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Four Modes of Engagement: Positioning University Urban Design and Research Centers for the Future

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FOUR MODES OF ENGAGEMENT POSITIONING UNIVERSITY URBAN DESIGN AND RESEARCH CENTERS FOR THE FUTURE

Courtney Crosson[*]

ABSTRACT

University urban design and research centers, which link academic pedagogy and research activities to real-world projects, have grown in number over the last several decades. As the rate of urbanization accelerates and universities' missions become increasingly grounded in visible impact and financial self-sufficiency, these centers continue to offer an important and appealing model. This paper looks at the evolution of these centers from their beginnings in the 1950s, advancement in the 1980s, resurgence in the first decade of the 2000s, and current growing status. From a survey of over fifty centers throughout the United States, a typology is established based on the dominant activity of each center: Advocate, Consultant, Educator, and Scholar. Case studies from each mode are examined at greater depth. Overall, this paper finds continued growth in the number of these centers and a recent broadening of involvement by a diversity of academic and professional disciplines. Given this expansion, this paper is a tool for emerging centers to frame their missions within an established typology and gain best practices. Across all modes, universal challenges include: sustained funding, administrative support, and clarifying student and community roles. As both universities and cities face new paradigms of growth and financial sustenance, models of the university urban design and research center will hold relevance as a vehicle to engage, articulate, and find solutions to the challenges within our multilayered communities.

INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR A FRAMEWORK FOR UNIVERSITY URBAN DESIGN AND RESEARCH CENTERS

In recent years, centers and institutes have played an increasingly important role in conducting research at major universities (Dorgan, 2008). They have served as important organizational points for attracting research funding from federal, state, industrial, and nonprofit foundation sources of support (Forsyth, 2006). Concurrently, universities have emphasized pedagogies of service-learning and multidiscipline collaboration to provide real-world opportunities to students and an expanded platform for research and application (Baum, 2000). Universities have

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sought sustained and impactful partnerships with the communities in which they sit. This paper looks at the resurgence of university urban design and research centers as an outcome of these trends. These centers come in a variety of forms: studios or labs for design, research centers, advocacy organizations, and professionally engaged consultancy groups. Overall, this paper finds current growth in the number of these centers at United States universities and a recent broadening of the diversity of involvement in these centers by academic and professional disciplines.

This paper looks at a large set of centers, labs, initiatives, projects, or institutes that formalize a link between universities and urban design in the communities with which the university identifies. For ease, this paper titles these formalized links *university urban design and research centers,* or *centers,* but recognizes the great variety under this umbrella and that some centers may even object to inclusion. Certainly, each center in the study will continue to evolve and, in the long term, may alter the activities and purpose captured in this current typological assessment. In an attempt to make a broad and thorough assessment of university urban design and research centers, this study includes the margins in order to guarantee an exhaustive sample and understand the emerging approaches to university community design and research.

The paper first traces the evolution of university urban design and research centers from their beginnings in the 1950s, advancement in the 1980s, resurgence in the first decade of the 2000s, and current growing status. From a survey of over fifty centers throughout the United States, a typology of four engagement modes is established based on the dominant activity of each center: Scholar, Advocate, Educator, and Consultant. Although the primary mode of activity is tagged, the paper charts the great variety within each center in the areas of financial support, administrative staffing, type of products produced, and extent of reach. Hybridization and transitions occur between multiple modes. To clarify the boundaries between the given typologies and create comparison, case studies from each are examined at greater depth. The paper concludes that centers will continue to serve an important role in linking university and community goals. The four presented modalities provide essential models through which universities can demonstrate visible impact in their communities and diversify sources of funding to strengthen research, teaching, and outreach outcomes.

The Origins and Expansion of University Urban Design and Research Centers

The literature that exists on university urban design and research centers has assessed their pedagogy, research, and community partnership outcomes. This literature offers discrete analyses of the successes and failures of centers within educational, research, and administrative goals, but fails to give a cohesive

framework to evaluate centers across their multi-dimensional objectives. This paper fills this existing gap through systematic study of over fifty centers to provide a relational framework comprised of four modes.

Recent Assessments of Centers: Pedagogy, Research, Administration

Literature focused on the pedagogical aspects of university urban design and research centers have analyzed the challenges and benefits of community engagement courses. Matching community expectations of professional quality work with student abilities and motivation is underlined as one of the greatest challenges of community-engaged pedagogy (Dorgan, 2008). Real-world projects often have timelines that are out of step with academic schedules and faculty have little ability to incentivize students to complete work outside of the structure of grading (Forsyth, 2006). Studies find that partnerships between universities and communities often fall short of initial, grand expectations due to limitations in student abilities and the semester timeframe (Baum, 2000). To address these gaps, Howell Baum (2000) emphasizes the importance of facing projects with realism. Success depends on setting purposes that are clear, specific, and realistic; on matching purposes to resources; making partners accountable to one another; and in continual organization. Universities can support quality products for the community by granting faculty additional work time to execute and complete the project after the semester ends (Forsyth, 2006).

