Contents

Alumni Interview with Dr. Ken Reardon – Jeff Peel 4
Student Spotlight – Lauren Masseria & Sarah Fields 7
On What Was – Ryan Ridings 8
Editorial: Rehabbing J-51 – Ahmed Tigani 10
Modernist Architecture in Central & Eastern Europe – Oksana Miranova 12
Power in Wall Street – Thomas White 16
The Future of Public Green Spaces – Sharon Moskovits 20
Shadow of the Istanbul Nouveau – Luis Gallo 24

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Spring 2012 issue of the Urban Review. Urban Review is a student produced publication of the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning that serves as a forum for ideas, a showcase of student projects and an opportunity for students to publish their works. This semester, we are pleased to present submissions from both undergraduate and graduate students in the program.

This spring’s issue does not reflect one common theme. Instead, it builds on some of the most interesting and reoccurring discussions we have in the classroom and between our peers and colleagues- including those presented by last semester’s authors. The diversity of topics in this issue speaks not only to the varied interests of our students, but also to the wide impact Hunter grads will eventually make on our field.

We would like to thank Dr. Ken Reardon, a 1982 MUP graduate, for taking his time to speak with us about his experience at Hunter and his current work. Dr. Reardon’s life-long dedication to social justice and community-based planning is an inspiration and evidence of the lasting impact of a Hunter College education.

Please enjoy this issue and do not forget to check out UAP’s new website (www.hunteruap.org) where you can find past issues of the Urban Review in PDF format by clicking People & Community/ Organizations/ Student Groups.

Erin McAuliff
Editor-in-Chief

We dedicate this issue to outgoing UAP Director of Programming and Communications Mary Rocco. She is a graduate of both the Master’s in Urban Planning program and the BA in Urban Studies program. For nearly five years, she has helped students navigate the program, the city and their individual career paths. Beginning in the Fall of 2012, Mary will be a candidate for a Ph.D in Urban Planning at the University of Pennsylvania. Students and faculty will both miss Mary’s warm presence and can-do attitude. We wish her well at Penn and in all her future endeavors.
Ken Reardon received his Masters in Urban Planning from Hunter College in 1982- going on to receive his Ph.D. in planning from Cornell University. Reardon was a tenured planning professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Associate Professor and Chairperson of the Department of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University, and is currently Director of the Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning at the University of Memphis.

What was your background before Hunter College, and what made you choose the school?

In the mid-1970s, I was serving as the Executive Director of the New Jersey Federation of Senior Citizens – a statewide coalition of more than 400 retiree organizations involved in economic justice organizing in New Jersey. Professor Hans Spiegel, then Director of the Urban Affairs Program at Hunter, approached me. He and his students were doing a study of statewide community organizing groups. Professor Spiegel’s questions forced me to think much more critically about the structural causes of inequality that we were struggling to address in Trenton. Professor Spiegel invited me to apply to his graduate program if I ever felt the need to take a break from my community organizing activities. In between organizing jobs, I thought I would enhance my analytical skills. I was attracted to the Urban Affairs Program because of its location, history of field-based learning, and the faculty.

The Department of Urban Affairs and Planning has had a history of activism and organizing since its inception. Was that true during your time in the program?

Upon entering the program, I quickly got to know six to eight activists who had been doing terrific environmental, economic and social justice work in cities across the country. They came to NYC,
in large part, to experience life in the Big Apple and to learn from a number of innovative organizing, planning and design efforts underway in the city.

I was so delighted to be back in the city, with a diverse set of students from across the country who were committed to making a difference that I switched from the one-year urban affairs curricula to the two-year planning program.

For most of my time at Hunter, a group of us met at Grand Central every Sunday morning to visit a unique neighborhood where equity-oriented planning was being attempted. We would divide up the responsibilities for studying the history of these efforts, identifying local sites to visit, and finding the coolest ethnic eatery or bar to have dinner.

While you came into the program with an organizing background, was there a specific professor or course that shaped your future?

In my first semester, I had the good fortune of having Don Sullivan, then Director of the Urban Planning program, for an Introduction to Housing course. Don was brilliant, demanding and intolerant of sloppy work – which all of my classmates, including myself, were occasionally guilty of submitting. He was wicked smart, committed to supporting the revitalization efforts of CBOS, and fully involved in a number of groups, such as the Settlement Housing Fund and LISC, which were seeking to promote a more balanced approach to economic and community development in the City.

I also had the opportunity to enroll in Peter Salins’ Location Theory class, which offered a terrific introduction to the changing structure of the NYC economy and physical form. While Peter was, to say the least, quite conservative and active in the establishment of the Manhattan Institute, he welcomed alternative points of view and encouraged my interest in planning in spite of his deep opposition to my politics. I also had the opportunity to take a course on full employment offered by Bert Gross and Stan Moses that Paul Davidoff lectured in on several occasions.

How else did Don Sullivan play a role in shaping your future?

Don regularly undertook a variety of community-based research projects for local citizen groups, citywide intermediaries, and municipal government agencies. He was kind enough to involve me in all of these efforts, offering me the opportunity to complement my classroom learning.

Don also seemed to know about every new architectural project, urban design effort, art exhibit, music concert and community change effort underway in the city, and he constantly encouraged me to take all of these in – often, with the help of complimentary tickets for me and my then fiancée – now wife of 30 years.

What were your biggest take-aways from your time at Hunter?

First, a deep passion for the Big Apple, all aspects of place-making and city building, and innovative approaches to resident-led change efforts. Second, I received a first-rate professional educa-

tion in city and regional planning from the likes of Sullivan, Spiegel, Salins, Hyman, Johnson, Milczarski, Gross, Moses and Birch. Third, I was introduced to an experiential approach to teaching and learning, which I subsequently adopted and successfully used as a planning professor for more than 25 years. Fourth, I developed a number of life-long friendships with classmates that have deepened and endured for nearly 30 years – individuals who have provided me with professional advice, personal support, and many hilarious moments.

Finally, the program modeled for me the way in which faculty can engage in various forms of what Boyer referred to as the scholarship of engagement that support the empowerment efforts of poor people and their allies. We referred to Hunter as “The People’s Planning School” – offering a first-rate education to poor, working class and middle-income social justice oriented activists who were dissatisfied simply to describe the world as it is but committed to working with others, using their organizing and planning skills, to bring about some form of Dr. King’s Beloved Community!

Where did you go after Hunter and how did your time in our program help you get there?

The influence of Hunter College played a key role in my choices of Cornell for my Ph.D. and the University of Minnesota for my Post-Doctoral work and the community-based research projects that I have subsequently chosen to pursue. I have little doubt that it was not for my planning education at UCLA – i.e. the University on the Corner of Lexington Avenue – aka Hunter College, I would have not been involved in efforts to: preserve the Essex Street Market, eliminate the City’s Auction Sales Housing Program, establish the East St. Louis Action Research Project, prepare a post-disaster recovery plan for the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans with ACORN, oppose a city-sponsored effort to raze one of Memphis’ last public housing complexes, and organize opposition to the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning’s decision to hold the annual conference in Charleston, on whose State House grounds the Confederate flag is proudly displayed.

You’re now Director of the Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning at the University of Memphis. What have you accomplished there that you’re most proud of?

Since arriving in the fall of 2008, I have worked with colleagues in the departments of anthropology and architecture to support resident-led change efforts in the South Memphis and Vance Avenue neighborhoods. In both of these economically-challenged neighborhoods, we have worked to assist local residents and institutional leaders in preparing comprehensive revitalization plans using a highly participatory “bottoms-up, bottoms-sideways” approach to planning. Since completing these community-driven plans we have assisted the South Memphis community in establishing a highly successful farmers market, designing and rebuilding their main arterial originally designed by famed landscape architect/planner George Kessler, and formulating a public arts project highlighting the community’s rich history.
In the Vance Avenue community, we have helped local residents establish a thriving community garden, expand an annual health fair, and secure funding for a HUD Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant. Currently, we are working with residents of these and other neighborhoods to establish a mobile food market to provide poor and working-class residents with access to high quality, farm-fresh and culturally appropriate fresh fruits and vegetables. We expect to see “THE GREEN MACHINE” serving consumers in fifteen of the city’s food deserts by August 1, 2012.

Can you explain your bottoms-up/ bottoms-sideways approach for South Memphis and Vance Avenue?

Deep cuts in the budget of the Office of Planning and Development have forced this agency to forego most long-term planning activities in order to keep up with basic zoning administration matters. Residents of the City’s many low-income neighborhoods, where ongoing public and private disinvestment continue to occur, have been forced to mobilize local residents, business owners and institutional leaders to undertake their own comprehensive neighborhood stabilization and revitalization plans. In recent years, these grassroots leaders have found allies within the University of Memphis Department of Anthropology and Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning, who have been willing to organize students enrolled in field-based courses to work with local activists to complete resident-driven economic and community development plans.

