LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

For the past four semesters, I have had both the pleasure and the honor of working with students from the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (UAP) to produce the Urban Review. The final product you receive at the holiday or end-of-year party each semester isn’t simply a showcase of the projects, papers and work of our student body—it is the culmination of a long and collaborative process representative of why the UAP program deserves its reputation for being an incubator for some of the most respected professionals in the field. In some small part, I like to think that each issue of the Review is responsible for strengthening the relationships and hosting the debates that make this true.

The students, faculty and alumni of the UAP program are a diverse group of individuals that contribute to the richness of this program’s history and presence in the field of urban studies. The Review, in some sense, is the voice of the department, and I encourage students who have not been involved up until this point to find a way to participate and shape that voice, to keep it current and representative of the dynamic people and processes that this department attracts and inspires.

Thank you to the individuals who dedicated their time this semester to developing content, to supporting each other and to continuing the legacy of the Review. As always, the work in these pages is representative of the innovative and inclusive thinking that characterizes UAP students.

Please find and share the Urban Review online at www.hunteruap.org/guapa.

Erin McAuliff
Editor-in-Chief

Erin McAuliff is a student in the Master of Urban Planning program and will graduate this semester with departmental honors. Her focus is on community development and education.
The New Jersey Edge studio seeks to create a plan for a neglected neighborhood on the edge of Northern New Jersey City and southwest Hoboken. This neighborhood is the home of the Lackawanna Center, a 1.3 million square foot warehouse and the focus of the study. The studio’s client, Emmes Asset Management, seeks to increase occupancy in the Lackawanna Center by repositioning the building as the focal point of the surrounding community.

The warehouse is an industrial behemoth, with a building footprint of 138,224 square feet, eight stories, paved overpasses and empty lots, and a reminder of when northern New Jersey was at the epicenter of America’s railroad and shipping industries. The surrounding neighborhood is typified by disjointed and overlapping jurisdictions and a patchwork of redevelopment plans. The interested parties, Hoboken, Jersey City, and New Jersey Transit, have not addressed the neighborhood as a coherent whole. The result is a maze of strip malls, brownstones, highways, and empty lots, but not a livable community. The New Jersey Edge studio seeks to bridge the edges, both physical and jurisdictional, between the communities in the area.

To recreate the neighborhood, the studio plans propose subdividing the building to reintegrate it with the existing street grid, allowing for an enhanced pedestrian network. The plan also proposes creating a new economic cluster of vertically integrated food manufacturing and indoor farming firms, as well as a university-sponsored Tech Center. The New Jersey Edge Studio provides a vision for a cohesive community with revamped human infrastructure, new job opportunities, and a repositioned Lackawanna Center. The building’s tremendous potential can best be taken advantage of by making it the focal point of a reinvigorated neighborhood.

To provide our client with actionable and fundable recommendations that are rooted in community input and will inspire continued community ownership, we propose:

- Promote environmental justice and public health
- Utilize a community planning methodology and build a framework for continued community ownership

Based on our research and goals we came up with three main recommendation areas:

- Development of Green Corridors: improved streetscapes that promote access to the waterfront.
- Improvements to the physical infrastructure on the esplanade; and
- Increased programming in the neighborhood & on the Esplanade.

PRINCIPLES

Promote environmental justice and public health

There is a gap in East Harlem. A lack of open space and a shortfall of public investment have contributed to higher rates of health and environmental problems when compared to surrounding neighborhoods. The purpose of this plan is to utilize environmental interventions, specifically green infrastructure and waterfront access, to promote public health and address issues of environmental justice in East Harlem.

Utilize a community planning methodology and build a framework for continued community ownership

In order to create a plan that meets the needs of East Harlem, the studio utilized a community planning methodology and conducted extensive community outreach. This outreach informed the studio about neighborhood concerns and needs and created a sense of community ownership of the plan. Community engagement drew on the extensive knowledge of a diverse group of stakeholders to form recommendations that are rooted in community input and will inspire continued community ownership.

Consider the natural topography of the study area

Because many of the environmental recommendations of this plan depend on the natural topography of the area, the team did extensive research of the natural history and current conditions of topography.

Provide our client with actionable and fundable recommendations and “think big” to inspire visionary change

East Harlem is often a neighborhood that is over-studied yet resources remain under-delivered. With this in mind, we established realistic short and medium term goals, as well as set forth a community-driven vision of long-term change. The short-term recommendations are meant to be quickly actionable and fundable, while the long-term recommendations that re-imagine the neighborhood and waterfront are larger, more expensive projects that would require cooperation with multiple agencies and organizations.

GOALS

IMPROVE WATERFRONT ACCESS to the esplanade and enable the use of one of East Harlem’s most important open spaces.

INCREASE TREES & GREEN SPACE to bring environmental and health benefits to East Harlem.

INCREASE STORMWATER CAPTURE by implementing green infrastructure, which we define for the purposes of this project as permeable surfaces, especially green space.

IMPROVE PROGRAMMING offered as a means of promoting waterfront use, active recreation to increase public health, connection to the water itself, and the stewardship of neighborhood green space.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Development of Greens Corridors: improved streetscapes that promote access to the waterfront;
• Improvements to the physical infrastructure on the esplanade; and
• Increased programming in the neighborhood & on the Esplanade to promote the use of the waterfront.
HOW THE GOWANUS WAS WON

WORDS & PHOTOS BY NATSUMI YOKURA
Until recently, the name “Gowanus” could never have been imagined as anything but an industrial, polluted wasteland in the middle of Brooklyn’s finest neighborhoods. This was considered unfortunate, given the area’s otherwise outstanding assets: excellent access, proximity to Brooklyn’s posh, brownstone neighborhoods, and the edge, post-industrial setting provided by abandoned warehouses. In any case, the Gowanus slowly caught on as an ‘up-and-coming’ neighborhood – residents moved in, developers took interest, new restaurants and bars opened, and artists came to take advantage of big, cheap spaces. The question is: what caused this transition? This piece will explore the reasons behind the transformation of the Gowanus Canal neighborhood from a polluted, unlivable industrial area, to the next “it” neighborhood. The reasoning examined here: the prominence of neoliberalism1 in New York City, the consequent unaffordability of living in New York City (particularly in Manhattan), and the emergence of Brooklyn as an affordable place the privileged capital2 by offering an alternative, yet culturally gentrified lifestyle.

An analysis of the Gowanus redevelopment also delivers an important commentary on the current state of urban planning. Comprehensive visions have been cast aside in favour of hasty development, compromising economic, environmental and social sustainability in changing neighborhoods like the Gowanus. The Gowanus redevelopment is thus an important opportunity for the planning community to rethink its values and purpose.

Before taking a closer look at the factors that catalyzed the Gowanus’ transition, a brief account of the area’s history, environmental remediation efforts, and recent development efforts will be useful in understating the current context. Of the tension the Gowanus is experiencing between its past and the future many want for it.

BACKGROUND
Basics
The Gowanus Canal is located at the westernmost portion of Long Island in the borough of Brooklyn in New York City. The mile-and-a-half-long canal divides the ward of Red Hook from Park Slope, and is bordered by Cobble Hill and Boerum Hill to its north. The Canal is fed by the Gowanus Bay which is part of Upper New York Bay. The Gowanus area lies on low ground, and ends where slopes on either side begin. This topography makes the Canal area prone to flooding.