Planning courses that involve community partnership are well-suited for an interdisciplinary pedagogy. According to Wim Wiewel and Michael Lieber (1998) of University of Chicago's Neighborhood Initiative, planning education can benefit from the political and communicative skills required in community and interdisciplinary settings. Katia Balassiano and David West (2012) argue for an experiential learning pedagogy in interdisciplinary studio courses. Michael Neuman (2016) points to synergistic motivations, local knowledge, acknowledging context, and multi-scalar thinking as key ingredients for effective interdisciplinary collaboration in community partnerships. Ann Forsyth and her co-authors (2000) present service-learning as a pedagogy that can help planning and design programs teach future professionals important skills for working with multiple publics. Service-learning integrates meaningful community service with instruction and strongly emphasizes the role of reflection in learning.

Centers that produce academic research within a community-focused mission face several consistent challenges. The largest issue highlighted by the literature is sustaining funding once it is acquired (Baum, 2000; Peason and Robbins, 2002; Stahler and Tash, 1994; Hojnacki, 1983). If the university is not able to offer stability to the center by supporting its annual operating budget, the center must rely on grants, awards, and professional consulting service fees. This produces year-to-year uncertainty for securing an operational budget to complete

research and fulfill community promises. Despite this challenge, Gerald Stahler and William Tash (1994) identify research centers as one of the most successful methods by which universities secure outside funding. Other challenges include finding designated space for the center and potential departmental conflicts for resources (e.g. money, time, space) if it is an interdisciplinary center (Stahler and Tash, 1994).

Overall, Wiewel and Lieber (1998) emphasize the importance of creating a situation of shared power to administrate university-community partnerships successfully. William Hojnacki (1983, 65) in his article, "A Case for University Applied Urban Research Centers," promotes partnering between local governments and universities to create urban research centers which benefit both parties and the local community. Universities can support local governments in addressing a common gap in capabilities and resources to produce applied research to find solutions to identified problems (Hojnacki, 1983).

Recent Surveys of Centers

In 2002, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) published a directory of university-community design partnerships (Pearson, 2002). Rather than a framework, this directory catalogues all centers that are a shared university-community enterprise and currently take on projects that use design as a tool to take action. This definition is narrower than the work undertaken by this paper's study. In an assessment of these partnerships, the NEA reports that while the work of these programs is impactful at a local scale, the learning outcomes often fall short of a national impact on community development objectives (Pearson, 2002).

In a 2006 article, Ann Forsyth looked at a broader definition of centers than the NEA directory, more aligned with the scope of this paper. She outlined and critiqued seven approaches to university-community partnerships: research centers, university firms, community advocacy center, extension, studio, clearinghouse, and umbrella organization. This outline provides an overview of types of activities undertaken by centers. Forsyth's article speaks in general terms from observations and experience rather from a systematic survey and in-depth case study methodology. This paper provides a systematic study and comprehensive examination of existing centers. It builds on the directory by NEA and the characterization of centers by Forsyth to analyze the growth of centers, modes of operation, and specific opportunities and challenges. It ultimately provides a relational framework of the broad diversity of university urban design and research centers that exist today.

METHOD: EVALUATING UNIVERSITY URBAN DESIGN AND RESEARCH CENTERS

The methodology of this study involved three stages: survey, framework formulation with the creation of a timeline, and framework testing through case study (see ***Figure 1***). First, a survey of the existing urban design and research centers in the United States was conducted. The list of top twenty-five public universities (US News and World Report, 2016), top twenty-five private universities (US News and World Report, 2016), top 25 graduate urban planning programs (Planetizen, 2016), and top twenty-five schools of architecture (Design Intelligence, 2016) were investigated for the existence of a center. Over fifty centers with an urban, multidisciplinary focus were identified within many of these universities. Data was gathered by reading centers' websites and blogs, related news articles, and social media presence. Additional information was gathered by contacting the directors, administrators, or faculty members involved in each of the organizations through email and phone. During these conversations, the interviewees referenced other centers for inclusion in the survey. Reviewed literatures were also drawn upon to identify centers for the survey.

Survey of Centers

A comprehensive spreadsheet was created to document the information generated from the survey process. The spreadsheet recorded detailed information on each center including geographic reach, administrative overhead, funding mix, products produced, mission, type of stakeholders, disciplinary involvement, designated space (on or off campus), year founded, and degrees and classes offered.

From this exhaustive list, over fifty centers were identified, relationally mapped, and organized chronologically to understand trends and relationships. ***Figure 2*** diagrams the translation from consolidated spreadsheet to relational representation. The centers were charted on two axes: type of product (paper to physical) and type of activity (thinking to doing). Additionally, each center was encircled with the disciplines that were involved from their host university. Although planning, architecture, art, and landscape architecture dominated in involvement, some of the most dynamic products were produced in centers where there was involvement from other fields including sociology, geography, engineering, and political science. In this diagram, centers that have off-site locations are tagged and stakeholder involvement is indicated through color. Most centers broadly engaged with students, community members, and the professional community.