During the past four years, anthropology and planning students and faculty have completed comprehensive plans for the South Memphis, Vance Avenue, and Brownsville communities. We’ve been using an empowerment approach to planning that seeks to enhance the capacity of community-based organizations working in poor and working class communities to positively affect the public and private investments that play a critical role in shaping the overall quality of life within urban communities. The U of M’s empowerment planning approach integrates the core theories and methods of participatory action research as proposed by William F. Whyte, Davyd Greenwood, and others; direct action organizing as espoused by Saul D. Alinsky, St Kahn, and Wade Rathke; and popular education as articulated by Danillo Dochi, Paulo Friere, and Myles Horton. Elements of each of these three approaches to social change are integrated into a community-based research model that views every contact with local residents not only as an opportunity to collect valuable information about the community and the dynamics that have shaped it, but as a chance to invite critically-thinking, civic-minded residents to become involved in the ongoing organizing, planning, and development effort taking place within the neighborhood. This approach to organizational and community capacity-building seeks to address the serious loss of social capital identified by Robert Putnam and others that often undermine the community transformation efforts of local residents.

What was gained/lost for the community over a more traditional top-down approach?

The top-down approach which has dominated Memphis’ city planning efforts since the urban renewal era has failed to produce significant benefits for the City’s poor and working-class communities. Frustration with the superficial citizen participation efforts that dominate the City’s public planning efforts have discouraged increasing numbers of neighborhood leaders from participating in these city-sponsored efforts which would fall in the “manipulation” rungs of Sherry Arnstein’s “Ladder of Citizen Participation”. Increasingly, local residents who are serious about addressing the structural causes of persistent poverty in their community are initiating their own independent organizing and planning efforts in light of the failure of city-sponsored efforts.

How receptive were these two communities to bottom-up planning. Although the Memphis civil right community has historically had great bottom-up campaigns and organizers more recent activism has taken on a top-down approach.

Not since the 1968 Sanitation Workers Strike has there been a sustained organizing effort by the City’s poor and working-class communities. As a result of the near-universal lack of poor peoples’ voice on critical municipal, county, and regional urban policy issues, the City’s development agenda has become dominated by the City’s largest landowners, developers, and financiers whose actions evidence little regard for the City’s very large low-income population. The embarrassment and pain experienced by local elites in light of the King assassination, resulted in a quiet effort to make sure the city was never put in a negative national spotlight as a result of the efforts of a grassroots movement, such as the garbage workers’ efforts. So, while IAF and ACORN have had episodic presences in the city, they were unable to create a sustained citizen organization that could make sure that the equity aspect of local policy decisions were being considered. Memphis remains one of a very small number of mid-sized cities in the US that lacks an influential citizen organization and makes major development decisions with little or no consideration on their impact on the life chances of the city’s poorest residents. Currently, leaders from the growing neighborhood action movement are discussing strategies for addressing the City’s lack of a powerful citizen action voice.

Have you found unique challenges to planning and organizing in southern cities like Memphis, or are our communities more similar than we know?

Yes, unexamined racism and unrepentant white privilege has produced a neo-colonial system of local politics in Memphis. The near universal lack of public debate and discussion on major economic and community development decisions that have significant impact on the future health and welfare of the City’s low-income communities is unique in my experience. Public policy discourse in Memphis is dominated by developers and social service providers who are willing, under pressure, to talk about the unintended consequences of the City’s and Region’s increasingly uneven pattern of development. They are, however, resolutely unwilling to discuss, in a serious manner, the structural causes of persistent poverty because they are not willing to consider modifying or limiting their longstanding privilege.
In April, a group of students from Hunter’s Department of Urban Affairs and Planning were able to attend the 2012 American Planning Association National Conference in Los Angeles, a city known for its urban controversy, perspectives and potential. There, they were able to engage with fellow planners from around the world, explore the city, and get a first-hand look at the current state of the industry and ideas for the road ahead. The trip inspired a breadth of responses from our fellow students, from photographs to poetry; their creativity offers a vicarious glimpse into what the conference had to offer.

Planning Haikus Inspired by the 2012 APA Conference by Sarah Fields

Global master plans  Buzz word in title  Delta Urbanism  The job search sessions
Abu Dhabi and Libya  Sustainable design and  The Dutch are so wonderful  arbitrary decisions
What Code of Ethics?  regional focus  water is our friend  please hire me today

CicLaVia at the APA Conference Los Angeles, California by Lauren Masseria

CicLAvia is modeled after Ciclovia, a weekly street closure in Bogota, Columbia. Currently, LA has done three installations of CicLAvia, where 10 Miles of roadways are closed to cars, and people are invited to walk, bike, skate and jump rope in the street! While, in town for the national planning conference, Sam Frommer and I walked the route from the Convention Center to the Hollenbeck Park hub which lead us over the 4th Street Bridge and the famed LA river! The event attracts people old and young and community organizations are encouraged to participate by setting up booths on corners along the route. Currently, the event is only twice a year, but I spoke with a University of California student that said they hope to get it going each month. Judging by the number of people participating, CicLAvia seems to be a success!
Emotional attachment to a place. It’s a simple yet confounding concept. We all understand it; certain places embody times and events, on who we were and who we are. These places have played such significant roles in how we all came to be, how we came to know the world, and how we aged and transformed. We are defined by the places that have been home, where we have adapted to new circumstances, confronted unfortunate events, and where we have achieved our personal triumphs. The confounding aspect for many of us is that – and particularly so in cities – places are static. No matter how rooted in the same soil or bound by a series of addresses, these places are inhabited by other people, with their own histories and goals, and the inherent desire to make a place for themselves. This will inevitably dictate that place be remade.

This is one of the most difficult components of determining what it is we do as urban planners. At the end of the day we are confined to the physical components of place making, but the final product is ultimately interpreted by the end users. As much as we can try to serve our various masters – the public, the community, the city leaders, our superiors, and even our own imaginations - place is characteristically so subjective. How do we best determine when to preserve, how to encourage change while incorporating various interests, or when we should rebuild from scratch?

Recently I was struck by a vague remembrance of a place I had known quite some time ago. It was a moody, drizzling day, and I was walking through Ditmas Park, Brooklyn, taking in the homes and the neighborhood. Many of the houses there have a distinct manner of lived-in-ness that I had always admired and enjoyed. While generous in size, most of them exist in a state of complacency, neither in disrepair or veneered in the perfection that dramatic renovations often lend. It’s the look of an area where a generation has lived for some time. There are streets in this area that are just perfect. They exist, to me, at this wonderful point in time, a combination of unconcern and resources spent elsewhere, leaving them in a happy equilibrium.

On that rainy day, I realized that the sensation I was feeling owed its origin to the streets I grew up on. The pitched roofs, the casually cared for yards, the way it looked like you wouldn’t be asked to take your shoes off at the door, lest the floors become scratched. Taking it all in, the grey, the relatively compact lots, the winter trees, the looming apartment blocks: it was a walk remembered...
from my childhood in Seattle. I grew up in a place like this, and being in the middle of something so similar, I was filled with a sense of longing for what I could no longer have. A place I could no longer inhabit.

The thing about it is, where I grew up – those unremarkable lawns, the aging cars parked at the curb, the houses with pointed roofs neatly arranged next to one another, giving way to apartment buildings that grow in size as you continue to cover distance – it no longer exists. The houses and the apartment buildings remain, but the place is not the same. The old Fords and Subarus gave way to European cars; the sun-faded facades and lawns have transformed into dramatic lighting and landscaped yards. Microsoft money, as they say, has changed the dynamic of the neighborhood and community that I knew. Just as the gay community and the educated bohemian population replaced the Catholic families before them, the Capitol Hill of my youth gave way to something I often no longer recognize.

We all have a remarkable capacity for reflective attachment. There are things that were not necessarily nice, good or of benefit to anybody we cared about, but when they are gone there is still this oddly remarkable sense of loss. We all know these things, these places, these parts of our personal and collective history.

When I was young, I wasn’t supposed to go south of John Street after dark. It was only a couple blocks from our home, but it was a world apart. John Street divided Capitol Hill from the Central District (the C.D.), and immediately gave way to subsidized apartments, halfway houses, derricks and boarded up homes, and the notorious “Deano’s Liquors.” A few oddly-shaped blocks, the triangle between Madison, John and 19th Avenue, was the nearby den of iniquity. “Crack corner,” the local pejorative for the stretch of buildings on Madison – encompassing Deano’s grocery and Deano’s nightclub, among others – existed as a fascinating glimpse into a world I did not inhabit.

Things change. I got older, and Deano’s would become a place that would sell me Newports and malt liquor. I went to high school in the C.D., and it became as familiar as my neighborhood to its north. During the late nineties and early aughts, Capitol Hill began to attract more and more wealth and the C.D. began to gentrify, but that little triangle of blocks just refused to garner any speculative attention, despite the wholesale changes occurring around it. The boundaries of Capitol Hill, in realtor speak at least, marched southward. The C.D. got new names – Squire Park, Miller Park - all foreign like a city I had never visited. The whole area took on a different feel as a building boom took hold and business addresses changed hands. I began to resent it. It was no longer mine.

