies must be interlinked. These factors cannot be isolated but they call for a perspective of mutual sustainment. In the United States and globally, bioregions continue to experience severe degradation and irrevocable transformations by human technology and corporate industry-driven economies. Other adverse factors are products of intentional multi-scaled political neglect, and ineffective actions by local powers that choose redundant solutions, and worse yet irresponsible actions in city planning. As Robert Thayer (2003) points out, we need to address issues through the interconnections of human and nature made systems. Likewise, we must remain aware of the hierarchies, nested, responsive, and fractal

pattern potentials, as we emulate ecological processes and functions. [Our practice today has a great challenge to respond with leadership guided by ecological consciousness and responsive humanity. As Rottle and Yocom (2010) note, “In many ways, ecological design—the act of improving upon ecological conditions through the intentional development and application of planning, design and implementation—is the work landscape architects intend to accomplish.” [(30)]

Landscape planners and designers are able to better understand and serve client-users by consistently integrating ecological thought and metaphors to improve both social and ecological networks. We can appreciate the form, function and processes that all living systems experience by how we apply science to our artistic interpretations, and as we develop concepts for built environments. In this way, ecological design can be readily tied to social justice in the ways that asset based community development integrates solutions with community goals.

In leading with a transformational landscape design approach, bioregional thought, and a design activist approach, Landscape Architecture has great potential to build and enhance upon the land mosaic and sustain its inherent physical, biological and social processes [Thayer, 2003; Rottle, Yocom, 2010]. Ecological design is built upon a land mosaic. It is composed of a matrix—dominant land habitat or use, corridors—linear conduits between fragmented parts, edges and boundaries—transitional outer zones, patches—disturbed and isolated areas of the matrix by human or natural impacts [Dramstad, et al, 1996]. Norwegian landscape ecologist, and land use planner for agrarian lands, Wenche Dramstad and her

colleagues have developed a manual that describes landscape ecology principles. ”Ecological research is finding that an intermediate level of disturbance in any given landscape is optimal for establishing high biodiversity […]” [Rottle, Yocom. (70) 2010]. Built environments are part of a choice disturbance that can benefit or deplete the natural landscape. Thoughtful and informed actions are required in order to know how much to disturb, at what frequency, and in order to support resilience of communities by our planning and design choices.

2.4 DESIGN ACTIVISM

Through this thesis research I identify, Design activism as process that invites multiple and diverse voices and visions to activate design through a wider lens and sensitivity to culture and place. Activism, in this sense integrates the many layers and complexity found in place through historical and present day conditions and it includes the future concepts of the site. Because landscape architecture projects are fundamentally a part of an on-going cycle of life and experience there is no static end product. It is a reciprocal and long-term dynamic practice. Designers can use design as a tool for transformation and become advocates, engaging the client-user. The client-user may not necessarily be the financial entity or political developer behind a community project yet; these community members’ knowledge and ideas are assets to the design process. Because landscape architecture remains dynamic over time, occasions for engagement by design activism is multifold. In defining activism in design we can borrow key elements from protest-resistance movements.

Understanding that a claim for change is contentious, working on behalf of the excluded, and disrupting the status quo are all parts of the actions that designers as advocates may adopt for meaningful transformation [Thorpe, 2008]. Ann Thorpe, architect and author from the United Kingdom, considers five key elements in her discourse on design activism: organizing, service, advocacy, mobilization, and alliance. Thorpe thoughtfully explores architects’ responsibilities by actions filtered through a transformative design for social justice criteria [Thorpe, 2008]. Thorpe’s

exploration is meaningful in forming a Transformational Landscape Design approach because she explicitly points out the need for social justice awareness in design.

Revealing issues impacting our social and ecological networks is vital in design activism. As important as involving the community of users to the design process, landscape architects have a voice in calling to action those with skills, financial power, education and an authentic will to serve politically.

In a project that spanned from 1982-2006, landscape architect, Randy Hester provides a great example of how a designer as advocate can expand efforts and ideas by the inclusion of the community's voice and participation. The community of Manteo, North Carolina, worked with Hester to help design a master plan for community re-development in 1982. [Hester, 1985] Identifying, mapping, interviewing, and discussing the value of local every day places and landmarks with the community became fundamental tools of local participation. These tools also enabled the community of Manteo's various voices and its collective form to be valued and acknowledged [Hester, 1985]. The "sacred spaces site map" that resulted served as a negotiating tool to inform the city planning board, outsiders and the designers about social patterns and important cultural sites within the community that could not be lost in a trade off to the tourism focus of the redevelopment for Manteo. Manteo's redevelopment has been a long process project, only completed in 2006 [Planning Tool Exchange 2013].

Although I believe consensus is not the best option in design activism, I do understand and agree that for constructive community participation, caution and vigilance is important. Any aspect of dominance creates splintered and special interest plans that give rise to conflict mediation and worse yet, costly litigation. [Hester, 1999] Those who dominate, dictate and get their interests met at the expense of the hard work and continued voiceless and faceless status of the remaining community members. Randy Hester warns that community designers cannot abdicate their role in

supporting and fostering multi-insightful participation [Hester, 1999]. Experts involved in community participatory design understand and can teach the local community tools on integrating sustainability practices and re-learning habits for sustainability [Hester, 1999]. In addition I profoundly agree with Hester that environmental justice and social justice remain a part of designer's responsibility and professional conviction.

An important predecessor to the socially aware designers previously mentioned, was landscape architect, Garrett Eckbo. He worked for the Farm Service Administration [FSA], a federal agency that was founded during the Great Depression of the 1930s. A decade later, Eckbo addressed housing issues for the nation's war effort, and later developed plans for rural farmworker's housing in the American West. Eckbo's planning approach can be considered an early form of design activism in the profession. Eckbo was aware of the importance of community involvement and land knowledge in planning and design. He considered the land character very important for the development of a rich site plan. As important, he advised fellow designers to be cognizant of the client-user and land interrelationship [Eckbo, 1950].

Most notably, Eckbo's landscape design work for the FSA explored these principles with a social design approach in mind. Sympathy and knowledge and responsibility to the varied human conditions found in the world inspired and obligated his response to the needs of his time [Eckbo, 1950]. Today planners and designers face similar issues. In discussing city planning, in 1942, Garrett Eckbo was concerned that developments in planning and design were negligent of the actual user [Eckbo, 1950]. He had ideas of inclusion of the most voiceless. He raised issues of designing recognizing human scale and human dignity. He was also concerned with the inequities of opportunities in the built environment for personal-social development. [Eckbo, 1950]

As a landscape designer and citizen during the Depression, Eckbo was acutely aware that banker-realtor associations did not have social justice as a goal. He described the nature of subdivisions of land as, "… a technique for converting the unbreakable continuity of the land into a series of

free and flexible pieces of merchandise subject to all the skills and cleverness of the entrepreneur." [Eckbo, 1950. (243)] In his well-known writings in Landscape for Living, Eckbo proceeded to describe the public as a voiceless and faceless client, once again, pointing to the flaws of development. [Eckbo, 1950] He also believed that planners failed by proceeding without adequate knowledge of the specifics of the site and of regional land relationships. He further argued that planners and designers have an obligation and a responsibility to consult with the community, and not be the decision-makers.

Notably, Garrett Eckbo's work for the FSA on behalf of farmworker and migrant worker housing reflected his inclusive philosophy. As for residential communities, in Eckbo's plans for farmworker and migrant camps, it is evident that he strove to consider topography, climate patterns, and plant character and value. If his work was set in a flat rural zone he considered the placement of houses and their access away from the hot western exposure, or he considered planting plans to be multifunctional. Basic and elegant considerations, Eckbo used plant groupings to create windscreens or shade for child play. He thoughtfully designed with the farmworker children's needs in mind. Furthermore, Eckbo relocated lots and houses in groupings to promote socialization and child supervision. He included in his FSA communities various small parks to break up the monotony of flattened rural lands, and to provide relaxation for all users. [Eckbo, 1950]

Garrett Eckbo's work is significant in that it provides a vision of the social justice struggles he confronted, and that marginalized communities like contemporary farmworker communities continue to experience today. Eckbo's noble work is also pioneering in that he designed for laborers as human beings, and not an alien community. The United States rural poor included—and today includes— white and other racial communities. Through his ideas and projects for the FSA, Eckbo highlighted the significant deficiencies designers and planners had already contributed by the 1930 and 1940s. His work is a great inspiration to promote design activism in landscape architecture. As planners and designers continue to face today, Garrett Eckbo faced ambitious politicians and economic players with presumptions for some of the people, and with the exclusion of others.

His work did not transform the poor habits planning and design still share today. Design activism opportunities exist and landscape architects today have to confront the political and realtor machines. The one greatest weapon designers have today is the knowledge of the scarcity of land to build on, the preservation of farmland movements, and the land trust and river keeper organizations. These groups advocate for the preservation of lands, heritage and conservation and regeneration of precious landscapes and watersheds. Joint efforts can be powerful to combat the economic –political injustices.

In the past thirty years several architects have become involved in works of service in order to address the most crucial rural poverty through social design, or using design process as activism. Samuel Mockbee, the late architect, painter, poet, mentor, teacher and social justice designer depicted the impact design could have in the poorest of American corners, rural Hale County, Alabama. As founder of Rural Studios in 1992 and as a long-time Auburn University professor, Mockbee engaged young student designers in projects of service, beauty and justice. [Oppenheimer Dean, 2003] He actively promoted working side by side with the client-user. Their participation was crucial and complemented the success of the end product, but always focused on the humanity of the people. Materials were found in situ, so recycling and reclaiming became part of the regeneration practice. Social and material assets were recognized and valued and given new life and dignity.