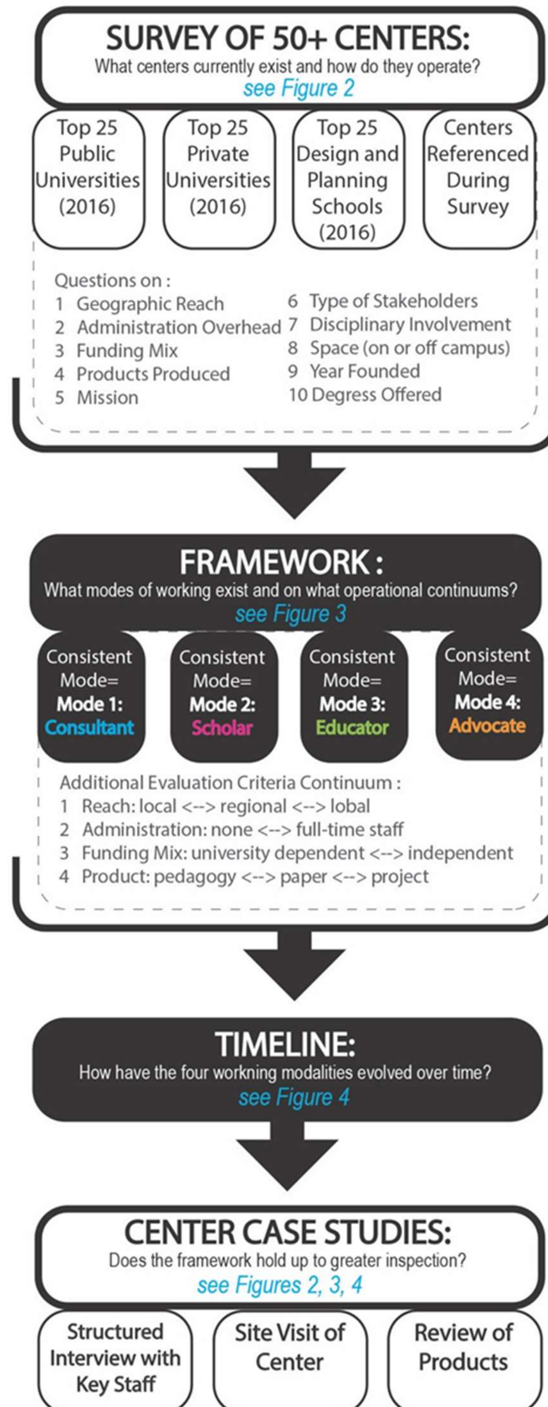

Figure 1
Survey of more than 50 research centers

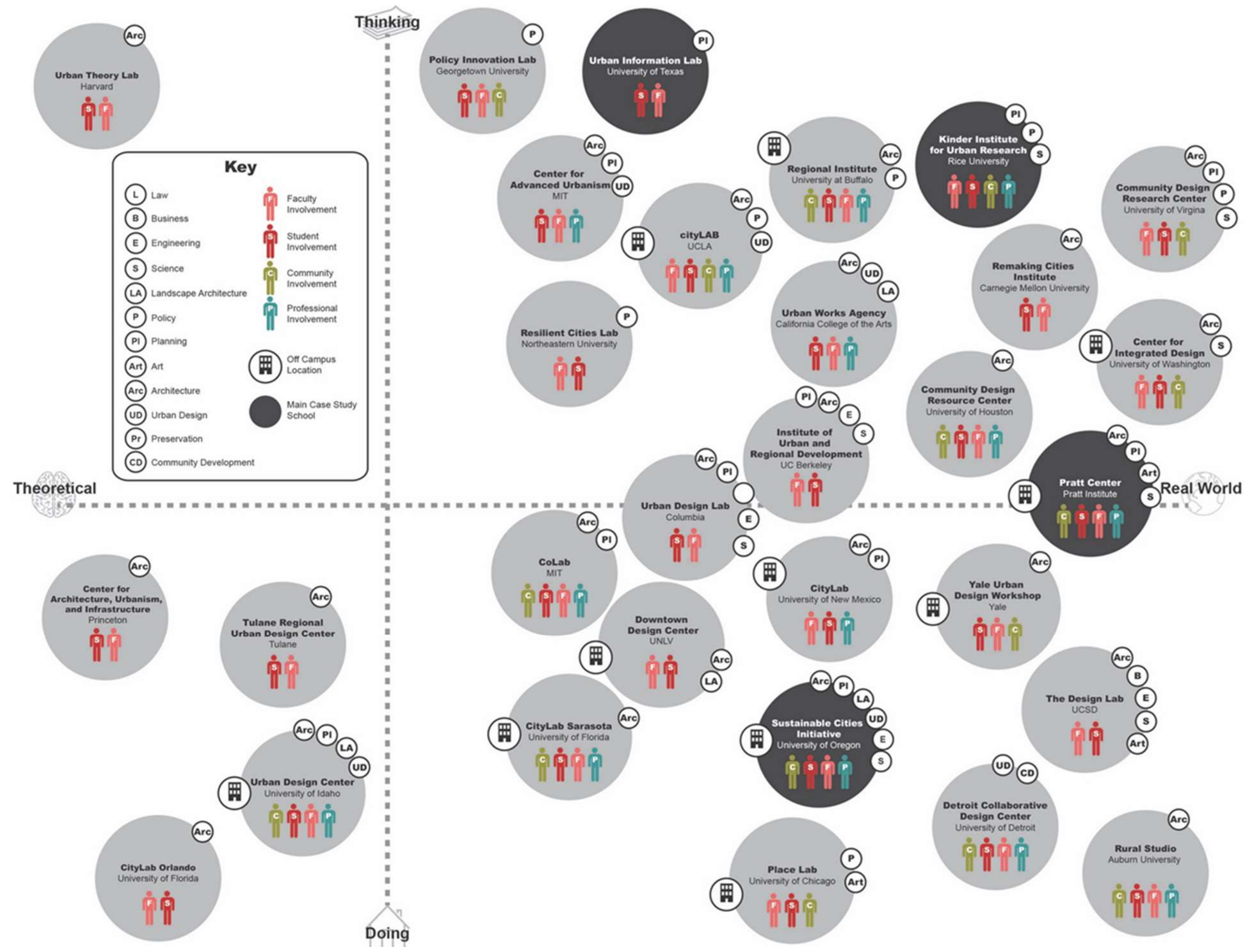

Figure 2
Evolution of center products (from paper to physical) and type of activity (from thinking to doing)

