Plural Planning at Multiple Scales: From Local Communities to Statewide Change

Cheryl Doble, Maren King

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ABSTRACT This case study examines an eight-year transdisciplinary action research initiative involving an academic planning and design research center and a state agency working in collaboration with other state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and communities. The primary goal of this collaboration was to help communities across New York State change the way they engage in community planning so as to improve the likelihood that investments of people, time, and financial resources result in revitalization. Through a series of linked projects, the questions addressed by the cases shifted in scale from individual community-based projects, to a series of demonstration projects in multiple communities, to a statewide community education program. Outcomes included policy and program changes at the state level as well as positive change and action for individual communities. The collaborative process presented challenges as it grew in scale and complexity. A discussion of the lessons learned reflects on the importance of acknowledging the effect of changes occurring over long-term collaboration, establishing a collaborative framework, and recognizing differences in mission and culture.

KEYWORDS Plural planning, transdisciplinary action research, community education, academic/state agency partnerships

INTRODUCTION

As in many northeastern states, New York communities are struggling in the face of economic challenges, aging infrastructure, and changing demographics. Downstate communities grapple with growth management and development pressures, while upstate communities experience the decline of a manufacturing-based economy, deteriorating community centers, and sprawling patterns of development.

Several New York State agencies and a State University of New York (SUNY) academic planning and design program engaged in a multiyear collaboration to help change the way communities across the state engaged in the planning process. The purpose of this joint effort was to improve the likelihood that investments of people, time, and financial resources would result in the implementation of projects, programs, or policies. The collaboration effected changes in statewide policy and programs. Collaborators learned much about differences in institutional cultures and ways of working as well as about how these differences affect the process of planning and design. Through retrospective analysis, this case study demonstrates the lessons learned about mediating, negotiating, or otherwise surmounting these differences to achieve shared goals and provides new understandings that can help establish more effective partnerships between state agencies and academic programs.

Organizing an Engaged Academic Practice

The Department of Landscape Architecture at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) has a 30-year tradition of offering landscape architectural studio instruction providing pro bono assistance to communities. Over the past decade, the faculty has shifted strategically toward more engaged academic/community partnerships and adopted a service-learning pedagogy in its design studios.

Service-learning facilitates student participation in organized, sustained activity related to the academic program and the needs of a community. Student reflection, a critical component of service-learning, integrates academic learning and societal realities to stimulate personal growth (Bringle and Hatcher 1995). In 2000, the department established the Center for Community Design Research (the Center) to manage technical assistance requests, coordinate service-learning studios and research activities directly addressing the needs of New York State communities, and build stronger academic/community partnerships. This reorganization enabled the faculty to integrate teaching and research through a community service-based academic practice.

Statewide Concerns about the Condition of Communities

In 1999, the lieutenant governor of New York convened an interagency task force to undertake a multifaceted and interdisciplinary study of the critical issues facing New York State communities (Donohue and Treadwell 2001). The task force held 10 roundtable discussions across the state so as to understand better the challenges faced by communities in various regions and to

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identify the issues they faced. The task force also sought to uncover best planning and development practices in the communities achieving success.

Invited to speak at the Central New York Roundtable, Ross Whaley, then president of SUNY-ESF, chose instead to allocate that time to a presentation by the Department of Landscape Architecture. Center faculty members presented a case study illustrating the potential of an academic and community partnership to foster community participation in local planning.

At the conclusion of the state roundtable, the task force presented its report—*State and Local Governments Partnering for a Better New York* (Donohue and Treadwell 2001)—with 41 recommendations for transforming planning in New York State. Recommendation 11 highlighted the work of the Center and recommended that the state "engage professional expertise found at State University of New York Colleges and Universities" (Donohue and Treadwell 2001). A state agency director later commented, "We hoped that we could focus the intellectual resources within SUNY on the problems that we were facing in our communities. We also realized that SUNY could be an economic engine in the 64 communities where they (*sic*) have a campus" (DCR Division Director 2007).

Partnerships were the central message of the report, which challenged state agencies to explore new ways of collaborating to provide community support. Both the chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture at SUNY-ESF and the director of the Center were invited to represent SUNY, a recognized partner in community revitalization, on the task force. This led to the formation of a partnership, now in its 10th year, of the New York Department of State's Division of Coastal Resources (DCR), SUNY-ESF, and the Center.

Establishing a Conceptual Framework for Case Study Evaluation

The collaboration of the Center, DCR, and other organizations and communities produced a series of temporally and geographically nested projects in a variety of organizational combinations. To understand and evaluate the thread linking this set of collaborative projects, two complementary approaches are particularly relevant. The first, transdisciplinary action research (TDAR), is a conceptual framework helping to organize and consider relationships and outcomes of a multiphase, multicollaborator project (Stokols 2006). The second is the theory and practice of plural planning at the foundation of the Center's mission, which attracted the DCR to its work.