Mockbee observed that “Physical poverty is not an abstraction, but we almost never think of impoverishment as evidence of a world that exists. Much less do we imagine that it‘s a condition from which we may draw enlightenment in a very practical way.” [Sam Mockbee 2013] Mockbee’s words spoke boldly and directly of our mission and responsibility as visual professionals and as compassionate leaders called to transform social inequalities of place and of social negligence. The Rural Studio’s activism approach was guided by the clients’ wishes and desires, by American Southern cultural heritage, and by the history of place and its pervasive poverty story.

Following and inspired by the work and compassion of Sam Mockbee, architect Bryan Bell co-founded Design Corps in 1997. This design activism group specifically mobilizes farmworkers and farmers with issues of housing communities. Understanding the users' needs and their sense of place makes their architectural projects practical, functional and culturally responsive and socially just spaces [Deveraux, 2004]. Spatial reorganization considers the need for social gathering spaces versus parking spaces. This seems basic but is frequently over-looked by planners and developers, especially with the focus of cookie-cutter solutions. Notably, the Design Corp's projects employ an asset–based approach informed by the Asset Based Community Development Institute's practice [Hendler Voss, 2008].

However, during the initial year that Design Corps was founded, the team of designers discovered that a needs-based assessment of a community, as was taught in design schools, was futile. The designers were working with rural poverty in the Shiloh community near Asheville NC. This is the moment Design Corps founders, Bryan Bell and partners; Scott Ball and Seth Hendler-Voss realized they needed a different strategy. McKnight and Kretzman's ABCD was what they chose to adapt their design approach. A basic principle, McKnight had stated in his writings impacted the designers approach, specifically he had stated, "service systems that focus on a needs-based approach can effectively disable communities." [Bell, Wakeford (125) 2008]. The asset-based approach element of Design Corps practice enhances their design activism work and illustrates how compatible design activism and ABCD approaches are,

Many other such joint efforts in design activism have sprung up following the footprints of architect, Mockbee. Designers leading university programs along with colleagues of various disciplines, and recent graduate fellows are carrying on this social justice service-focused design approach. Bryan Bell advises designers to seek out challenges for design, including those found in our marginalized communities, emphasizing a need for a transformation in how architecture is practiced [Bell, 2008]. Part of being a design activist is the willingness to have great courage and perseverance, and to wear many hats: funding seeker, political junkie, teacher, mentor, advocate, leader, and persuader, to name a few.

2.5 SUMMARY, DESIGN RE-CONNECTIONS

Design engagement must be holistic to promote well-being and enhance *quality of life* for humans and, equally, the well being of nature present in the greater landscape. Both people and ecological processes matter in the places that we are challenged to create. Understanding and enhancing *sense of place* and a community's assets are a critical part of the holistic approach—the enhanced design framework—for which I advocate. Such a framework requires flexibility in thought and application, dependent on the richness of human cultural and social diversity (social assets), and the fluctuating biodiversity of the environment that we intersect and overlap (natural assets). This implies a practice that includes *ecological design*, and *design activism*. Ecological and social knowledge and adaptability, combined with responsive, just, and empowering actions reveals the benefits of an *asset based design* approach, that I promote.

I believe, that the initiation of our design process, by the inclusion of marginalized communities and land-knowledge in strategic thought, is responsive action. I argue that an Asset-Based Design approach for Landscape Architecture practice is a holistic approach that practitioners can advocate and use to create a strong, professional paradigm, while transforming neglected and abandoned communities. This holistic approach is informed and affected to by diversity in social, historical, cultural, ecological processes, and land-based assets.

Landscape Architecture projects can be addressed with a sense of place concept in mind and practice. Each element of a site is an asset of value and inspiration for an integrated design and multi-functional response. Design professionals have a great responsibility to develop built environments with the awareness that negative experiences and emotions can take place on site. However, progressive design criteria, and a design framework that includes design activism and ecological design principles can be positive components that address issues of sense of place and provide support, on various levels, for social communities, bioregional systems, and even minute organisms on site.

CHAPTER 3

FRAMEWORK AND PRECEDENT EXPLORATION

CHAPTER THREE: FRAMEWORK AND PRECEDENT EXPLORATION

The Transformational Landscape Design Framework is the strategic groundwork that a designer-planner and the community co-create by the acknowledgement and inclusion of all local assets. These assets include human/social, and physical/ecological in character. The framework is adaptable to each site and the site's character; it becomes the social-ecological cornerstone to build upon. I am proposing that the TLD approach creates a new frame of reference through the application of Asset Based Design, Ecological Design, which informs and responds to processes of multi-faceted sustainability actions; and finally through Design Activism, designers become leaders in a service—expertise profession.

These ideas of holistic sustainability remain true today, as they have been for the past fifty years. The movement of Ecological Design has continued to evolve along with other key social justice movements that were initiated in the Twentieth Century [McHarg. 1969]. "Sustainability means connecting the flows and structures between the natural world and the built environment at every level of scale. It means transforming the mechanical into the organic, the layer of large grids into ecosystems. We may always have global economies, but they should serve merely to supplement economic activity occurring at the smallest viable scale."
[Autopoiesis 2013].

The Transformational Landscape Design framework I propose emphasizes the importance of all local site's assets and their intersections. For instance, where a structure, or environment is built, the place it touches and impacts the natural or ecological landscape, it is the exact intersection. The dynamic and unique interrelationships of assets impact and depend on the bioregion. There exists a dynamic reciprocity of outcomes through design activism, guided by a comprehensive site analysis and discussion by all the people that leads to a real sustainable world.

3.1 DYNAMIC LOCAL ASSETS

As discussed in the literature review, every community has various unique assets. The richness and diversity of these assets and their valuable functions create an exciting palette of resources for landscape architects. Assets revealed, or newly identified to designers and to the client-users, add to the wealth of tools that the community possesses and can consciously work with. In general there are two main categories of assets to consider in applying the TLD framework. Social assets are considered all the human-derived or inherent to individuals and communities. These assets range in behavioral, to experiential, to cultural, utilitarian, and of service in character. Physical assets are considered those that specifically relate to the ecological systems of a local place and inter-connected regions. These are the human-impacted yet, not human made in their origin. For example, a physical, or ecological asset may be a buried creek or a dammed river. The factors that cause the state these natural assets are found in presently may have been human influenced and not geologically influenced. The following is a brief list of each to guide the developing of the framework.

SOCIAL ASSETS may be the mutual support system that exists among community members, such as informal social networks and neighboring activity or more organized events such as an after school program, or a parent volunteer network. Other social assets are local economic systems and access to them; local educational institutions as resource and support; civic and regional inclusive visions. The range of social assets is endless and includes: story telling, play-enjoyment, artistic expression, varied cultural heritage, and diversity of ethnicities. Assets impacting lands and waterways directly include: socio-environmental histories, such as recognition of past cultures and native people's inter-relationships with the environment; policy-making, architectural and planning expressions; farmlands, parklands; land trusts and conservation-preservation-restoration organizations.

PHYSICAL ASSETS include the ecology of place; the hydrological cycles of place; geomorphology, such as rolling hills and valleys remnants found in farm landscapes; climate and microclimates; soils, rich and diverse native to the locale type; geography, such as the location and its surrounding bioregions; topography that can be worked with and not against for circulation and flow of natural drainage; geology, acknowledging its character; and many more.

3.2 ROLES AND PROCESSES

Connecting social and ecological community assets, as working essential resources, requires an identification of key roles and processes. These are essential for the Transformational Landscape Design [TLD] framework's function. Combined with Design Activism, as an effective action for transformation of planning and design, the TLD framework provides a new perspective to envision and proceed in an inclusive and comprehensive design process. Marginalized communities and lands are filled with such places affording abundant opportunities for holistic transformation.

The Transformational Landscape Design [TLD] framework for which I am advocating includes the principal elements so far explored in this thesis: Asset Based Design approach, Ecological Design, and Design Activism. These important elements, working together, encompasses the TLD approach needed. The key function of the design framework is its flexibility and requirement of inclusiveness of all assets of the communities with which landscape architects work, including human and non-human bio-systems. The design framework does not call for a majority rule option or consensus. It provides for vigilance of the process and the functions of proper planning, design and stewardship. The following are ideas that explain the ABD framework's principal elements and how their functions will support the emerging transformation of design processes and practice. I propose that this framework is essential to a design transformation in planning for marginalized communities and lands.

Landscape architecture has an important role to lead in the integration of the social and physical assets for site planning and design. Landscape architects may lead with the concept of thoughtful integration as a core professional principle. These actions, will allow designers to practice in a dynamic, responsive and responsible manner over time. Built environments are fundamentally created with the analysis of the physical and social character of sites. Yet, the traditional physical character does not necessarily include a comprehensive ecological character analysis of place, as in the TLD approach that I propose in this thesis. The design shift from a traditional site analysis to a more inclusive and comprehensive one comes with the activation of all the processes through shared ideas and thoughtful listening to the story telling of people and of place. Design becomes an action that respects all parts, and requires that each part be whole and integrated with greater visions, within temporal and spatial scales, and in a balanced multi- faceted sustainability. This action is key for landscape designs' overall functions and successes.

ASSET BASED DESIGN [ABD] approach is an inclusive practice of planning, design, and building as processes that places a high value on what exists on site, and re-connects bioregions to social systems, at varied spatial and temporal scales. The Transformational Landscape Design framework's adaptability provides the structure for this approach's effectiveness. For example, community design can integrate farmworker housing, located near a creek with plans to restore a river or waterway for its viability. This design action may include an enhanced sustainable habitat as potential eco-tourism feature for overall enjoyment and economic local gains, and the integration of the social community. Through design activism, a Transformational Landscape Design approach can result, revealing processes that produce benefits for the whole local site and its interconnected bioregion.

