

**INCITE** **CHANGE** **INSIGHT**  
**CHANGE**

**Theme Publication**

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# Editor's Introduction

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Change is many things but ultimately it is a process; a process with physical, psychological, and often societal impacts. The criteria by which we evaluate these impacts varies across populations, varies with individuals, and varies with time and shifts in vulnerabilities. But within this simplistically complex, rhythmic yet episodic process lies beauty. The beauty of understanding; the beauty of mystery; the beauty of honesty, humility, wisdom, all borne on the processes of change. Perhaps Burke's coinage of the term "sublime" is more apt as change is often both beautiful and terrifying.

Stability, sustainability, resilience are not the enemies of change. Rather, these represent a dynamic search for quasi-equilibrium; a pulsating, creative fluctuation about some long term mean. Thus, to resist change is futile as one seeks to stand against a conception akin to fear of the dark. It seems that one of society's great losses is the energy expended in treating change as an opponent; we have much yet to learn.

In our ponderings and musings to select a theme for this gathering of educators, ideas, and perspectives we were continually drawn to the processes of change. Of these processes we are catalysts and students, instigators and evaluators, producers and consumers. And so we came to our theme listening and considering:

## **incite Change | Change insight.**

We incite change through the teaching of our children, of our students, of those we mentor. We incite change through the acts of design, the transformation of place both physically and spiritually. We incite change when we serve others, and here I mean others in the largest sense – people, animals, plants, soils, water – which collectively we call ecosystems. Yet the term "ecosystem" has achieved a certain scientific sterility on the one hand and triteness on the other due to conscription to the realms of social banter. Might we simply go back to the term "community"? Are we not called to provide stewardship to the community of which we are a part? Thus, when we serve those we teach, the places we hold dear, the natural communities and all their inhabitants we engender change. A progression or transition to a better condition is our goal.

While we hope our actions are "evidence based" and spring from good intentions (the paving material on

the road to hell) we cannot learn, grow, and steward if we do not observe the products and processes set in place by our plans. Critical observation of change informs understanding, deepens it, and allows for broadened, rigorous application to our acts, our processes, our representations in our quest to make difference. Our theme for this Council of Educators of Landscape Architecture CELA 2015 Conference: incite Change | Change insight may appear dichotomous or formulaic given the conventions of printed text but we perceive the words and ideas as constantly cyclic and representing a single construct rather than opposite sides of the coin. And so we ask: how do you incite change; how do you change insight? Some of the responses to this question are included in the manuscripts presented in this document. Other perspectives will be presented during the CELA 2015 Conference and all will hopefully spur greater understanding and the sympathetic application thereof.

Change, while bearing beauty is too often feared, perhaps more so by clerics and engineers than by poets and painters, but never-the-less change can indeed be terrifying. While I blame my occasional sleepless nights on age and proclivity I do still have trepidations about the coming practice of this discipline we call landscape architecture. I offer here my misgivings, concerns, and suggestions for change.

In what is now over three decades of teaching, researching, and serving within the discipline of landscape architecture, my greatest fear has come to be of our increasing lack of connection to place. It seems that we are caught up in or being drawn in to "the race to virtual nowhere". Increasingly, our students, our colleagues, others we serve, lack meaningful connection to place. A by-product of a more mobile society you say; to which I would counter that even nomadic hunting and gathering clans had stronger ties to the lands they inhabited. I strongly doubt that any 18-year-old Kansa (the people for which our state was named) had any question about where their food, heat, water, or entertainment came from. But inquire of your undergraduate students as to these necessities of living in a place and be prepared to endure the shrugs of indifference. It seems to me that the tap root of this living thing we call landscape architecture gains both its nourishment and its structural support by going deep and strong into the native soil. And I suspect that no

Smartphone app or “Placebook” media site will build the type of connection we need, it’s up to us. Up to us to incite change in the education of the students, colleagues, professionals, and the communities we serve in the realm of landscape architecture. To incite change involves risk, yet these are risks we must take if our discipline is to maintain, vitality, significance, and relevancy during the next half-century. In short, we must look to change the ways in which we teach, practice, research, and serve this middle-aged discipline of ours as we seek to enhance our abilities to do good for places and those who inhabit them.