Transdisciplinary Action Research. Transdisciplinary collaborations, unlike multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary projects, encourage participants from various disciplines, organizations, and sectors to develop a shared conceptual framework to guide their work beyond the typical disciplinary boundaries to construct breakthroughs in theory, practice, or policy (Stokols 2006). This feature of transdisciplinary collaborations is especially relevant as society faces complex environmental and social problems that require new and transformative solutions (Healey 1997). Stokols's (2006, 65) TDAR framework defines three types of transdisciplinary collaboration:

1. Collaboration across multiple scientific disciplines
2. Coalitions of academic researchers and community members
3. Intersectoral partnerships among government agencies, universities, and community organizations

The number and diversity of partners, geographic scale, and time frames differentiate these collaborations. Stokols (2006) maintains that while there have been separate studies of the three types of collaboration, less is known about linked collaborations involving sequential phases that focus on the same set of issues. These linked cycles are important to translating initial research into public policy, and Stokols suggests that research into the nature of these cyclical shifts is necessary to strengthen coordination of the several levels of collaboration.

By Stokols's definition, the project undertaken by the Center cycled between two types of transdisciplinary collaboration. The first involved the coalition of academic practitioners and community practitioners representing diverse professional and lay perspectives on community Vision Planning projects.[1] The second comprised intersectoral partnerships involving organizations, agencies, and institutions at local, regional, and state jurisdictional levels that shared a common goal—in this case encouraging a planning process leading to greater community capacity and project implementation.

Stokols's (2006) framework of collaboration types and his description of their shared and distinct characteristics provided a strategy for analyzing and understanding the activities of the Center's projects. This case study focuses on the project processes and the shifts occurring between the two types of collaboration represented in the various projects.

Collaborative and plural planning. Stokols's action research framework invites partners from various disciplines and sectors to work together to answer common questions (Stokols 2006; Stringer 2007). This approach, at the heart of the Center's practice, facilitates the collaboration of students, faculty, and community in investigating community-identified issues. Such academic/community partnerships build on the principles and practices of community design established in the United States in the mid-1960s (Hester 1989; Schuman 2006). Community participation is a defining characteristic of this work, and designers and planners have developed specialized methods to facilitate public dialogue in planning and design processes (Hester 1990; Sanoff 1999). Through their participation, community residents take ownership of the resulting plan and develop leadership capacity to implement plan recommendations (Arnstein 1969; Healey 1997; Hester 1989).

The use of the word *plural* to describe the community planning and design process recognizes that communities are not homogenous groups. A plural process, in which community members plan in a collaborative manner, must recognize, negotiate, and resolve controversy and tensions that come from differences in perspective and power (Forester 1999; Healey 1997; Schneekloth and Shibley 1995). The Center's faculty recognizes the value of uncovering, exploring, and "confirming and interrogating" differences and of finding resolution in the development of a community plan using participatory methods (Schneekloth and Shibley 1995, 8). As with transdisciplinary collaboration, the plural planning process is open and respectful and encourages dialogue and effective communication among participants. Following is an examination of the effectiveness of the plural planning principles used in this case study.

Methods used in evidence collection and analysis. The authors of this paper, as part of the Center, were continuously involved in the projects discussed in this case study, which is a narrative of partnership and retrospective evaluation rather than a study undertaken by an independent researcher (Yin 2009). Its intent is to measure the success of various processes of transdisciplinary collaboration in formulating and implementing community planning policies by evaluating interpersonal and interorganizational collaboration and to describe outcomes and tangible products. The authors used multiple sources of evidence so as to represent fairly the viewpoints of the primary agency partner, of the other participants, and of the Center.[2]

Because the relationship of the academic practice and agency partner changed over time and other collaborators entered and left the series of interrelated processes (Stokols 2006), the authors documented and analyzed a chronology of events in anticipation of discovering a sequence of cause and effect (Yin 2009). This chronological approach provided a structure for interviewing the DCR leadership and staff, who initially refined the project timeline, identified milestones or significant events, and described aspects of the story important to them.[3] Before interviewing DCR staff

members, the authors performed the same activities. Consequently, the themes and concepts structuring the evaluation come from the events and milestones identified as significant by representatives of the DCR and the Center and from the literature on collaboration and transdisciplinarity (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

Organization of Case Study Presentation and Discussion

The case study contains four sections. The first three describe the evolution and structure of the eight-year engagement—the purpose, research questions, and process of each phase. The fourth section includes findings and lessons learned from the multiple projects involved.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR COLLABORATION

The DCR administers the statewide Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP), which provides expertise and financial resources to help communities plan and implement waterfront revitalization strategies. To develop a better understanding of the potential value of a facilitated plural planning process, the DCR funded the Center to help the DCR address the following research questions:

1. How can facilitated community participation in the planning process lead to development of a shared community vision and goals that promote action leading to implementation and community revitalization?
2. How can New York State agencies collaborate to help municipalities achieve their vision, improve their environment, and strengthen their economies?
3. What SUNY resources might contribute to community revitalization and the protection of local environmental and cultural resources?