DESIGN ACTIVISM [DA] is a method that promotes a vigilance that is required to transform participation of the voiceless and faceless [Oppenheimer-Dean, Hursley, 2002; Bell, 2001]. This method encourages designers to take on roles as diplomats and advocates within a complex fabric of empowered collaborators. Through this method, the client-user participates in building, in accepting ownership, and in fostering and practicing lifetime stewardship. The client-user is also better informed to understand the flexibility and dynamic potential of ecological design and his/her role as co-inhabitant. For example, a community elder through storytelling may reveal the landscape of the past and describe the past climate, the past organic farming techniques. The inclusion and high value of this social asset and its corresponding tale, becomes the activism to acknowledge for designers and communities to be inspired with for their own activism contributions. In this processes, a rich socially and ecologically integrated outcome can be built.

ECOLOGICAL DESIGN [ED] is the integrated practice that *reveals* phenomena, exposes relationships, teaches, inspires, and heals and sustains systems of life that contribute to a consciousness that inspires responsibility and thoughtful actions.

In their book Ecological Design, Van der Ryn and Cowan reveal the economic and ecological cost accounting that designers, builders and consumers continuously must make [1996]. As designers and consumers, we can try to understand the economic cost but the ecological costs are not immediately apparent. A correlation to human health and sense of place can be made in becoming aware of ecological cost. By using planning and design practices that are asset-based, culturally sensitive, and ecologically informed, we can challenge designers to become activists for the marginalized. The costs of ecological degradation by the disposal of pollutants on bio-systems and the abandonment of the bioregional network also have a destructive role. These actions and their devastating consequences, cycle back to impact human health and sense of place. We dwell within, we breathe, we drink, and we harvest from the soils and waters of those bioregions. At the same time, we can negatively impact the environment with poor choices and arrogant neglect. Ecological design principles and practice are promoted in the ABD framework enabling the

complete integration of a social design within a network of sustainable ecology, and delighting and informing users towards stewardship and extensive responsibility of present and future actions.

The Transformational Landscape Design framework is essential to promote within the lens of a transformational landscape design practice. Climate change, increasing populations—living on urban sites and their periphery, poverty and injustices are all factors that remain, that need to be acknowledged and responded from local to global scales. New design practices, as I propose, have a leading role to change old practices and sustain comprehensive fair practices. Designers and planners must remain cognizant that these transformational processes require meta-disciplines and authentic collaborative visions. The proposed design framework is perhaps better defined as a dynamic structure sustaining life, of reciprocal actions and outcomes that reinforce viability. The framework is endless in potential and open to change, dependent on future and developing technologies, as well as, ancient holistic practices that have been replaced by careless ones. The sources of the design framework are equally important: social and physical asset-driven design; ecological design practices and their adaptability, cohesive, and healing qualities; and design activism as powerful motivation and action for aesthetic and functional solutions, and service for all.

3.3 PRECEDENTS

The precedent case studies that follow are relevant in part, because of their specific response to principles of sustainability, and as importantly because they demonstrate the explicit connection that flows between nature and built environments. They embody aspects of the Transformational Landscape Design framework discussed above. These cases are significant too in their range of client-users; their project size and impacts on bioregions, their diverse locations with particular social implications; and they each have a timeless quality, serving for great inspiration and sound powerful example.

The precedent projects address conditions that connect nature and humans in deliberate and thoughtful ways. These projects, developed in different decades, and in communities of various income levels were integrated with local cultural traditions, and designed with innovative and imaginative approaches. This mixture of site conditions and community voices serve to support an asset-based design approach development and its open collaborative participatory character. Yet somehow ecological-design and asset-based design approaches are seldom seen as mainstream design practices. It is apparent—through collaborative roles, processes, and outcomes—that the communities and individuals, who participated in these projects, were well aware of the value of assets of place. Furthermore, each project integrates particular assets in ways that enhance the sense of place for human communities, and by doing so, acknowledges the importance of enhancing and restoring the ecological systems of place.

The following three precedents model the use of integrated complex processes. Each case is evaluated on its response to the outlined TLD framework. Although principles and frameworks are created and promoted in design literature and education, there remains a great deal of responsibility for landscape architects, planners, architects, and policy-makers to continually question and promote practices toward environmental comprehension and integration, and the awareness of socio-cultural patches that are interwoven on a site.

CASE: **Village Homes/ Davis California / Central Valley**

WATERSHED: Sacramento River

BIOREGION: Putah Creek/ Cache Creek

YEAR: 1973-75 planning/ 1975-1982 built in phases on 60 acres [Francis, 2002; Yolo County, 2013]

PROJECT SCOPE: 222 single and multi- family homes/ 22 apartments/ commercial office and small business spaces/ community agricultural use: garden-orchard-vineyard/ community center/pool/studio/outdoor theater/ day-care center/ greenbelts/ [Thayer, 2013; Francis 2002]

PLANNING-DESIGN TEAMS: Michael and Judy Corbett and community residents

KEY ASSET ROLE: **DESIGN ACTIVISM with social revolutionary vision, guided by earlier pioneers of eco-design/ ECOLOGICAL-SOCIAL connection**

KEY PROCESSES: The key process is **INTEGRATION** of physical and social assets of place with innovative ideas and historical sound land uses. A key benefit is the enhancement of connections of bio-flows, and human circulation.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: “Prior to the late 1890's, the main flow of Putah Creek passed under your feet en route to the great seasonal wetlands just to the east that offered the opportunity for the harvest of fish and waterfowl.“[Thayer, 2013]

In the east lays the great Sacramento River marshlands. Today this zone of the watershed serves multi-functions, as productive rice fields and restored native habitat corridor, known as the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area. Along the site of where Village Homes is located, was the seasonal home of the Patwin People, native Californians who lived entwined with the ecology of place.

SENSE OF PLACE contributions are framed within the holistic design of place.

This development was planned and built responsive to a local-regional dry Mediterranean climate type and soil conditions. The creation of a community garden, vineyard and orchard is profoundly enriched by this thoughtful and integrated choice. The then “future” community-inhabitants of Village Homes expressed and strove for mindful, individual and collective ideas and actions. The team promoted designed curvilinear circulation paths, narrow concrete sidewalk-use; and cycling and corridors responded to integrative functional choices. These design actions served to create restorative local wildlife habitats and connected socio-ecological flows. By including social-ecological history in the process, informed and inspired

design decisions and economic concerns of daily living on site. Fundamental use of solar energy; locating doors and widows away from excessive heat or cold; planting selections as habitat and buffers or screens against local agricultural dust and harsh winds responded to an enhanced experience of place [Francis, 2002]. The extensive thought process in developing and building Village Homes integrated planning with community, bioregion and implementation principles outlined. According to Judy Corbett, co-planner, this cohesiveness and inclusionary practice can foster an additional solid foundation for a sense of community that in turn is pivotal as support for the goals of the long-term planning process [Corbett, J. and Velazquez. 1991].

SUMMARY

Through design activism practice, with a well-educated middle class community as clients, Village Homes expresses the adaptability of the ABD framework. I am proposing for marginalized communities but it could serve every community well. Village Homes, as concept and development integrates ecological design, design activism and local resources. People and ecology become those specific assets; they are recognized and capable in productive design development.