A Brief History
The Gowanus Canal was built on what was formerly the Gowanus Creek in 1860 to serve the growing industry that existed along the Creek and powered Brooklyn’s significance as an important, regional industrial center.3 The Canal was constructed to provide shipping access to factories, and also to serve as an outlet for industrial waste and sewage.4 Among the industries operating along the Canal were lumber, coal, oil, paint, building materials and metal foundries. The base of the Canal (the north end of the Canal, which today is the Carroll Gardens and Boerum Hill neighborhoods) held brownstone and brick townhouses that housed Canal workers, and left a legacy of low-rise, brownstone and brick townhouses.5 By the 1920s, the Gowanus was the busiest and most polluted canal in the country. The pollution was recognized as a serious issue already at this time, and a flush tunnel carrying water from the Buttermilk Channel (the waters separating Red Hook from Governor’s Island) was employed to clear out the pollution produced by industry.6

Post-Industrial Gowanus
The Canal’s demise as a manufacturing and shipping center eventually arrived in the latter part of the 20th century as a result of several key market changes in the post-World War Two period which reduced demand for the Canal’s chief products. Further, the construction of the Gowanus Expressway by Robert Moses in the 1940s and 1950s and the popularity of containerized shipping in the 1970s negated the need for the Canal as a shipping and manufacturing corridor.7 The neighborhood was not completely abandoned, however. Artists began moving into the area in the 1980s because of the abundance of large, cheap spaces for work and exhibition.8 Proteus Gallery at Nevins and Union Street was founded in the late 1980s and is part performance space, part gallery, and part work space. More than twenty years later, artists continue to base their work in the Gowanus area.9

People have always lived in the Gowanus neighborhood – in the late 19th and early 20th century, it was canal laborers, later it was Italians and Puerto Ricans. Today, the Canal’s new status as a trendy neighborhood has attracted artists and white middle-class families alike. Homes routinely sell for over a million dollars — prices can even reach up to $3 million.10 Soon, unique businesses such as terrarium retailers, dog daycares, trendy restaurants, music venues and bars began appearing in the Gowanus, reinforcing the speculation that the neighborhood was the new “it” place.

RE-ZONING THE GOWANUS
In response to the growing interest in the Gowanus (as evidenced by the “mini-rez” explained described above), the NYCDCP undertook a rezoning study in 2008 of the Gowanus Canal corridor, a 25-block area around the Canal in which intensified mixed-uses were envisioned. However, any comprehensive rezoning projects have been put on hold by the recent designation of the Canal as an EPA Superfund site (to be discussed further below)[政党纲领, 2009]. Even without the rezoning, a new luxury condo was recently completed on 8th Street between 3rd and 4th Avenue, while a waterfront 700-unit condominium development, complete with a Canal-adjacent amenity, is under way. This has come to choice between providing welfare services and accommodating global capital in order to solve the fiscal crisis, New York chose the latter and eventually established itself as an important global economic center. This choice had dire costs. The city’s economic development policies in the 1970s and 1980s produced a city that made the rich richer and the poor poorer. Rents sky-rocketed, leaving the city with the label of “eternal homelessness.”20 The departure of many city dwellers to the outer boroughs (e.g. Brooklyn) or out of the city altogether.20 More and more, Manhattan became the city of the privileged and “Monopoly Rents” were charged as a premium for living in Manhattan.21 Meanwhile, Brooklyn offered desirable housing stock, a culturally-rich, alternative lifestyle, urban amenities, and affordability. Thus for many people, especially those out-priced from Manhattan, moving to Brooklyn was an obvious, and often times necessary choice.

Brooklyn’s Symbolic Capital
As alluded to above, Brooklyn’s symbolic capital has been a powerful magnet, particularly for the next “it” neighborhood. The borough initially experienced a “renassiance” in the post-World War Two period as a result of its low-rise historic architecture, neighborhood feel, cultural amenities and convenient access to Manhattan. Migrants to Brooklyn were also escaping the “sameness” and bureaucracy that characterized the suburbs and Manhattan.22 Indeed, the Brooklyn phenomenon was a political commentary on the failure of Modernist urban planning, specifically New Deal liberalism and its “university campuses, government complexes and corporate skyscrapers.”23

By the 1990s, Brownstone Brooklyn was home to New York’s educated and wealthy, as well as the intellectual and cultural center of the city, surpassing Manhattan in this respect.

The Waters of the Gowanus Canal are contaminated with over a hundred years of accumulated pollutants, such as coal, ash, tar, and toxic metals.33 In other words, the Gowanus is contaminated as an “as of right”19 development. Furthermore, a Whole Foods (perhaps the touchstone of gentrification) is set to open adjacent to the canal in late 2013, despite flooding from canal waters during Hurricane Sandy in late 2012.

Environmental Concerns
The waters of the Gowanus Canal are contaminated with over a hundred years of accumulated pollutants, such as coal, ash, tar, and toxic metals for paint and glue manufacturing.34 Further, microbes such as cholera and typhoid have been found in the Canal.35 It is troubling then, that the Gowanus is situated on a flood plain—something that the city was made keenly aware of during Hurricane Sandy. Despite these concerns, the Canal has never been properly cleaned up, despite some short-term fixes dating back to the beginning of the 20th century.36

The EPA and Superfund Designation
Despite the need for a serious remediation effort, plans to designate the Gowanus Canal as a Superfund site were met with opposition. In particular, resistance came from developers that have invested cash in their planned developments, and Mayor Bloomberg who countered with an alternative proposal for a faster, “less-bureaucratic” clean up. Bloomberg knew well that an EPA Superfund designation would delay and even kill investment interest in the Gowanus Canal, and negatively affect economic development and tax revenues.37 Nonetheless, the EPA designated the Gowanus Canal as a Superfund Site in March 2010.

To the contrary, many residents viewed the Superfund designation as a blessing. Not only will the EPA impose human and environmental health and safety, it has granted a pause to think more carefully about how the area should be redeveloped.

EXPLAINING THE GOWANUS’ TRANSITION FROM BLUE COLLAR TO WHITE COLLAR
With this brief summary, a sufficient historic and present context should now be in place to clearly consider the impact of the Gowanus’ transition into a desirable neighborhood despite the problems exposed above.

Manhattan’s Unaffordability
In the postwar period, New York City concurrently pursued economic development and welfare. The city had a booming goods production economy and well-paying union jobs, and provided welfare services and education. Global capital arrived in the 1960s and 1970s, and received favorable tax cuts and funding for their perceived role in boosting New York’s economy. This arrangement caused over-expenditures and eventually a fiscal crisis. In 1981, Mayor Koch and the City Council made the tough choice to bring in global capital and accommodate global capital in order to solve the fiscal crisis, New York chose the latter and eventually established itself as an important global economic center. This choice had dire costs. The city’s economic development policies in the 1970s and 1980s produced a city that made the rich richer and the poor poorer. Rents sky-rocketed, leaving the city with the label of “eternal homelessness.”20 The departure of many city dwellers to the outer boroughs (e.g. Brooklyn) or out of the city altogether.20 More and more, Manhattan became the city of the privileged and “Monopoly Rents” were charged as a premium for living in Manhattan.21 Meanwhile, Brooklyn offered desirable housing stock, a culturally-rich, alternative lifestyle, urban amenities, and affordability. Thus for many people, especially those out-priced from Manhattan, moving to Brooklyn was an obvious, and often times necessary choice.

“With hip bars, and cafes, used-book stores, yoga studios, and renovated townhouses, Brooklyn has been recognized by the public as blighted, but instead it is both celebrated and reviled as a site of cultural consumption for a new middle class.”24 Not only does the Gowanus Canal neighborhood inherit the symbolic capital of Brooklyn, it has forged its own. Since the abandoned warehouses and foundry buildings no longer served their original purposes, they have been excellent, affordable spaces for artists and new businesses to gain footing.25 As a haven for artists and young people, Gowanus has lived up to all that is “Brooklyn” but
more actual planning is performed by groups such as Living City Block, the Gowanus Institute, and the Gowanus Canal Community Development Corporation (GCCDC) that proclaim mandates to make the Gowanus a unique, profitable and sustainable neighborhood. These groups consolidate funding, supporters and draft plans for their plans as a response to the lack of action on the part of the NYCDCP.

A Critical Conclusion: the Gowanus Canal Redevelopment Study as an Indicator for the Future of Planning

Because the Gowanus Canal redevelopment is unconventional due to the unusual landscape and serious environmental hazards, it calls for a comprehensive solution that considers not just the entire neighborhood, but the implications of its redevelopment on neighboring areas, the borough of Brooklyn and the City of New York. In this way, the Gowanus Canal redevelopment is a rare opportunity for city planners and officials to plan with foresight and conscience.

Unfortunately, as with many other contemporary socioeconomic and political issues, the hands of urban planning seem to be tied by a neoliberalized political economy of land uses and providing housing, characteristic of neoliberalism and evident in the case of the Gowanus. Moreover, due to the fragmented and reactionary nature of urban planning and development spawned by neoliberalism, the goals that are inclusively decided upon as a community of New Yorkers may close the "critical distance" and act as a social critic. Though the redevelopment of the Gowanus Canal is underway, it is not too late to question, reaffirm and pursue the goals that are inclusively decided upon as a community of New Yorkers.