Only a couple years ago I was in town for the holidays, having drinks with old friends at a newer hipster bar on Madison. Standing outside at closing hour, several of us – all from Capitol Hill or the C.D. – looked across the street at Deano’s. We marveled at how that little corner of our city had so stalwartly held firm, baseheads still anxiously shifting their weight outside the door, seemingly oblivious to the new superblock of condos that stood across from them. There was this sense of pride, in all of us, in how that stretch could remain despite the massive cultural and physical changes that had taken place all around it. New people be damned; 21st and Madison is not for you.

It’s gone now, Deano’s, razed after a series of lawsuits, only to be replaced by who-knows-what. In December, when I last visited, the vacant space down the street – I don’t even remember what was once there – was posted with notices of intent to construct a large senior facility. I’ve gotten a bit lazy with walking up and down hills since I left Seattle eight years ago. When I return for visits I shop for groceries at the Safeway housed in the ground floor of that massive condo complex on Madison instead of walking up to the old Quality Foods where I used to go with my mom. My sister, after years of living in Los Angeles, moved back to Seattle last year. She lives on 21st, a block off John, next to an old subsidized apartment complex. I helped her with the Craigslist search, and she couldn’t believe that she could get such an affordable rental on Capitol Hill. The little triangle that resisted change finally became something else.

And this is what I want to do. I have invested in an education to provide me with the tools to embark on a career in land use and redevelopment. I love it. It’s endlessly fascinating to me. I live in a place, a place where I want to work and live and know and own as my own, where I don’t have a personal history- where I don’t have a first-person knowledge of what was. It’s a remarkable handicap, because while I know that feeling – the sense of place, of how intrinsically important it is to belonging, to being part of a community, of ownership – I can only impart what I know and apply it to where I am.

Success in planning, particularly to those arenas that embody the human emphasis on the importance of space, is often informed by an attempt to marry competing interests. Those that have known and dictated what place has meant and should mean, and those who are arriving, unmoored, intent upon finding and establishing something meaningful to them. The manifest destiny imbued fabric of American culture, with its constant influx of immigrants and dynamic interstate movement, demands the capacity for change. But this is often at odds with the universally recognized importance in sense of community, in the place that is known, that is home. I hope that I am able to always remember what this means, even if I never knew a place so personally.

About the Author:

Ryan is a first-year Master of Urban Planning student and a 2011 graduate of the CUNY School of Law. He is interested in the way land use and property laws can be used to balance the demands of economic development, historic preservation, and housing needs for the less fortunate. An estranged native of Seattle’s Capitol Hill, he is fascinated by his complicated emotional response to the way his home has evolved.
When it comes to developing and rehabilitating residential housing, municipal governments regularly step in when conditions in the capital markets make it difficult for private actors to finance projects on their own. The government’s willingness to lend a helping hand has led to a myriad of tax incentive programs dedicated to addressing faulty buildings and spurring new construction.

Tax incentive programs focused on subsidizing development tend to be popular among bureaucrats and housing specialists, a position which allows elected officials to freely lend their support (and their votes) to getting these incentives implemented. However, one such program, the J-51 tax incentive program, was not renewed by the New York State legislature when it lapsed on December 31, 2011. The program’s renewal has been stalled as state lawmakers consider how to extend or modify the program. Also, holding back an extension is a campaign by tenant activists to use renewal as leverage to win stronger rent protections. Their position, and correctly so, is that the public dollars gifted through exemptions like J-51 need to be reshaped to help create more truly affordable housing instead of just making life easier for the developers who are applying for them.

On face value, there is no reason not to support J-51. As early as 1946, the New York State Legislature began experimenting with a tax incentive program to answer a valid argument made by owners of old tenement buildings. At the time, owners claimed that mandated improvements to their existing residential buildings, like the installation of central hot water or indoor plumbing, were an overwhelming expenditure to absorb. The state wanted to encourage development, so in 1955 New York State amended the New York Tax Law to allow local municipalities the freedom to help these owners. Later that year New York City would add Section J-51 to the Administrative Code; the Section was defined as “a tax exemption and tax abatement program for the alteration and improvement of existing substandard dwellings” in order to “eliminate unhealthy or dangerous conditions and to replace inadequate sanitary facilities.”

Administered through the New York City Department of Housing Development and Preservation and Department of Finance, J-51
allows owners to recapture either an exemption or abatement for anywhere up to 90% of the certified cost of construction. The recouped incentive reduces the amount of taxes the owners must pay per year on their property by freezing the building assessed value or reducing the overall taxes due in a given fiscal year. In exchange for accepting the benefits, owners are required to make their rehabbed apartments/building subject to rent regulation for the duration of the incentive contract.

By all accounts, developers and landlords have considered the program a huge success for making the rehabilitation of rental property possible. By fiscal year 2011-2012, there were nearly 600,000 units receiving annual benefits through the J-51 program. Success, though, does not mean the process has always gone smoothly. Issues have come up, such as with a series of co-op and condominium owners who saw their tax bills dramatically increase after exemptions expired on a large number of converted buildings rehabbed during the 1980s. More recently, in May 2011, a New York State Court found the prior owners of the Peter Cooper Village / Stuyvesant Town complex, Tishman Speyer, guilty of illegally deregulating apartments while still receiving J-51 benefits.

“Public dollars gifted through exemptions like J-51 need to be reshaped to help create more truly affordable housing instead of just making life easier for the developers who are applying for them.”

Examples like those mentioned above have raised concern about possible abuse and an absence of any focus on protecting the rights of tenants. So, as those discussions continue to progress, housing advocates have wisely viewed this debate as an opportunity to make progress by pushing their legislative allies to only agree to an extension if additional protections for renters are included in any final deal. Those in the real estate industry who benefit from this program are often the same funders undermining renter’s rights through money and influence. This moment in time is a rare chance to see secondary positive impacts that can be yielded from continuation of this program.

This is not an opinion shared by tenant advocates alone. Some legislators have been questioning the validity of the program at a time when we are seeing other state incentive programs like the Advantage Program, a rental subsidy program for homeless families, eliminated and record levels of homelessness in our streets.

In a letter to Speaker Sheldon Silver, 28 Assembly Democrats challenged whether or not the forfeiting of $257 million annually in tax revenue was in the best interest of all New Yorkers. To put into perspective of how massive this give away is, the total amount lost through J-51 credits is greater than the city’s share of the capital budget for the NYC Housing Authority and NYC Housing Preservation Development combined. In their letter, the lawmakers cite alternative uses that could benefit from that same level of funding, for example redirecting that money to create 26,000 Section 8 vouchers, a valid suggestion when you consider more than 125,000 people are currently on the waiting list for rental assistance vouchers according to administration officials.

Recommendations for any extension that can be possibly supported by affordable housing leaders include protections that limit the time such charges by landlords are attached to a tenant’s rent after the cost of an improvement program has been recovered, or creating more diversity of opinion on the Rent Guidelines Board, a body empowered by the state. Where the tax program is written to help affordable housing, the program’s preferential rebate provisions are given to the rehabilitation of moderate or low-income housing. While the provision is a great idea, the finished renovations allow the owners to drive the value of those apartments up and make them unavailable to other low- and moderate-income families in the future. Steps should be taken to ensure that the value of the new improvements does not drive those units out of the affordable market.

When legislators have the conversation about whether or not to continue our government’s investment through giving taxpayer dollars or giving a break to others in paying their share, the focus should always be on how we can maximize the benefit for our citizen investors. This program has a history of success, and since it does provide help for developers, the state should continue to offer it— but we need to make sure this investment, our investment, is returning its highest possible yield.

(Endnotes)
7 Secret, Mosi. Clock Ticks For a Key Homeless Program NYTimes Printed May 31st 2011 link: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/31/nyregion/new-york-city-close-to-ending-key-housing-program. html?pagewanted=1&sql=Section%2088&t=cesc&scp=26
8 Letter to Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver from the office of Assemblyman Hakkeem Jefferies. Dated February 14 2012

About the Author:
Ahmed is a second year graduate student of urban planning focusing on community driven legislative solutions to housing and infrastructure development on both the local and national level.


Modernist Architecture in Central & Eastern Europe

By Oksana Miranova

The first half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of the modern nation state. Many new nations in Central and Eastern Europe inherited a substandard housing stock from the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian Empires. In the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Vienna under the First Austrian Republic, the state assumed responsibility for housing construction. The production of mass housing in all three nations became tightly intertwined with Marxist ideology, and modernist planning was used to radically re-imagine the city, the home and the individual. The centralization of power over housing production in the hands of a few experts employed by the state left little room for resident participation. However, the modernist tower blocs were a vast improvement over the existing housing available to the working class; their rapid construction alleviated housing needs, at least in the short term.