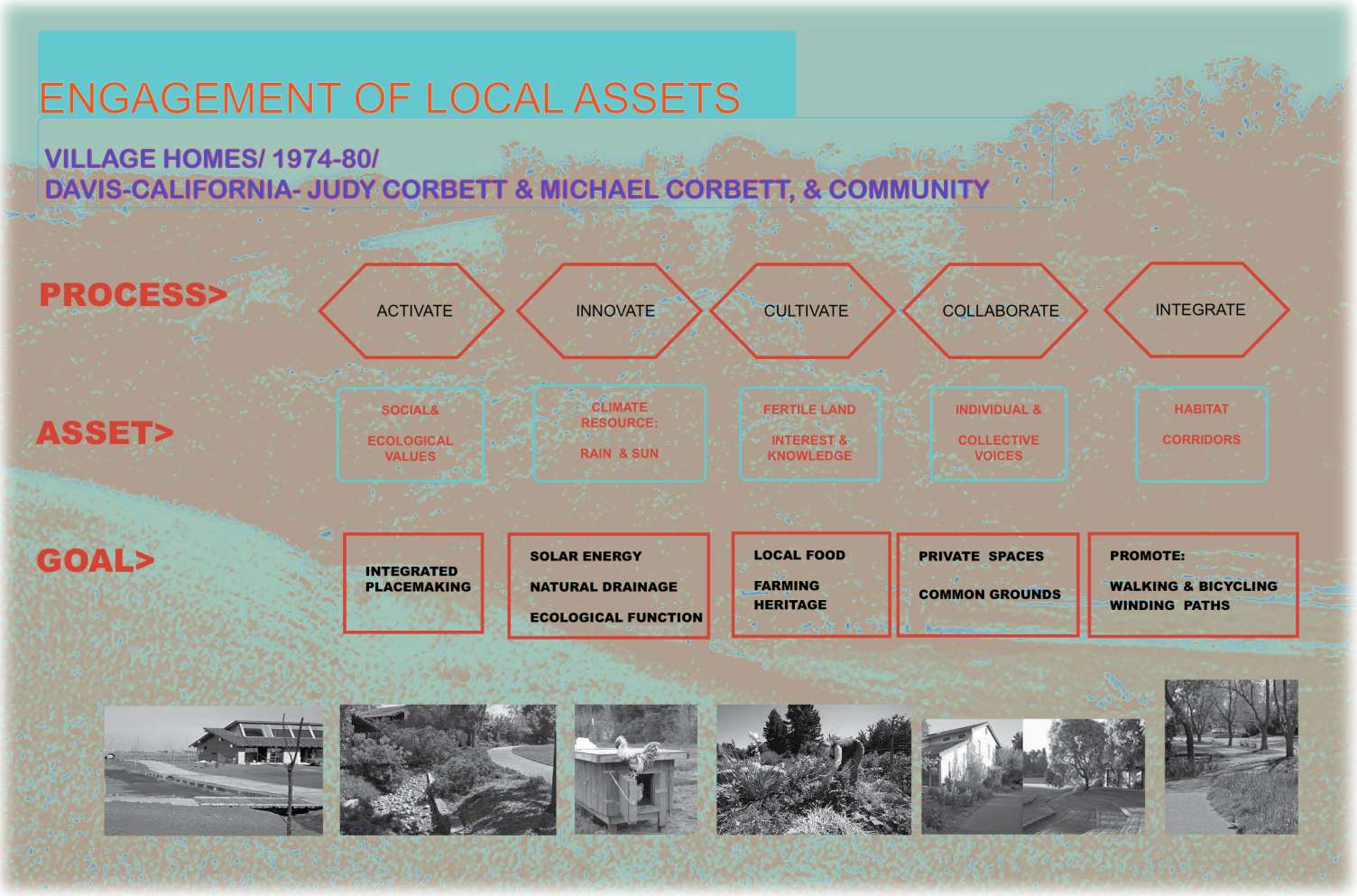

FIG. 1 VILLAGE HOMES PRECEDENT ANALYSIS

MAGE SOURCES: GOOGLE
FRANCIS/ CORBETT& CORBETT

CASE: **Butterfly House/ Mason's Bend/ Alabama**

WATERSHED: Black Warrior River

BIOREGION: Talladega National Forest- Black Warrior River

YEAR: 1996-1997 [Black Warrior River 2013; Wiki/Talladega National Forest 2013; Oppenheimer Dean, Hursley. 2002]

PROJECT SCOPE: Remodeled six-hundred square foot house/ fully ventilated porch (250 square feet)/ wing-like tin roof over the inside-outside porch multi-functional collects rainwater for laundry, toilets, and irrigation and properly channels cool breezes/ clerestory windows and fan-exhaust draw hot air out and cool in/ wood burning stove is used for winter heating/ wetlands sensitive septic system/ reclaimed tin and heart pine from a razed one-hundred and five old church building near the site/ indoor plumbing/ wide doorways, disability access ramps, and handrails/ [Oppenheimer Dean, Hursley. 2002].

PLANNING-DESIGN-BUILDING TEAMS: Samuel Mockbee, Auburn State University students, and homeowners: Ora Lee and Anderson Harris [

KEY ASSET ROLES: **DESIGN ACTIVISM & DESIGN/BUILDING**

KEY PROCESSES: The key process is **ENHANCEMENT** of the existing small poor rural home in the traditional Black Belt of the American South. The project process was thoughtful, culturally sensitive, and deliberate choices were resolved with the Harris family's participation, the architect, and students. Sam Mockbee observed the family's use of the porch area in their former home; this guided its transformation and key preservation of the original rural home. The original house structure was enhanced through its function. The design action that resulted in the final architectural process was the enhanced indoor-outdoor home character [Oppenheimer Dean/ Hursley. 2002]

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: The land where the Butterfly House is located remains as it was, an impoverished, rural, marginalized area surrounded by the Black Warrior River basin and wealthy coal mining industries. The river is now on the list of the top ten most endangered rivers in the United States [Black Warrior River 2013]. Hale County, where this site is located is also the historical area of enslaved African American communities, or the “Black Belt”. They were the main laborers of the highly profitable cotton plantation communities [Encyclopedia Alabama 2013].

Prior to the period of European colonization, the native people settled one of the largest multi-tribal communities in the region. “The Moundville site, occupied from around A.D. 1000 until A.D. 1450, is a large settlement of Mississippian culture on the Black Warrior River in central Alabama. At the time of Moundville’s heaviest residential population, the community took the form of a three hundred-acre village built on a bluff overlooking the river.” [Moundville UA 2013] The state’s racial apartheid practices endured until the last quarter of the Twentieth Century when the Civil Rights Movement forced sweeping changes throughout the South. [Encyclopedia Alabama 2013]

SENSE OF PLACE contributions are enhanced by the noble acknowledgement of traditional southern rural culture and living. Sam Mockbee, the client-family, and Auburn University architecture students developed responsive alternatives adaptable for local-regional humid climate conditions by expanding the existing roofline with a dramatic and functional butterfly roof design. The expansion creates comfortable screened gathering spaces and shades the added front porch experiences. In the winter months, a fan pushes cool air out and a wood oven heats the indoor-outdoor porch areas.

The butterfly roof design and expansion to the original house also creates opportunities fro restoration of socio-ecological flows. For example the roof angle and design allowed for the collection of rainwater for irrigation of a family garden; this creates new habitat and pleasure for the homeowners; the rainwater may be collected in the garden or used on the wetlands sensitive septic system. The client family is elderly and one person is disabled. The design team improved sense of place for the clients through sound actions: the use of reclaimed

materials— from recycled wood and tin from one hundred and five year old deconstructed church located nearby—building accessible paths and doorways to the original house and finally adding indoor plumbing to the house.

SUMMARY

Through design activism and sound building practices, the Butterfly House depicts tangible ways to accomplish high quality design with low-cost yet quality materials. The students involved from Mockbee's Rural Studios, demonstrates the additional benefit when a university institution is open to take on a challenge that is both design related but importantly social in its service to the community. The client-family did not ask for help, the architect saw an opportunity to benefit and enhance the experience of life for the client and his students. Mockbee, from rural Alabama himself, did not have to travel far to see an opportunity to practice design for humanity and for justice. The potential may be great of the TLD framework with ecology as knowledge and life-supporting asset and with design activism, as its instigator.

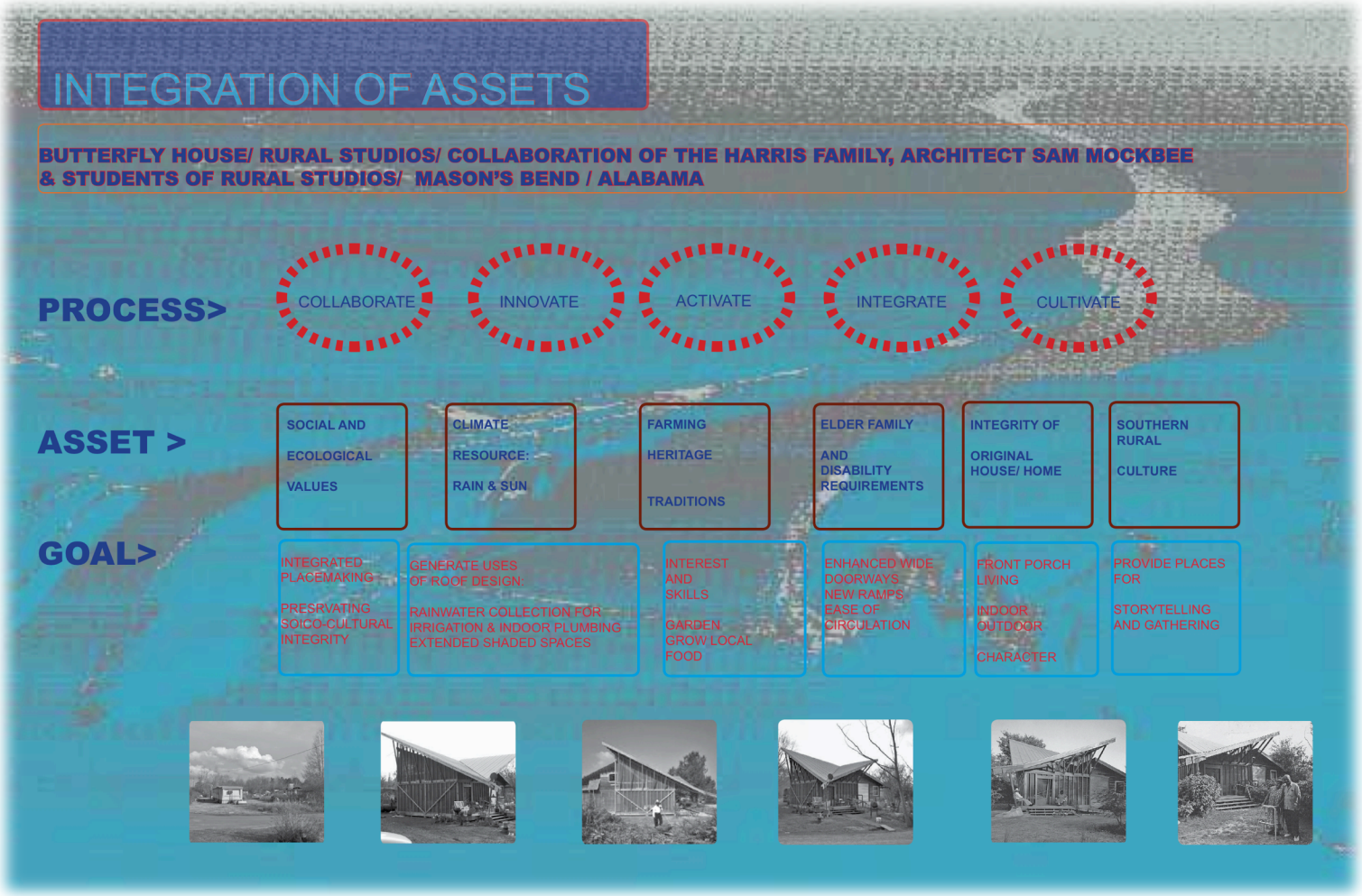

FIG. 2 BUTTERFLY HOUSE PRECEDENT ANALYSIS

IMAGE SOURCES: RURAL STUDIOS

CASE: **Northeast Puyallup Longhouse/ Tacoma, Washington/ Puyallup Tribal Lands**

WATERSHED: Green-Duwamish River

BIOREGION: Puget Sound [Bioregion Evergreen 2013]

