TEACHING-LEARNING-RESEARCH: DESIGN AND ENVIRONMENTS

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Inspiring Public Imagination through a Micro Eco Village for Students

• Author(s) Name:
Cameron Van Dyke

• University or Company Affiliation:
Appalachian State University

• Abstract:
I am a university professor and product designer who has been working with my students to build a micro eco village in order to explore life in a more authentic and equitable relationship with the natural world. This “living laboratory” is in its second year of immersive, daily testing in an off-the-grid rural setting. The students and I have worked side by side to make the project a reality: clearing building sites, milling trees into lumber, cutting and splitting firewood, building three small dwellings, fabricating rainwater collection, and building a solar electrical system. We are all discovering together what can be done on steep wooded land in the mountains of North Carolina. Our goal is to create a small sustainable learning community that provides a fully immersive experience for the students that live full time on the property.

The goals of this community based participatory research project are as follows:

1) To discover through first hand daily contact new options for sustainable living
2) To improve those discoveries through iteration and prototyping
3) To normalize these new behaviors so as to be acceptable by the general public
4) To share our experience with the general public so that they might both imagine and desire the changes that we are demonstrating.

This living laboratory is a prototype for a new sustainable paradigm. It is both a test of new sustainable patterns of living and a demonstration to the public in order to inspire positive
social change. Our project is a form of activism that is focused on a positive replacement of the status quo. The ultimate goal is to “Create Public Imagination” for a sustainable future. Learn more at: www.thefuturepeople.us

• Author(s) Biography:
Cameron Van Dyke has been a designer and fabricator starting at a very young age. By the age of 12 he had filled his father’s garage with bicycles and furniture projects. He went on to earn a BFA in Furniture Design from the Rochester Institute of Technology and an MFA in 3D Design at the University of Michigan. He operated his own design/build studio for 20 years – creating everything from bespoke furniture to residential interiors to public sculpture. In 2016 he shifted his design practice to teaching and is now an assistant professor of product design at Appalachian State University in the mountains of North Carolina, USA. This new rural situation has allowed him to begin experimenting with primitive living, micro architecture, and self-derived solutions for dwellings and transportation.