Modernism as Ideology

Modernist planning and architecture emerged in the early 1920s, with an aim to rationalize the chaotic nineteenth century metropolis. According to James Scott, modernism “envisioned a rational engineering of all aspects of life, in order to improve the human condition”.¹ As a planning discipline, modernism reacted against the built environment created by rapid urbanization and industrialization. Le Corbusier’s Radiant City of concrete and steel is a vision based on modern building techniques, the automobile and the highway.²

Modernism cannot be classified as a tenet of either the right or the left, or of a market or non-market economy.¹ However, it most strongly connotes a left-leaning perspective.⁴ Modernism meshed well with early to mid-twentieth century leftist regimes because it was the “progressives who [came] to power with a comprehensive critique of existing society, and a popular mandate (at least initially) to transform it”.⁵ Further, leftist regimes concentrated
housing production and land-use in the hands of the state, allowing for greater application of modernist ideas. The centralization of power over land use maximized the scope of the urban planning projects.

Initially, Marxist governments enabled modernist architects to envision holistic solutions for poor urban conditions by designing new ways of organizing the home and the city. By transforming space, modernist planners hoped to transform the individual – to create a cohesive working class-consciousness in Vienna or a “new Soviet man” in the Soviet Union. This process left minimal room for input from those who were supposed to be transformed; Le Corbusier dismissed the public with his claim that “the design of cities is too important to be left to its citizens”. Despite similar goals, modernist planning methods interacted with local conditions to produce varying results in Vienna under the First Republic, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia.

Vienna

Austria emerged from World War I fragmented and economically weakened. Its fragile state lent unprecedented authority to Vienna’s municipal government, where the Social Democratic party enjoyed strong political support, unlike everywhere else in Austria. From 1918 to 1933 the Social Democrats attempted to shape Vienna into a model socialist city within a larger capitalist society. A weak national government in Austria allowed the municipal government in Vienna to have complete control over the city’s affairs for a brief period.

Working class housing became the primary expression of Austro-Marxism in Vienna, enabled by the municipal government’s direct control over city housing policy. Consequently, the design process was laden with ideology, drawing heavily from the newly emerging International Style, as well as Taylorism, a mass production technique meant to ensure maximum efficiency. The rationalization of the household was pushed to its limit with an experiment involving built-in furniture, but the idea was abandoned for economic reasons. Architects designed efficient domestic spaces and communal facilities for childcare and laundry in an attempt to allow the housewife to participate in political work. Overall, the design of the new dwellings was oriented towards creating a politicized proletariat.

In application, the effect of the proletarian dwellings on the working class proved to be a great disappointment to Social Democrat proponents of modernist architecture and design. The dwellings failed to socialize the working class. The greatest points of contention were the eat-in kitchen and “sentimental knick-knacks” prevalent in working class homes. The lack of interest in modernist design among the working class was seen as a sign of a lack of class consciousness, signifying a failure by social theorists and architects to reconcile their own middle-class backgrounds with the traditional working class culture of the time. Further, the new housing failed to meet all of the residents’ needs. For example, apartments – designed around an idealized working class household – did not account for non-nuclear family structures. Additionally, communal laundry and childcare facilities often further restricted women to the domestic sphere because of limited operational hours. However, the new working class dwellings were a great improvement over other types of housing available to the Viennese working class. The new buildings offered privacy, running water, plumbing and most importantly security of tenure.

Soviet Union

Modernist planning experienced two periods of popularity in the Soviet Union – an aspirational period in the late 1920s, and a production period between the 1950s-1970s. During the first period, the intelligentsia imagined a post-revolutionary, idyllic Soviet city and citizen. The Constructivists – as this group of intellectuals became known – sought to limit urban growth, and use technology to improve the living conditions of the Russian proletariat.
Ideologically, they aimed to restructure gender relations, encourage collectivism and promote political activity.\textsuperscript{17}

Like the Viennese Austro-Marxists, the Constructivists wanted to use planning and design to guide the development of socialist life. Unlike the Austro-Marxists in Vienna, the Constructivists opened their ideas to public debate by producing literature and speaking at public meetings.\textsuperscript{18} If allowed to continue, widespread public discourse over planning and design may have created a more democratic approach to the construction of housing. However, the Party – fearing loss of control – quickly denounced the planning debate, Constructivism and modernism in general. The Party accused the Constructivists of counter-revolutionary “infantile leftism”\textsuperscript{19}, citing an “underdeveloped political consciousness of the Soviet population”.\textsuperscript{20}

Modernism was forbidden under Stalin.\textsuperscript{21} Construction stalled until the early 1950s, when Nikita Khrushchev came to power.\textsuperscript{22} Unlike Vienna, post-1950 Soviet housing construction did not undergo intense ideological debate. Soviet authorities were confronted with a nationwide housing crisis; construction speed and efficiency overshadowed ideological discussion. Further, the lure of planning for a new, post-revolutionary Soviet society was gone. The Soviet Union was emerging out of 25 years of brutal repression under Stalin. New housing plans lost the grandeur of early modernist designs.

However, many aspects of modernist architecture were incorporated into the building boom of the 1950s and 1960s. The khrushevki\textsuperscript{23} constructed during this period were pre-fabricated slabs, frequently built in conjunction with nurseries, schools, groceries and communal facilities,\textsuperscript{24} forming microrayony.\textsuperscript{25} Even though ideological factors were not the thrust behind khrushevki’s design, Soviet scholars stressed the inherent collectivism in the microrayony.\textsuperscript{26}

In the authoritarian Soviet society, there was no space for public input in the housing planning process. Consequently, not all residents’ needs were met. Like in Red Vienna, apartments were constructed for the ideal Soviet nuclear family, a poor fit for the reality of extended families living together out of necessity. The drab, repetitive towers, frequently built out of cheap materials, were depressing and openly mocked by Soviet citizens. However, the khrushevki – with central heating, plumbing and hot water – were a great improvement over older housing stock. Said Florian Urban, “many first-generation residents perceived these buildings as a new kind of freedom and as signs of enormous progress for Soviet workers.”\textsuperscript{27} While the relationship to the khrushevka would change over time, their rapid construction through the 1950s and 1960s alleviated the Soviet housing shortage.

**Czechoslovakia**

Czechoslovakia became communist – and came under Soviet influence – in 1948. Like Austria and the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia faced a housing shortage due to nineteenth century urbanization and industrialization that had been further exacerbated by World War II. While the Czech solution echoed the Soviet Union, Kimberly Zarecor argues that mass construction of panelak\textsuperscript{28} was not merely the result of imposed Soviet architectural ideals. Instead, design decisions were reached through mediation between the state and professional architects.\textsuperscript{29}

The mediation process took place within the state institutional framework, and precluded influence from future residents by sanctioning architects as their representatives.\textsuperscript{30} Ultimately, the panelak predominated in Czechoslovakia for similar reasons as in other Marxist countries in the 1950s - it was cheap to construct en masse and it used cutting edge construction techniques for its time.\textsuperscript{31} While broader ideological issues, such as encouraging collectivism, may have played a small role in the design process, they were not as central to the discourse as they were in Vienna or the

![Prague-Hostivař, the Czech Republic. Kolíšk Housing Estate; Photo by Wikimedia Commons user cs:ŠJů](Image.png)
Soviet Union in the 1920s. The needs of the residents, and the quality of the construction were secondary to the need to build a lot of housing, fast. The rapid pace of pre-fabricated construction allowed Czechoslovakia to alleviate its post-war housing shortage.

**Conclusion**

The architectural determinism implicit in early modernist thought did not address the ideological hurdles it aimed to solve. Design did not socialize Soviet, Czech or Austrian citizens to Marxist ideology. With the evolution of Central and Eastern European nation-states, and the devastating effect of World War II, housing production became less of a way to socialize the proletariat to a new post-revolutionary society, and focused instead on meeting the basic needs of the population. Modernist housing construction did address the need for housing among the working class in Red Vienna, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia during mid-twentieth century, which was no small feat. However, unresolved tension between abstract and applied plans, and the lack of meaningful public participation in planning, led to rapid disillusionment with modernist design.

(Endnotes)


3 Scott, James. 2003, 126.

4 Ibid, 126.

5 Ibid, 127.


8 Hall. 2002, 224

9 Blau. 1999, 34
10 Ibid, 44
11 Ibid, 189
12 Ibid, 204
13 Ibid, 192
14 Ibid, 196
15 Ibid, 46.


19 Ibid, 46.

20 Ibid, 42.

21 Ibid, 48

22 Urban. 2012, 129

23 Khrushchevka: Five storey pre-fab apartment blocs, built during the 1960s in the Soviet Union.


25 Microrayony: A Soviet “micro-district”, or modernist residential neighborhood.

26 Urban, 2012, 133.

27 Ibid, 134.

28 Czech pre-fabricated tower blocs


30 Zarecor. 2010, 221

31 Zarecor. 2010, 222

**About the Author:**

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The economic crash of 2008 was a global wake-up call to the power of stock markets, making the invisible orchestrations of capital production tangible. This essay investigates the myriad ways in which Wall Street inflicts its power and influence on New York City through the climax of capitalism: the New York Stock Exchange.

Defining performativity, theorist Judith Butler states that “performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability... This iterability implies that ‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production.” Using this definition, I will unpack Wall Street, using performance theory to provide a different analysis to traditional urban techniques, finding hidden behavioral influences.