Categorization: Establishing the Framework and Timeline

The second stage was to interpret the gathered information in the spreadsheet to inform a set of deeper case studies. From an analysis of the activities and voiced purpose of the centers, a framework was developed based on four dominant modalities: Consultant, Scholar, Educator, or Advocate. These are represented by distinct colors shown for the modes in Figure 1 applied to figures 3 and 4**.** Although most centers engaged in all four modes, each center was tagged with a primary activity. Two main questions drove the categorization process: (1) who is doing the majority of the work (e.g. students, faculty, administrators, or community collaborations) and (2) who is paying for the majority of the work (e.g. tuition revenue, research grants, contracts, or mission-driven foundation grants)? If the majority of a center's products were produced by students and funded through tuition dollars, it was classified as an Educator. If the majority of work was produced by faculty and funded by grants, it was classified as a Scholar. If the majority of work was produced by a variety of positions with substantive administrative support and funded through contracts, it was a Consultant. If the majority of the work was produced in collaboration with community groups with support from foundations and mission-driven organizations, it was an Advocate. Additionally, some centers have emphasized different modes over time, but the categorization focused on the current status of the center in the last year.

Two graphic tools were created to organize the centers and understand the evolution and current operation of these modalities. A timeline, Figure 3, tracks the creation of these centers against historic trends. Various decades see greater growth or a higher disposition toward certain modalities. A consolidated line diagram, Figure 4*,* links each center and modality with type of funding, administrative capacity, extent of reach, and product produced. This graphic decodes dominant clustered operational behaviors of different modes.

Testing the Framework through Case Study

In the third stage, one case study was completed for each of the four modalities to test the framework and understand the great variety within each mode. Additional case studies were completed to cross examine this main case study. In depth interviews with a set of preset questions with the current director of the center were conducted to gain this deeper picture of operation. Site visits were also conducted by the author to see firsthand the physical location and functioning of the center. A comprehensive review of the center's products, available through the center's website or physically acquired during the site visit, was done. Findings are discussed in the following sections.