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1. Neoliberalism (1973-present) rejects egalitarian liberalism, a period of democratic socialism where federal policies helped prop up the working class into the middle class, and attempted remediation of social injustices such as the renewal of inner-city ghettos and instead calls for deregulation of industry and shrinking of the state.

2. The term symbolic capital was conceived of by the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, and refers to the recognized power of an agent, be it an item, an address or activity. He also attributes reputation, prestige and fame to the term. Symbolic capital is convertible into social (one’s social network), cultural (intellect and education) and economic capital (money and stock). For example, one’s tastes both demonstrate and determine one’s richness (or poorness) in symbolic capital.


9. A 2002 report by the New York Coalition of the Homelessness recognizes that while homelessness is neither new nor unique to New York City, routine homelessness has never been such a widespread “visible feature of urban life” than it is today. Until the 1970s, it was rare to see homeless people unless one purposefully sought them out.


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27. Boyce and Merlis, 34.

28. Greenberg, 244-245.


30. Greenberg, 244-245.
By Marly Pierre-Louis

In her 1994 article published in UCLA Women’s Law Journal, Deirdre Davis calls street harassment, “The Harm That Has No Name.” It is defined as unsolicited comments, remarks, gestures, or touches usually targeted at a woman from a man and can include everything from seemingly innocent comments like, “Hey Baby” to hissing, whistling, leering, threats, touching, grabbing, and following. This behavior is often dismissed as playful and harmless, but women everywhere experience this as something much more treacherous. Street harassment exists on the spectrum of gender-based sexual violence and should be regarded and treated as such. Although it is not as severe as sexual assault and rape, “it carries many of the same traits as other forms of sexual violence, and can cause considerable mental and emotional damage.” Queer and transgender women are also subject to harassment when their gender presentation is compounded by their perceived sexual orientation. The particulars of their experience should not be glossed over and thus are outside of the scope of this paper. Here, I will focus on the experience of female presenting women, regardless of sexual orientation.

In December of last year, a young woman in New Delhi was fatally beaten and repeatedly raped after boarding a bus. The bus driver initiated and encouraged the assault by making lewd comments about her.

In New York City, Darnell Hardware pushed himself onto a crowded train car, stood behind a young woman and grabbed himself to ejaculation - on three different occasions. The women, held captive by the crush of other passengers only discovered the extent of what had happened to them after discovering Hardware’s ejaculate on their clothes.

“A 2000 survey by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics showed that more than half (52%) of the female respondents were feeling afraid walking around their neighborhood at night, whereas only 23% of the male respondents were afraid to do so.” Moreover, research shows that women use parks and open spaces significantly less than men do.

These stories and others I will share in this paper demonstrate the fact that street harassment “makes the urban environment uncomfortable, hostile, and frightening for women,” making that support and perpetuate street harassment. I will discuss the role that planning plays in this issue by placing it in a spatial context with civic engagement, transportation, and public space implications. I will then discuss how street harassment manifests on the streets and on public transit. Lastly, I will offer recommendations on what planners can do to address this issue.

In an effort to contextualize and localize this issue, I conducted two focus groups and a web survey with a small group of Black women who live in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. The intersection of race and gender is often overlooked in considerations of street harassment and gender violence. For this reason, I chose to explore this topic through the lens of Black women. When appropriate, I’ve included quotes from this study group throughout this paper.

FEAR OF RAPE & GENDERED SPATIAL BOUNDARIES

Sexual terrorism, a term defined by Carole Shafferfield as “men’s systematic control and domination of women through actual and implied violence,” genderizes public spaces by allowing men to control women’s access to it. Thus, street harassment is implied violence. Further, by policing a woman’s movements through the streets, men define her participation in public life. If women are subject to violation of personal privacy when they enter public areas, that invasion effectively drives them back into the private sphere where they can avoid such violations. By turning women into objects of public attention where they are in public, harassers reinforce the message that women belong only in the private sphere - at home. When women enter public spaces, their very being becomes public: their bodies up for public scrutiny, commentary and consumption. While the representation of street harassment is often conveyed as innocent banter, in reality it takes on a far more insidious quality.

Although men are more likely to be attacked by a stranger than women, women must consider safety in a way that men do not. Since women cannot know if a remark might escalate into violence, street harassment reminds women that they can be attacked at any moment. And since in the United States, one in every five adult women has been the victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime, this is hardly an overreaction. “Sexual harassment is a gateway crime that creates a cultural environment that makes gender-based violence ok.” While not all harassers are rapists, women have no way of knowing who is and who isn’t and are thus forced to move through space with a generalized fear of being assaulted.

“I’m always concerned that I’m gonna walk down the street and get raped. Its just something I’m always thinking about, regardless of what neighborhood I’m in, what city I’m in, there’s like a fear that I live with.” –“C.C.” Black woman, late 20’s

WOMEN’S RIGHT TO THE CITY

In this section, I share the stories of the women I interviewed to reveal what street harassment actually looks, feels and sounds like.

Verbal harassment

Sexually explicit language emerged as the most common form of harassment.

“Oh my way to pick up my son from school on a weekday I decided to run up to the school so I would not be a minute late. I was passing a thin AF AM (African American) brother who said ‘damn sexy look at your titties jiggling.’ I was horrified and said, ‘You’re disgusting.’ He replied, ‘Be grateful I don’t rape you’ and then stood on that corner staring at me. I was scared to leave the school with my son fearing I would have to pass him again and that he would be able to see/identify my child.” –“B.B.” Black woman, early 30’s

“A man tried to pick me up when I was walking home from the subway. I told him I wasn’t interested and to leave me alone. I thought he had backed up but he followed me to my house, confronted me and made sexually explicit gestures. My main fear was that he knew where I lived.” –Anonymous

Physical harassment

About a fifth of respondents had been grabbed:

“I was walking home several years ago while living on Greene Avenue. While only 5-6 houses from my house a man AF AM (African American) brother on a bike rode past me and grabbed my butt while passing. I felt so violated and dirty, disgusted at what this stranger did. I showered for over an hour. Did not talk to anyone that night, no calls, nothing. I felt paralyzed.” –“B.” Black woman, early 30’s

In light of the intensity of their harassment, women maneuver throughout the city in myriad ways to avoid being harassed, followed, grabbed, or assaulted. They avoid areas, abstain from activities, and otherwise, alter their daily lives in order to stay safe. In her 1993 piece, “Street Harassment and the Informal Ghettonization of Women,” Cynthia Grant Bowman writes that street harassment:

“…not only diminishes a woman’s feelings of safety and comfort in public places, but also restricts her freedom of movement, depriving her of liberty and security in the public sphere… Thus harassment makes the urban environment uncomfortable, hostile, and frightening for women.”

Restricted freedom of movement

Here the women discuss the ways in which they alter their routes and daily activities to feel safe:

“I try to come home earlier from events, won’t go to events that start too late (e.g. I missed a karaoke event in the city that started at midnight because I did not want to leave my house so late and didn’t want to pay for a cab), try to travel in groups.” –“E.” Black woman, 30

“I don’t even like to walk to the corner to buy a bag of candy when it gets dark. I either ask my boyfriend to walk with me or I won’t go. Also, if I am going to wear a dress, I like to travel in groups so I feel safer and don’t get as many comments.” –“E.” Black woman, 29

“I changed what I wear. I don’t even wear heels anymore. I don’t even bother. I don’t want to wear anything that will bring attention to me. Just act like I’m not here. And it’s come to the point where I do everything that I can do to be invisible.” –“L.” Black woman, late 20’s

Not only does the fear of street harassment exclude women from fully enjoying the culture, social life, and opportunities that they should have equal access to as citizens, but it can also have an impact on their access to education and economic independence if they choose not to take night
classes or work late. In her article, "Street Smut: Gender, Media and the Legal Power Dynamics of Street Harassment or ‘Hey Sexy’ and Other Verbal Ejaculations," Olukemi Okunke Laniya writes "Street harassment excludes women from public space, which they are entitled to share with men as equal citizens of the state. A fundamental aspect of liberty is mobility, yet free exercise of mobility often is denied to women."

Further on the topic of mobility, harassment on public transportation adds another level of maneuvering that women must do to stay safe.

**Harassment in transit**

Overcrowded trains create a cover for sexual harassment. In a 2007 survey done by the Manhattan Borough President's office entitled, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Sexual Harassment and Assault in New York City Train Systems," with 1,790 participants, 63% of female respondents reported being sexually harassed, 69% of respondents reported having felt the threat of sexual assault or harassment in the New York City subway system. The term "subway grinders" is used by the NYPD to describe men who take advantage of packed train cars to rub themselves against women. The sheer volume of people on a packed train makes it possible for men to grope and fondle women, and more difficult for women to identify who did it.