Identifying what constitutes the space of the New York Stock Exchange is problematic. The Exchange itself is housed at 11 Wall Street, but deciding where the NYSE’s influence ends proves to be complex, for space is “rarely well defined.” The space of the Exchange undoubtedly extends further than the immediate vicinity of the building, and so I include, as many do, the entirety of Wall Street in my analysis. The NYSE casts a metaphorically long shadow across Manhattan, affecting spatial politics through the Financial District and beyond. However, the majority of my focus remains between Broadway and William Street.

Part One: The Conditioning

In psychology, classical conditioning (also known as Pavlovian) is used to describe the process in which a conditioned stimulus is used to elicit a conditioned response. The most infamous study is of course Ivan Pavlov’s ringing of the bell to induce the produc-
tion of saliva in the dogs he was observing. In this section, I will explore the behavioral conditioning found on Wall Street.

If money is the new religion and globalization “reconstructs the market as a religion devoted to capital”, then banks are our new churches. And if banks are our churches, then it follows that Stock Exchanges are our cathedrals. Former Senator and Vice Chair of UBS Phil Gramm describes the New York Stock Exchange as a religious experience: “[when] I am on Wall Street and I realize that that’s the very nerve centre of American capitalism, and I realize what capitalism has done for the working people in America, for me that’s a holy place.” The Exchange is the zenith of faith in capital.

The NYSE is a place of worship, belief, congregation and ritual. Where traditional cathedrals emphasize belief in God, exchanges emphasize belief in capital. Since being unpegged from gold in 1971, the dollar holds no inherent value, therefore operating by belief. The NYSE is the apex of this belief system.

The 2008 global financial crisis itself can be understood as a crisis of faith in the values of American homes; billions and billions of dollars’ worth of faith. However, thousands continue to congregate daily, following the ritualized ringing of the Market’s bell. Ritual compensates for “the instability of kinship and affinal ties”, and with the advent of virtual trading the bell now fulfills a symbolic role to unite traders through classical conditioning rather than necessity.

Following 9/11, the Exchange’s sphere of influence has expanded: a temporary pedestrian zone from Broadway to William Street was incorporated into the city infrastructure in 2004. The use of vehicle barriers and custom-designed barricades is formal recognition of this influence. The defensive structures validate Henri Lefebvre’s belief that “[whenever] threatened, the first thing power restricts is... the street.” Exemplified by the reaction to Occupy Wall Street, the right to the city has been suspended with the New York Police Department deploying barricades “all over” and curtailing rights to free assembly. The area is bounded physically and stage-managed to “provide and sustain common-sense understandings about what activities should take place.” The temporaneous nature of the Exchange’s security tent is an illusory technique to disguise the permanent altering of social space and behavioral conditioning and regulation by NYPD.

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The concept of public space is challenged by Wall Street’s impossitions, revealing that “public space is not a concrete reality but rather a tenuous condition.” The qualities of the city we take for granted form a “kind of hybrid of physical spaces and public spheres”, and the vulnerability of these seemingly concrete concepts are revealed in the ease with which these freedoms are restricted. The previously public Exchange sidewalks are now accessible only to employees who clear security check points; street vendors have been replaced by barricades, and vehicular access is now curtailed by barriers. The monolithic musculature of the Stock Exchange has surpassed the rights of New Yorkers to public space.

Part Two: The Material Conditions

Wealth, capitalism, and raw power are exuded by the Exchange and Wall Street. The height of Wall Street demonstrates the superiority and skill of American architects, especially considering the area’s development when skyscrapers were almost exclusively American - the first being the New York Equitable Life Assurance Building, built in 1870 a block north of the Exchange. Though the architectural expertise quickly spread across America, it took years for these skills to be exported globally, and for rivals to afford this new style of construction. For this reason, the financial district was arguably even more impressive in the early 1900s.

As well as being architecturally impressive, the buildings on Wall Street and in the rest of the Financial District capitalize on the idea that “verticality symbolizes power” to impress dignitaries and professionals. The grandeur inflates international opinion, helping attract the global elite not only to invest, but also to work in the American financial market.

The imposingly tall buildings are “phallic representations, puncturing the skyline.” Simplistically, the phallicogcentric constructions feed into the patriarchal values of Western society. This emphasis of male privilege is empowering to those who work there, suggesting majesty over the surrounding area and implying that Wall Street professionals are more worthy of respect than those in other professions.

There are practical reasons why the financial district is so heavily populated by skyscrapers. Skyscrapers maximized the extremely limited space in old New York, allowing a high concentration of financiers and speculators to create a corridor of excellence along Wall Street. These highly specialized workers increase efficiency by operating in close proximity, thus reducing work-related travel and increasing networking opportunities. Many employees and executives still need to be in “close, face-to-face touch and communication” with others, despite the growth in online conference services such as Skype.

The buildings display New York’s wealth in two ways. Firstly, they exhibit the enormous quantities of money spent on design, construction and maintenance. Secondly, they enhance the wealth of the city by housing the global financial elite who earn incredible wages and bonuses while also, for the most part, generating money. In the 1990s, for example, Wall Street was responsible for 21% of new jobs in New York and 56% of income growth, its success contributing to the success of the City. The simultaneous display of extreme capital production and consumption (employees must be paid, buildings maintained) is what makes Wall Street unique and so valuable to the City.

The architecture of the Stock Exchange itself capitalizes on the cultural value commanded by the Greco-Roman Classical era, both summarizing and building upon the power and value. The main façade has six Corinthian Columns built into it, the slender fluted columns topped with acanthus leaves and scrolls. This is the most ornate of the classical orders of Roman and Greek ar-
architecture, implying only the superlative is befitting of the New York Stock Exchange.

Of course, neo-classical architecture is not unique to the Financial District, and much of New York built in the early 1900s is Beaux-Arts, a fashion taught at L’École des Beaux-Arts in Paris that heavily influenced the US from 1880 to 1920. This architectural cohesion allows Wall Street to bleed into the urban surroundings, allowing it to be theorized as part of the performance of the city as a whole. As mentioned earlier, the success of Wall Street is the success of the City.

Above the tall Corinthian capitals, there is a large pediment that contains a marble-sculpture relief on the tympanum, the triangle above the columns, designed by John Quincy Adams Ward (also responsible for the George Washington statue on the steps of Federal Hall on Wall Street). The sculpture is called ‘Integrity Protecting the Works of Man’ and manifests the stock exchange as a reflection of national wealth. The central figure is the angel Integrity, wearing a winged hat reminiscent of Hermes/Mercury, the god of commerce.

To the left, human figures represent science and technology, featuring engineers studying blueprints. On the right, agriculture is represented by, among other things, a man holding a sack of grain on his back and a female shepherd. Like medieval processions, this art makes “a claim for the involvement of every citizen” in the machinations of the Exchange.

Although the Stock Exchange involves citizens on a macro level, on a direct level it is one that only “privileged few who deal in capital speculation... or financial capital” can partake in. Thus stands the paradox – the Stock Exchange is, and makes sure to appear as, representative of the entire population of the United States, yet operates in an exclusive, insular capacity.

‘Integrity Protecting the Works of Man’ works to demonstrate the inclusivity of the Stock Exchange, yet connotes the opposite by signifying that this is a highly privileged space for a select few to use and inhabit. Not only does the act of representation reinforce exclusion; the relief also exemplifies white privilege. White privilege is evident in the Caucasian figures, with no hint of the indigenous population of Native Americans, Mexicans, African-Americans and Chinese-Americans that played a colossal role in shaping the United States through their labor. The glamorous, idealized sculpture fails to be representative of the US.

Power is not only exuded by the Exchange’s facade; Trinity Church also lends an authoritative and controlling aura. The investment of cultural value in Christianity in the West imbues the church with power and demonstrates its importance in the eyes of America. This wealth is physicalized in the spire at 281 feet, and figuratively through the shadow cast over Wall Street each evening. Sanctuary adds political power to the church that exudes influence over people’s behavior in this area by capitalizing on the tradition of peace and respect.

The separation of Church and State is formalized in the first amendment to the Constitution declaring that legislature “can make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”. By uniting both, Wall Street flaunts its control ensuring that “the city [is] no longer available as a stage primarily for the separate scenes of the citizens, for they are now relegated to “spectators only.” Citizens are not only spectators to the market data that affects their daily lives, but also the power of those who run the Exchange.

Conclusion

Arguably, the facade of the New York Stock Exchange is just that: a front disguising the inner workings and failings. The current economic crisis has broken the illusion of infallible stock markets for another generation, and they still struggle to stabilize. Additionally, three trading floors have closed in the past four years as trading continues to transition off-site. Though Wall Street attempts to maintain the center of capitalism, in actuality it is declining as the Internet becomes more powerful and location becomes less important.

Post-crash, reflection upon the American Dream resulted in the emergence of the Occupy Wall Street movement. America has thrived on the concept of individual freedoms and unlike, say France, “it was unusual for Americans to turn against the rich, because of the carrot that had always been held out.” Now, Wall Street is fighting government regulation.

