In his keynote address at the 1965 national meeting of the American Institute of Planning, Paul Davidoff, one of the creators of the Hunter Urban Affairs and Planning program, said that “the prospect of future planning is that of a practice, which openly invites political and social values to be examined and debated.” Today, nearly half a century later, the Urban Review, now in its fifth year, remains committed to the moral and ethical imperatives of our ideological founders. Just as they did, we strive to examine the practices that drive change in our cities. We aim to impart our truths upon the public sphere. The words that follow are our contributions to the discourse of human settlement. I invite you to wrestle with the issues as we have, and to do so publicly and aggressively. Our communities, our profession, and our democracy not only benefit from such debate, they depend on it.

We present to you the works of Chris Leonard, Mia Moffett, Eric Petersen, Meira Harris, and Jeremiah Cox. Together they address critical concerns of our present-day: gentrification, alternative planning, affordable housing, land use, and public transit. Keeping with tradition, their essays engage the discussion of governance in ways that I believe uphold a long-standing Hunter College tradition of social justice and civic responsibility.

We are also excited to share interviews with New York City’s great planners and policy makers. Former Director of Poverty Research at Center for Economic Opportunity Mark Levitan discusses poverty and inequality with the pragmatism of an economist, creating both historical precedent for our conception of poverty and political precedent for our approach. Randy Wade, Nicole Altmix, and Bonny Tsang from the NYC Department of Transportation provide a how-to on completing capital projects amidst budgetary, bureaucratic, and public constraints. And, parting from the norm, we decided to include a third interview, this one with Karthik Ganapathy from 350.org, a key organizer in the People’s Climate March. Blending theory and practice, Ganapathy shows us what goes into a global environmental movement.

You will inevitably form your own opinions about the issues addressed in these pages. When you do, I hope you’ll share your thoughts with us and with others. I hope you’ll attend political rallies, and write to your City Council Member, and do everything you can to challenge the status quo. Every contribution counts. This is ours. Enjoy.

Daniel Townsend
Editor-in-Chief
AN INTERVIEW WITH
MARK LEVITAN

Mark Levitan is an Adjunct Professor in the Urban Affairs and Planning Department. He recently retired from a full-time position as Director of Poverty Research at the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) and now teaches undergraduate and graduate courses focused on poverty and inequality.

You’ve made a career out of poverty research and advocacy. What made you decide to focus your economic expertise on this subject? Like a lot of things in life, it’s half intent and half accident. The first job I got after I received my Ph.D. was at Queens College and it was a research position working in what was known then as the Labor Resource Center. I enjoyed the work, but I felt that I wasn’t challenged by what I was doing. I had become very interested in the whole debate around welfare reform, so this was in the mid-1990s and I felt that my expertise as a labor economist gave me some insight into what was going to happen as welfare reform rolled out. It was a nice match with what Community Service Society was looking for. I was able to write some things that had some influence on what was happening in the city, not necessarily around welfare reform, but about joblessness, particularly, joblessness among African-American males. I think some of my most influential work focused on that topic.

How did you get involved with the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) after the Community Service Society (CSS)? After 10 years, I felt I had gotten the t-shirt. I was looking around for what next. The last year or two at CSS, I had become ever more aware of the limitations of the poverty measure that we and everyone else in the United States was using. I started reading about it and thinking about it more and then came upon an ad in The New York Times, ‘Director of Poverty Research at the Center for Economic Opportunity’, I applied for the job and I got it.

But having established myself in one position, and this is a lesson to young people, when you’ve established yourself in one position, you’re in a really great position for the next job because to a certain extent, I was okay where I was and I could set certain parameters about the next job. My condition for accepting the job at the city [with CEO] was that we would be able to implement a set of recommendations that had been created by the National Academy of Sciences for an alternative poverty measure. I’d been convinced that this was the way to go and, fortunately, it wasn’t difficult to convince people in the city that this was the way to go. Other approaches, I think, would have been dead ends. I think I was proven right.

