



Cincinnati Fall 2005

## International Laboratory for the Environmental Project

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# RETHINKING THE BASIN

*communication ACROSS structural CORRIDORS*

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## Project aim

A first analysis of the study area shows the absence of unity between the single parts of the city. The project aim came out of this reality. Our purpose was to visualize a single project scenario for the future of the Basin in order to single out an element that connects the separated parts of the Basin. This single project scenario mediates between:

- social perceptions and perspectives for the study area, and
- territorial dynamics acting on the study area.

It is possible to achieve this scenario through the instillation of a revitalizing role in the Basin; integrating existing functions and adding new ones.

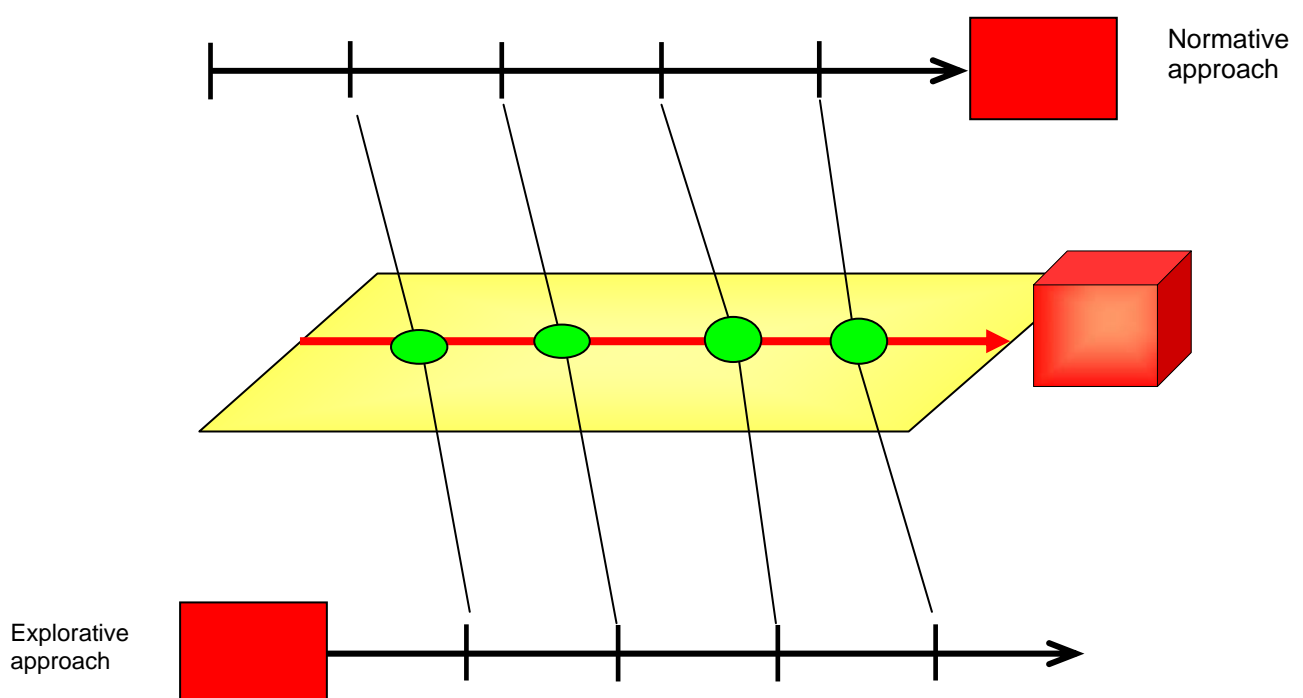
## Project approach

The concept of the project came from the idea the cities are not static systems, but prove to be dynamic with time. Therefore, as change is physiologic, our project represents a succession of steps throughout time. The aim defines an ordered schedule of urban priorities and territorial feasibility.

In our project we merge together the explorative and normative approaches to define our ideas. The explorative approach starts with analyzing the wishes and expectations of local community residents. From this analysis we constructed a future image of the city. This image is important because it takes into account real ideas from real community residents. The normative approach starts with the investigation of the area's characteristics. From this investigation we can create an image which penetrates the superficial layer of the area to understand all its interrelated dimensions: environmental, functional, social, and economical and how they connect. From this deeper understanding we form an in-time process to arrive at a possible future image for the area.

Our project blends the two final images together to construct one integrated image.