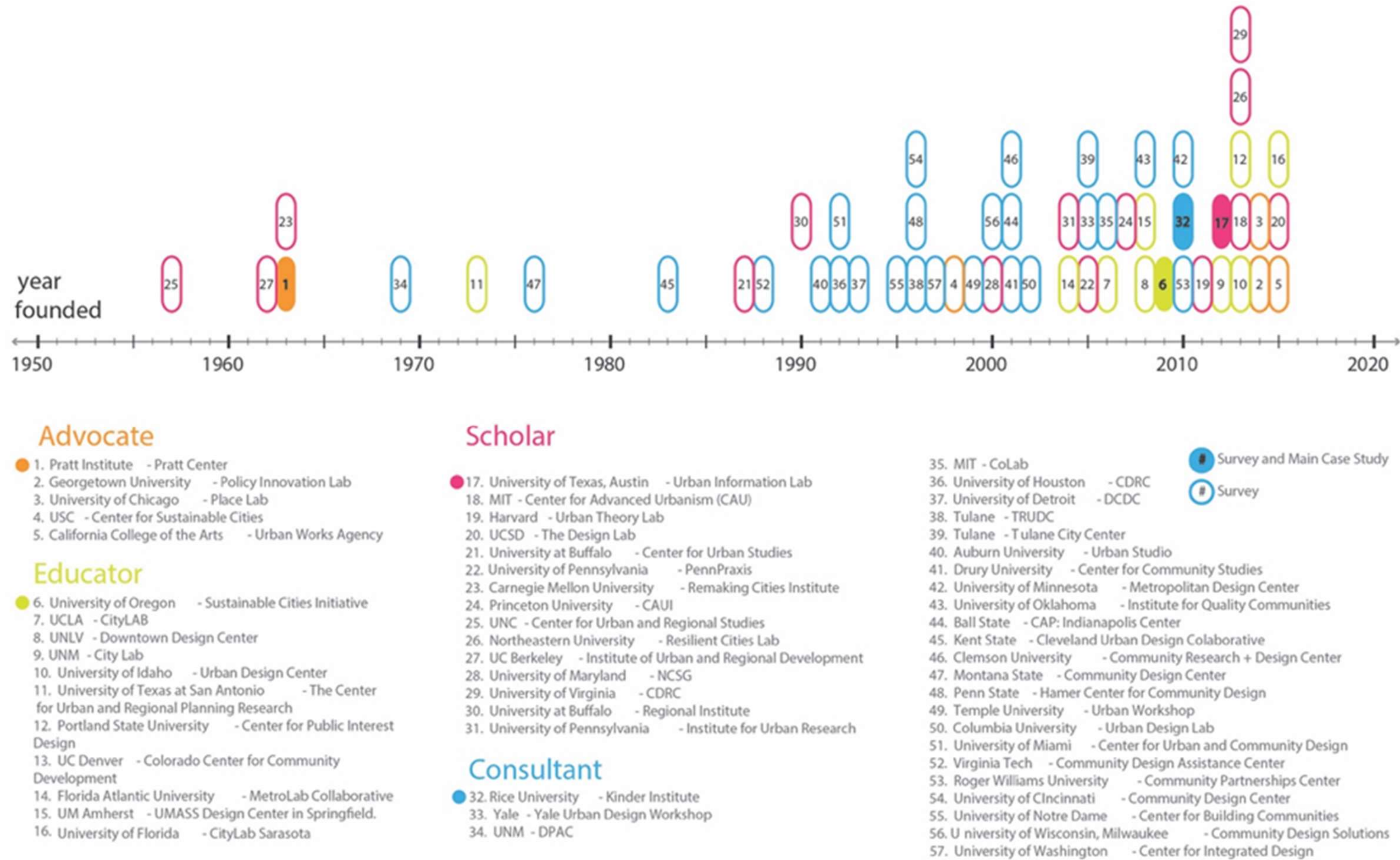

Figure 3
Center evolution from inception with respect to modalities of Consultant, Scholar, Educator, or Advocate

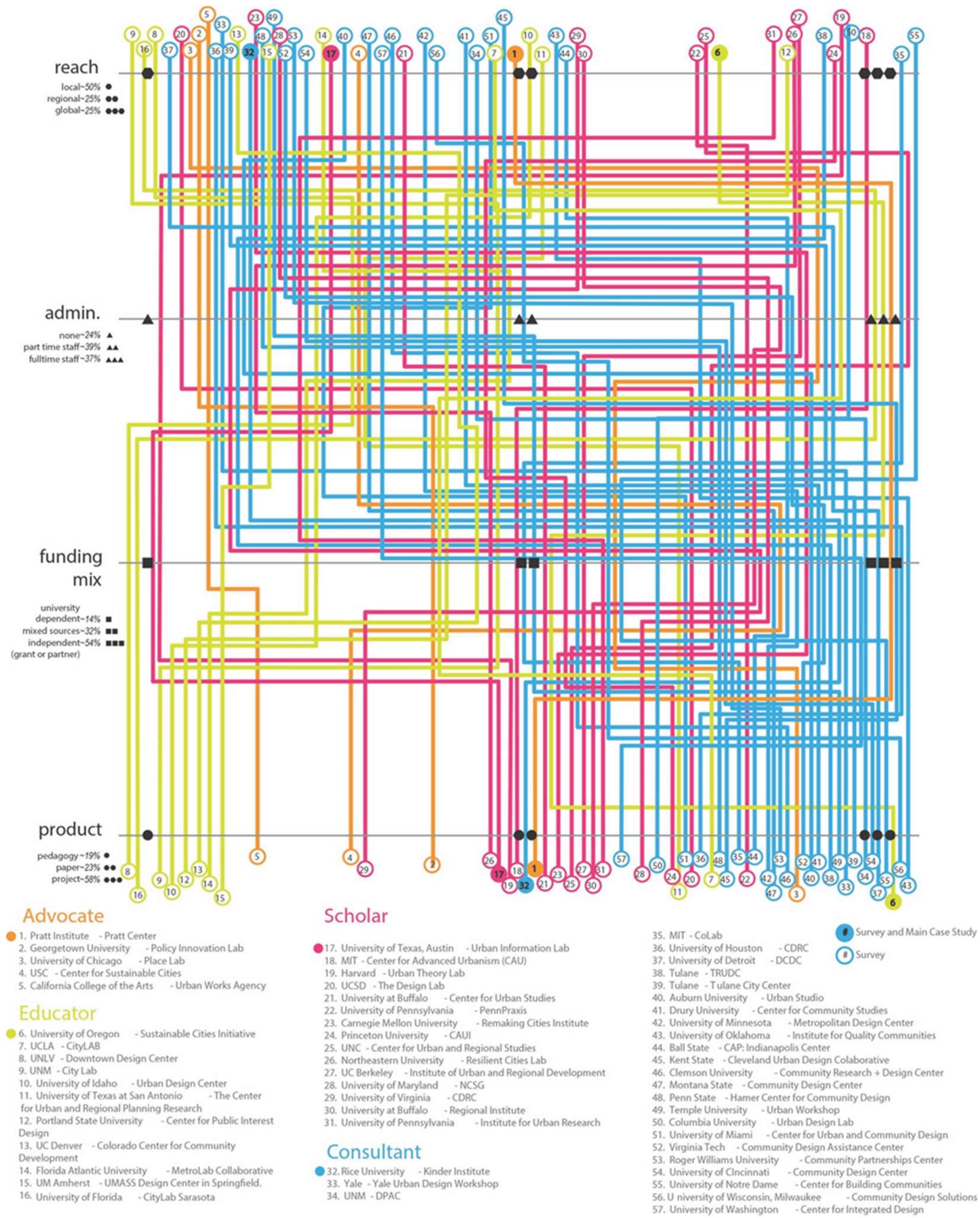

Figure 4
Linking each center and modality with type of funding, administrative capacity, extent of reach, and product produced

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE UNIVERSITY URBAN DESIGN AND RESEARCH CENTER

The Consultant Mode

The dominant activity of these centers is to work with community partners to help improve communities at both local and wider scales. These centers are typically project based and are not focused on theoretical research. Funding usually comes from the community and industry partners and grants, but not the university. These centers require at least one designated administrator to function (usually to pursue grants and manage multiple incoming monetary streams). They use mainly the professional skills of faculty and student support to assist partners in design or social change work. The wide variety of scopes of work result in different levels of impact. A center with five-hundred students involved in many projects will have a much larger impact than ten students doing a single project. Both scales can work successfully based on the funding and collaboration structures within centers.