The public space around the New York Stock Exchange is controlled through architecture capitalizing upon the cultural value placed upon the classical era, and through proximity to Trinity Church. The stricter restrictions in place following OWS echo Rudy Giuliani’s limitations on the size of “press conferences and demonstrations” at City Hall during his time in office.
The future of the New York Stock Exchange and Wall Street is tenuous in the face of increased regulation and decentralization due to Internet trading. However, for now, Wall Street continues as the leading capitalist enterprise, and its monetary and ideological power can still be felt across the world, despite the efforts of OWS and other populist movements.

(Endnotes)
5 Capitalism: A Love Story, dir. by Michael Moore (Overture Films, 2009)
12 Miller, p.ix
14 Miller, p. 117
16 Conway, p. 25
21 About the Author:
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When a lot of land becomes available in a desirable part of the city, do we reserve that for a park or children’s playground? Or do we yield to the interests of developers who would profit from putting up another office building or condo, which would fill city coffers with significant taxes gleaned from the new property? Of course, the issue is never as straightforward as posed in this hypothetical situation. Nevertheless, cities have continued to face major dilemmas: how to allocate enough public space in light of the economic advantages of having residential condominiums and businesses fill up urban streets.

Recently, many people have become more aware of environmental and quality of life issues, giving way to the awareness and importance of public green space. Public space can help strengthen community life and improve daily interactions between city residents, as well as help environmental facets of the city by improving air quality or providing fresh food to residents. With limited space in many cities, teams of architects, planners, and environmentalists have been turning to new innovative ways to transform unused space into useful green space. Some of the more interesting examples include the High Line, the Beacon Hill Food Forest, Orange County Great Park, and the Delancey Underground. The new ‘green’ projects are not meant to subtract from more traditional public spaces and parks; rather, they are there to enhance the urban landscape.

Unlike conventional parks, these spaces are unique and original in that they create green space in unexpected places where most of us would not have pictured a park. Intrinsically, these spaces are not very different from traditional parks in what they can offer to residents. Parks in New York City, such as Central Park, Riverside Park and Battery Park, are all multiuse parks and feature various elements that can help improve the well-being and lifestyles of residents. They offer places for both recreation and leisure such as playgrounds, dog parks and benches for resting.

The newest types of public spaces offer similar benefits, but have further expanded the possibilities of what a park can be. This can be seen through the High Line, where an existing structure with little apparent use is conserved with great success. (In a review by Nicolai Ouroussoff from The New York Times, the space was described as “one of the most thoughtful, sensitively designed public spaces built in New York in years” that “alters your perspective on the city.”) Yet another example of imagination is the Beacon Hill Food Forest, which contains the added element of food production. It reinvents the typical form of food production as practiced in community gardens to a more communal concept. The Delancey Underground reinvents altogether what the term “park” means by creating an indoor green space.

It’s clear that with creativity, imagination and enhanced use of technology, new such parks will be created in many cities. The projects described below could be considered pioneers, and their success a good omen for wider public acceptance.
The High Line

One of the first examples, and probably the most highly publicized of these projects, was New York City’s High Line, unveiled in June 2009. The project involved turning an abandoned elevated railroad track, previously used from 1934 through 1980, into a park. The space itself has had a tempestuous history dating back to the mid-1800s. It began as a street level railroad track in 1847, and for the next 80 years, became known as Death Avenue for the vast amount of deaths that occurred in accidents between trains and street traffic. By the 1930s, the city decided to rebuild the train tracks above-ground, creating what is now known as the High Line. Over the years, some parts were demolished, but trains continued running along the elevated tracks through 1980, when it was shut down. Throughout the 1980s, some residents of the neighborhood fought for demolition of the railroad tracks, but never succeeded. In 1999, Joshua David, a resident of the Chelsea neighborhood where the High Line is located, and Robert Hammond, a consultant for a variety of entrepreneurial endeavors and non-profits, formed the advocacy group Friends of the High Line. The group aimed to bring together residents of the neighborhood to promote reusing the High Line as an open public space. By 2002, the group gained the support of the city by showing that the project was economically viable and that new tax revenues gained from opening the space would be greater than the cost of construction. They proposed a plan, dividing the construction of the space into three phases; the first section was completed in summer 2009, the second in 2011, and the third section is anticipated to debut in the spring of 2014.

The High Line is more than just a park; it hasn’t just added to the amount of green space in the city. It also incorporates various cultural events, information sessions on horticulture and gardening, and provides free weekly walking tours. The park has also helped revitalize the neighborhood by providing residents with public space, and by attracting both New York City residents from other neighborhoods and tourists to visit the new space. On March 12, 2012, designs for the third section, the widest section of the High Line, were released; they included some proposals to turn a part of the space into a public meeting center and create a children’s play area from the original beams covered in rubber. These additions will help make this public park into a multiuse space benefitting both the community and the city as a whole.

Some critics feared that the High Line might become an overcrowded and pretentious park filled with celebrities and New York’s elite. Thus far, this has not been the case, as mainly locals and a few tourists tend to fill the park. The High Line gives off an overwhelming feeling of serenity, disconnecting the visitor from the noisy and fast-paced atmosphere of the city. Nicolai Ouroussoff for The New York Times explains that it is “a subtle play between contemporary and historical design; industrial decay and natural beauty sets the tone.” Its aura echoes its historical past through its concrete plank floors, which evoke the linier element of the tracks, and gardens reminiscent of “abandoned track bed(s) when it was covered with weeds.” The High Line not only reconnects one with its history, but also provides an escape from city life.

The success of the High Line has sparked an interest in other cities to transform their unused railroad tracks into parks. Chicago has proposed turning the Bloomingdale Trail, abandoned elevated railroad tracks in the heart of Chicago, into a public park similar to that of New York City’s High Line. Currently, plans and designs of the Bloomingdale Trail are still being discussed. Atlanta is also working on revitalizing an old train track called the Beltline, an abandoned street-level railroad track that loops around the city. City officials are looking at the Beltline as more than just a potential park. They see it as a multi-functional project that will feature a new rail transit system, a 33-mile multiuse trail, large-scale parks featuring sports and recreation space, along with a plan to expand affordable housing in the neighborhood over the next 25 years.

Another example of creating unique public spaces is in Seattle, where the Beacon Hill Food Forest has been proposed. The project, which is expected to begin construction within the next year, incorporates public space in the form of a park, with an innovative approach to community gardens termed food forest. The space is an empty plot of land in the city’s Beacon Hill neighborhood, which has been the property of Seattle Public Utilities and has remained largely untouched for decades. The project was first proposed in 2009 by local Beacon Hill gardener Glenn Herlihy, who formed the group Friends of the Food Forest with two other students from a permaculture class. Since then, they have made efforts to reach out to the local community, drawing support for the project in their first public meeting. By the second meeting, the group was already working on designs for the project.

To avoid the traps of high maintenance community gardens, the project uses a novel approach: permaculture. Permaculture is an agricultural concept that promotes self-sustaining landscapes through a mixture of different plant life that creates its own ecosystem. By using this concept, the garden will require little upkeep. Its needs will be similar to that of a forest. Friends of the Food Forest have proposed planting a mix of full-size trees and shrubs, surrounded by a mixture of exotic flowers and trees, such as Asian pear trees, surrounding an enclosed community workshop.
building. The space will also feature recreational areas including a gathering space with barbecue facilities, a large sports field, and a children’s playground. In addition to the food forest, people in the community will be able to purchase their own personal plots for gardening. The goal is to have the food from the forest be open to the public, so that everyone will have access to fresh, local food. The group hopes that people will respect others in the process and not abuse this concept by over-picking from the forest.

The Friends of the Food Forest had to overcome various obstacles with the different city government agencies to get the project approved. Although it will be operated on public government owned land, it will be mainly funded through donations to the non-profit group. The group has recently partnered with P-Patch, a community gardening non-profit organization; their partnership has yielded $100,000 in funding for the project. They are currently working on raising awareness about the project within the community through free multilingual workshops to teach residents about the basics of food forests and gardening. Development of the forest will begin sometime this year.

Orange County Great Park

If creating multiuse public space is the future, California is ahead of the game. The city of Irvine, about an hour south of Los Angeles and nearby Laguna Beach, has started construction on an innovative project turning a former Marine Corps base into multi-functional public space. This new space, titled Orange County Great Park, incorporates various cultural, educational and recreational activities into one sprawling public arena. Phase one of the project is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

The space will feature a 165-acre sports park, divided into various fields catering to different sports. Some of the proposed amenities include soccer fields, a skateboard complex and a rock-climbing wall. The sports park will also include a great lawn lined with citrus trees that will provide space for picnickers, sunbathers, and those just looking to relax on the grassy field. Orange County Great Park is located in a large canyon, which planners have turned it into a multi trail hiking space. The canyon itself is filled with various native plant life, streams and a series of small pools of water. A large bridge connecting the two end points of the canyon will allow visitors to walk over the canyon and enjoy its beautiful views. There are also plans for creating a botanical garden in the space, which will focus on plants native to southern California.