Over half of the participants in my focus group described being flashed or masturbated in front of in train cars or platforms:

> "When I was kid a man flashed his penis on the D train, Prospect Park station. And then one time, I was on the 48 bus I must’ve been 11 years old, this man sat next to me, put his arm around me and licked my face." –M.

Black woman, 30’s

> "I was like 16, I fell asleep and I woke up and this guy was masturbating and I acted like I was sleeping." –Z.

Black woman, 28

**WHAT PLANNERS CAN DO**

Ignoring street harassment and gender violence and the effect they have on the ways women are able to participate in urban life is equivalent to planning for half the population. Poor management of urban space, lack of street lighting and urban life is equivalent to planning for half the population.

In order to tackle this issue, planners can begin by using participatory tool recognized by the United Nations as a best practice for addressing street harassment and gender violence in urban areas around the world. According to the report released by Women in Cities International in 2010, safety audits involve:

> "...a group of women walking around an area to observe, consider and record views about safety related issues as they appear. The walk is followed by a meeting to discuss results, decide on the necessary changes for creating a safer space and formulate recommendations for relevant agencies. The experiential nature of the tool and its use in a familiar physical environment makes it a particularly effective means of empowering ‘ordinary’ women to participate in community development, while the interaction between them helps develop ideas about key issues and the way forward."

With the use of mapping and safety audits as planning tools, planners can identify "hot spots" of harassment to focus on. In "Is It Safe To Walk Here?", Loukaitou-Sideris proposes a range of design and planning interventions that can be implemented to install feelings of safety and preclude opportunities for harassment. For example, mixed-use zoning and the creation of multi-use spaces with an overlay of activities would produce a "critical mass of people in public spaces" and opportunities for "natural surveillance by neighbors." Storefronts facing the sidewalk and buildings with street facing windows would also have the same affect. In addition, placing stations and bus stops in well-lit and open areas near businesses and heavy pedestrian activity, as well as making sure bus shelters are well-lit, would help women feel safer taking public transportation. Loukaitou-Sideris also recommends "the replacement of pedestrian tunnels with safe, ground-level crossings, and the elimination of empty alleys as well as fences and heavy landscaping blocking sight lines" to reduce fear and feelings of being unsafe. Lastly, the design of public spaces should help ease tensions between different groups using that space. This can be accomplished by "the formation of time and activity zones through design and planning in parks and public spaces that allow different groups to use the same space."
You’ve recently published High Life, a book about co-owned, shared, and collaborative housing in the US. Where does your book fit into previous research on the subject? Can you share a few conclusions that you’ve gleaned?

Co-owned housing has long been a neglected topic in urban and housing research. Most of literature, even today, imagines the U.S. through a two-tier lens of single-family suburbs of middle-class homeowners, on the one hand, and inner-city rental apartments for the poor, on the other. But the reality is more nuanced. We see glimpses of this in the literature on gentrification and in discussions about “first ring” in housing: owned multifamily housing. I was especially interested in limited-equity housing, and situated the entire story in a three-dimensional way of how different kinds of people have employed co-ownership to various ends, to solve their particular housing problems, at different moments, in different places. One of the most fascinating things about co-ownership is that it’s not just “co-ops” or “condos” or “townhouses”—and whatever images come to mind when we hear those terms. It’s a slippery, shape-shifting web of social, political, and financial relationships that can take an almost infinite variety of forms: legal forms, forms of governance, and physical forms. If “house” and “apartment” are physical, and “own” and “rent” are contractual and financial, co-ownership really does introduce a third dimension in how we conceptualize housing, and I wanted High Life to convey some of this dynamism.

You first published your dissertation on the same subject in 2007. How did your interest in collaborative housing evolve and grow into the book?

I think the book is important because it offers an opportunity to reevaluate the success (and limitations) of local programs like Mitchell-Lama and national programs like FHA’s multifamily sections, and, more urgently, to evaluate some of the claims being made for and against homeownership in the wake of the mortgage abuses of last decade. We need to be more sophisticated in our understanding of how factors—including tax breaks and long-term mortgages, but also demographic change, expectations for quality in housing, shifting gender roles, centers of employment—actually get translated in specific forms and geographies of housing. Since the mid-1960s, and especially since the 1960s and 1970s, we’ve seen whole new kinds of communities emerge, but our conceptual models have not kept pace.

I’ve not been approached by any housing officials, but I have been approached by a land-use and housing lawyer in Chicago, now doing a mid-career fellowship at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, who is working to rescue distressed condominium complexes in Illinois—mainly suburban garden-apartment and townhouse complexes that are home to working-class, often African American, families, who were victims of predatory lending. Policymakers and pundits, in continuing to imagine homeownership as exclusively single-family houses, have done a terrible job of thinking about the specific challenges of co-owned housing, of which there are many. In metropolitan America one in five homeowners lives in a multifamily complex. The market for condos and co-ops and townhouses in many places suffered far more than that of single-family houses, and when homeowners struggle, they don’t just risk foreclosure, but in undermining the viability of their entire complex, since monthly maintenance or HOA payments are essential for physically maintaining common elements. Almost no one is talking about this issue, and we know almost nothing about it, in large part I think because this housing is largely invisible: co-ops on Park Avenue and Lake Shore Drive are fine. It’s the ones in peripheral areas that are more likely to be in trouble—and the majority of multifamily housing, both rented and owned, has been suburbia since at least the 1950s. Many of the photographs in your book are your own, and you occasionally publish reviews of notable urban-focused art exhibitions. What role does art play in understanding urban environments?

I think the visual plays a central, if under-appreciated, role in urban thinking. Many deeply ingrained planning approaches are shaped quite fundamentally by visual considerations. Too often, however, we lose track of this thread, returning to visual information can help us unpack assumptions, and reevaluate norms. In housing, for example, many core assumptions, such as our abiding interest in subsidizing production over consumption (Section 8 notwithstanding), derives from arguments advanced by architects and architectural critics in the early twentieth century. The privileging of visual order over social concerns—and faith in visual order to lead to social outcomes—remains so powerful that it makes it difficult to even detect when this process fails. HOPE VI, which has been terrible for vulnerable tenants of public housing, continues to appeal precisely for this reason: it’s difficult to visually detect the harm it does. At the same time, what housing looks like—that metropolitan space looks like—is hugely important. In the case of my own research, rich visual information is crucial to drawing attention to the aspatial nature of co-ownership—to its infinite physical forms and metropolitan geographies. To talk about housing only in terms of room sizes or methods of ownership or structural soundness or rents is to trivialize a major part of the human experience.

In terms of ways of knowing, I believe the artists’ eye is crucial to studying the city. Artists look at urban space differently than do planners, architects, policymakers, or social scientists. As a result, they are positioned to see things that we might otherwise overlook. Photographers, especially, have made important contributions in this respect. Today we have a lot to thank photographers like Andrew Moore, who’s trained his eye on decaying Detroit and Title I projects in New York City, and Camilo Jose Vergara, with his long-term series on the state or other institutional actors, but this can prove limiting. I’m thinking of graffiti artists altering the streetscape and giving voice to underrepresented communities, or Parking Day, or Candy Chang’s interactive murals on empyrean storefronts in New Orleans and on Fulton Mall in Brooklyn. These are no substitutes for other kinds of urban interventions, but planning can certainly learn from these kinds of experiments.
Located in transforming Long Island City, the 5 Pointz Aerosol Art Exhibit Center has been a center of attention since its owner announced the future demolition of the former industrial complex.

The world’s premier graffiti hub is threatened by land speculation and luxury developments represented symbolically by the Citigroup building, a pioneer in the neighborhood’s transformation.

The 5 Pointz re-opens its door to the public this May for a new season of concerts, live graffiti performances and festivals, thumbing its nose to the rumors!

Fatah Sadaoui is studying at the Hunter College UAP department as part of an exchange program with the Institut D’Études Européennes (Paris 8 University). With a specialization in art in urban settings and graffiti, he expects to graduate in June 2013 with a Master in Urban Governance.