In changing the ways we teach connections to the larger community we must look for any means of linking our students to their surroundings. Fewer tests and more days afield seem a good start. Projects that are local and allow for multiple site visits, inventory and analysis as well as ready discussion with stake-holders (real or supposed) are appropriate. Less concern with award-worthy presentation and more with helping community through the clear and supported presentation of ideas and proposals would seem the best approach. Addressing how we inhabit our places is of the utmost importance. Carl Smith in his paper: “Studies in Denser Living: Changing student insight and inciting change in student residential aspirations” presented here, looks at the impacts of a changed way of teaching and influencing one’s future choice(s) of housing. Such decisions to live with greater density and the concomitant reduction in resource consumption foster stewardship and greater affinity to place. Cera et al. speak here about interpreting their investigations into the effects of climate change on the plants we rely upon in our local environments. In this work we see a change in how we might teach, design, and react given observations lead by climate predictions.

The nature of our practice must surely change. We are rapidly becoming an urban culture and our discipline is needed more and more to provide respite from the constant (and not always positive) stimulation that is urban life. My hope is that we don’t lose sight of the rural, working lands that will face increasing pressure to provide the food, clean water, energy, and refuge necessitated by our growing urban inhabitation. Nor should we shy away from the tension zone, the so-called rural-urban interface as these are particularly dynamic and exciting ecotones offering great opportunities for learning. Urban agriculture is a practice that is gaining attention and momentum. Regardless of whether urban areas can truly become self-sufficient in terms of food production, the re-connection of people to the soil, the places that produce their food and joy is of sustaining value. David de la Peña’s manuscript in this document speaks to the development of an urban agriculture in Sacramento, CA and opens a discussion of the role of landscape architecture in this movement.

The ways we research, generate or increase insight will continue to change. Social media and unmanned aircraft are not going back into the bottle and we should look to how such changes can help develop understanding as well as a broader audience. I do hope our discipline can maintain some balance between field observation and predictive, conceptual modeling. Ben Shirtcliff’s paper on the use of social media to provide an uninhibited picture of a little-studied urban subculture provides an example of a shift in our methods of creative inquiry. While we will no doubt have increased evidence of the “life” around us we must remain vigilant as to the rights of privacy and freedom of expression.

Perhaps the most difficult yet most needed change involves the expansion of those we serve. Such expansion is necessary on at least two counts: 1) If we are to grow the impact of our discipline, the employment of our unique blend of skills and perspective, we must serve societal needs. This service will not always be profitable economically but must aim to help sustain and enrich places and the people who inhabit them. 2) If we hope to continue to attract the best and the brightest to this discipline our efforts have to be seen, from the inner city to the conflicted borders. If the best we have to give is offered only to those who already have plenty, we will surely decline in our ability to inspire, to attract the best hearts and minds – those necessary to sustain this ever-shifting, transformational practice we call landscape architecture.

Must landscape architecture change? – of course, and not necessarily. We will change the ways by which we teach, practice, research, and serve and this succession will better connect us to the places and people we seek to “keep”. These changes will be driven by shifts in the ways we think, perceive, and apply our understanding (as imperfect and incomplete as it will always be). Finally, mystery is as beautiful and necessary as is that which we understand. Be bold; incite change and allow such change to inform your insight.

We hope you enjoy the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and stories at our CELA 2015 Conference in the Flint Hills of Kansas – this special place that I pray will weather our transgressions and allow for small celebrations of understanding. We hope the papers presented in this special conference theme publication are provocative and insightful. We hope that this small document is a beginning, a first attempt at deepening and enriching the development of CELA’s discourse on creative inquiry. And we hope you find increased delight in joining and pondering the processes of change.

TDK