### An integrated approach



## Explorative Approach

The goal of our interview process was to gain some insights from the people living in these areas about changes they would like to see in their communities and the entire Cincinnati area. For this reason we traveled to Lower Price Hill, Camp Washington, the West End, Over-the-Rhine, and two women from the suburbs: one from the west of Interstate 75 and one from the east of Interstate 75. There were some general questions so that the residents felt free to suggest their own ideas and desires for their neighborhoods. We also asked about the movement of these residents from neighborhood to neighborhood to find what draws them to visit other communities and if public transportation plays a large role in this movement or not. Finally, we asked these residents their impressions of the Mill Creek, Railroads, and Ohio River as this was our area of study. From all of these responses we wanted to understand what, if anything, commonalities these residents shared.

Through these questions we learned that the views the Mill Creek, Ohio River, and Railroads were either negative or non-existent. However, one reason some of these residents visited a different community, Greenhills, was the attraction of Winton Woods: a large park almost half an hour north of the Basin along Mill Creek watershed! We also found a certain reminiscence among older residents about how the neighborhood used to be years ago when the residents cared about their community and took pride in the place where they lived.

Generally, the women we interviewed spoke about the lack of safety for their children and families, and the men requested more and better job opportunities. Nearly all of those interviewed verbally warned us to be careful as we were walking the streets for this survey. We put the suggestions and desires of the residents into the three following categories:

**Increased safety and health.** We formed this category due to the expressed desires for lower speed limits on streets, installation of more streetlights, increased law enforcement, belief that the Mill Creek “is bad for us,” the request for safer, drug-free parks for children and families, less abandoned lots and the need most residents felt to verbally warn us about our safety.

**Increased employment opportunities.** We formed this category from the desire to see less abandoned houses and lots in the area and also direct requests for more and/or better jobs.

**The re-instillation of community pride.** We formed this category from the older interviewed-residents remembering the nice families who have left and moved on that had, at one point, put effort into making the community a nice and enjoyable place to live. Also from the negative and hopeless self-image the residents had of their community and belief no one would put effort into its revitalization.

We address the specific requests through some of our interventions, and through a cyclical effect all of the requests by residents are addressed through our new plan. However, before we look at these specifically, we will understand the normative approach, and see how the interventions our an integrated image.

## Normative approach

This approach involved a research immersion of the study area. We looked at previous studies and projects done by institutions and stakeholders on the environmental, social, political, cultural, and economical aspects of the Basin and beyond. Two large projects we looked at were the Mill Creek Watershed Greenway Master Plan, and the 2002 Over-the-Rhine/West End Plan. We looked at other studies of the Basin as well. From these efforts we gathered a conglomeration of images that highlighted different territories. We then selected a specific point of view to reflect upon the relationships among these territories.

We decided that the component of flows best represents the urban character of Cincinnati. In this sense, the flows we recognized (the flow of people, of freights, of information and of environmental dynamics) oriented themselves in an organized way. This orientation greatly contributes to the definition of Cincinnati as a place where interaction occurs among different territorial dimensions at different scales. According to this observation we refer to the system of corridors as a framework for our reorganization of the Basin.

Our project rethinks relations among elements of the urban system and separates them into different levels. On one level we promote the contact and exchange among the different elements. This level, links different territories to one another so that they form a consistent urban fabric. On another level we reinforce the different identities of the territories, emphasizing separation.

The first resulting image of the Basin consisted of a network of north-south corridors connected to one another by the Ohio River. Each corridor encompasses its own unique character as a result of the different activities and functions that occur within it.

- **The Functional Corridor:** consisting of the Mill Creek, railways, and industrial Queensgate
- **The Transportational Corridor:** consisting of the Highway
- **The Environmental Corridor:** consisting of the eastern hillsides which make a border of green ending in Sawyer point and Eden Park at the riverfront.

The project aims to emphasize the identity of each corridor exploring innovative ways to connect them. The adopted strategy identifies new and existing elements associated with the corridors, giving them the role of “development generators.”

In order to identify potential opportunities for these territorial regenerators it is necessary to consider the Basin as a part of the larger metropolitan region. The Basin’s role is characterized by centrality. All flows and movements of the metropolitan region converge here, which strengthens the existing connector: the Ohio River. These ideas led to a final image which we then integrated with our other final image created by the residential suggestions.

Together they formed one unified plan for the Basin. A system of corridors subtly connected through different existing nodes (Findlay Market, Music Hall, Washington Park, Aronoff Center, Contemporary Arts Center, Sawyer Point, the Stadiums, the Freedom Center, the Convention Center, and Union Terminal), future nodes (our interventions), and the Ohio River. These nodes maintain the identities of their respective areas while attracting visitors; this then creates movement among them all. Therefore, the city becomes united through movement.

We will now explain the interventions of our plan and how the explorative and normative approaches effected their implementation.