Fatah Sadaoui

5 POINTZ, LIC
BY FATAH SADAOUI
OPEN DATA: A CATALYST FOR URBAN INNOVATION

INTRODUCTION

From the Federal to local level, many government agencies in the United States are providing its citizens with free (“open”) data in order to encourage public transparency, participation, and collaboration. At the request of President Obama, Peter Orszag, then the director of the Office of Management and Budget, issued a memorandum in 2009 requiring that Executive Departments and Agencies 1) publish government information online, 2) improve the quality of government information, and 3) create and institutionalize a culture of open government.1 This memo was premised on the notion that new technologies allow citizens to better participate in government, and that more participation will lead to a higher quality of governance.

Many cities across America have adopted similar local legislation, including New York City, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Chicago, Portland, and others. Technology has come to play an important part of daily life, which has made it increasingly clear that the best way to ensure government transparency and accountability is to provide the public with digital information. This allows technologies and curious citizens alike to analyze and digest government data through a variety of methods, including mapping, visualization, and application development.

This article makes the case that providing open data increases government accountability and transparency while also improving access to city services and civic participation. Additionally, open data enables civic technologists to build tools that improve the way citizens interact with cities, and this process is most often powered by open source technologies.

I will begin by describing how a recent paradigm shift in business management relates to public policy and open data. I will then review open data policies in the United States at the federal and local levels. This will lead to a discussion of how open source software is an important and necessary complement to this open data revolution. Finally, I will provide specific examples of civic technologists who have successfully joined open data with open source technologies, creating applications that enhance the quality of daily life for urban citizens.

OPEN INNOVATION IN BUSINESS AND TECHNOLOGY

In the past, most of the innovation in the business world was due to internal research and development (R&D). In the manufacturing sector, R&D was often used to improve internal production techniques. For example, “What can we do to produce our widget faster/cheaper/better/etc.”? However, this caused firms to sink large amounts of money into research projects which may or may not prove to be profitable. Over time, particularly as globalization replaced traditional boundaries of business and government. Likewise, if a company developed a technology which did not prove to be profitable, sharing this innovation with others would allow another firm to find a way to make money off of the innovation (which would, in turn, provide profit to the original innovator).

This trend is most vividly seen in the software development world. As the Internet developed and began to allow people across the world to interact with each other, it became clear that harnessing the collective potential of software developers worldwide could produce free computer programs that rivaled proprietary (and therefore, expensive) systems, such as Microsoft’s Windows. This trend was enabled by technologies such as version control and bug tracking tools, allowing large groups of programmers who may never have met face-to-face to collaboratively contribute to an open source project. Indeed, open source software often represents a conglomeration of intellectual capital, which can provide the public with analysis and planning tools which may or may not be profitable in a traditional sense. However, regardless of whether or not the innovation is immediately profitable, the important point here is that programmers are able to leverage the open source innovations of others, and build tools which would have been impossible for that programmer to code by him/herself.

Government agencies have begun to open their data to their citizens because it is becoming increasingly clear that much of the innovation in the world is taking place beyond the traditional boundaries of business and government. Likewise, although not all innovations are immediately profitable, every innovation in the open source realm represents a building block that others can manipulate to create new technologies. As more and more open source projects are developed, the potential for harnessing these innovations to create useful tools for both businesses and the public alike grows.

OPEN DATA POLICY IN AMERICA

The first step towards open data in America began in 1966, when the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was signed by President Johnson. The FOIA provides the right to American citizens to obtain federal records from any agency, provided that the data does not fall within a list of certain exemptions. This is the principle underpinning all subsequent open data legislation in America.

On President Obama’s first day in office in 2009, he signed the Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government, declaring that “information maintained by the Federal Government is a national asset.” The attitude and intent of this memo can be boiled down to a simple sentence contained within it: “The Freedom of Information Act should be administered with a clear presumption: In the face of doubt, openness prevails.”

By recognizing the value of providing open data to the public, President Obama ushered in a new era of government transparency. This, in turn, encouraged municipal governments in cities across the country to adopt similar legislation pertaining to local datasets.

Portland (Oregon) was an early adopter of open data legislation, with Resolution #36735, passed in 2009. Although Portland’s resolution did not explicitly call for an open data portal, many of the directives contained within appear in subsequent legislation adopted by other cities.

In 2010, San Francisco amended their Administrative Code with Section 22D, establishing a local Open Data Policy. In addition to the previously mentioned benefits of transparency and accountability, San Francisco wanted to allow independent analyses of city datasets, to encourage the local high-tech workforce to develop civic apps at no cost to the city, and to harness innovations in government-citizen interaction to provide social and economic benefits to its citizens.

In an effort to keep pace with San Francisco and Portland, other cities began to enact open data legislation in the years following. 2012 will likely become known as a watershed year in the open data movement, as New York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago enacted their own local open data legislation. Each city called for the creation of a web portal containing local datasets, provided for free to the public.

As open data becomes more widely available, cities are able to harness the talents of their local population. For example, New York City’s yearly competition “BigApps”12,13, and San Francisco’s “DataSF”14 provide an opportunity for citizens...
OPEN DATA IN NYC: A CALL TO ACTION
NATHAN STOREY

Urban planners should expect open data to radically change the future of New York City by increasing transparency and efficiency in government, and fostering innovation. On March 7, 2012 Local Law 11—Publishing Open Data was signed into law in New York City. The law mandates that all public government data (exceptions exist for data that is sensitive due to privacy or security concerns) be made available to the public on a single open data portal in machine-readable format. Although the law is not slated to be fully implemented until 2018, the first of the law’s provisions went into effect on March 7, 2013.

Local Law 11 aims to “streamline intra-governmental and inter-governmental communication and interoperability, permit the public to assist in identifying efficient solutions for government, promote innovative strategies for social progress, and create economic opportunities.”

As major producers and consumers of government data, urban planners must be aware of the new paradigm of open data. In New York City we will work for and with the agencies that must now comply with Local Law 11. In cities across the country and at the federal level, open data is becoming the new normal. The benefits to transparency, efficiency, and innovation are cause to embrace open data.

Local Law 11 was a great step forward for open data in NYC, but bureaucratic inertia is still a major hurdle to fully implementing open data in many agencies. If we work with data in a government agency, each of us can do our part to comply with open data requirements and more that agency forward ahead of the 2018 implementation deadline in NYC. If we need government data to do our work with an advocacy organization, private developer, or consulting agency, we can use our influence and activism to push agencies to make their data open quickly. Regardless of where we work, if we have any control of a dataset that might be useful to the public we should go the extra mile to open that data up.

To read more go to: http://bit.ly/open_data_for_urban_planners

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to create tools using open data, and to share them with the public for testing and evaluation. In this manner, cities are able to provide their citizens with high quality civic tools at little to no cost to the municipal budget.

OPEN SOURCE AND OPEN DATA

Open source software has provided an important conduit through which information gleaned from open data can be shared with the public. Although there are many proprietary software packages which were designed for data analysis (such as Microsoft Excel or ESRI’s ArcGIS), it is unlikely that open data would have taken off if it did not have a suite of open source toolkits for analysis. If the data is free, but the tools for digesting it aren’t, then is the data truly “open”?

Luckily, civic hackers who are comfortable writing computer code can utilize a large array of tools to analyze all of this open data. For example, the computer language Python can be used to access data and produce complex charts and dashboards using the plotting library matplotlib. For those who want to make a map but can’t afford an ESRI license, there are tools such as MapBox, CartoDB, and Leaflet which allow users to create beautiful, complex, and interactive geographic visualizations on the web for free. These are just a few examples of the many open source tools out there.

OPEN DATA AND THE REAL WORLD

There are countless instances of civic hackers leveraging open data and open source technology to make applications that would have been impossible or prohibitively expensive for the government to create on its own. Below are a few salient examples of this trend in action.

Portland, Oregon and the General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS)

In 2005, the city of Portland’s transit agency, TriMet, began a collaborative development process with Google that changed the way transit data is shared and visualized over the web. Bibiana McHugh, an IT Manager at TriMet, wanted to get transit routing information on the internet in the same way that MapQuest provided automobile routing information.4 However, due to the complex spatial and temporal domains of transit data, a new method for cataloging and accessing transit data was needed. Google developed the GTFS (General Transit Feed Specification) format for sharing transit data, which is a series of text files containing tabular and routing information for every single vehicle in the transit provider’s fleet.5

Using GTFS formatted data from TriMet, the Google Transit Trip Planner was launched in December 2005.6 It was the first application of its kind, allowing users to get public transit routing information in the same way that automobile drivers were able to use MapQuest or Google Maps to find the best route from A to B.