YEAR 2011, 2012 [Environmental Works 2013]

PROJECT SCOPE: Winners of 2012 LEED Platinum Award/ Project of the Year and 2013 SEED / Excellence in Public interest Design [Environmental Works 2013]

This project is located on land of an existing housing development of the Puyallup Tribe. The project's siting, on a hill overlooking the tidal flats of the Puget Sound, is known as "the Land of the Hidden Waters". The site is a "sacred place" due to its connection to Native History and connections to land and water. [Design Corps 2013; Coast Salish 2013] The collaborative design team embraced and fostered Coastal Salish cultural traditions and the connection to wildlife habits. A sustainability factor of this project is the economic opportunities offered to the community. For example, tribal members attended workshops and were employed to build the structures. Deconstruction of an old building on site created the opportunity to reclaim materials to be re-used for the new project. The project includes ten one and two-bedroom units, a 2200 square feet community building, utility structures, and a sweat lodge. The project, designed to mimic the basic frame of a longhouse, created private dwellings and commons for uniting the residents. Natural landscaping and habitat corridor of 110,000 square feet was restored and preserved. Throughout the project elements of ecological design were used and economic sustainability reliance was encouraged. [Premier Sips 2012/ 2013]

PLANNING-DESIGN-BUILDING TEAMS: Puyallup Tribe/ Puyallup Tribal Housing Authority/ [Architects]/ Common Grounds/

KEY ASSET ROLES: **DESIGN ACTIVISM/ BUILDING/STEWARDSHIP/**

KEY PROCESSES: The key process is **ENGAGEMENT** of Puyallup Tribe's traditions, existing natural corridor, and restoration of existing housing to create a visual and real connection to the land beyond the site. This engagement is fundamental as it is a model for other housing authority projects to learn from and model.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: Coastal Salish people who depended on the bounty of the land and sea during rainy months originally inhabited the region's land and waterways. These communities lived within a richly forested land in cedar-planked longhouses; they navigated the waters in their dugout canoes and migrated throughout the year, depending on the land and its dynamic conditions. Communal living and work were part of the traditions of these communities [Coast Salish 2013].

SENSE OF PLACE contributions are responsive to the local-regional climate,
and are enriched by the Puyallup-Salish collective traditional ideas and skills. The longhouse concept is used to design the site layout and to incorporate the value of communal living and promoting mutual efforts as done in the traditional Salish longhouse. Individual homes are connected to the communal grounds. This responds to the need for private living spaces in a balanced way. Enhancing the sense of place, the community-design team established a choice to act responsively by preserving a wildlife woodland habitat. In combination to socio-ecological flows, the Puyallup Longhouse project integrates socio-ecological history. The site is located on former Salish native lands and it is oriented with a view of Mt Rainier, the Puget Sound and the preserved woodland all surrounding the community. Innovations and economic sustainability of place was manifested through the Salish creative woodworking applications and importantly the hiring of the Salish local community to build the project. A

sense of place recognizing, the regions natural beauty, economic sustainability and the need for inclusion of all people was accomplished in this project.

SUMMARY

The Northeast Puyallup Longhouse project is a comprehensive idea of Asset Based Design. This has been achieved by employing Design Activism; in collaboration and actions of the housing authority, the Puyallup elders, Puyallup native community members, and the professional design team; in adopting ecological design, in the use of a green building criteria; and the development of stewardship of the environment jointly with preserving Puyallup heritage.

FIG. 3 PUYALLUP LONGHOUSE PRECEDENT ANALYSIS

IMAGE SOURCES:
ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS,
PUYALLUP NATION, AND SEED

3.4 REFLECTIONS on the TLD FRAMEWORK

For a substantial application of the proposed transformational Landscape Design framework, landscape architects would be called to the table. In each of these cases, and most of those researched through the research undergone through the literature review, landscape architects are not participating as initiators or leaders. As I continue next to introduce a potential farmworker community site for the TLD framework application in Chapter Four the value of involving landscape architects from the beginning of a project will become more evident. The TLD framework and its approach are crucial especially regarding marginalized communities and lands in need of acknowledgement, renovations, re-design, and regeneration.

After reviewing these precedent cases, I am inspired by the progressive planning these designers have added to our allied professions' historical resumes. The past history and work of so many forward-thinking designers, master builders, and concerned residents as described above, greatly motivates my pursuit in developing a collaborative and comprehensive ABD framework. Ultimately, designers and the communities where they work have a challenge to remain vigilant of the unbreakable connection between what flows between nature and our built environments...and vice versa.