**A Water Plaza: harbor, culvert, and park.** This intervention includes the construction of a harbor and new residential community. Green space surrounding the harbor and most importantly a culvert system for the sewage plant that redirects the sewage away from the Mill Creek.

**Residential Ideas:** This intervention directly addresses the issue of community pride. This harbor will give the residential community a name in Cincinnati; one of which to take care and be proud. It also specifically addresses the comment about Winton Woods. This Water Plaza would serve in a very similar way to its respective community as Winton Woods does to its providing an outdoor area with activities for all members of the family. The installation of a new culvert system and clean up of the Mill Creek provides more job opportunities as well.

**Normative Approach:** We recognize this corridor as a functional one. Although the harbor may not turn into a functional harbor for the barges that empty, it suggests the functionality of one and shifts

Cincinnatians focus back to the functional Ohio River which is still used today to connect this city to the rest of the United States.

This intervention boosts the identity of this corridor separating it from the others. However, as we know from our interviews, it will attract people from the rest of the city, making it a connecting node.

**An Inter-modal Platform and Transportation Office District.** This platform and coinciding district serves as the new gateway to Cincinnati. It includes an expanded railway from Union Terminal to the Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky International Airport and Lunken Airport; a skyscraper district consisting of office buildings for corporations and businesses connected to the rail lines, airport, Mill Creek, and factories in the area; underground buildings helping to blend the functional and environmental corridors. These buildings serve as either office or commercial and are expansions of Union terminal under the ground. Their tops create a park in which to view the rail yard and celebrate the functionality of the corridor.

Explorative approach: This district directly addresses the desire for more employment opportunities as a great deal of construction will be necessary, and then other specialized services for the businesses which will occupy the buildings. It also brings economic development to the Basin.

Normative approach: This district positions Cincinnati in the growing globalization economy to construct headquarters for service-based corporations. Telecommunications are paralleled by the commuting traffic of the rail lines, bus lines, and air port service. This district is important, as is the beautification, to Cincinnati to emerge as a city in the global market.

**A Mixed Use District.** This new district will not be located in any of the neighborhoods we visited, but rather will serve as common ground among those neighborhoods, and the city in its entirety. This district contains the “big box,” North American mall in its west side and connects to small businesses in its east side.

Explorative approach: This intervention directly addresses requests for more employment opportunities and economic development. It also starts a cyclical effect which indirectly addresses nearly all residential requests. The thinking behind the cycle is that as more people are attracted to an area more money is put into it. Through the increased funding, safety and the environmental condition of the area increases. As these increase more people and businesses will be attracted to the area starting the cycle over again. (see figure 1.1).

Normative approach: This intervention again builds on the functional corridor. While it does add to this corridor’s identity it also serves as a connection among the flows as it creates a new commercial corridor across Interstate 75.

**A Linking Park System.** This intervention connects the entire basin through a system of small and large parks. It includes a large park along the west side of the Mill Creek by North Fairmont, the Water Plaza, and small neighborhood parks and playgrounds dispersed through out Lower Price Hill to link those two. It includes a large park along the riverside that links the Water Plaza on the West side to Sawyer Point on the East side. This park system also includes a large project planting foliage and flora along side the Mill Creek, Ohio River, and the west side of the Railroad yard.

Explorative approach: This linking park system directly addresses residents’ requests for small, close-by parks for their children to play in. It also directly addresses the desire to go to Winton Woods by providing similar services in these residents own neighborhood. It also addresses the desires of the Downtown worker to have more green space available.

Normative approach: The riverside park builds on the Ohio River corridor bringing the river into the city. It includes a bike/walk path linking the functional corridor to the environmental corridor through environmentally sound means of transport.



Figure 1.1

## Conclusion

Our project comes together from two parallel approaches meeting to create one grand plan for the Basin. Within these approaches we identified three things: One, the corridors of flows; Two, sections of the corridors to prove how they are separated and connected; and Three, residential ideas of the Basin and their neighborhoods.

With all of this in our hands we formulated our interventions to create a master plan. These interventions built up the corridors we identified, and also addressed the ideas of the residents. They also created new nodes (which work with existing nodes in the Basin). It is through these nodes that the corridors become connected in three ways: One, through the flow of people from other areas visiting the nodes; two, softening the boundaries and increasing connections between corridors (such as the underground buildings creating a blend between functionality and environment); and three, the environmental transportation system along the riverside.

With this final image we hope to make set Cincinnati in a place to provide services for the future global market. Making it ready to accept business headquarters and “a nice place to live” with beauty, functionality, and easy access to other parts of the region.



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