Within less than a year, five more cities began formatting their transit data in GTFS, and today it is the default format for sharing transit information with the public. Coordinating transit agency timetable data with an online routing service was once a far-fetched idea. Now it has become an integral part of daily life, accessible from every smartphone and computer for just about every major city in America.

In many ways, the openness of GTFS data has been a harbinger of the larger municipal open data revolution. By providing GTFS data to any developer who wants to build an app, cities began to see transit apps proliferate, which increased the quality of the transit rider experience. Public transit users have become accustomed to and reliant on real time information about how late their bus is or whether their subway line is out of service today. All of this has been enabled by open GTFS data.

MTA BusTime

In 2011, New York City’s Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) announced that they would be partnering with the civic-tech non-profit OpenPlans to implement a real-time bus tracking system for all of the MTA’s bases.7 At the core of this system is the OneBusAway platform, an open source project developed by researchers at the University of Washington to provide bus riders with real time information on the bus system.8 Using GPS devices on MTA buses, a server is updated every 15 to 30 seconds with the real-time location of every bus. By combining this information with MTA’s published timetable (in the GTFS format, of course), the server knows whether each bus is on time or running late. When a New Yorker uses the application, they can see real time information for every bus that services the stop closest to their location.

Currently, BusTime has been released for all services that serve Staten Island, and roll out to the other four boroughs should be completed by the end of 2013.9 Within a year of releasing the Staten Island functionality, approximately 10% of all bus riders on Staten Island were using BusTime on a daily basis, which civil engineering professor Dr. Karl Watkins called a “smashing success.”10 Clearly, by leveraging open source technology and transit data formats, MTA is making public transit more accessible to its riders, and as rollout to the rest of the city progresses, the bus system will only become more accessible.

THE OPEN DATA MOVEMENT IN NEW YORK CITY

The maps were created by Rachel Spillman, who will graduate in May with an MS in Sustainability and the Urban Environment from City College.


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created in response to a lack of municipal open data. Across the world, civil society provides services that local governments are unable to provide. In this instance, street data was needed. Because this data was not available from a government institution, civil society was able to take the slack and create their own dataset. However, had the Haitian government provided this data with first-responders, there may have been fewer deaths in the initial hours and days after the earthquake. Although crowdsourcing is a viable way to generate data, at the end of the day, the onus rests with local governments to provide data that will enrich (or possibly save) the lives of their citizens.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the examples cited that there is no one specific or best usage of open data and open source technology. Rather, I have made the case that open data enables civic technologists to build tools that improve the way citizens interact with cities, and that this process is most often powered by open source technologies. Whether for altruistic or personal reasons, everyone wants to make their city the best place it can be. This might involve opening up a direct line of communication with elected officials, reviewing government spending records, or even just making a map of a specific trend of interest.

As business models change and new technology develops, it is becoming increasingly clear that everyone is standing on the shoulders of giants, whether or not they’d like to admit it. The days of proprietary technology and data are numbered. As free alternatives to expensive software packages proliferate, a new generation of technologists will grow up in an age where technological innovation takes place within a “share and share alike” framework. Likewise, as governments across the world continue to open up data to their citizens, these civic technologists will have their hands full analyzing and visualizing this constant stream of information. As the benefits of open data become more widely known and documented, no city will want to be left behind.

We are likely at the very beginning of a new race to the top. This time, the top meaningful civic participation in the planning process, the technical processes. The cities who reach the top fastest are likely to be those who realize the benefits of open data, and provide their citizens with the resources they need to create the kinds of innovations that are most needed. In the past, businesses would often spend lots of money trying to develop an innovation based upon the presumed desires of their customers. In the future, this model will be turned on its head. Citizens will develop the apps that they want, because they believe they’ll make their daily life better/easier/more fun/etc. They’ll ask their local government to provide datasets which enable them to create these apps (assuming this data isn’t already provided!), and the governmental open data laws will force these agencies to comply.

You may be wondering, “How can I encourage my city to open up more data?” Although there are ways to do this using legislation, the best way to make such a case is by creating an interesting app or visualization with data that is already “open.” As cities begin to see their citizens interacting with government information and producing

high quality applications, the point will prove itself. Cities will realize that their citizens are motivated to improve the urban experience, and that they can harness this potential by providing even more information.

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THE CORPOREAL BODY

Up until around the fifteenth century there was no distinction between a “private” or “public” corporation: the medieval town or city was seen as a corporal body unto itself—everyone who lived and worked inside the city’s walls collectively encompassed a united set of interests, an autonomous corporation just the same as the East Indian company would be in the seventeenth century. The rise of Mercantilist bureaucracies whose domain spanned many countries and colonies, such as the aforementioned East Indian Company, coupled with philosophical meditations on the burgeoning idea of the inherent rights of an individual, fractured the “self-sufficient unit” of the municipal corporation. Correspondingly, the state increasingly sought a role to protect individual rights by mediating the conflict of private versus public identities.

These different corporate identities were cemented in 1872 when the New York State Judge F. Dillon declared that there must be a strict distinction between the public and private sector. In his book City Making: Building Communities Without Building Walls, Gerald E. Frug, explains how Dillon placed “cities in the sphere of the state and private corporations in the sphere of the individual in civil society.” More importantly, Dillon’s “rule” placed the ultimate power of a city’s life (and death) not by the city’s own government, but on the state that the city resided in. This state, Dillon wrote, “breathed into [the city] the breath of life” ignoring the fact that many of our nation’s cities, such as Boston or New Amsterdam, were created long before the formation of the United States of America.
In 1905, William L. Riordan, a “newspaperman,” published a series of conversations with George Washington Plunkitt, “a successful politician of New York City’s Tammany Hall.” Plunkitt was frank in his political machine shop talk and said no problem explaining how he got rich off of what he called “honest graft.” Plunkitt goes on to explain, “I might sum up the whole thing by sayin’: I seen my opportunities and I took ‘em.” One example of a fruitful opportunity was when Plunkitt was tipped off that the city was planning to build a new park. He was able to quickly buy up all of the land in the area before any official announcements were made, and is then able to sell the land to the city at a handsome profit. Plunkitt rightly asks, “ Ain’t it perfectly honest to charge a good price and make a profit on my investment and foresight?” Honest or not, Plunkitt the politician could be seen as a Dillon example of why mob-rule cities needed to be nannied and disciplined by the state.

In the nineteenth century, New York City’s governmental power was highly decentralized and distributed through all of its neighborhoods, via the appointment of neighborhood Aldermen, Councilmen, and Supervisors to name just a few positions that competed with each other and the mayor for power.14 There were many confusing laws—a government “hodgepodge”—and it was sometimes unclear who the responsible authority was over a particular jurisdiction of policy.15 Corrupt officials were able to get away with graft, skimming the till, and other outrages. Yet much was accomplished during the high point of the reign of Boss Tweed.

In 1965, Robert F. Pecorella published Community Power in the Postreform City: Politics in New York City, 1960-1970 (New York: Columbia University Press), whose state office staff helped Columbia to coordinate a blight study after a previous outside firm had reported that what blight there was was Columbia’s own fault.30 Using persuasive information obtained from Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests, Spraygen wages a lengthy legal battle against both the University and ESDC. But, in December of 2010, Spraygen’s “six-year battle” ended when the United States Supreme Court refused to hear his appeal regarding an ongoing suit in favor of Columbia University’s eminent domain land grab.31 It was a “done deal,” as they say: Dillon’s vision of a state needing to control a rowdy city is upheld by the fact that both city and state collaborated in a neighborhood land-grab for a private entity.

**THE NINETEENTH CENTURY POLITICAL MACHINE TURNED OUT THOUSANDS OF PATRIOTS WHO LOVED BOTH THEIR NEWLY ADOPTED CITY AND COUNTRY, PATRIOTS WHO FELT PROUD OF THE FACT THAT THEY WERE INFLUENCING LOCAL NEIGHBORHOOD POLICIES.**

Turn of the 20th century reformers took away the local power of the alderman and centralized the city government in the newly formed functions of the city’s functions. Bureaucratic efficiency was a major goal in the reform government, and the efficiency of these various city agencies were all aimed towards a pro-growth agenda. But this white, middle to upper-class agenda was done in the service of an imaginary unified ideal for a singular city vision. Thus, under the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954, slums were cleared, many of the older or undesirable city residents were dislocated and scattered through “urban renewal,” and often times commercial facilities or upper income housing was built instead of lower income housing replacements.