The Center approached these questions through three related tasks:

1. A studio-based service-learning collaboration with three waterfront communities
2. A survey of SUNY programs and centers providing community service
3. An exploratory meeting of state agency and academic service program directors

Testing the Water: The Lake Ontario Waterfront Initiatives

In spring 2001, faculty members and students in landscape architecture collaborated with three Lake Ontario waterfront communities through a service-learning studio. The DCR wanted to determine whether facilitated plural planning might help the communities identify and address critical planning issues. Student teams worked with each community, conducting a series of three workshops to help residents articulate a shared vision and goals, explore and evaluate planning alternatives, and establish action steps to accomplish their vision. Reports and presentations were prepared to document the work.

Following the studio, the DCR convened regional state agency representatives in Syracuse to attend community presentations. Each community presented its vision, goals, and priority action steps. Agency representatives and community leaders discussed the community visions and identified resources that might advance priority actions in each community. Representatives later commented that the clarity of the community presentations and the ensuing discussion helped to confirm the priority actions set by each community and identify available resources within the agencies. Community leaders were empowered by the meeting and left with a clear understanding of how the state agencies might assist them as well as of the actions necessary to receive that support. Within a week, the communities identified the priority projects to be undertaken by SUNY students over the summer (Figure 1).

The DCR director was pleased with the communities' progress and the outcomes of the community-interagency meeting. At the close of the meeting he

Figure 1. Participants examined and discussed refined design studies prepared by ESF students and displayed during community events at the Summer Institute of the Lake Ontario Waterfront Initiatives.

asked, "How can we accomplish this in 1,300 communities?" (DCR Division Director 2007). The Center reflected on this question several years later and realized that the commitment to answering this question drove much of the subsequent work.

Convening the SUNY Centers and Programs

A larger unanswered question remained: "How do we engage and integrate resources across the SUNY system?" The State University of New York has 64 campuses. In their home communities, these campuses provide important economic and intellectual capital. The SUNY system provides a distribution of discipline-specific expertise across the state. Landscape architecture programs are located in Syracuse and Ithaca (Cornell), architecture and planning programs in Buffalo, and a planning program in Albany. Understanding the resources of individual campuses and developing a framework for collaboration within SUNY and with state agencies presented a challenge.

After conducting a survey of SUNY-wide centers and departments providing community outreach and service, the Center created the *SUNY Sourcebook* (Center, 2001), a directory of service activities and contact information for 84 departments and centers on 30 SUNY campuses. The sourcebook was distributed statewide, and placed online with links from state agency websites, enabling communities and state agencies to contact potential academic collaborators (Figure 2).

In the fall of 2001, the directors of these departments and centers were invited to participate in a SUNY program, *Dialogues through the Disciplines*, fostering interdisciplinary faculty dialogue on topics of statewide importance. Representatives of the DCR described current planning initiatives and invited collaboration from SUNY. The Center facilitated activities exploring ways to encourage collaboration among SUNY and state agencies, resulting in the creation of a steering committee to organize a collaborative SUNY Network around identified projects. Five SUNY programs representing the disciplines of landscape architecture, architecture, and planning[4] formed a consortium to review the DCR work program and discuss how the programs might collaborate with the DCR.

Outcomes

The Lake Ontario Waterfront Initiative allowed the DCR to observe the application of vision planning in three communities and to explore the potential for academic-interagency cooperation at the regional level. A DCR program manager later confirmed the exploratory nature of these community projects: "You were part of a test as to what the vision process really was so that we could actually specify that in our work programs later. This was very successful" (DCR Assistant Bureau Chief 2007). The three projects provided an opportunity for the faculty members to examine

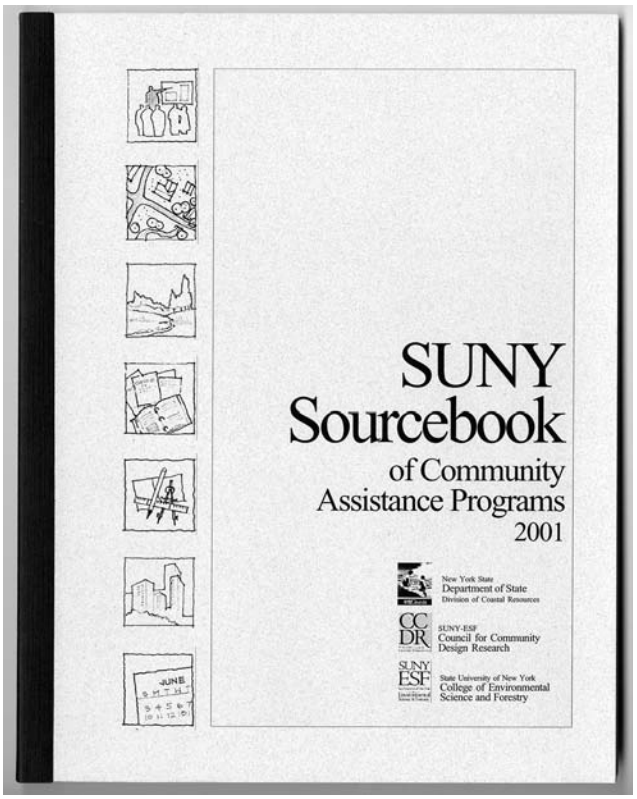

Figure 2. The CCDR prepared the *SUNY Sourcebook* which documents the SUNY programs and centers providing community service and outreach.

and document their process and to refine the Center's service-learning pedagogy.