CHAPTER 4

POTENTIALS OF THE

TRANSFORMATIONAL
LANDSCAPE DESIGN FRAMEWORK

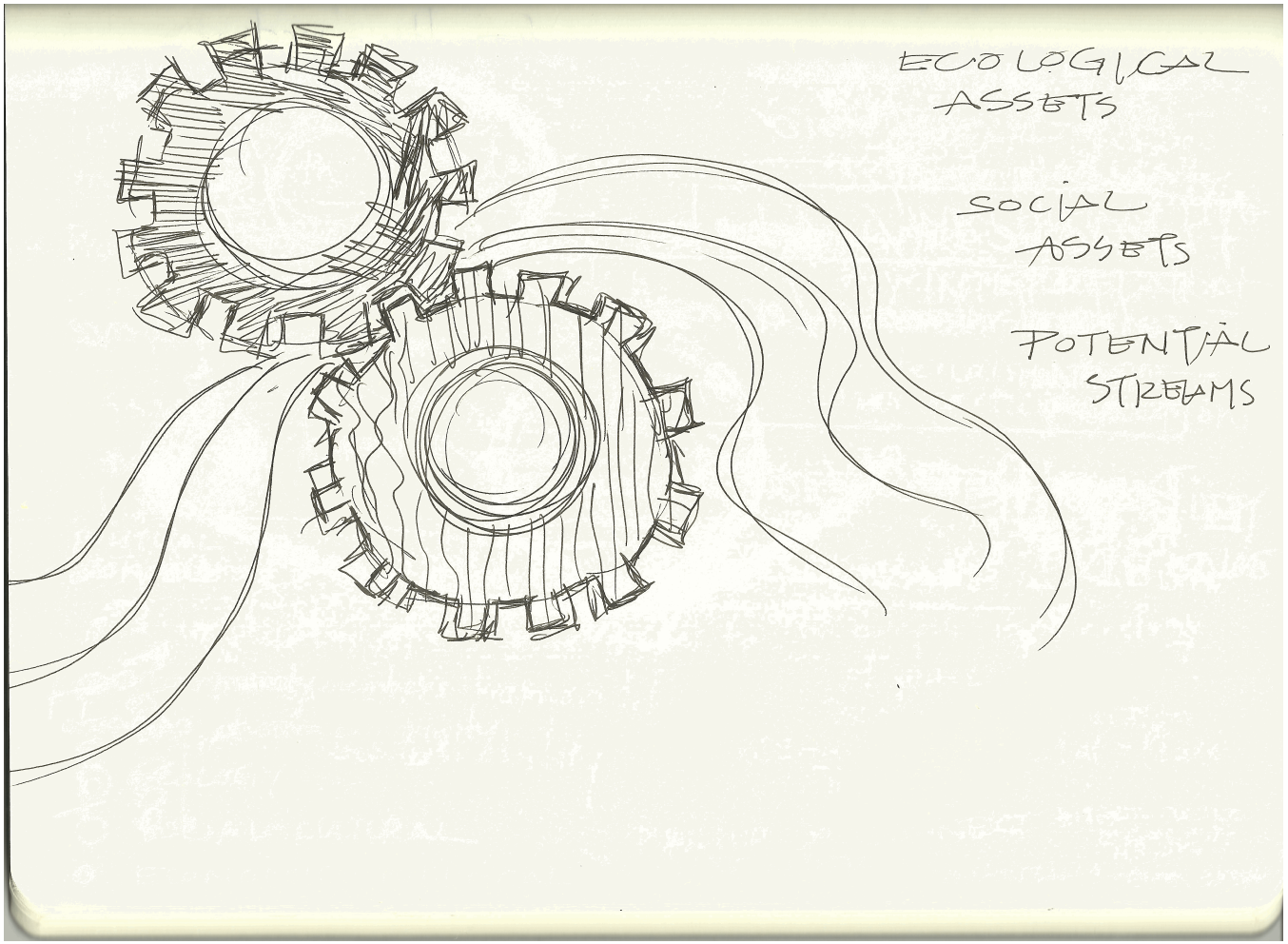

FIG. 4 SKETCH OF ASSETS INTEGRATED AND POTENTIALS

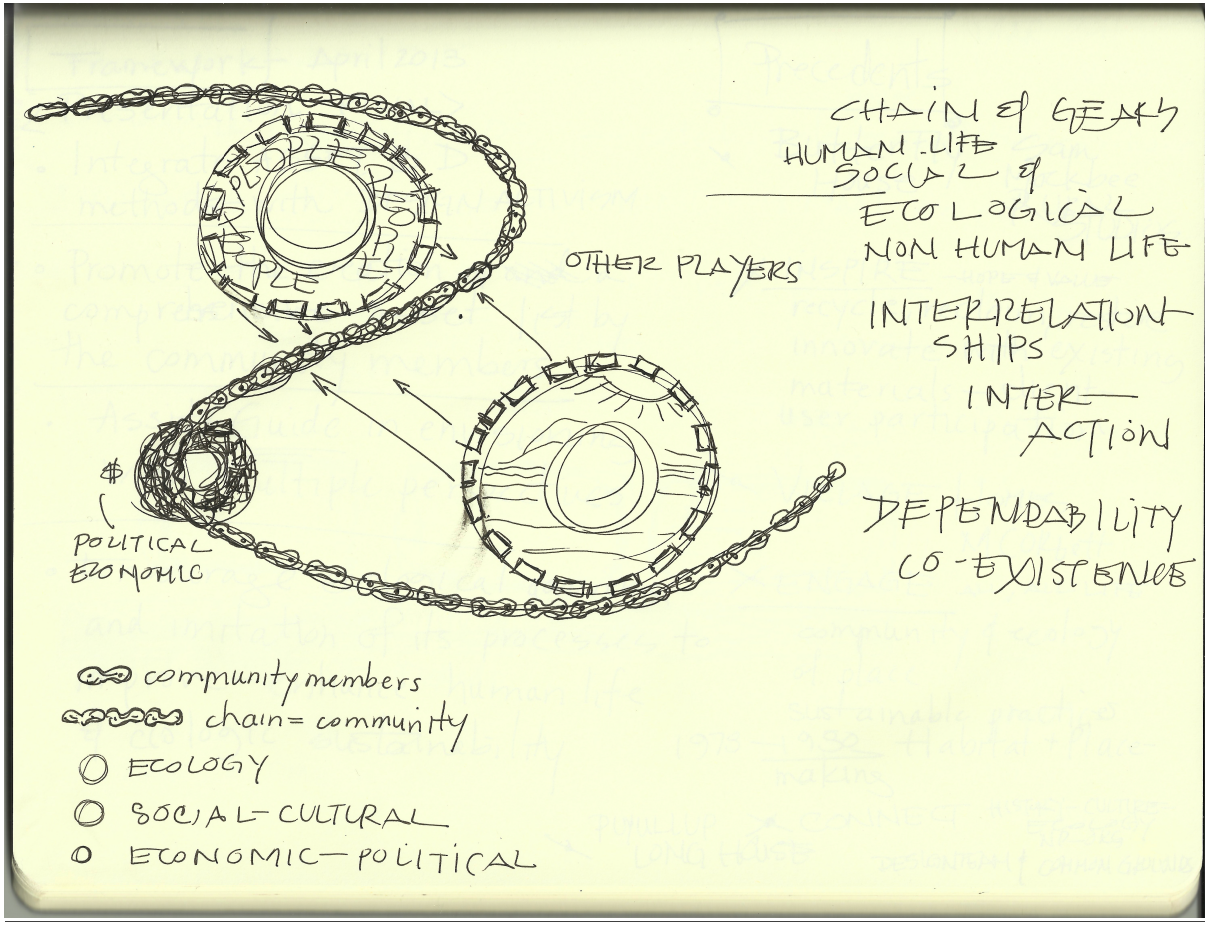

FIG. 5 SKETCH OF COMMUNITY AND ASSETS INTERLINKING

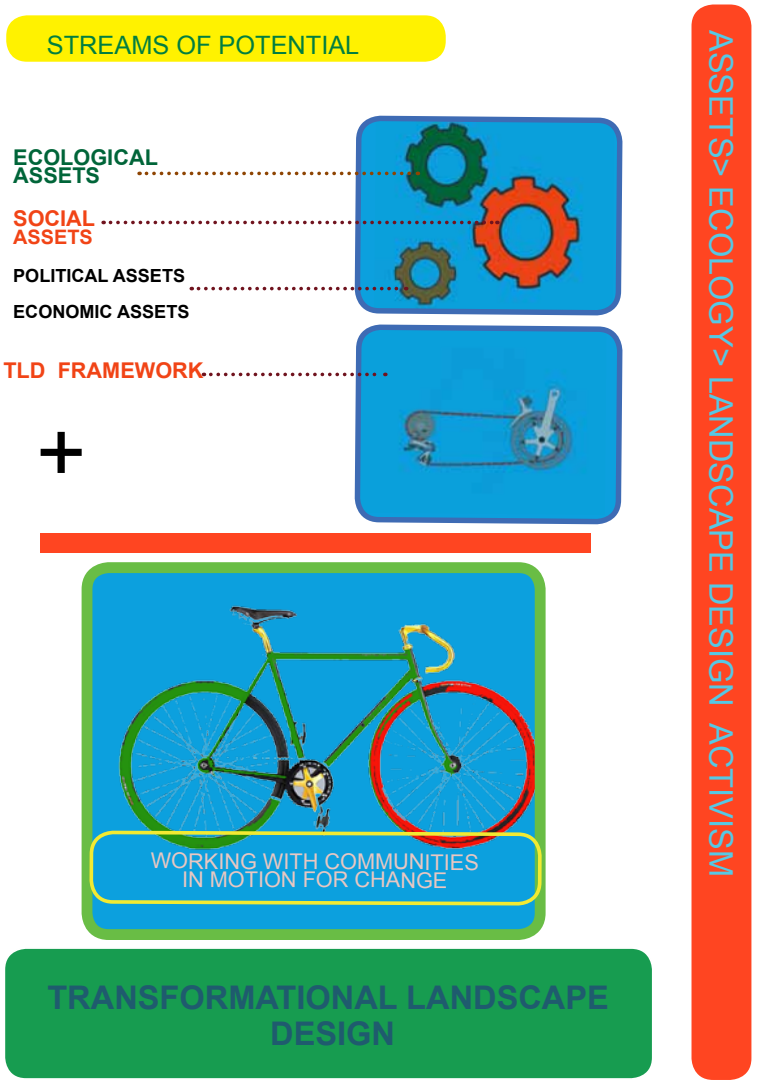

FIG. 6 TLD FRAMEWORK POTENTIALS

CHAPTER FOUR: POTENTIALS OF THE TRANSFORAMATIONAL LANDSCAPE DESIGN FRAMEWORK

The Transformational Landscape Design framework will now be hypothetically applied and tested to consider its real life potential and challenges. The framework may serve in anchoring the design and community with its ecological fabric, creating various opportunities for regeneration and integration of the marginalized community to its rich bioregion and prosperous economic landscape. As I stated in the Introduction to this thesis, I have previously lived for many years surrounded by the rural landscapes of Yolo County, Northern California. I have also had the privilege in serving impoverished farmworker families. The community, for this thesis' goal is the El Rio Villas [ERV] community. El Rio Villas is a public housing community located on unincorporated lands to the east of the City of Winters and seven miles to the west of Village Homes in Davis, California. ERV is currently publicly owned by the Yolo County Housing [YCH] organization. Unlike the Puyallup Housing Authority, whose employees are native Salish people, Yolo County Housing does not have a farmworker or other very low-income representative. The poor to extremely poor income levels of the county's population are some of the people housed at el Rio Villas. The purpose in developing the ABD framework and its application is to point out its value in addressing those assets and functions that traditional planning and design may disregard or simply not consider. ABD framework is also crucial in addressing the disparity found in marginalized communities as public housing that houses farm laborers.

COMMUNITY: El Rio Villas

OWNERS: Yolo County Housing [formerly YCHA]

LOCATION: Winters, California- Central Valley

BIOREGION: Putah Creek /Cache Creek

WATERSHED: Sacramento River [YCHA 2013; Yolo County 2013]

4.1 CONTEXT FOR EL RIO VILLAS COMMUNITY

El Rio Villas community is public housing for low income to extremely low-income persons. As of this past April 2013, Masud Chaudry, the supervisor of YCH's Public Housing Portfolio states that only thirty-eight of one hundred and twenty-six families that currently live at El Rio Villas are farmworkers [Correspondence 2013]. The Yolo County Board of Supervisors oversees the YCH organization [Yolo County 2013]. In a letter dated August 1, 2013 sent by YCH Executive Director, Lisa Baker she explains to the public housing residents that issues of sequestration and financial implications for the low income properties of Yolo County. Baker specifically directs the following to the residents of El Rio Villas and other similar properties stating,

"If you live in our Rental Housing in Winters, Woodland, Knights Landing, Esparto, Yolo or

West Sacramento: Funding cuts have also impacted operations in our rental units.

HUD has prorated the amount of subsidy it pays to help you with the rent. We now receive approximately 83% of what it should be. HUD has also yet to award 2013 Capital Funds, which are used to make repairs to units and has cut the fund by about 50%. Yolo Housing now receives less funding for rehabilitation than it did 20 years ago when our units were newer. As a result, we have taken steps to provide the best product we can

within these limitations." [YCHA 2013] This correspondence speaks of the dire situation for this housing organization to supply public housing for the severely poor, with the impacts of budget cuts trickling down to the most fragile and disenfranchised communities.

Yolo County is one of the richest agricultural counties in the state of California. In fact, of its 653,549 acres, up to 46% of Yolo County's total acreage is devoted to agriculture. [Yolo County 2013] Yolo County farmers are greatly supported by over thirty years of agricultural expertise and technology provided by the University of California, Davis, a Mediterranean climate, and rich alluvial soils ideal for year round agricultural work. Throughout the county there are over eight hundred local farms, networks of farmer's markets and nineteen Community Supported Agriculture [CSAs] programs. The county is known for its exemplary land management practices and actively pursues the preservation of the county's agricultural heritage [Saylor Daily Democrat 2012]. Yolo County's agricultural and economic bounty ranges from tomatoes, walnuts, apricots, plums, rice, hay, to plant seeds and more. The county is also rich in ranching and is experiencing an increase in profitable vineyards. It has also become a well sought-out agritourism destination. All these economic endeavors bring substantial tax income and wealth to the county.

The residents that work in many of these agricultural professions are farmworkers; significant numbers are poor and immigrant workers. There are measures in place, such as the Housing Element Report that Yolo County provides detailing housing needs, income levels and other social conditions that may impact fair housing access and the contrast of poverty in this wealthy agricultural county. "Extremely low-income households typically consist of minimum wage workers, seniors on fixed incomes, disabled persons, and farmworkers. This income group is likely to live in overcrowded and substandard housing conditions." [County of Yolo 2030 GPHE, 2013].

