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## UCLA's city lab holds competition to promote architectural sustainability

By [SANDY BUI](#)

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In the late 19th century, architecture played a fundamental role in the recovery and rebuilding of cities after major urban disasters, such as the Great Chicago Fire, according to Dana Cuff, the director of UCLA's cityLAB.

After Hurricane Katrina and the September 11 attacks, it became clear to Cuff, an architect, that architecture today is ineffective. She said architecture was essential to responding to both of those crises.

"Somehow we had lost our opportunity to contribute even as much as engineers had, and I felt that design was fundamental to making the city whole again in both those cases."

UCLA's cityLAB is an urban think tank dedicated to various projects about contemporary urban issues, urban design, and the architecture of the city, according to its Web site.

"CityLAB was formulated with the idea that architects had a real contribution to make to the city if they work in concert with all the complicated players that were essential to (designing) the next generation of American urbanism," she said.

For Cuff and cityLAB co-director Roger Sherman, design professions have become too compartmentalized, preventing these professionals from addressing issues collectively in a "political, economic and urban architectural way," Cuff added.

With various research projects already under its belt, cityLAB's latest project is WPA 2.0: Working Public Architecture, an international competition geared toward seeking "innovative, implementable proposals to place infrastructure at the heart of rebuilding our cities during this next era of metropolitan recovery," according to the competition's Web site.

Receiving about 200 designs from professionals around the world, the competition explores different types of projects to address topics ranging from global water issues, to even carbon-neutral, water-powered vehicles, Cuff said.

Recently, cityLAB announced the six competition finalists, who will attend an experts' workshop on Sept. 26 at UCLA to work with engineers, environmental consultants, and various other technical support to make their projects as legitimate and possible to implement as possible, Cuff said.

Defining cityLAB's work as "experimental urban thinking," Cuff said that the WPA 2.0 competition focuses on unifying design and utility components in architecture.

Like the Works Progress Administration program that lasted from 1935 to 1943 and the New Deal agency under President Franklin Roosevelt's administration in the 1930s, the competition is based on the assumption that public funds being spent in this current administration's planning should benefit the public, Cuff said.

Cuff explained that with more creativity, the nation's current infrastructure bailout can provide the public with double the benefit and demonstrate that design elevates infrastructure to a public amenity.

"(Buildings) very much can be embedded with ideas of city-making within them," Sherman added. "The system can be understood as kind of a continuity of having more of a continuous relationship with the buildings that are within (the cities) as opposed to thinking about buildings as kind of insulated, isolated enclaves that are disconnected from everything around them."

Cuff said she hopes to see conversation about infrastructure at the policy level elevated to include design, noting that the competition's final symposium and exhibition on Nov. 16 at the National Building Museum in Washington D.C. is crucial.

In Washington, teams will be presenting digital animations of their projects to the jury comprising of world-renowned architects, educators, engineers, and elected officials who are in a position to implement the projects, Sherman said. Winning schemes will then be taken to various committees and agencies in Washington, Cuff added.

CityLAB will launch an online Web exhibition in February 2010, featuring video from the events, essays from the competition organizers, and all of the competition submissions, said Linda Samuels, a third-year urban planning graduate student who is the

senior research associate at cityLAB.

Spawning directly from the WPA 2.0 competition is a student edition for which students around the world can submit proposals.

With registration for the student competition ending on Oct. 16 and design proposals due Nov. 2, selected student submissions will be presented at the symposium and exhibition in Washington.

Darina Zlateva and Takuma Ono, two Beverly Hills residents who both graduated from Harvard University Graduate School of Design, created Hydro-Genic City, 2020, which was selected as a finalist.

Underlying Hydro-Genic City, 2020's proposal is transforming waterworks into active public architecture, ultimately combining water and mobility to create a healthy and strong community, said Zlateva.

Zlateva said she and Ono particularly liked the competition's ability to reach a wide audience and have an impact on the discussion about sustainability and infrastructure, igniting opportunities for architects, designers, policy makers, planners and engineers.

Referring to the past few decades, Samuels said that decisions about how a city is formed were run primarily from a position of economics, allowing corporations to shape cities to reflect their interests and investment, she said.

Though, Samuels noted that she senses a current turn for the better.

"The city is starting to be influenced by people who care about ecological sensitivity and community involvement and public space and public interaction, and these are really critical issues in making a city livable and sustainable and more beautiful," she said.

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