After the community agency meeting, the Center initiated a summer institute with DCR funding and hired students to help the three communities advance their priority projects. Community outcomes included an intermunicipal agreement to manage planning, review development, and cooperative projects. Using studio reports and drawings, the communities developed grant proposals for the funding of major recreation and streetscape projects (Figure 3).

There were also changes in the state agencies and SUNY system. The DCR used the process documented by the Center to develop the planning work program and formally required vision planning as a first step in the preparation of comprehensive plans funded by the LWRP. The SUNY Network connected faculty members with common interests across campuses and improved community access to SUNY resources. Landscape architecture faculty members at SUNY-ESF and Cornell University offered combined studios with the DCR. This multicampus partnership continues to support service-learning research, connecting faculties on a national and international level.

COMMUNITY CENTER DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

In 2002, the DCR chaired the Community Center Revitalization Committee (CCRC), established to develop innovative approaches to agency collaboration in the revitalization of community centers. Building on the success of the waterfront communities, the committee organized demonstration projects in 12 communities to explore three research questions:

1. How can existing resources be coordinated in a manner that enables catalytic change in a community?
2. How can agencies, organizations, and academic partners collaborate to provide leadership and expertise to help communities build local planning capacity and bring about the revitalization of their community centers?
3. How can agency practices, policies, and programs that support community planning and implementation be transformed by the lessons learned from this collaboration?

Working with the Communities

The location and size of the 12 demonstration communities varied from large jurisdictions in the New York

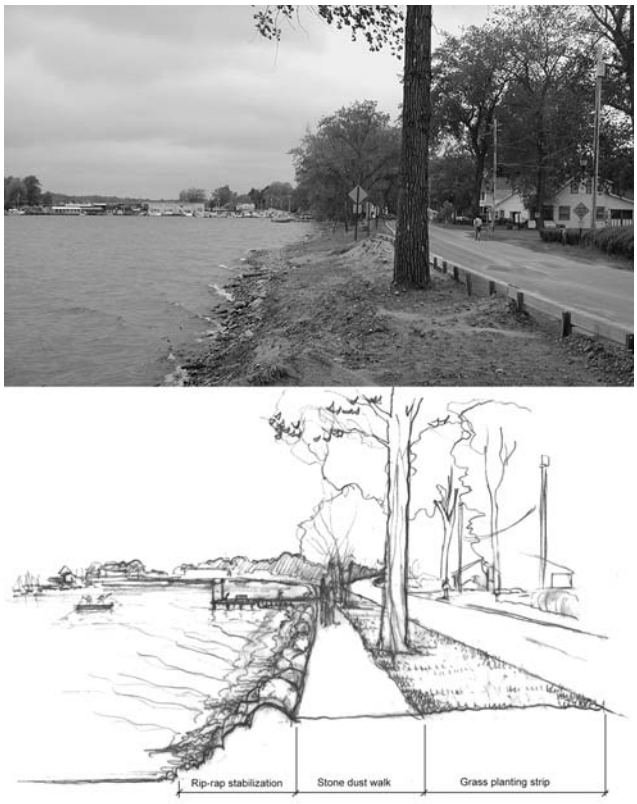

Figure 3. Implemented design projects proposed during the Lake Ontario Waterfront Initiatives project included shoreline stabilization and a path between the beach and the downtown district in Sodus Point.

City metropolitan area to midsize upstate cities and rural hamlets. Based on each individual community's planning needs and its proximity to the participating SUNY campuses, staff members from the Center and the DCR paired the SUNY design programs with demonstration communities. The DCR leadership viewed SUNY participation in the demonstration projects as a continuation of an experiment that began in the waterfront communities: "We had 12 test beds, and we wanted to see how SUNY could perform in different situations" (DCR Assistant Bureau Chief, 2007).

The academic design programs collaborated with four communities and nonprofit organizations, and private consultants worked with the other eight communities. The architecture and landscape architecture faculties worked with local leaders to establish community advisory committees, and with local partners to organize and facilitate community planning and design workshops. Within each community, residents constructed shared understandings of local issues, created a collective vision for the future, and defined collaborative action steps to accomplish that vision. Faculty members and students developed new participatory methods, experimented with graphic strategies, and elevated the quality of the academic discourse and documents produced by the collaboration (Horrigan 2006) (Figure 4).

Building Local Capacity

Over the first year of the project, the DCR conducted four training sessions for community leaders, planning staff members, and volunteers from the 12 demonstration communities, to build leadership capacity, enhance community understanding of the planning process, and increase public participation in planning. At these sessions, participants shared individual experiences, identified critical community issues, and discussed their progress. Experienced instructors introduced best practices in leadership and organizational management specifically related to community planning and downtown revitalization.

