Planning by Design: Campuses, Waterfronts, Districts, and Cities

ARC 48720
PPP 90807

Spring 2021

Planning by Design focuses on the connection between urban design decisions and the challenges of urban planning and development, based on the premise that a better understanding of this relationship will contribute to critical knowledge, policy and practice for a robust, equitable, and forward-looking urbanism responsive to the unprecedented density of the 21c -- a density of urbanization, interaction, and information.

The course is divided into modules, beginning with paradigmatic late 20c and early 21c district programs and scales: The Campus District, The Waterfront District, The Innovation District, and Neighborhoods. The final module addresses the challenges and opportunities for greater equity and opportunity for district types, responding to the changing future of work accelerated by the novel coronavirus, to developing more profound community engagement and empowerment strategies, to adapting to emerging technologies.

These built environments test the capacity of architecture and urban design to propose meaningfully complex and resilient program and urban form. Districts can build up—or tear down—an urbanism that is equitable, experientially stimulating, architecturally rich, locally grounded and globally connected.

Through presentations, case studies, lectures, guest speakers and the semester project, learning will include how to identify a compelling challenge for a district/neighborhood and how to research existing and potential strategies, and how to communicate these.

The course compares regional, national, and international districts, with a baseline of study of the Pittsburgh region. Reconciling the district concept with broader urban questions is a global task, and semester projects have ranged from an abandoned mall in Youngstown, Ohio to the old port of Harbin, China, to the informal neighborhoods along the Mithi River in Mumbai, India. The work develops comprehensive visions, programs, and supporting arguments for proposals that engage the complex array of community organizations, public sector, private sector, academic, and civic organizations required for district-scale initiatives.