In your time at CEO, you more than doubled the percentage of people who are near poor. Linda Gibbs, Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services, credits you with helping to reveal the ‘actual face of poverty’. What makes your data more accurate than what it replaced?

There are two key questions that any measure of poverty has to address. One is, ‘How much is enough?’ and the other is ‘Enough of what?’ What are the resources we count when we figure out if people are above or below the poverty line? And in both respects, the official U.S. Poverty Measure is obsolete. The poverty threshold is too low; in particular it’s too low in New York because it doesn’t account for the differences across the country in the cost of living. One thing we know about New York is that it’s a very expensive place to live and it’s expensive primarily because of the cost of housing. The official poverty measure does not recognize that fact. The other way that the poverty measure is inadequate is that its definition of income is much too narrow. It only accounts for cash income and over the last several decades, the composition of the kinds of supports that the government provides low income people has changed dramatically: away from cash assistance and towards tax credits and in-kind benefits like food stamps and housing assistance. None of that is captured by the official measure. One thing you want a poverty measure to do is to see the effects of new and evolving policies on the poor and the official poverty measure is dumb as dirt when it comes to addressing that issue. On both sides of the poverty measure, we needed to make a radical overhaul. The National Academy of Sciences’ methodology pointed towards a way to do that.

How does poverty research influence the way our leaders govern? There’s an ‘is’ and an ‘ought’. How does it actually affect how our leaders govern? I guess I have to confess: not enough. It was the hope in the 1960s when people in the Johnson administration were thinking about a ‘war on poverty’, that a poverty measure would be a way of holding political leaders accountable for the progress, or lack thereof, we were making in the war against poverty. It didn’t serve that role really and part of the reason it didn’t serve that role was that everyone understood that the measure was so deeply flawed that they stopped taking it seriously. My hope is that the administration in the city, which has made poverty and inequality central to its mission, is going to use this measure in a more serious way, that they will look at the results of what the measure finds and think about how its programs will impact the poverty rate in the city. I think that they’re making an honest effort to do those things.

Speaking of how our leaders govern, one of de Blasio’s poverty initiatives is to expand the city’s living wage measure. How effective do you think this measure will be? Are there other endeavors the new administration is implementing that you think could be more successful?

So, thinking about poverty in New York City, there’s one key insight from the work that we did at CEO, and that is thinking about the low income population in the city, it’s stuck between a rock and a hard place. The rock is the low wages that people earn in the city’s service sector and the hard place is the high cost of housing. The de Blasio administration is working on both the rock and the hard place. The expansion of living wage legislation is important because it will raise wages for another 10,000 workers. Well, that’s great. Probably more important is that it helps the city advocate for an increase in the state minimum wage and for a New York City minimum wage, which would be higher and much more universal in scope. That would have a significant impact on poverty for working families in the city. But of course, the other thing that the city is committed to is more affordable housing and those are the two short run levers that the city has. The long run levers are successive schools, and universal pre-k is going to help. But that is a long run investment. It’s not something we are going to see the results of for a decade or two, but the more young people finishing high school and going on to higher education… that is a path out of poverty.

Strip away the facts and figures. What does it mean to be poor in New York City?

I think of someone trying to run on a treadmill that’s set too fast for them while they’re juggling four balls at the same time…

It’s constantly being behind, constantly being in a panic. How am I going to pay the rent? How am I going to pay the utilities? How am I going to juggle the job and the kids? What happens when I get sick and I can’t get to work or what happens when the kids get sick and I can’t take them to child care? It’s this constant feeling that you could lose control at any moment and the consequences of that are catastrophic.

What have you found to be effective at reducing poverty in New York City?

Well, I think the one key thing that we find is housing subsidies. Section 8, public housing are by far the most effective programs in lifting people out of poverty. One thing we know about New York is that housing is really expensive and if you can take that burden off people’s shoulders, you actually lift a lot of them above the poverty line. The problem is that we don’t have enough of it, so we have hundreds of thousands of people on waiting lists for Section 8 and for the public housing. Both programs are essentially funded by the federal government and there is little immediate prospect of getting more money for these programs.