Learning from the Process

The DCR convened the agencies and nonprofit organizations participating in each of the 12 demonstration projects in a workshop to define best practices for identifying planning issues and for improving and better supporting state programs and policies designed to enhance community design, planning, and implementation. Workshop sessions focused on

Figure 4. In working with the 12 demonstration communities, SUNY faculty members and students developed and implemented multiple strategies to promote understanding and engagement. These included (from top): matrices to strengthen community understanding of relationships; modeling to allow community members to create and visualize waterfront alternatives; photo collages to present possibilities, stimulate discussion, and develop alternatives; and documenting process and planning recommendations on banners displayed in the community.

evaluating four broad topics specific to community center revitalization:

1. Design and planning
2. Economy and markets
3. Smart growth
4. Community organization

DCR invited four organizations, including the Center, to prepare a paper summarizing critical issues relating to an assigned topic, distribute the paper to participants to frame discussion during the workshop, and facilitate a specific session at the workshop. During the daylong workshop, agency representatives, community leaders, and nonprofit partners discussed critical issues, identified best practices, and developed recommendations based on their experience in the demonstration projects. The facilitating organizations then prepared summary reports for their workshop sessions.

Each of the four organizations signed an individual memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the DCR describing its scope of work and compensation. While the DCR specified a common format for each issue paper, there was little communication or coordination among the four groups in paper preparation.

DCR staff members involved in reviewing the papers assumed various evaluative perspectives, and the review process did little to improve the integration of the framing papers. According to a DCR program manager involved in the review of the papers, "We went into this trying to do a number of things, which were never clearly defined. [The process] had some success, it had some benefits, but I don't think that it ever achieved what it was supposed to" (DCR Assistant Bureau Chief 2007).

In the end, each group approached paper preparation from a different perspective, and there was little consistency among the papers, workshop formats, or summary reports. The four groups submitted materials that did not integrate easily into a useful document, and DCR staff hired a professional writer to prepare an integrated summary.

Outcomes

The community demonstration projects. An architecture studio and two landscape architecture studios successfully facilitated community participation in a range of planning contexts and complexities. Faculty and students worked within the newly established vision planning framework program that evolved at the DCR following the Lake Ontario Waterfront Initiative projects. These were the first projects in the state-funded LWRP program to use the vision planning process and its documentation, and they serve as models for communities currently entering the program. Pointing to the value of this work, a DCR program manager stated, "The products that we hold out as good examples of vision planning are the early ones. If someone asks what a good vision is, we use the Watertown example"[5] (DCR Assistant Bureau chief 2007).

Faculty members, students, and community partners shared lessons learned through presentations at several statewide conferences. The value of the collaborative learning among academic and community participants, the respect held between the two sets of participants, and the quality of the planning documents emanating from the partnerships confirm the transformational potential of academic/community collaboration.

Community training sessions. Participant surveys confirmed the value of the training sessions, describing them as informative and as an opportunity to network and celebrate success. Community leaders emerging from the demonstration projects noted that the understanding and support gained through the program gave them confidence to perform their roles in the partnership. Experiences from these sessions led the DCR to implement training programs in all of its projects financed by the Environmental Protection Fund.

Learning from the process. While the issue papers and workshop summaries did not produce a coherent document, they did capture innovative practices and recommendations that the DCR continues to implement.

DEVELOPMENT OF STATEWIDE PROGRAMS TO BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY

The experiences of the Lake Ontario Waterfront Initiative and community demonstration projects led the DCR director to develop an educational program providing knowledge and guidance to communities struggling to complete planning studies and implement priority projects. Because of its demonstrated capacity to integrate service-learning teaching experiences into community planning and its long-term collaboration with the DCR, the Center was a logical choice to work with the DCR to develop this program.

Two questions guided the development of the community education program:

1. How can the leadership and expertise present in the state agency be extended to build community capacity to guide planning and accomplish revitalization?
2. How can the process and lessons learned in the demonstration communities be delivered to 1,300 communities?

Framing the Approach

The draft proposal for the DCR and the Center detailed the goal of establishing "an integrated and long-term outreach and education program that draws on the experience and academic resources of SUNY ESF and other academic partners, in collaboration with the New York State Department of State and other state and local public and private partners." The program was to provide training workshops to facilitate local leadership

in two DCR-funded programs—the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) and the Brownfield Opportunity Area Program.

After several meetings, the leadership of the DCR and the Center developed a guiding outline for each educational session, including the educational goals, desired outcomes, content, and audience. This approach combined the DCR's knowledge of the grant program requirements with the Center's understanding of educational methods and content. The program involved an action learning approach. Following their mastery of specific topics, workshop participants were to apply their newly gained knowledge to actual community projects. A notebook with reference materials and workbook activities would help workshop participants share the educational program with other members of the project team.[6]

Structuring the Process

Despite the preparation of a draft proposal, a MOU between the Department of State and the Center was necessary to establish contractual terms, project scope, and funding. In the scope of services, the Center detailed a three-step process for the development of each training session. DCR review was to occur at the end of each step to avoid major revision and rewriting. Development and approval of the MOU by college and agency representatives required 18 months. The initial 4-page proposal referencing the responsibilities of the Center and the DCR became an 18-page agreement and scope of services detailing the Center's responsibilities as consultant to the DCR.