Although Yolo County Housing provides some information about low-income families and farmworker housing, available data is not comprehensive for all of the unincorporated sectors of the county, where a good percentage of farmworker housing communities are located

[County of Yolo 2030 GPHE, 2013]. To better understand the complexities this specific community is confronted with for basic survival, more in-person research and interviews will need to be conducted.

4.2 SOCIAL CHARACTER OF EL RIO VILLAS COMMUNITY

El Rio Villas is a public housing complex with multi-room apartments, ranging from one to four bedroom units, for extremely low to low-income residents. [YCHA 2013] Although today it seems that a lower percentage of farmworkers live there than in the past, it still remains an important community to consider. Communities like El Rio Villas may experience substantial turnover in residential occupancy due to shifting levels of poverty, loss of work, changes in family dynamics and evictions.

The El Rio Villas is sited on an unincorporated section of Yolo County near the City of Winters. While migrant farmworker camps operate during the county's growing seasons, settled farm laborers [non-migrants] dwell at El Rio Villas and other housing developments in the county set aside for extremely low-income, households.

In the last five years, federal, state, and county budget crises have adversely affected efforts to improve the infrastructure and physical buildings of El Rio Villas and other low-income housing developments, throughout Yolo County. In October 2008, Yolo County Housing, YCH managing the property produced a Physical Needs Assessment Report [YCHA 2013]. In this report, El Rio Villas is reported as a property in great need of renovation, and photographs of the property confirm this conclusion. Such conditions, without the called-for renovations are unable to fulfill the intent of Yolo County Housing's mission statement, "Working together to provide quality affordable housing and community development services for all." [YCHA 2013]

4.3 ECOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF EL RIO VILLAS

El Rio Villas borders Putah Creek, part of the bioregions' watershed that has experienced significant change. The Putah Creek Council, along with a wide range of local partners, continues to accomplish some significant restoration and preservation of this local hydrologic asset. The work accomplished thus far, and the creek habitat's dynamic transformation can be modeled by public housing organizations.

Prior to being dammed, "Putah Creek and her flow [were] unpredictable at best, and destructive at worst. The creek had a vast riparian (stream-side) forest which extended miles in either direction, and its substrate was gravel and cobble…The [tendency] for Putah Creek to overflow her banks in a large storm made the flat, fertile farmland from Winters and east an ideal place to grow wheat… "[PCC 2013]. The land today, where El Rio Villas is sited, was former riparian streamside property, which included a forest of valley and coast oaks, interior live oaks, cottonwoods, alder, and willow [PCC 2013]. Prior to Anglo settlements, Putah Creek meandered seven miles to the east to the site of today's Village Homes in Davis, California, and continued through the land that is now the campus of the University of California at Davis. The creek flowed freely through swamp and tule basin, reaching the Sacramento River [UCD LIB 2013].

In the past twenty-five years, the Putah Creek Council and other local partners have worked extensively to restore and preserve the natural habitat of this essential corridor.

4.4 THE TLD FRAMEWORK

Given the qualities of El Rio Villas described above – a rich socio-cultural and ecological history—I believe that this community has potential to test out the new design framework that I am proposing in this thesis. El Rio Villas community represents the client-user that is severely voiceless and faceless—the client type important to acknowledge as landscape architecture design activists. The community, as many others disenfranchised ones, has assets to be uncovered and valued. Whether there are elder members, one-parent families, or a single farmworker living on site, each person has social values in their skills, heritage make-up, in their life-story, in their struggle and in their accomplishments. Collectively the community can have a voice and ideas for improvements and collaborations with local partners. Putah Creek's location in the "backyard" of the community land is an enormous asset. The creeks' regeneration and stewardship serves as outdoor classroom, as habitat and a sense of place-enhancing value, and importantly as inspiration. The location of the creek also ties the community to the greater bioregion. Heightened reciprocal actions and outcomes can be experienced by the human and nonhuman life of place.

OBSERVABLE SITE ASSETS

The El Rio Villas site exhibits great potential for better transportation, connections to nature, and connections for its residents to the City of Winters. Significant renovations of the El RioVillas community allows for an opportunity to re-frame the emphasis with a holistic Transformational Landscape Design approach. For example, the community may need to access the town center. As of now, the residents depend on a local bus, bicycling across or walking across a highway to reach the center for resources. Although public transportation is good, a local alternative energy shuttle could be used on more regular cycle. This opportunity serves the community, and the local economy stands to benefit also. Great opportunities for enhancement and functionality of place are present. The community as of now also has a chain-link fence that seems to demarcate one property from another, but all are part of the same community of El Rio Villas. A TLD alternative action could be a landscape-

planting screen. The screen could serve as a demarcation line, as buffer from winds and noise, as shade and restorative qualities. The planting screen could offer a new ecological habitat to a concrete and lawn plaza. Repairs and safety matters can be re-focused using local resources, native landscaping, and reclaimed materials, such as the local fruit and nut companies' old wooden palettes. A renovation process can occur, without repeating the normal renovations that tend to be cosmetic and may be ecologically and economically costly.

The marginalization of El Rio Villas is both physical and metaphorical. Extremely low-income families live there and it is a place where settled poor farmworkers and their families may be able to afford housing. El Rio Villas' physical housing structures are typical of California rural housing development located on unincorporated lands of the county. An eight-lane highway, Interstate 505, segregates the community from resources. The residents, as previously mentioned may walk through a steep uncovered, concrete and asphalt bypass, in order to reach the neighboring city's core. A typical pedestrian scene is a stay-at-home adult and child walking to school or the local health clinic. Summer temperatures of 100 degrees or higher are experienced on about 21days during the summer in this bioregion's climate [Thayer, 2003]. Putah Creek is located in very close proximity to El Rio Villas, yet not easily accessible for residents. One idea is to connect the community to the creek at the El Rio Villas site with a pedestrian bridge and trail. The new trail may be an alternative route for people to walk, bike, or take an alternative energy-wise tram to the core of Winters. Designing with ecology, considering all physical and social assets with a service directed design approach creates the crucial design activism to value and transform the marginalization of people and lands.

Renovations and new design plans can be accomplished by engaging YCH organization, the residents, City of Winters representatives, and other potential partners. Yolo County's agricultural businesses continue to grow, and the need for affordable housing specific to this population is an urgent matter [County of Yolo 2030CGPHE 2013]. To meet this specific challenge, perhaps a different clustering pattern or multi-level re-structuring can increase the density of units available for the countywide demand on affordable housing.

As of now the following are some of the social and physical assets that would sustain a sustainable design for El Rio Villas and would support the accompanying design activism.

SOCIAL ASSETS potentially applicable in this TLD framework are:

The El Rio Villa community participation; Yolo County Housing and HUD participation;

City of Winters participation and partnership; University of California, Davis Landscape Architecture may provide workshops and planning charrettes; Village Home community as model—ERV community could be invited to tour this still-inspiring neighboring community, for inspiration and to see the real potential attainable; key residents of Yolo County and innovating leaders such as Warren Roberts, Judy Corbett, Michael Corbett, Robert Thayer, and Don Saylor to name a few progressive planners, landscape architects, and activist politicians in the region; local restoration and land trust groups, such as Putah Creek Council as mentors and partnership and the Center for Land-Based Learning located in Winters and headed by Craig McNamara, President of the California Board of Food and Agriculture Farm to School Programs [CLBL 2013]

PHYSICAL ASSETS potentially beneficial to El Rio Villas community that exist and some that can be designed are: the site and its bioregion relationship; Putah Creek; native plants; solar energy potential; wind power potential; local climate; trails as habitat corridors and enhancement of sense of place for humans; and trails along creek connecting humans to nature and supporting better circulation for the community; and enhancing public access to public waters.

Once the ERV community, owners and interested partners are invited to participate in a new planning process, one that espouses the TLD framework, design activism is possible. Asset based design and ecological design can then contribute to an enhanced and integrated sense of

place. These actions could respond to the Yolo County Housing depleted financial state, the community's structures in need of renovations and repair, and significance, the community and individual voices can be hear

4.5 PLANNING AND DESIGN

The TLD framework includes the principal elements so far explored in this thesis: Asset Based Design approach, the practice of Ecological Design, and the power of Design Activism. The key function of the framework is its flexibility and requirement of inclusiveness of all assets, including human and non-human systems. In order to initiate work with a fragile and marginalized community, planners and designers must use subtlety, intuition, recognition and varied communication media as fundamental tools. Each project and each community exposes new opportunities that challenge our own skills and habits. As planners and designers, we are challenged to ask our clients, and client-users to be open-minded and to listen to one another, and we too can exhibit this respect and discipline.

SUMMARY

By applying the transformational Landscape Design framework jointly with the El Rio Villas community's vision, and the partnership of the public housing owners, I want to emphasize that the framework is adaptable and not formulaic. The uniqueness of each community, their assets, and partners are crucial and their collaboration is possible by the social and just role of landscape architects as design activists. Designers can lead and guide and yet allow the community and all the players to voice their ideas and respect their voices. Interactive participation is crucial because it allows for ideas to flow and for potential enhancements to sense of place to be imagined and visually expressed informing experiential qualities that are possible.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS

AND
CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

I started my thesis inquiry and exploration looking at landscape architecture, seeking to redefine its responsibility, and its leadership potential through the development of a new framework that considers sense of place, the value of an asset-based approach and the design activism philosophy. I embarked in this thesis to address these main questions:

How can the considerations of a site's assets— including both ecological processes and socio-cultural layers, challenge and inform the planning and design of farmworker communities?

a.] How can an Asset-Based Design approach enable a greater consideration of ecological functions on a site?

b.] How can an Asset-Based Design approach promote greater sensitivity toward the specific cultural values and sensibilities of those who dwell in a given site?

In the process of trying to address these questions I developed a new framework to articulate the value of an asset-based approach but that also reflects the transformational potential of adopting new ways to approach design.