I think the problem is in Washington. I think that public housing in particular has been less of a success across the country than it has been in New York City for a variety of historical reasons. Our public housing, as much as it’s criticized, has really overall been quite a success story. And that message has not gotten across to policymakers in Washington. I think they see public housing as sort of a nesting ground for people who behave badly. I think there are big challenges facing public housing in the city, but there’s a reason why so many people want to get in and no one ever leaves.
AN INTERVIEW WITH RANDY WADE, NICOLE ALTMIX, AND BONNY TSANG OF PEDESTRIAN PROJECTS

As New York City approaches the one-year anniversary of Vision Zero, Mayor de Blasio’s ambitious plan to end traffic deaths, we wanted to check in with staff at the New York City Department of Transportation to see how the effort is impacting their work. We spoke with Senior Planner and former Director of Pedestrian Projects Randy Wade, Senior Project Manager Nicole Altmix, and Assistant Press Secretary Bonny Tsang about DOT’s history of improving pedestrian safety; its focus on quick, inexpensive, and effective projects; and what all has changed in the past year.

Can you tell us how the city’s approach to pedestrian issues has changed since you started with the DOT?

RW: When I had gotten there, they were finding their way with the new federal legislation that had authorized funding specifically for pedestrian and bicycle modes. Previously, money had gone toward highways and bridges. And so there were new groups formed called the Pedestrian Projects Group and the Bicycle Program, and there was a lot of energy and enthusiasm. They had already done some studies, and the speed hump program evolved out of that research. The leading pedestrian interval was also introduced, which is several seconds—usually six to eight seconds—at the beginning of the cycle, where the cars are held and pedestrians can walk without conflicts. Around 2006 or 2007, there was a new interest in doing temporary things—quick things. We did Pearl Street Plaza, Willoughby Street Plaza, 9th Avenue and 14th Street, and worked with business improvement districts and partners and started establishing ways to make changes that were low cost and could be done within a year or two.

The pedestrian plazas, with the granite stones and the planter boxes, became almost iconic. Can you talk a little bit about the evolution of that design?

RW: Someone had mentioned to me in 1997 that there were granite blocks not being used when they took them off the sidewalk. They were just going into a yard. At first some people were concerned about putting them next to traffic, but we worked with the engineers and they became comfortable about the idea. We saw that people started to use them as seating in a very informal way. When we ran out, we wound up ordering granite blocks of a certain dimension. Those were the ones that were used at Water and Whitehall and also in Times Square.

What makes a city pedestrian friendly?

RW: People need things to see at a walking speed: diversity, surprise, whimsy, shade from trees, a great public transit system, the compatible human scale of bicyclists nearby, other people on the street for a sense of safety as well as interest and the magnetic draw of crowds. DOT provides the platform for this city life through the country’s most expansive network of sidewalls, signals, stop signs, traffic calming, seating, a coordinated street furniture system, new small plazas and incremental street redesigns that improve safety in every corner of the city.

How does the DOT engage the community in its process?

NA: We constantly source feedback from the community for agency programs and initiatives, most recently and specifically with the Vision Zero workshops. Not including the borough town halls, we hosted nine Vision Zero workshops to gather comments. We also collected information from our Vision Zero website. We are able to cross reference public feedback with crash data and prioritize locations for improvement.

How has Vision Zero impacted your work lately?

RW: It’s really impacted the work of the whole agency. Everybody’s pulling together. There are certain groups that are very devoted to coming up with the slow-speed corridors and slow-speed zones. It’s really wonderful to have a top-down vision like Vision Zero because it’s a very big agency with a lot of people doing a lot of different things, and it has provided a very strong focus.

And it looks like the 25 mile-per-hour cap is going to happen?