The leadership envisioned that a team of authors would develop each training session, an approach providing opportunity for transdisciplinary collaboration among outside experts, the DCR, and the Center. The Center prepared a list of qualifications and necessary expertise and selected six authors to work with the Center and DCR staff.

To help authors prepare consistent and high-quality materials, the Center prepared an author's guide describing the desired educational approach, presentation, and notebook templates as well as a development and evaluation guide outlining the content of the presentations and activities for each educational session.

The Writing and Review Process

The process of developing the community education program was more complex and time consuming than either the Center or the DCR had anticipated. Early in the process, the DCR program managers decided their staff was too busy to participate on the writing teams. This decision required modification of the envisioned, collaborative, program-development approach. Full realization of the intent and promise of the initial approach did not occur. In addition, the empirical knowledge of the DCR staff was weighted insufficiently, a loss not recognized until later in the review process. While all of the outside authors possessed the necessary expertise, they possessed variable experience with DCR programs. The lack of DCR staff participation on the writing teams made preparation of the sessions difficult. In every case, the Center faculty and staff had to complete the training modules, even those meant for preparation primarily by outside authors.

The DCR process of reviewing draft documents was cumbersome and lengthy, revealing differences in approach among the DCR project managers and disagreements among reviewers about message and content. With a limited number of staff members available to work on the project, the scheduling and review of draft materials was challenging. The DCR's LWRP program manager agreed that expectations and schedules were unrealistic: "I think that everyone had an expectation that things had to meet that deadline . . . so schedules were set probably when schedules shouldn't have been set" (DCR Assistant Bureau Chief 2007).

It took three years and many hours of research, writing, rewriting, talking, and negotiating to move from the development of the guiding outlines to the delivery of education sessions on a regularly scheduled basis. The process required learning about the institutional culture, values, and ways of working in the various DCR

Figure 5. As part of each community education seminar, participants engaged in hands-on activities through which they applied concepts and processes introduced in the lectures.

programs as much as it involved the development of topics and content for the training modules.

Outcomes

The DCR received the community education program late in September 2007. Through October 2008, more than 500 community volunteers, municipal staff, elected officials, and consultants attended sessions totaling 18 days. Program participants evaluated their involvement in the program in a positive manner and were supportive of its continuation (Figure 5). The few negative comments indicated a wish that the program had occurred earlier. Some participants felt they possessed enough experience to teach the courses themselves. The DCR leadership has since received positive feedback from staff members working with communities that participated in the sessions.

LESSONS LEARNED—EVALUATING THE TRANSDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION

Many positive outcomes and products have resulted from the collaboration of the Center, the DCR, and partnering organizations (Figure 6). Intersectoral collaboration allowed the Center to test the application of various planning approaches within the context of DCR programs, enabling the agency to revise programs based on known outcomes. Working across geographic scale, the Center's initial and independent projects with individual communities have expanded to include interagency collaboration producing systemwide changes at the state level. Vision planning has become a recommended step in the preparation of all comprehensive planning projects funded by the DCR; continuation of grant funding is now based on the successful completion of progressive steps in the program. A statewide community education program designed to strengthen local leadership in guiding community planning has been implemented. Lessons learned include that the recognition of shifts occurring in the TDAR cycle, that establishing guidelines for a responsive, collaborative framework, and that knowing the partners to be involved in a TDAR collaboration are important to its success.

Recognizing Shifts in the Transdisciplinary Cycle

While the major partners (the Center and the DCR) remained constant, the transition from academic/community collaboration to intersectoral partnership resulted in increased complexity, altering the nature of the collaboration in significant ways. As the projects progressed from simple to more complex relationships, the characteristics and dynamics of the partnership changed. As suggested by Stokols (2006), the coordination constraints and challenges facing this collaborative partnership increased substantially as the scale and scope of the projects expanded. The Center underestimated the significance of these changes and did not adjust working practices to accommodate them.

Collaborative leadership. Through the project, leadership in both the DCR and the Center continued to believe in the value and purpose of collaboration. Much of this continued trust among partners was based upon

respect developed through previous professional relationships (Shaw 2004; Stokols 2006). The partnership grew, however, to include additional stakeholders who did not necessarily share the commitment to intersectoral collaboration or have the capacity to provide effective collaborative leadership. In several instances, first in the development of issue papers for the community center demonstration projects and later in the preparation of the community education program, the organizations' leaders had to require reluctant staff members to continue the work. As the partnership grew, the need for collaborative leadership increased; the development of an active leadership team representing partnering organizations might have helped reduce conflict (Linden 2002; Stokols 2006).

Compromised mission. Initially, the Center's primary responsibility was to the communities with which it was working, but as the projects progressed, its responsibility shifted to a state agency. The Center employs specific methods to facilitate collaboration when working with communities, but it did not have an effective strategy to facilitate the development of collaborative relationships among state agencies and an ever-expanding group of partners. While the partners shared similar goals, their various perspectives were never fully recognized, negotiated, or resolved (Linden 2002). In long-term partnerships, regular meetings to discuss accommodations for shifting relationships and roles among partners are essential. Participants should examine how such shifts might affect the mission, goals, and work of the partners.