Essentially I began this inquiry inspired by the design activism of Bryan Bell and Samuel Mockbee. These architects' compassion, expertise as artists and professionals, teachers and mentors captivated my curiosity to explore how landscape architects can contribute to difficult socio-

ecological conditions with a new transforming design framework. The literature I chose provided the richness of varied projects in design and planning practices. Exploring Sense of Place, Ecological Design and Asset Based Community Development has informed and inspired the formation of the Transformational Landscape Design approach and its corresponding framework. The fact that sense of place experiences can be positive or adverse contributes to the urgent need for the creators of built environments to act responsively and justly. Design Activism is especially powerful in serving disenfranchised communities and lands with design expertise, and as importantly, with a landscape architecture perspective.

Landscape architecture inherently responds to human conditions and ecological systems. I propose that this work can be accomplished with landscape architects' involvement in projects for the most disenfranchised communities—existing fragmented impoverished human and depleted ecological networks. Kretzman and McKnight's ABCD philosophy is fundamental in the development of the Transformational Landscape Design framework. The development of appropriate design approaches, through the incorporation of identified complex assets, can be used to create the catalyst needed to address issues of social and ecological degradation and marginalization.

Weaving together an Asset Based Design method, Ecological Design, and Design Activism emphasizes my intention with this thesis to illustrate the value of initiating projects from the richness of assets that exist in a community, and through this processes, provide opportunities for empowerment for these least served communities. The cases used as precedents and El Rio Villas were chosen for their specific potential to demonstrate the value of this Transformational Landscape Design Framework. These projects are exemplary models for the opportunities provided through the proposed framework. Each project faces difficult challenges but hope and hard work are vital. The challenge in the case of the Butterfly House was a reluctant client, Alabama's elderly rural poor. The Puyallup Longhouse challenge may have been working with Salish Native American people who have been neglected from a historical past perspective. The Village Homes project was challenged by the immense

novelty in regenerating American community development. There were skeptics that could not envision pedestrian/bike-dominated aspects, the back to carports, alternative energy development and success [Francis, 2002]. These ideas and plans were proposed in a university agrarian town. Finally the El Rio Villas public housing community's challenge may be a skeptical attitude yielded by the habitual neglect of an extremely poor farmworker community located in a wealthy agricultural county and region of the United States. The larger community and the public housing agencies may have real concerns of how these changes can happen. Their mindset is fixed on past behavior and an attitude that it is impossible. TLD with a focus on asset-based design perspective raises an important fact; there are assets to be revealed or that have been habitually overlooked. TLD framework is crucial in its implementation and its potential to empower the voiceless and faceless.

Inspired by some great activist designers featured in the literature review, I chose a contemporary marginalized farmworker community – El Rio Villa -- to explore my thesis questions. Nestled in the North Central Valley of California, El Rio Villas is a sound pilot project site to test out the proposed Transformational Design framework because of its compelling contradictions of place and economy. As I posed in my critical stance, I look at the degradation and pollution of lands and waterways as a careless act, similar to the development of socially and economically fragmented communities developed for farmworkers. The restoration of Putah Creek is a testament and inspiration to regenerate an ignored community and explore the ecological integration potential such a site offers. The past practices throughout the Yolo County watershed caused the destruction of Putah Creek's habitats for salmon, trout and other living organisms. This destruction came about through damming the source of this watershed [Thayer, 2013]. Economic industries, housing developments and the dominance of leveling the native rolling hills for agriculture have contributed to the degradation and buried aspects of the creek. These ecological assets can be regenerated within the TLD framework as a guiding reference.

Much like the natural, physical assets of El Rio Villa, there are important social assets in this community. Importantly, the outcomes of regenerating the site's ecology can benefit the social networks too. Healthier environments and lands lead to improved air and water qualities for

all bio- forms; less-harmful pesticide-driven farming can also be developed and provides improved economics for both employees and the companies that thrive in Yolo County. Social and ecological assets need to be recognized and highly valued from the onset and not, as an after-thought once degradation is apparent. Past lessons are of great value and serve as social assets in themselves. A degraded landscape's condition also capable of story telling. The TLD framework becomes a catalyst for regional planning and for local community enclaves, such as El Rio Villas' renovations and/or redevelopment.

Through the development of the Transformational Landscape Design framework, with its integration of the principles and processes of ecological design and design activism, an asset based design perspective can transform old practices into new hybrid responses to design. The concept that no action that we take is temporary in its consequences comes to the forefront. As designers of built environments, we are called to serve with new perspectives, with inclusive, integrated methods, and with a guiding ecology in partnership. The proposed Transformational Landscape Design framework responds comprehensively to a sustainable and an enhanced sense of place.

I have argued that landscape professionals have a pivotal place in leading with a new TLD framework, specific to marginalized communities. Regretfully, the political and economic systems in place create barriers and challenges to design activist work. Other challenges come from social norms and the socio-political make-up of farmworkers. Many immigrant farm laborers come from nations where they do not have voices, and many are monolingual speaking different languages. The learning curve for all those involved in these transformational design efforts, and the community's trust level may be an enormous challenge that will be confronted. Yet, as stewards of the land and of communities, and as keen observers of place and its ecological layers, landscape architects have great potential to lead professionally. Landscape architecture, at is core, always needs to respond to nature within ecological and social parameters. Social and ecological systems interrelate in a cyclical pattern. The

health and viability of each system is essential. As landscape architects, our profession is socially and ecologically informed and inspired. The users are both bio-systems and social systems each reliant on the other.

The Transformational Landscape Design framework offers a responsive way for landscape architecture professionals to actively contribute to the development of planning and design for marginalized communities and lands. The framework I propose in this thesis can prompt planners and landscape architects to engage more effectively in design activism through the recognition of sense of place and the social and physical assets of any community. When undertaking new projects, design teams and community members can be encouraged to work together to integrate the complex systems of social and physical/ecological assets. The cultural heritage; the history of the local cultural community; the emergence of a creek, for example, that resounds with the waters of the greater watershed, all become key parts of holistic planning and design evolution. Built environments must possess integrity and a dynamic nature. The inclusion of complex bio-systems and complex socio-cultural systems may inspire stewardship and ownership.

The TLD focused on Ecological Design promotes greater acknowledgement and respect of the physical assets within a community. The ecological systems of place are exposed and play a crucial role for the entire network of function and experience. Issues of the local economy, health, and skill development practices all are part of socio-cultural systems that can develop sustainably. Great value is placed on what exists locally and what the community can contribute. For example, in terms of physical assets, low energy use can be developed through ecological design inspiration, such as redesigning inclusion of natural light exposure inside dwelling structures. On-site energy can be developed and collected through passive solar panels. Storm water runoff and issues of water scarcity can be resolved through the landscape planting choices and the use of porous hard surfaces that will allow water percolation.

Regarding social assets, attention to socio- cultural systems can reveal new design approaches. , For example, the recognition and celebration of ancient practices, as can be found in some farmworker communities, can enhance sense of place and profoundly connects human and non-human life. Moreover, Informed client-users, who express themselves both individually and collectively, consequently can become empowered through a collective voice. Through an awareness and understanding of the bio-systems, community individuals and the collective can be inspired to care for, respect, and appreciate all the contributions that are possible through unique assets of place. Importantly, the health and integrity of place can emerge and be sustained by the enhancement of each complex bio-system and through the value of local cultures.

Enriched experiences and Sense of Place among local community members through the exposure of the varied human and non-human life systems is possible in this transformational approach. Exposure comes through awareness and re-emergence of degraded systems (both human and natural) that are present on a site. Defining roles, processes, and the mutual impact of people and place may shed light on community potentials. Consequently these actions can provide regenerated systems that transform quality of life for improved sustainability for individual and collective functions, human and non-human.

The Transformational Landscape Design approach applied with Design Activism promotes greater sensitivity toward the specific cultural values and sensibilities of those who dwell in a given site. This can be accomplished through the inherent value of accepting diversity and understanding its rich contribution to the social framework. The knowledge, experiences and perspectives of each person, and the collective voices are equally valued and given an audience.

THESIS SCOPE AND POTENTIAL

As I conclude this thesis, I want to share my aspirations for its continued relevance and utility. I plan to present this thesis' primary points to El Rio Villas' farmworker community in Yolo County, California. This work would also be of use for other fragmented communities in Yolo County.

As a designer and idea generator, I hope my thoughts, concerns and advocacy for design activism and a Transformational Landscape Design Framework will stimulate other landscape architecture students and multi-disciplinary professionals to plan and design projects with the components described in this thesis. As a final note, I plan to create an audio/visual version of this thesis so that my colleagues and potential client-users who are non-English speakers, or not literate, may also hear my activist voice.

Through my thesis work and subject choice, I have embarked on a journey that skeptics may not fully understand. Within this thesis development and academic reviews, it is quite apparent to me that many designers cannot comprehend the value of working in a new way as I propose. Understandably and respectfully I can appreciate their skepticism, though I am convinced: landscape architecture is an amazing and powerful profession that can better initiate positive change through the proposed framework. Social and environmental justice issues have been visible throughout my entire life. Ecological degradation is global and local with immense impacts and consequences at each scale. The architecture profession, as Samuel Mockbee believed, is a service and humane in nature [Rural Studios 2013]. Each life form depends on the other as designers depend on other disciplines' expertise and collaboration. Landscape Architecture Revolutions are important movements; we are now in

the midst of a Green Sustainable Movement. I contend that a Humane and Green Sustainable one that is just and inclusive is a necessary next step. On my future professional journey, I will carry with me a satchel with the TLD, and the literary and creative richness I found through my research. It nourishes and nudges me outside to make a difference and attempt in the least and ultimately to transform the injustices and degradation I witness in the world as a designer, artist and human being. As a respected mentor, and dear friend Leslie Bowman Marcus taught me, “Make it happen!”

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