The Consultant mode had many strengths. Overall, these centers were the most financially successful. They had the largest annual budgets and consistently excelled at securing large, multi-year funding sources. The work produced by the Consultant mode often had quick and direct impact as the projects were framed to answer a specific need and were output oriented. However, the Consultant mode often struggled to fit easily within the bounds of the university setting. Challenges included inhibited academic freedom as projects were driven by client needs rather than intellectual discovery, misalignment between the projects that clients were willing to fund and the specific interests of research faculty, and lack of student learning due to the narrow objectives and strict timelines of client funded projects. Another common issue voiced by the Consultant mode was that they were sometimes perceived as taking work from professional partners within their communities. This is perception went against the community engagement mission of most of these centers.

The Scholar Mode

These centers are focused mainly on theoretical and applied research and are more closely tied to the university. Funding usually comes from the university or grants. The majority of collaboration tends to happen within the university and its bodies, rather than with the government or community partners. Little to no administration (outside of the typical facilities and administration provided by the university) is needed in this mode. These centers use research methods and expertise as tools for scholarly thinking and writing. Scholars impact their profession by publishing papers, journal entries, books, newsletters, and blogs, adding to the body of knowledge on a particular subject. Oftentimes, impact of the work extends out to other universities or professionals who bring theories to reality or expand on the knowledge-base related to the work.

The main strength of the Scholar mode is its academic alignment. As the output of this mode is mainly publications, it syncs well with a typical university promotion structure that prioritizes academic publications. Additionally, this mode was often a positive mechanism to encourage multi-discipline and multi-sector collaboration. These centers provided strong support for graduate and advanced undergraduate research opportunities, though often operated outside of the core undergraduate education mission of many universities. Generally, work from the Scholar mode was less connected to the community. One downside to the emphasis on academic publication was that the work is not always communicated in a way that is accessible and useful to community members. The topics under investigation also commonly focused on individual faculty research agendas rather than stated community need or professional demands. Further, this mode relied largely on faculty members to administrate the center. Faculty members were often challenged to meet these administrative demands as they were pulled between many projects and teaching, research, and service responsibilities. Faculty administrators appeared slower to respond to the community than an executive director model because of myriad of demands on their time. Due to these pressures and limited time, centers led by a faculty administrator were often steered toward the faculty member's own research agenda. Thus, in the Scholar mode, the center's work seemed less agile to new needs or demands of community partners.

The Educator Mode

These centers are focused predominantly on teaching the next generation of professionals in the associated fields. Courses and degrees are generally offered directly through the center. Funding is almost all university based. Administrative duties may be taken care of in part by the University, but sometimes additional administrators are needed to handle development and dissemination of work (particularly if construction is involved). Service-learning and design-build pedagogy and other strategies for learning are used by instructors to educate students. Teachers impact future generations of professionals through the teaching and mentorship of students through real-world, community-informed projects.

Positively, the Educator mode supports the core mission of the university to educate. This mode provides real-world project experience to students, particularly aligned with professional schools of planning and architecture that seek to produce practice-ready graduates. This mode also appeared more able to respond to local community needs because the center was funded through a stable stream of tuition revenue rather than beholden to the fluctuating demands and interests of clients or grants. Centers in this mode took on more pro-bono and short-term projects. Challenges faced by this mode included spotty administration by faculty, inconsistent quality of products due to the limitations of the academic calendar and

student effort and skill, and variability in community connection because of a constant turnover of students.

The Advocate Mode

These centers focus more on policy and public education and how these mechanisms can better communities. Funding comes from those looking to promote change—be it the university, community partners, or national organizations. This typology needs at least one administrator (such as a director) to clearly guide the mission and fundraise. These centers use models for raising public awareness and changing policies and laws to accomplish their goals. The impact of advocates ranges from simply distributing knowledge to changing laws for the public good. Both of these potential impacts can have a large effect on communities or the profession at large. Few of the surveyed centers were classified under the Advocate mode, though many hybridized Advocate activities with their dominant mode.

This mode strongly focused on community needs and supported long-term community relationships. Through their mission-driven objectives, this mode used scholarly work for direct impact that addressed community needs. Although the impact was often more limited in scope and geographic reach, this mode supported deep, long-term impact. With the right mission, these centers received sustained, multi-year funding by mission-aligned foundations and organizations. One challenge faced by this mode was a conflict between the political nature of advocacy and the apolitical mission of institutions of higher learning. Additionally, some tenure-track faculty found it difficult to situate their scholarly publication incentives within the work of these mission-driven centers.

DYNAMICS BETWEEN THE FOUR MODES

During the creation of this framework, three inter and intra center dynamics were observed: (1) operations, (2) hybridization between modes, and (3) transitions of modes over time. The next section discusses the dynamics between the four modes.