A shifting framework. At various stages in the project, the partners had various roles, levels of engagement, and relationships with each other. This affected allocation of resources, lines of communication, and the effectiveness of the collaboration. The straightforward relationships of the early collaboration became complex contractual relationships limiting the flexibility necessary for transdisciplinary collaboration. In one community, strong local leadership and effective

1999

- NY Lt. Governor convenes Task Force and statewide discussions

2000

- SUNY ESF Center for Community Design Research established

2001

- *State & Local Governments Partnering for a Better New York* released by the Lt. Governor
- Lake Ontario Waterfront Initiatives begun by CCDR
- SUNY Sourcebook prepared by CCDR
- "Dialogue through the Disciplines" organized by CCDR

2002

- 12 demonstration communities announced
- Work with demonstration communities - SUNY Design and Planning Consortium begins

2003

- Work with demonstration communities continues
- Community Center research papers prepared by CCDR and other non-profit organizations
- Community Center workshops and community training occur

2004

- Discussions and preliminary work for a statewide community education program begun by DCR and CCDR

2005

- Development of the community education program continues

2006

- Development of the community education program continues
- Test delivery of 3 sessions of the community education program

2007

- Delivery of the community education program begins
- Development of the community education program continues

2008

- Delivery of the community education program continues
- Development of the community education program continues

Figure 6. The time line guiding the partnership of the Center and Coastal Resources.

communication among faculty members, municipal planning department, and DCR resulted in a project achieving both its academic and community goals. Conversely, in another community, weak local leadership and poor coordination limited the exploration of new collaborative planning methods. While the impact of these changes caught the Center by surprise, it believes that most of those challenges would not have occurred had the partners initially established a stronger collaborative framework and been open to recognizing and understanding differences in culture and mission.

Understanding the Partners in a Collaboration

Organizational mission and culture. An understanding and appreciation of the cultural contexts in which collaborating partners work is especially important when partnerships are embedded within large, complex organizations (Shaw 2003). The DCR, a state agency, and the Center, embedded in a public academic institution, share many of the same cultural characteristics. Making positive progress in collaboration, however, required acknowledgement of the notable differences in purpose and culture of the two principal partners. Research conducted at academic institutions is often about exploration and discovery or is oriented toward challenging and changing convention. The Center works with communities to explore new methods of participation, collaboration, communication, and organization. The DCR assists communities across the state by disseminating best planning practices. Its aim is to maintain control of a consistent message and an accessible project process. The DCR is responsible for stewardship of grant funding, and its primary role is to review and comment on grant-related products and documents.

Differences in approach and mission were especially apparent in the community education program. Describing the planning process and DCR programs was straightforward. Motivating communities to develop approaches that creatively address local needs within the structure of the DCR programs was challenging. While the community education program clearly introduces the grant program requirements and the value of good planning and design, its long-term effectiveness in empowering participants to generate significant change in their communities has not been evaluated.

Operational frameworks. Other issues that might have been raised to good effect include organizational differences in schedule and work rhythms, common challenges in academic-community partnerships (Horrigan 2006; Stokols 2006). Maintaining a common schedule for the Center and the DCR was difficult. The SUNY-ESF academic calendar drives Center schedules and availability. Scheduling students and faculty members in community projects required advance planning and an early commitment to start dates. The unpredictable nature of community needs and the timing of grant announcements drive the schedules of the DCR. Difficulties encountered in coordinating multiple tasks with the DCR required the Center to simplify and contain its work.

Developing a shared conceptual framework. Unlike other disciplinary collaborations, transdisciplinary scientific collaborations require a shared conceptual framework for addressing common research topics (Stokols 2006). The primary criterion for success is the extent to which knowledge and practice is transformed and extended beyond the "concepts, theories, and methods of particular fields" (Stokols 2006, 67). Early establishment and periodic adjustment of these conceptual meanings help sustain a commitment to the development of these concepts, which is at the heart of Stokols's definition of transdisciplinary action research.

The initial shared conceptual framework of the project required the hearing of all voices in a respectful manner and enabled the deliberation of differences through dialogue. While this process was evident in the initial community projects, it became less effective as the collaboration grew into an intersectoral and cross-scalar statewide partnership of agencies and organizations. The inability to discuss various perspectives and agree on a conceptual framework undermined

the effectiveness of the collaboration. With a better understanding of the organizational differences among partners, there might have been more success in establishing and modifying the shared conceptual framework needed to sustain effective collaboration.

Establishing a Responsive Collaborative Framework

The agreement to collaborate. In transdisciplinary research, the partners must make a formal agreement acknowledging and emphasizing the collaborative nature of the endeavor (Gazley and Brudney 2007). All organizations and participants must be willing collaborators, and the agreement must clarify the need for collaboration (Gray 2007). The spirit of collaboration varied during the DCR-Center partnership but was stronger in the early stages of the project, when both organizations had fully engaged leadership.