Using a bridge, visitors will be able to walk from the botanical garden to the cultural terrace, the center of the park, where a museum, library, café, and tree-lined open space for relaxing are all within reach. A free shuttle bus from the terrace connects people to other areas of the park. The park will feature two structures that link it to its aviation and military past. The Great Park Air Museum will provide a history of aviation and including various vintage aircrafts and remnants of the former runways as a way to educate visitors on the park’s history. Integrated with the museum is the park’s first major attraction, The Great Park Balloon Ride, where 30 visitors at a time will be able to ride a tethered helium observation balloon over the landscape of the park. The park will also house a Veterans Memorial to commemorate those who have served in the military.

In order to preserve and promote the natural landscape of the region, the park will include a three-mile long Wildlife Corridor, which will serve as a link between two different national parks for wildlife to migrate. The hope is to help preserve the region’s natural ecosystem.

Throughout the planning process for the park, locals were asked for their feedback and opinions on how the space should be allocated. These suggestions were then incorporated into the design, which was displayed at an open house. There, residents of the region were asked to provide additional feedback. The communication between locals and planners became crucial to creating the final plans of the park and making the space as useful and beneficial to residents as possible, thereby allowing the park to reach its full potential in helping to promote community life.

The Delancey Underground

Advances in environmental technology make it possible to create public space in unlikely places. This is the case for the proposed Delancey Underground in New York City. The project calls for reinventing an abandoned underground trolley station located below the neighborhood of the Lower East Side, an area currently owned by the MTA. The space, spanning two acres, hasn’t been used since 1948, when trolley service in New York City was suspended. The project was proposed by architect James Ramsey and Dan Barasch of the tech think tank PopTech. They were intrigued by many of the space’s unique turn-of-the-century features, including cobblestones, rail tracks and vaulted ceilings, which they plan to preserve in the final design. They hope to make the park more than just a shelter on a rainy day by incorporating cultural elements such as a farmer’s market, concerts, and art installations. In order to create their vision, they plan to utilize fiber optic cables to bring natural sunlight underground. Solar panels located at street level will serve to collect sunlight throughout the day, and that light will then be transferred below ground via fiber optic cables. The Delancey Underground Rendering by The Delancey Underground Project
optic cables. This technology will distribute light wavelengths that support photosynthesis, which will enable plants, trees and grass to grow in the underground park.  

This project is still in its early planning stages. The founders are currently raising money and awareness for the park by creating a Kickstarter campaign with a goal of raising $100,000. Within the first week, they were able to raise 60% of their proposed goal, a good omen for the project. However, the project has yet to be approved by the city. Additionally, the MTA is currently trying to sell the space and there is no guarantee that they will sell it to the Delancey Underground project.  

“By continuously improving on the concept of public space, we can make it more politically and financially viable to build additional urban public spaces, thus making cities an even more desirable place to inhabit.”

With limited natural resources, the use of existing structures and smarter utilization of space is the hallmark of all of these innovative projects. These projects represent the forefront of future developments. By continuously improving on the concept of public space, we can make it more politically and financially viable to build additional urban public spaces, thus making cities an even more desirable place to inhabit. All of these projects repurpose unused space; the High Line turns a vacant railroad track into a vibrant public park and sets a precedent for this type of space, with other cities following in its path. The other New York City project, the Delancey Underground, strips preconceived notions and limitations of public space, using new technologies to reuse a discarded underground space. The Beacon Food Forest not only develops an unused plot of land, but also reimagines the traditional community garden into a self-maintaining forest. While the Orange County Great Park revitalizes an abandoned military base, providing a unique multiuse space that gives ode to its origins, it also creates a model for community involvement that will hopefully be replicated in the future. With better use of technology, the possibilities for public space in the future are endless, and with broader community involvement, new public spaces will not only become more innovative, but also serve the varied needs of residents.

(Endnotes)
5 High Line History.  

About the Author:
Sharon is currently pursuing her BA in Urban Studies at Hunter College. She volunteers regularly through New York Cares, assisting children with after school activities and helping the elderly. Last semester she studied abroad in Prague, Czech Republic and traveled extensively throughout Europe, where she was exposed to different cultures. This summer she will be interning with the architecture firm Crown Design and Consulting.
Istanbul’s growing profile as a global city has enriched many, but threatens to further impoverish and disenfranchise some of its most vulnerable residents. With Istanbul at its commercial and financial center, Turkey’s Gross Domestic Product has doubled since 2002. Much of the capital surplus has been pumped into real estate investments propelling the city’s rampant redevelopment, megaproject proposals, gentrification and urban renewal initiatives in many of the city’s neighborhoods at an unprecedented scale. Experts warn that the ongoing redevelopment programs may have dangerous social consequences, and are calling on officials to adopt a more inclusive approach to the city’s urban planning policies.

As it basks in the glow of being designated the 2010 European Capital of Culture, Istanbul – Turkey’s economic powerhouse – is rushing to take its place on the world stage, building sleek new high-rises, hosting global conferences and attracting robust foreign investment. But in the shadow of those skyscrapers, there is another Istanbul, a little-seen realm where the urban poor are coming face-to-face with the bulldozers clearing ground for the sparkling new city.

Three urban, centrally located neighborhoods in Istanbul – Sulukule, Tarlabası, and Tophane – illustrate the tension between the flourishing city and the housing needs of the urban poor.

The neighborhood of Sulukule, located in the city’s historic peninsula and perhaps the world’s oldest Roma community, is already flattened - with just a few holdouts living amid the rubble. The Roma people, negatively referred to as gypsies, have been one of Europe’s largest and most ostracized minority groups for generations. The community is being displaced to make room for boutique hotels and new high-rises adjacent to the iconic Hagia Sofia, monumental Blue Mosque and the ancient Sultans palace: cradle of the city’s imperial history and today’s tourism industry.

The wrecking balls have also started their work in Tarlabası, a centrally-located working-class neighborhood and ethnic Kurdish enclave with immediate proximity to the Beyoğlu District. Fears of a similar fate are thought to have propelled residents of the already gentrified Tophane neighborhood in Beyoğlu – which encloses Taksim Square and Istiklal Avenue, the city’s main culture, entertainment and nightlife hubs – toward violence against art gallery patrons.

Additionally, the grandiose development of Istanbul is also affecting those in the outskirts of the city with advanced plans for the construction of a third bridge over the Bosphorus, the water strait that bisects the city and separates Europe and Asia. The plan includes a new highway that will trigger sprawl into the city’s remaining forested areas, which house its water supply.

With massive amounts of money and the city’s international reputation at stake, fierce debate is raging over the government’s “urban transformation” programs: They may be beautifying and enriching the city, but at what social cost?

Istanbul’s success story

“By the standards of neoliberal globalization, Istanbul is a success story,” says Çağlar Keyder, a sociology professor at Bosphorus University. “It is a business platform for the transnational corporate elite as well as a playing field for the cosmopolitan consumers of global lifestyles. The evidence of this success is apparent in the blocks of newly erected high-rise office buildings, luxury residential compounds and dozens of new shopping centers, according to Keyder.

Critics, however, decry the exclusive way in which the programs are being carried out, calling for the inclusion of local residents in the planning processes that directly affect their livelihoods. In the absence of such collaboration, they say, the increasing inequality between rich and poor could lead to heightened tensions, irreversible societal consequences and additional acts of violence like the ones seen in Tophane, where the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art recently opened.
“Lack of representation will result in further marginalization of the urban poor and perhaps the emergence of a new type of poverty, in which the poor have no hope whatsoever for upward mobility and are in a state of permanent destitution,” Ozan Karaman, a Turkish geography professor at the University of Minnesota, told me in an interview.

According to Karaman, at the root of the problem is housing policies of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. The policies were drafted as part of an urban transformation plan created after Parliament passed legislation in June 2005 that allowed municipalities to implement their own urban development programs. In recent years, he said, the government has come to view the urban poor residing in informal settlements as largely dispensable. “While informal and unplanned settlements by the rich are being tolerated, the poor are no longer being allowed to build their own homes wherever they can. This is perhaps one of the fundamental shifts over the last decade,” Karaman said.

The dispensability of the urban poor and their dwellings has facilitated the recent evictions, expropriations and gentrification in central areas of the city, including historical neighborhoods such as Tarlabası and Sulukule. The frustration among citizens affected by such policies and gentrification trends boiled over in the Tophane art gallery attacks.

**Clash of the citizens**

In the summer of 2010 a group of people attacked an opening event at several art galleries in the Tophane neighborhood, including many from the city’s growing Western expatriate community. The attackers put at least five people in the hospital with injuries from pepper spray, broken bottles, batons and knives. According to news reports, the crowds drawn to the area by the art galleries were disturbing neighborhood residents, who were quoted as saying the influx of boutique hotels and restaurants serving alcohol, which can be offensive to more conservative Muslims, is upsetting their community, displacing them and causing their rents to increase.

Experts say clashes between newcomers and longtime residents could become more frequent if people feel they have no say in the transformation of their neighborhoods and believe they must resort to violence in order to make their voices heard.