Four Modes: Operations

During categorization, centers were also mapped against four operational continuums: geographical reach, administrative support, funding mix, and type of products produced (***Figure 4***). Although over ten operational dimensions were examined, these four most strongly differentiated one center from another. Generally, the Consultant mode tended to have a regional to global reach, require greater administration support, secured higher volumes of funding largely from industry, and produced professional products. The Scholar mode tended to have a broad reach, required less administrative support, secured moderate levels of funds

largely from grants, and produced academic publications. The Educator mode tended to have a local focus, required little administration, derived funding from existing tuition dollars, and produced semi-professional products. The Advocate mode tended to be locally focused, have greater administrative support, successfully secured larger amounts of funding from mission-driven foundations, and produced products that directly address community identified needs.

At the time of the survey, half of the over fifty sampled centers were locally oriented, with only a fourth (25%) with a global mission. The majority of centers (54%) were financially self-sustaining through grants and contracts, with only 14% relying solely on university funding. Projects were the dominant output of 58% of centers, with a balanced divide between pedagogy (19%) and papers (23%) as alternative products. A variety of administrative models either within departments or spanning multiple disciplines exist. More than three quarters of centers (76%) relied on additional part or fulltime employees to operate. Research work overwhelmingly used an applied rather than theoretical methodology (see Figure 4).

Four Modes: Combinations

Within a dominant mode category, there are several hybrids or combinations. Take for example, a center that does the majority of its work in the Consultant mode, but also acts as an Educator and Advocate. Such a center receives the majority of its funding from industry partnerships and paid reports, but also acts as an Educator when it hires undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctorates to carry out the work. Additionally, this same center can play the role of an Advocate for the particular mission of the agency supplying funding. In other cases, centers are Educator-Scholars (primarily tuition revenue focused, run through coursework, and occasionally publishing papers from course products) or Scholar-Consultant-Advocates (principally grant focused with additional streams of revenue from contracts, powered by faculty time, demonstrating impact through scholarly publications while advocating for community wellness through progressive urban design). Although each center is classified by its dominant funding source and work product, most centers engage with a community through a myriad of processes.

Four Modes: Transitions

Additionally, many centers have transitioned from one model to another over time. Transitions are most often spurred by a change in the interests of the center's leadership or funding availability. For example, the Kinder Institute at Rice University initially grew out of a course that produced an annual comprehensive area survey documenting the changes in Houston over time. It was funded by tuition dollars and powered by student work (fitting the Educator mode). However, as the survey grew, the center garnered grants to use the survey for broader research and

several post-doctorates were hired and more faculty were involved in production (fitting the Scholar mode). Most recently, the Kinder Institute has switched from a faculty director to an executive director pulled from industry and government experience. The main source of revenue is now a healthy endowment and contracts with industry partners. A marked decrease in faculty involvement has been replaced by hired research associates to complete the terms of contracts (fitting the Consultant mode) (Paterson, 2018). This one example is indicative of the journey of many centers across the country – endeavoring to stay nimble within changing funding availability and educational expectations.

THE FOUR MODALITIES DEFINED BY CASE STUDIES

After the creation of this framework, case studies of over ten centers were conducted to tune the framework with the on-the-ground realities of centers. Each case involved an interview with the director with a pre-set list of questions, a site visit to the center by the author, and a comprehensive review of the products produced by the center. One case study for each of the four modes is detailed in this section, though additional cases that were studied are cited.

Consultant Modality: The Kinder Institute

The Kinder Institute at Rice University operates primarily through the Consultant Mode. Around fifty percent of its present funding is from grants and contracts for commissioned work, forty percent from the annual earnings of an established endowment set up by private donors, and ten percent from cooperate donations. The Institute is self-described as a think-tank running in a university. It emphasizes real-world impact as its main performance metric. The Institute is viewed by the university as an important mechanism to realize the university's strategic plan which posits that Rice will not succeed if Houston does not succeed. Academic publications are not prioritized and rarely produced, although annual reports of their work are disseminated to the Houston community. The Institute reports directly to the Provost of Rice University, to its Advisory Board, and to the Kinder family. Originally housed within the School of Social Science and administered by a tenured faculty member at its founding in 2006, the Institute moved to the provost level around 2010 when it received a $15 million endowment from the Kinder family. In 2014, an Executive Director was hired (from industry and government) to run the Institute in place of previous faculty administration. At this time, its main mission transitioned to a Consultant mode and away from previous activities as an Educator and Scholar. In addition to the Executive Director, there are about fifteen staff (2 administrative assistances, 3 communications and development, and 6-7 researchers). There are no courses formally associated with the Kinder Institute, though several faculty members across the university have linked the service-learning work of their courses with Kinder's work (Klineberg, 2018; Fulton, 2018).

Other universities that have centers that follow the Consultant mode include Yale Urban Design Workshop (mainly supported through contracts for real projects), Columbia University's Urban Lab (garnering funding from internationally commissioned studies and projects), and Colorado States' Institute for the Built Environment (largely executing contract research work). Each of these cases has at least one administrator who oversees development and contract execution. These centers are not formally associated with any courses or curriculum within the universities.