The Center found that a flexible collaboration design that builds incrementally on initial findings is easier to sustain than a multiyear, multistage project formulated in a single agreement (Shaw 2003). Formal agreements should be simple and easy to modify and provide the framework for a series of discrete stages that build on the results of earlier work.

Facilitating collaboration, setting collective goals. Transdisciplinary collaboration requires the clear communication of shared goals and outcomes (Stokols 2006). A facilitated practice of discussing and determining goals is foundational and must occur early in each new initiative. Had the four groups responsible for preparing the community center demonstration project issue papers and workshops prepared a collaborative framework and a statement of collective goals, they might have produced a coherent body of work and had greater impact. In retrospect, the Center believes that various motivations and individual agendas undermined the collective effort.

Communication protocol. Continuing communication as to mission and goals, specific responsibilities, and progress among the partners, as well as within each organization, is critical (Stokols 2006). Staff members did not always share or understand the closely aligned goals and common vision held by the leadership of the Center and the DCR. Establishing and maintaining effective communication among the widely dispersed partners was challenging. Although the internet can speed some types of communication, physical distance and a lack of face-to-face meetings hindered the development and sharing of ideas (Stokols 2006). Budget development and staff assignment must take into account the time and resources needed to maintain effective communication (Gazley and Brudney 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

While the collaboration was highly successful in terms of product and outcome, transformation beyond disciplinary or organizational boundaries did not occur to the extent initially desired by the Center and the DCR. This case study underscores the potential as well as the challenges of TDAR to transform collaborations of academic institutions, communities, nonprofit organizations, and state agencies. The Center learned that while the underlying principles of effective collaboration are transferable, processes that are effective at one level do not easily transfer as geographic scale and organizational complexity increase.

Although a series of research questions guided the work and investigations, there was never a plan to evaluate the collaborative process. Continuing evaluation of the process likely would have helped project leaders recognize problematic conditions and facilitate adjustments to better support the collaboration.

To support community change through multiple disciplinary and organizational collaborations, projects must begin with an intent to achieve transdisciplinarity (Stokols 2006). They must acknowledge the challenges inherent in academic / governmental collaborations and create a realistic framework recognizing the strengths, cultures, and limitations of each partner. Projects must be open, transparent, and respectful in communicating

these differences. Participants must be willing to change organizational practices that inject unnecessary obstacles into the collaborative process.

Based on this case reflection, the Center is currently working with the DCR to develop a framework for future collaboration that includes a plan for collaborative leadership, a workshop to establish shared goals among participants, a communication protocol, integrated working groups with representation from all partner organizations, and an evaluation strategy. Despite the challenges, the transdisciplinary collaboration of government agencies and organizations is worth pursuing. Through such collaboration, academic research may inform and guide government programs and policy.

NOTES

1. Vision planning is a process by which the community envisions the future it wants and plans how to achieve it. Through public engagement discourse, communities identify their purpose, core values, and visions of the future, which are then transformed into a manageable and feasible set of community goals and plans (Green, Haines, and Helebsky 2000).
2. The sources of evidence included documentation (letters, memos, e-mail, meeting minutes, memoranda of understanding, evaluations of community participants), artifacts (the products of the partnership including Community Vision Plans and educational materials), and interviews with agency leadership and staff (recorded and transcribed) that provided the greatest insight toward understanding the worldview of the agency.
3. The authors recognize the potential for bias in all research but particularly in case studies and projects in which the participants being studied or evaluated perform data selection, analysis, and synthesis. Several methods were used to reduce bias. Both DCR leadership and staff members were interviewed. In developing themes the authors looked specifically for agreement and differences in perspective, the DCR's own identification of agency culture and organization, and the confirmation of or mention of goals (shared and not) and values. The DCR reviewed a copy of the draft article, and the authors have made several minor revisions based on its comments.
4. The five programs participating in the planning and design consortium were the Department of Landscape Architecture at Cornell University, the Department of Geography and Planning at the University at Albany, the Department of Architecture and Planning at the University of Buffalo, the Department of Architecture at City College of New York, and the Department of Landscape Architecture at SUNY-ESF.
5. The City of Watertown's Black River Vision Plan was prepared by the CCDR through a plural planning process designed and facilitated by students in a service-learning studio. The plan was the first in the state utilizing the new DCR Vision Planning work program.
6. The educational approach for the program modeled the *Your Town* program, a workshop-based training program for community leaders and decision makers funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.

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AUTHORS CHERYL DOBLE is Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture at SUNY-ESF and founding Director of the CCDR. Her teaching, research, and outreach integrate service-learning pedagogy and participatory practices of community design. For the past three years, she has directed the *Erasing Boundaries* project to advance service-learning in the disciplines of landscape architecture, architecture, and planning.

MAREN KING is the Director of SUNY-ESF Center for Community Design Research. She coordinates service-learning and applied research projects that engage students, faculty, community members, and other partners. She received her BLA (1978) and MSLA (2002) from SUNY-ESF and has more than 20 years' experience in private professional practice. Her research interests include participatory practices, service-learning and academic/community engagement, connecting community and regional-scale planning, and community center revitalization.