BT: On November 7, the citywide default speed limit was lowered to 25 mph, from 30 mph originally. In preparation for this, DOT lobbied successfully for the city’s top engineers for safety—and avoid our earlier hurdles. From NYC, then collaborate to propose local improvements that came after some pretty horrific crashes. Some of the changes include adding pedestrian islands and dedicated left turn lanes. The work began in the fall of 2014.

RW: We developed a pedestrian safety island prototype that’s 63 feet long, because we wanted to do something that would have trees in it. Trees would be the safety feature to make it more visible. They’ve done islands before but it was never so systematized. Now there’s a half-dozen in-house concrete crews that go around and they both repair sidewalks and also build these islands. That’s one thing that DOT can do on its own without sending a capital project over to the Department of Design and Construction.

What other cities are paving the way for pedestrian-friendly spaces?

RW: Chicago was early on the scene with innovations, especially in landscaping. San Francisco began a Parklet program modeled on NYC’s work but coming up with wonderfully inventive interpretations. Los Angeles, with so much sprawl, has discovered that its walkable neighborhoods attract the creative young professionals. Philadelphia has done tremendous work around its train station, and really any city or town you might want to visit will be walkable—or you wouldn’t go. People travel for nature or for walkable urban places.

What lessons can the rest of the country learn from the work that NYC is doing?

RW: Most everyone fears change when it comes from the outside especially if it has never been done before. It became easier to get public buy-in in New York when the benefits of earlier projects could be shown. The public discourse has become so educated about possibilities that an engineer or resident in any other city can easily go online to get ideas from NYC, then collaborate to propose local improvements in temporary materials—point to designs approved by our city’s top engineers for safety—and avoid our earlier hurdles. And we continue to learn from other places.
This paper attempts to argue how the 2005 rezoning of Greenpoint-Williamsburg has contributed to the fading Polish culture in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Development, business growth and increased rent prices for both residential and commercial locations have combined to dislodge the core long-time Polish residents and business owners of Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

2005 REZONING

In Greenpoint and Williamsburg, the 2005 Points of Agreement is the document that is generally referred to at community board, city council, and developmental review meetings when residents inquire about the logistics, economics and fairness of local accelerated housing development. During these meetings, when residents and economically-advantaged community advocates attempt to vend their frustrations regarding noise, proposed building heights, or construction traffic and pollution, they are likely stonewalled with references to the 2005 Points of Agreement. It is an inmovable object that continues to regulate new development in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

The Points of Agreement are divided into five sections: Open Space, Industrial Preservation, CB1 Needs Assessment, Community Advisory Board and Affordable Housing. Specific text in the Industrial Preservation section refers to the protection of Industrial Business Zones (IRZ) e.g., “The Administration commits that it will not pursue or support rezoning and variance applications to allow residential use in the proposed North Brooklyn IRZ.” While this protectionist mechanism is clear and warranted for the manufacturing areas, residual effects of rezoning have certainly changed the cultural landscape of Greenpoint.

The 2005 rezoning of Greenpoint and Williamsburg rewrote the boundaries for where specific building types could be developed, thus increasing the residential density. Greenpoint has traditionally been an industrial neighborhood, but the 2005 rezoning laws increased the number of lots that could be used for residential use, while simultaneously slashing the number of lots that could be used for manufacturing use.12 This would eventually increase the availability of residential units while decreasing the availability for manufacturing space, resulting in fewer jobs for laborers, many of whom were Poles.

Regrettably, the rezoning has also affected other ethnicities or nationalities, e.g. Latinos and Jews. However, in order to explore how the neighborhood has changed for any one of these nationalities, it is imperative to focus on a particular group of people and in some cases assume that the economic and residential challenges they (Polish residents) are facing also applies to other groups. One subset (and symbolic) group of people who represent the Polish population are the men who are still employed in the manufacturing industry. Although some newcomers to Greenpoint have taken to the Polish restaurant or kitchen, the hard-working Polish men have sustained these establishments for decades, though their numbers (both the customer and the business) are dwindling fast.