Scholar Modality: The Urban Information Lab

The Urban Information Lab operates predominantly in the Scholar mode. It was formed in 2013 at the University of Texas School of Architecture. Over fifty percent of funding is supplied through grants. Sponsorships from municipal governments or private industry continue to grow and make up over a third of its funding. The remainder of the annual budget is supplied by the university through salaried faculty research time (Paterson, 2017). The lab completes research on emerging information technologies and their impact on the built environment and urban services in contexts across the United States. Example projects range from researching Airbnb spatial distribution of rentals in five U.S. cities to Uber price surges during special events in Austin. The Lab is co-directed by two full-time, tenured faculty members in the discipline of urban planning (University of Texas, 2018). There is no hired administrator for the Lab. Although no courses are formally associated with the Lab, graduate student research training is supported through the retention of multiple research assistants. Few undergraduates are associated with its work.

Other centers primarily operating in the Scholar mode include Harvard's Urban Theory Lab, University of Pennsylvania's Institute for Urban Research, Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Center for Advanced Urbanism. All of these centers mainly produce academic publications and are supported largely by grants and the universities in which they sit.

Educator Modality: The Sustainable Cities Initiative

The Sustainable Cities Initiative at University of Oregon delivers the majority of its work through the Educator mode. The Initiative uses applied teaching, research, and community partnerships to create sustainable solution for cities. Founded in 2009, the Initiative's original source of funding was from the university's Provost. Its current million-dollar budget receives a third of its funding from the university, a third from grants, and a third from sponsorships by municipal governments. As its budget is evenly divided, its work also falls strongly within the Consultant and Scholar modes. It is classified under the Educator mode because the majority of its output occurs through its Sustainable City Year Project where over

five-hundred students from across campus participate annually in over twenty community-defined projects through coursework. Although these projects are largely executed by undergraduates, the Initiative supports graduate students hired through its Urbanism Next Center as research assistants. The Initiative sits at the provost level and is run by two tenured faculty co-directors from two different disciplines (planning and architecture). The Initiative has administrative assistants, though like most centers in this study, more development and dissemination of work would be possible if there was a greater budget for these resources. The Initiative works across colleges and disciplines and is housed at both the Eugene campus and the White Stag Block in Portland (Larco, 2016).

Other cases include University of Florida’s CityLab (offering degrees and classes directly through the Lab), Texas A&M’s Institute for Sustainable Communities, and the University of Idaho’s Urban Design Center (delivering the majority of its work through coursework). These centers are all focused on the dual mission of connecting with their communities and supporting student learning.

Advocate Modality: Pratt Center for Community Development

Founded in 1963, the Pratt Center for Community Development has worked in the neighborhoods surrounding Pratt for over five decades and has operated predominantly through the Advocate mode. It is a mission-driven center that is focused on community development, business innovation, and forward-thinking research and policy. Large foundations and organizations, such as the Ford Foundation, fund the operating budget of the Center. Pratt Institute supports the Center by providing its building location on campus and underwriting faculty salaries. The Center has an Executive Director (hired from industry and government rather than academia) and over a dozen other full-time employees focused on development, project management, and research (Koschitz, 2017). The original and continued aim of the center is to advance solutions to the challenges experienced by low-and-moderate-income communities. Professional skills and practical experience are leveraged “in the areas of community organizing, policy advocacy, planning, and technical assistance to support community-based organizations and small businesses in their efforts to improve neighborhood quality of life (Pratt Institute, 2018).” This advocacy agenda has formed a deep and long-term partnership with the surrounding community.

Other cases include Georgetown’s Policy Innovation Lab (focused on informing and changing policy), California Collage of the Arts’ Urban Works Agency, and University of Chicago’s Place Lab (emphasizing advocacy for communities surrounding the university). These cases all focus on directly creating change in policy and the built environment in their immediate communities through advocacy efforts.

CONCLUSIONS:

A FUTURE OF ENGAGED WORK, SCHOLARSHIP, EDUCATION, AND ADVOCACY

University urban design and research centers link academic pedagogy and research to real-world applications. These centers provide an infrastructure for faculty, students, and research staff to complete research, coursework, and projects that engage with urban planning and design practice. Four modalities (Educator, Scholar, Consultant, and Activist) structure a framework to understand the diverse work of these centers. Inter and intra dynamics of these four modes include operational factors (administrative support, funding sources, geographical reach, and material outputs), hybrids, and transitions. This paper fills a current gap in a systematic study and relational understanding of these centers.

Each of the four modalities face unique challenges. The Consultant may encounter complaints by the professional community of unfair competition. The Scholar may endure yearly budget uncertainties between grant funding cycles. The Educator may enjoy a stable university budget but struggle to meet the expectations of the community partners within the fixed schedule of coursework. The Advocate may encounter misunderstandings of their role of advocating for a community while staying apolitical, especially if the center sits within a state university.

Each modality also has unique strengths. The Consultant has demonstrated the greatest capacity to expand university revenue. The Scholar fits most naturally within the skillsets and incentive structure of faculty in a tenure system. The Educator is the easiest center to initiate, as it functions within existing coursework structures and there is little new overhead. The Advocate is the best model for targeting specific issues or desired areas of change within a community.

Overall, this paper is a tool for universities interested in starting a center to develop their own missions and for existing centers to contextualize their efforts within a systematically established framework. All modalities can demonstrate visible impact and bring diverse sources of revenue for universities. For these reasons, centers continue to expand in number and mission across the country and involve a widening set of multi-discipline academic and professional interests.

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