

Overview

The East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP) is a **cooperatively managed community assistance and development program** of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Faculty and students from the collaborating campus units - the Department of **Urban and Regional Planning**, the Department of **Landscape Architecture**, and the School of **Architecture** - work together with **East St. Louis community groups** on highly tangible and visible projects that address the immediate and long-term needs of some of the city's poorest neighborhoods.



East St. Louis, Illinois, has long been seen as a prime example of urban blight in America. With post-war industrial abandonment, most of the city's blue collar jobs disappeared. The **population has decreased by more than half** from 1960 to 1990, and the city has lost many of its employed residents to more prosperous suburban communities.

In 1990, the population was **98% African-American**, with over half the residents living below the poverty level. Unemployment is nearly 30%. With shrinking tax rolls, the city was **forced to eliminate many of its municipal agencies**, beginning with its city planning office in the 1970s. Garbage was not collected by the city from 1987 to 1992. Many **city employees were laid off**, and police and fire departments did not have resources to replace defective equipment.

In the face of this bleak picture, the residents of East St. Louis have shown tremendous will and resolve. Many **local residents are actively involved in neighborhood revitalization**. Local churches have maintained a strong presence in their neighborhoods and often lead these improvement efforts.



Since 1990, ESLARP activities and accomplishments have been an important part of the **growing neighborhood revitalization movement** in East St. Louis, Illinois. Aided by the University's instructional, research, and public service resources, ESLARP is showing results in communities where residents are mobilizing to **address current social, economic, and environmental problems**.