**WHO IS PROTECTING WHOM?**

Is there much honest graft to come by in the 21st Century? What if the state aids and abets a private entity in creating its own opportunity for honest graft? In December of 2008, reporter Jonathan V. Last, writing for the *Weekly Standard*, delved into this very scenario when he examined Nick Spraygen’s battle against Columbia University.31 Spraygen, who owned “a thriving self-storage business” in the neighborhood of Manhattanville, was a last man standing in a standing in a lawsuit that targets Columbia University, and one could get from point A to point B through newly constructed public transportation projects.

Nineteenth century New York City was also dealing with a constant flow of poor immigrants, but these people were not ignored. Boss Tweed and his cronies welcomed them to city life by greeting them at the dock, offering them something hot to eat, and quickly indoctrinating them into local politics. One did not need millions of dollars to run for office in those times. According to Alexander B. Callow, for a citizen of Boss Tweed’s New York, “civic responsibility was an understanding of the poor immigrant’s plight, justice was a playground for the children, or something to eat when times were bad.”32 The nineteenth century helped political machine coordinators of patrons who loved both their newly adopted city and country, patriots who felt proud of the fact that they were influencing local neighborhood policies.33

Columbia was already smoothing out the scheme with the New York State Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC), whose state office staff helped Columbia to coordinate a blight study after a previous outside firm had reported that what blight there was was Columbia’s own fault.30 Using persuasive information obtained from Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests, Spraygen wages a lengthy legal battle against both the University and ESDC. But, in December of 2010, Spraygen’s “six-year battle” ended when the United States Supreme Court refused to hear his appeal regarding an ongoing suit in favor of Columbia University’s eminent domain land grab.31 It was a “done deal,” as they say: Dillon’s vision of a state needing to control a rowdy city is upheld by the fact that both city and state collaborated in a neighborhood land-grab for a private entity. Having a neighborhood condemned as blighted for the sake of a private corporation: private citizens were being supplanted by a powerful private corporate body through the guise of public entities. Nick Spraygen was wealthy and could afford to spend a few million on a legal battle, but even he could not break through the bear hug of private interests and the New York City government.

2. Frug: 28
3. Frug: 44
4. Frug: 27
5. Frug: 44
6. Frug: 67
8. Riordan: 347
9. Riordan: 348
10. Seymour M. Mandelbaum, Boss Tweed’s New York, (Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 50
11. Mandelbaum: 51
14. Callow: 73
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
23. Moody: 285
24. Moody: 286
25. Moody: 285
26. Moody: 287
28
You were a member of the inaugural Urban Affairs class at Hunter. What was the atmosphere of the Urban Affairs program at that time?

There were twelve of us. I think, and we were all very close. We got to know each other as students, as colleagues, and as friends. We were a very diverse group of people—it was a fabulous group.

One of the other participants was Paul Menino, a captain in the New York City police force. There was also a transit cop from the MTA. There were women who were making the transition from being a suburban mom to moving back into New York, re-entering the workforce in the banking area.

There were twelve of us, I think, and we were all very close. We got to know each other as students, as colleagues, and friends. We were very diverse group of people—it was a fabulous group.

Are there lessons that you took from that program that continue to inform your work?

Oh, yes, yes, all the time. I mean, in all the work that I do, whether I’m reading grants or writing grants, raising money, or doing politics. I remember one professor, Herb Hyman, he did social planning, and if you took his class, you could write any grant you needed to. He really provided basic training, and during the two semesters you had to make a case study and make your case two times, very detailed, no stone unturned, and if there was, you had to do it again. We did actual projects. The first one I worked on, we were trying to develop a proposal for a healthcare center in Chinatown—and now it exists. And that’s because the City came to Hunter and said, “What do you think?” You had to decide whether it was feasible. And it was; it was a major deal.

Of course we had help, but it was our project.

What was the process of moving from the Urban Affairs program to the non-profit world and politics?

Well, Urban Affairs was always about issues. I did a lot of work on healthcare. That’s when HMO was a new word—we studied the Kaiser Permanente program and the HIP program in New York; those were the only two HMOs, really, in the country, so that just shows you how old I am. And we studied [the] economics of the city, where the jobs were, where they were going, where they were coming from. We studied poverty. We studied drug abuse. So, if you take that, and you think about it, that’s not that far a jump to the non-profit world.

Has the nonprofit world changed in the time you’ve been working there?

It’s gotten much more professional, much more complicated. Anything that affects corporations affects the non-profit world, so they have to become much more—not that they weren’t transparent, but they have to keep a lot of different kinds of records, they have to do a lot of different reporting, they have to respond to the government much more diligently. And some of them have folded because they can’t maintain that, some of them have folded because the government used to fund them and the government is not funding them. Hospitals have certainly changed, because healthcare’s so different.

Do you think non-profits are still effective mechanisms for creating change?

Oh, sure. I think they’re the most effective mechanisms, better than the government, because there are stakeholders who participate.
CONSTRUCTING THE URBAN FABRIC

BY SAM CHODOFF

There is meaning in every landscape. The places that Americans have built for themselves compose an unimaginable spread of constructed environments, an awe-inspiring array of stories, of lives, of experiences imprinted on the physical landscape. There are the great cities: crushing, moving, rolling amalgamations of people and culture. There is suburbia: sprawling highways and endless backyard pools, controlled, calm, and secure. These spaces reflect the people who inhabit them, who move between them, who construct and are affected by them.

As students of the city, we are trained to observe these places, their citizens, and the relationship between person and place, carefully. We learn to search for patterns, to anticipate changes, and if we can, to nudge development in a better direction, however we define that. To do this effectively, we must have a theory of cities that we can turn to, a clear foundation describing how society and the landscape are connected, with a sense of the direction of cause and effect. Here, we are ill-served by much of the literature and scholarly debate that exists.

In America, where the suburbs have been the dominant form of landscape for the past half-century, the bulk of the writing concerned with the built environment explains its development in one of two ways: to proponents of the first, the form of American cities is the exclusive result of that sum of individual tastes and choices we call market forces; to defenders of the second, it is, instead, the product of state policies created by the powerful to further their own interests. Neither perspective, however, paints an entirely accurate picture of what has driven the development of the decentralized American city. A focus on the ways that the imperatives of the powerful shape the human landscape reveals important large-scale patterns, but ignores the role that individual choices, tastes, and beliefs play in composing the warp and weft of that landscape. A focus on markets, on the other hand, allots too much importance to individual agency, and fails to account for the ways that individual choices are influenced by the social environment.

In fact, this basic formulation, the idea of a debate between market forces and state policies, is a red herring. Space is constructed through a continuous, iterative, dynamic process of negotiation among all the different scales of society—power is present both in individuals and also in groups large and small. People are both agents and pawns. The proper metaphor for the people who try to shape space and society, the planners, policy-makers, politicians, and profit-seekers, is neither that of the driver in complete control of a car, as one view would have it, nor of the hapless rider of a bucking bull, as the other would describe, but of the parent trying to raise a child. Parents have undeniable influence on the development of their children, but that influence is only one among many factors that shape the path and character of that development.

DAVID HARVEY

The flaws of the state-power oriented perspective are most clearly shown in the work of David Harvey. His 2008 article “The Right to the City,” highlights three mistakes that undermine this reading of development. First, his reliance on simplification and generalization underscores the degree to which attributing the development of the decentralized city to state power alone is itself a simplification. Second, his argument that consumerism itself is a mechanism of pacification, perpetrated by the powerful inaccurately concentrates agency in one segment of society. Finally, his focus on one type of power relationship ignores the multitude of complex relationships that actually determine the shape of society.

