

Delhi, Philly and beyond: What is a Social Science Studio?

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In architecture design studio, students primarily focus on creating designs/models for a particular project. Aside from readings and short lectures, studio time is primarily spent collaborating with peers, experimenting with design ideas and models, and receiving continuous feedback from the instructor. The "Social Science Studio" concept is simple: Use the design studio format to ask social science questions.

This method was developed by Kushanava Choudhury (a political theorist), Durba Chattaraj (an anthropologist) and Moulshri Joshi (a professor of architecture) as a part of an interdisciplinary study of urban space and economics in New Delhi, India. In summer 2013, we conducted a three-week workshop with 23 architecture students titled "The Invisible City" in New Delhi India, where we used the studio format to study how politics, work and housing are arranged in one neighborhood in New Delhi, India. The Delhi project is described in more detail below.

In the workshop, we used multiple methods drawn from architecture, planning, anthropology and political science, including mapping, sketching, photography, interviews, field notes and socio-economic surveys. The workshop trained students in new methods beyond the traditional tools of the design studio and gave them the opportunity to apply these methods to generate new knowledge. Students who were trained in making maps and floor plans discovered they enjoyed doing surveys and interviews and writing field notes. More importantly, they incorporated these multiple methods into their projects and thus were able to see a familiar space with new eyes. By developing new and multiple ways of seeing as a group, we were collectively able to generate a large amount of new knowledge as well as new research questions.

As professors, our pedagogy is focused on building a community of peers who will be working together, learning by doing and gathering information mainly through independent research rather than assigned readings. The primary role of the professor in the studio is as a mentor and a guide rather than a lecturer. We have independently adapted this method to the study of social science. I applied this method to teach a course where we studied the city of Philadelphia. The course was an experiment, which could be a model for how to teach social science and humanities through active learning.

Big Question, Small Unit of Study: Italian Market, South Philadelphia

Studies of urban revitalization focus on anchor institutions, the "growth model" of big business-generated employment, and "creative-class" driven gentrification. Largely, these studies do not focus on immigrants. On the other hand, studies of immigrants in US cities do not usually ask what role they play in urban transformation.

The Social Science Studio builds on research by Penn Urban Studies professors Michael Katz, Domenic Vitiello and others on recent immigration in American cities. Vitiello has researched how various new immigrant communities have been accommodated in cities, focusing particularly on Philadelphia. Katz wrote about the role immigration plays in urban revitalization in small American cities like Bridgeport, CT or Paterson, NJ. He proposed that immigration provides an alternate growth model to the dominant ways of thinking about how cities grow. However, these processes may not be limited to small cities. Philadelphia is one of the largest cities in America. In the last decade, South Philadelphia especially, has witnessed a transformation, with new businesses, rising property values, improving schools, and a very diverse population. A focal point of this phenomenon in our city is the once-blighted Italian Market area in South Philadelphia. Now a mix of Mexican, Vietnamese, Chinese and Cambodian residents alongside the traditional Italian community, the market and surrounding areas have been revitalized in the last decade by immigrant-owned retail. The real-estate market has been transformed by the arrival of these communities as have the demographics of the public schools which

are now, in some cases, majority immigrant.

In the Social Science Studio, by focusing on the Italian Market neighborhood, students explored how immigration transforms urban spaces in large American cities. They researched how immigrants are remaking the city economically, politically, socially, and culturally. We approached the field with multiple sets of disciplinary tools to describe what exists on the ground, in order to accommodate multiple ways of seeing.

The detailed, interdisciplinary neighborhood-level study which we undertook through the Social Science Studio has a longer history at Penn. It draws on a method of doing detailed neighborhood studies with a group of students to seek insights into large theoretical questions that goes back to WEB Du Bois' ward-level study of African Americans in the 7th Ward in Philadelphia, which was later the basis of his classic book, *Philadelphia Negro*, one of the foundational studies of what became American sociology.

Interdisciplinary Methods:

In the Social Science studio, 6 students worked collaboratively as in a design studio and develop related but independent projects over the course of the semester. The work was by nature interdisciplinary because it engaged multiple methods and fields to produce new types of knowledge.

The goal of the studio for each student was to produce a project, rather than to pass a final exam. The students were trained to conduct interviews, make maps, find data, write field notes and design and conduct socio-economic surveys. They used these tools to produce their own independent projects. Their findings are available on the website.

The New Delhi Experiment

The "Social Science Studio" method we intend to use in this course was developed by Moulshri Joshi (architecture), Durba Chattaraj (anthropology) and myself over the course of a three-week workshop with 23 architecture students which we conducted in New Delhi, India in 2013.

As an architect, an anthropologist and a political theorist, we were puzzled by the gaps in our understanding in our respective fields. New Delhi is the capital of India, and a master-planned metropolis. Yet a majority of its citizens live and work in unplanned, and often unauthorized, areas of the city, which are sources of affordable rental housing as well as employment, as locations for thousands of small businesses and workshops. These spaces and forms -- unplanned and planned, informal and formal -- are overlapping and constitutive of a larger system and set of arrangements which we called "The Invisible City," because architects, planners and social scientists rarely find out how these spaces function as a whole.

Our three-week workshop explored a one-square mile field site in New Delhi called Taimoor Nagar, which contains a wide range of formal and informal economic activity, legal and unauthorized housing, and planned and unplanned spaces. The 23 architecture students were given intensive training in social-scientific research methods. The students wrote field notes, conducted interviews, produced maps and architectural drawings of the site, designed graphics about local political and administrative arrangements, and generated an "urban dictionary" of local terms. They were also trained in survey methods and conducted a detailed survey on work, housing and politics. By combining the methods of architecture, planning and anthropology, their research has produced new insights into how a majority of the city, which is informal and unplanned, is organized, ordered and built.

We have adapted a pedagogical approach that augments the architects' site studies with a social scientist's understanding of the broader cultural, economic and political processes that shape urban space, and methodologies with which to examine them. Through interviews, surveys and mapping of specific neighborhoods in the city, this interdisciplinary approach seeks to utilize expertise from urban planning, architecture and the social sciences to look at Economic, Politics and Space together in the

making of a place. By focusing on a one square-mile area, and examining it through multiple methods, we were able to generate new research questions that point towards new concepts and design solutions. Our findings are available here:

http://repository.upenn.edu/socialsciencestudio_presentations/4/

Goals and Implications for Philly-based Course

The Social Science Studio method has affinities with cutting edge multidisciplinary approaches such as the "Open Architecture Studio" for innovation advocated by John Seely Brown.

The model of the Social Science Studio can inform both architects and scholars in humanities and social sciences. It can be a pedagogical model for instructors seeking to teach multidisciplinary methods using new tools beyond the lecture/seminar/lab formats. The Social Science Studio can also be a model for how a classroom can be used to generate research and new research questions in emerging scholarly fields.

Unlike in a traditional design studio, the goal of the Social Science Studio is not intervention but rather interpretation. However, we hope that our students' interdisciplinary projects will be part of larger conversations about how cities work and how they are being transformed.