Similar to Tophane, in transforming Sulukule, a neighborhood in the historic peninsula of Sultanahmet, the municipality adopted a completely top-down approach and denied any input from the residents.

“The project not only eradicated the visible physical structure of the Roma community but also their invisible cultural and economic networks and their unique social ecology. It has been an utter failure,” said Karaman.

In late 2010, I went to a free open-air International Roma day celebration concert paradoxically hosted by the city’s government in Sulukule, the same neighborhood from which the municipality was evicting Roma residents.

At the Roma day event, I met Kerem Yasin, a graduate student from Ankara, the country’s capital, who was quick to criticize the demolitions in the Sulukule neighborhood affecting the Roma community.
“The thing is that many Roma quarters are being demolished due to urban renovation programs and many Roma people are being displaced to the periphery of the city, where they are excluded to neighborhoods prone to more crime, drugs and poverty,” Yasin said.

Residents in the Tarlabası neighborhood also say they are under constant pressure to leave their homes and workplaces as the municipality begins to tear down 278 buildings as part of a redevelopment project for the area. Municipal authorities have a contrary opinion, claiming instead that the transformation is proceeding peacefully with the consent of all involved.

“This model of urban development does not rely on the consent of its citizens but on the imperative of bringing in foreign direct investment. It refers to market-centric criteria for success and treats the city as a corporation competing with other ‘city-corporations,’” Karaman said. He added that such policies of exclusion can exacerbate social class divisions and often end up ingraining the homogenizing and disrupting effects of globalization.

Global meets local in Beyoğlu

The art gallery attacks in Tophane have brought issues of gentrification in Beyoğlu into the spotlight. The current redevelopment of these neighborhoods can be linked back to the liberalization of the Turkish economy in the 1980s, which accelerated the city’s integration into the global market as a “gateway to the country and perhaps to the greater region,” according to Keyder. He acknowledged that the resulting changes have brought improvements as well as challenges.

“Despite complaints from locals, the gentrification of Beyoğlu and the historic peninsula and the rebuilding of the waterfront around the Golden Horn have created new spaces of leisure and culture where luxury hotels and world-class restaurants open every week. Occupancy rates are high as international meetings and congresses proliferate, while the nightlife and culinary delights have become legendary,” Keyder said.

“Istanbul’s entire urban area looks more ‘finished’ than before,” he added. “Roads have been paved, new city parks have multiplied and municipal services function relatively well throughout the city.”

Proponents of the municipality’s plans say urban transformation projects will bring similar revivals to areas such as Tarlabası. As the first bulldozers began demolishing buildings in the central neighborhood in September of 2010, Beyoğlu Mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan said that the 278 buildings to be torn down were selected because most had been empty for decades.

He also said some of the buildings in the expropriation plan would be renovated, not demolished, and that the municipality did not plan to extend the project throughout all of Tarlabası. “Until now, no building in this area has been restored for 50 years. Now dozens of buildings have already started to be restored in areas around the project,” Demircan added.

However, to Tansel Korkmaz and Eda Ünlü-Yücesoy, architectural design professors at Istanbul Bilgi University, the real purpose of such projects is to make the urban poor invisible in 21st-century Istanbul, as they discussed in the Open Cities Exhibition held at that university.

“The following statement by Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan about the neighborhoods of the urban poor summarizes the essence of the official approach: ‘cancerous district[s] embedded within the city.’ Planning operations in Tarlabası, Fener-Balat and Sulukule are [intended] to move the urban poor to the outskirts of the city and to make available their inner-city locations for big construction companies for their fancy projects,” Korkmaz told me.

The Prime Minister’s plan: a third Bosphorus bridge splitting clashing sides

Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan’s plans are propelling large-scale building projects aimed to reinvent Istanbul and make its future just as magnificent as its past. One of these projects includes a new bridge over the Bosphorous Strait. According to the Prime Minister, with the construction boom of the city, Istanbul is preparing the way for a modern future on a historic foundation. Erdoğan’s comment is included in a new documentary film on the impact of growth on Istanbul called Ecumenopolis.

The debate over a third bridge over the Bosphorus has triggered divided reactions among academics, politicians and communities throughout Istanbul. Urban planners insist the project could push the metropolis over the edge and send it sprawling into forested areas that house the city’s water supply, leading to irreversible social and environmental consequences. Istanbul, on the verge of undergoing a plan that will drastically alter the city’s current urban landscape and ecosystem, is at risk of uncontrolled sprawl. The irreversible loss for the city at stake is being gambled by the gains of real estate developers and government contracts around this multi-billion dollar megaproject.

“The introduction of the third bridge will be the death of Istanbul,” said Murat Cemal Yağcıntan, an architecture and design professor from Mimar Sinan University. “The main focus of the [original master] plan was to not let the city grow into the northern areas, but they threw that plan into the garbage. I don’t think this is a planning or transportation decision; this is all about economics and capital accumulation,” said Yağcıntan.

The construction of the third bridge contradicts an already established master plan that intended to contain the city’s borders from intruding into the northern forests. But recently, in faraway Ankara, which sits in central Anatolia, the Ministry of Transport has unilaterally decided that Istanbul needs a third bridge.
“This has nothing to do with solving the traffic and everything to do with developing property,” according to Haluk Gercek, a transportation planning professor at Istanbul Technical University. “Ankara has the means to get the job done. New legislation allows construction in forested areas and places planning authority that once rested with city officials into the hands of the central government,” added Gercek. The ministry was established in the 1950’s with the help of Americans influenced by Robert Moses and other planners whose style was visionary and dictatorial.

The planned highway that will be built along the third bridge poses a tremendous threat not only to the environment, but also to the communities on which it encroaches. Urban patterns show that the construction of highways enables private vehicle usage and urban sprawl. In the case of Istanbul it would lead to more cars on the city’s already traffic-saturated streets.

According to Yaşar Adanalı from Stuttgart University, the planned throughways will spur the transformation from rural farming to real estate development and reduce the much-needed agricultural land production of the city.

On the opposite side of the bridge debate, however, Transportation Minister Binali Yıldırım said in a press conference that the proposed route would cause minimal environmental damage and divert heavy truck traffic from the roads in central Istanbul. Others argue that this infrastructure project would create massive investment and jobs, tackle increasing unemployment rates, and showcase Istanbul as the modern global city that it is — a resonating populist tone heard in politicians’ discourse discussing megaprojects in the city.

Andrew Finkle, a New York Times writer based in Istanbul, explained how the viability of Istanbul itself is being threatened by “a series of what Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan cheerfully calls ‘zany’ urban development schemes. These include a huge canal that would run parallel to the Bosphorus Strait and, zaniest of all, the third bridge over the real Bosphorus.” In the Prime Minister’s own words: “With the new convention centers, sports and cultural centers that we’re building, we’re preparing the way for a modern future and at the same time, investing to turn Istanbul into the financial center of the world.”

Community involvement and activism

The public debate is now unfolding with the participation of local communities that would be directly affected by the construction of the third Bosphorus bridge. Elke Louwers, an academic who advises the Rotterdam Municipalit and now works in Istanbul, was involved in talks with Sariyer grassroots community leaders, the district at the mouth of the Black Sea and the planned site of the European side of the bridge.

“These local representatives said they hope to play an active role in the planning process for what’s to come through their backyards,” Louwers added.

The plans for a new bridge have set off an outpouring of civic protest organized by residents, community leaders, environmentalists and university students. These demonstrations mirror the battles over urban renewal and highway construction seen in the days of Jane Jacobs and slum clearance resistance in New York City.

Lowers stressed active cooperation and political involvement to influence the decision-making processes. “We have seen an interest in collaboration from a few municipal officials and community leaders on critical issues,” she said, adding that they hoped that the Sariyer district could become a model for cooperation between grassroots community organizations and municipal officials.

The construction of the third Bosphorus bridge will likely continue on its development course, but not without resistance from residents, local activists and criticism from urban sustainability experts. Debate over the benefits of the bridge will persist as long as there is the possibility of irreversible social and environmental consequences.

Equality in inclusivity

The debate over the city’s approach at executing megaprojects and urban renewal hinges on finding a balance beneficial to all stakeholders between attracting global cultural and financial capital and relieving the disenfranchisement of the urban poor. The booming city is at a clash between old and new, modern and historic, and must still sustain the livelihood of an estimated 15 million residents.

“Urban redevelopment projects should be executed in collaboration with citizens and residents, not despite them. There is no need to re-invent the wheel; there are plenty of models of community-based development that have been successful since the 1970s,” argued Karaman.

“Policymakers and developers should stop assuming the role of experts imposing a designed scheme over a given situation,” he added. “They need to let the residents be planners of their own futures and consider them as part of the solution instead of treating them like part of the problem.”

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Luis, originally from Colombia, holds a B.A. in Geography from the University of Washington and is now a Hunter Urban Affairs and Planning graduate student. He based this feature article on interviews he conducted while working as a freelance journalist in Istanbul in 2010. He is currently a Community Engagement Facilitator and Audio Producer for StoryCorps, based out of Brooklyn.
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