Harvey’s argument proceeds from his contention that “from their inception, cities have arisen through geographical and social concentrations of a surplus product” and that “urbanization has always been, therefore, a class phenomenon.” Such a reduction of thousands of years of complex human activity foreshadows Harvey’s use of a selective reading of history and of incomplete generalizations. This penchant is clearly evident in his arguments concerning the development of suburbia. Suburbia, we are told, was constructed by Robert Moses and the “ruling classes” to absorb “surplus capital” and tamp down socialist activism by changing the pattern of consumption among the American lower- and middle-classes. Such a characterization ignores both the vast and colorful history behind the development of a suburban lifestyle, and the degree to which the suburbs evolved from the bottom-up rather than being effected from the top-down. Suburbia’s roots date back to the nineteenth century, the suburban ideal has always been only one of many ways of conceiving the ideal community. All these conceptions have long histories, and all have evolved side-by-side simultaneously. To characterize the history of the urban form as a linear progression from one form to the next is to oversimplify the robust intellectual and cultural ferment that inspires the built environment. Furthermore, to say that a particular group constructed suburbia to achieve a particular end ignores the many technological innovations and cultural currents, such as the invention of the automobile or the glorification of the nuclear family, that allowed the common human impulse toward privacy and insular community to consume the landscape around the old city.

There is a place for looking with a critical eye at the processes of society, but Harvey takes a far too jaundiced position in his confusion of embourgoisement with pacification. A major justification for the creation of suburbia, he says, was that “debtor-encumbered homeowners...were less likely to go on strike.” Of course, the heyday of suburbanization was a time of numerous strikes and other strong union activity, but, in any case, it is not striking Harvey is concerned with, per se, but a larger shift in perspective away from the group and towards the individual. To be sure, it is not unreasonable to see a correlation between the change in lifestyles associated with the move to the suburbs and a rise in conservative values in the succeeding decades. But it is unreasonable to ignore the fact that this move was also associated with a vast improvement in quality of life, as many lower-class and formerly marginalized groups, the descendants of the Irish or Jewish or Italian immigrants of the preceding hundred years, moved up the economic ladder into a comfortable middle-class. It makes a certain amount of sense that as people become happy with their situation their values turn more conservative, more toward the preservation of the perceived status quo.

Harvey also points out that many of this new bourgeoisie participate in the pervasive hyper-consumerism of modern society. He calls this ‘pacification,’ because these people, he says, are blinded by consumerism to the economic injustices being perpetrated upon them. But such a term gives agency to the wrong segment of society. For all the direct and indirect harm our suburban, consumer society does, both to those left out of the general prosperity by its inequalities and, through environmental degradation, to future generations, it is imperative to recognize that to a very real degree this consumerism is not generated (though it is sometimes abetted) by state policy or by the capitalist juggernauts who take advantage of it (and, yes, at times, encourage it), but by the desires of the newly comfortable and relatively wealthy, having moved up the economic ladder into a comfortable middle-class. Such a characteristic ignores both the vast and colorful history behind the development of a suburban lifestyle, and the degree to which the suburbs evolved from the bottom-up rather than being effected from the top-down. According to Harvey, many of this new bourgeoisie are so happy with their situation their values turn more conservative, more toward the preservation of the perceived status quo.

Finally, Harvey’s focus on traditional loci of power and resistance to those powers blinds him to the complicated ways that power is distributed and the complex web of motivations that characterize all the different segments of society. The state, for one, is not always focused entirely on the interests of the rich. The suburb of Wythenshawe on the outskirts of Manchester, for instance, is one example, of many, of a space founded by a progressive, idealistic state as
an ameliorative response to the poor housing conditions of a city. In this case, and others in the US and Europe, the state was acting in the interests of one segment of the lower-middle class, and against the interests of another segment of the public, the villagers and commuters that inhabited the rural land and who resisted the incursion of the city into their bucolic existence.” A demonstration of the observation that the most vehement opponents of suburbanization are often the upper-middle-class protectors of what they consider traditional settlements. That these states sometimes fall short of the ideals they propose should not be taken as evidence that all are corrupt.

Moreover, in a democratic state, power is not confined to those we are accustomed to naming the powerful. Many American suburbs are being transformed as immigrant and minority communities settle away from the central city. The debates in these communities demonstrate the variety of motivations that impel change. In Fairfax County, Virginia, for example, the observation that programs for gifted students did not reflect the overall ethnic composition of the schools prompted the schools to make some changes in the interests of minority populations, while resistance among the established white upper-middle class undermined others. The point here is that power and motivation are not uniform. Neither the populist public nor the state has a monopoly on ideas of what the best interests of society are, and whichever one holds the greater share of power in a particular time and place must contend with the “responsibilities of power,” and we hope that if they fail, then a new source of legitimacy and power will rise in its place.

ROBERT BRUEGMANN

The opposing perspective, focused exclusively on the powers and the rights of individuals, has equal flaws. An analysis of Robert Bruegmann’s 2005 book Sprawl: A Compact History shows that the most egregious failure is the elevation of the fulfillment of people’s stated desires above all other characterizations of the good society. First of all, and leaving aside the question of whether polling is the optimal path to an accurate picture of urban desires, this leads him to misinterpret what those stated desires are. He holds out as a foundational fact that “polls consistently confirm that... most people worldwide... would prefer to live in single-family houses.” But when such polling data are examined more closely they show a much nuanced picture. Among the newest generations of Americans, for example, a large majority states that they have no interest in the suburban lifestyle. And when the poll includes a choice of different housing types, the clear trend among responses is towards smaller lots and more integrated communities, a reversal of the previous decades’ ever-increasing removal from daily contact.

But beyond this simple misunderstanding of what people say they want, the development of suburbia shows how government can cherry-pick among competing desires, can reinforce and empower specific group impulses. The clearest demonstration of this is the segregated, unequal character of suburban development. The same decades that saw, in the US, a vast expansion of white middle-class population, wealth, and property, saw at the same time the concentration of poverty into ever more segregated areas of the inner-city. This segregation was encouraged and enforced by federal housing policies, even after the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968. Those perceived as minorities were denied access to the burgeoning middle classes by an entrenched segregation and by the federal and state policies that failed to prevent or mitigate, and even at times abetted, that segregation. Indeed, this is true to such an extent that Americans perceive the boundaries of class to be largely conterminous with those of race.

At the same time, the persistence of the detached single-family house as the basic American housing form demonstrates the way cultural norms shape the stated desires of much of the American public, even in the face of demographic changes that make that form inefficient or inconvenient. The single-family house is designed for a 1930-1950s style nuclear family with one stay-at-home parent and one parent that commutes to and from the house. The argument can be made that this form of house, and the neighborhood that accompanies it, are ill-suited to today’s legions of single-parent and double-working-parent households. But while preferences are changing in the face of these shifting demographics, the change is very slow, tempered by the traditional narrative that informs the embedded cultural ideal. And if cultural norms affect individual preferences and the market forces they create, it follows that anything that affects cultural norms will also affect the development of the built environment. While Harvey takes the argument too far, he is right to point out that our choices and our culture are influenced by marketing and other forms of propagandizing, that what we hear and see affects what we believe and how we behave. The market-focused perspective does us an injustice when it ignores the communal instincts of human society, when it insists that detached individual reasoning is the sole basis for decisions that affect the shape of our cities and towns.

CONCLUSION

In the end, while both perspectives are necessary, neither is sufficient to explain or predict the course of urban development, and indeed, it is foolish to try to separate them. Margaret Crawford has observed of the relationship between governors and governed on a local level that “boundaries between local governments and citizens are often blurry. Many people occupy multiple roles, moving between identities as citizen, bureaucrat, professional, or advocate.” There is no reason we should not extend this observation beyond the local sphere, and note that the relationships among government, markets, cultures, and individuals are fluid and inconsistent, that influence flows in all directions. Space in a human society evolves in response to all of these, and to the push and pull between them. For an inclusive model of development in the built city, we must turn to Ali Madanipour, who insists that the built environment is a product of the individual, the structural, and the social. He proposes a model for understanding and influencing the development process that takes into account the physical, psychological, social, and historical dimensions of the built environment, the social character of the development process, and the social and physical context of any single development.

Basing our understanding of the urban fabric on such a model, and attempting to use it to inform our actions, is a difficult prospect, and one that may not be truly possible, but it must be the ideal we aim for in any discussion of the urban form.

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References

1. Dr. really, a hundred parents, who are all from different backgrounds, and who all receive parenting advice from different sources, trying to raise, simultaneously, a thousand kids who are actually local is where this metaphor truly breaks down adults with their own perfectly valid ideas of how they should be raised.


5. Madanipour, pp. 188-189.

6. Harvey, p. 27.


8. Harvey, pp. 31-33.


11. Massey, pp. 646-647.


20. That is, no longer the Catholic and Jewish and German and Scandinavian communities: these had become part of the white majority.