A POLISH RESTAURANT EXPERIENCE

When you walk into a Polish restaurant, you feel alone. Most times it’s just you and a few Polish men sitting down enjoying their meals. They too are alone, having just exhausted their final strength during the last hour of work, now surrendering their nostrils to the billowing and scented steam lofting from their fresh plate of Polish cuisine. They are tired-looking men dressed in denim, with leathery skin and dirty fingernails. They dine alone and sometimes watch Polish programs on the small television hanging from the ceiling in the corner. Because you order at the register, waitresses are rare.

As the only bilingual employee, the one at the register can take orders in both Polish and English. Rarely do they write it down, for nothing is special ordered. Meats aren’t cooked medium and nothing is placed on the side. When you give your order it immediately gets yelled to a few grandmothers in the kitchen who fold it into their repertoire. After you have placed your order of baked bread with shredded beets and roasted potatoes in meat gravy, you sit down and wait, in silence and alone. They do not play music and they do not come around and ask how everything is, because the act of having dinner is only about one thing—having dinner. Dining at these establishments is refreshing because there is no smoke and mirrors like you get at new trendy places hopping to impress. The Poles know that their food is great because it is linked to the cultured mountains and seasoned valleys of Poland.

In a neighborhood where 12 ounces of beer at a Polish restaurant costs $3, now the bar TOir at 615 Manhattan Avenue charges $9 for 10 ounces of beer and the coffee shop BUDin at 114 Greenpoint Avenue charges $10 for a latte. As Greenpoint, attracts more unique business models such as boutique shops and fine cuisine, the lone Polish dinner and $3 beer places are slowly fading away. One could argue that this change would have happened naturally as Brooklyn quickly become a mecca for both expanding and entrepreneurial businesses. However, the 2005 Rezoning of Greenpoint & Williamsburg certainly opened the doors of competition and put many mom and pop shops on their heels. The 2005 rezoning put into motion an era of development that very well could be the most significant in Brooklyn during the 21st century.

THE PLEA OF OLECHOWSKI

Former Community Board 1 Chairman Christopher Olechowski wrote a passionate plea to the neighborhood in an attempt to rally the Polish community as it continues to be the victim of development and gentrification. Part of his petition read:

“That residents of Polish descent more than half whom have been forced to move out from Greenpoint be given special status as an aggrieved ethnic minority and that local elected officials, city officials, as well as developers give priority to Polish immigrants who have been forced to relocate to other neighborhoods or are on the verge of eviction from existing buildings due to rising rents.”

For a community that is hanging on to the last vestiges of cultural hope, Olechowski showed the North Brooklyn residents that cultural representation is a necessary force in the fight for the ethnic longevity of a neighborhood. As an ethnic Pole and community leader, Olechowski understood that Greenpoint’s developmental changes have had a significant impact on the Polish community.

A STUDY OF GREENPOINT’S POLISH MIGRATION

In 2008, Ewa Kern-Jedrychowska (former graduate student in the Anthropology Department at Hunter College) conducted a study based on the migration patterns of the Polish community in relation to gentrification in Greenpoint. During her study, Kern-Jedrychowska interviewed many Poles and learned that the major reasons for their migration to other neighborhoods were “increasing prices of homes, damage to already existing homes caused by new construction, rising rents, and harassment practices.”13 One of these other neighborhoods is Ridgewood, Queens, which has seen an explosion of Polish residents since the rezoning of Greenpoint in 2005.

Still, harassment practices exist for Poles who remain in Greenpoint in 2014. In an interview I conducted with my mother-in-law, who has been a Greenpoint resident since 1992, she acknowledged that her landlord has steadily been treating her and her husband with an increasing amount of disdain. This treatment, she says, started around 2009 and has grown progressively worse. At first, the landlord launched verbal insults, but when it came time to fix things, (the heating pipes, for example) he hired laborers who did shoddily, untimely work and merely provided short-term fixes. She is convinced that the work done on her rent-stabilized apartment is illegal, haphazard and likely tied to the landlord’s awareness that he could charge new tenants triple what he is currently getting as per market rate rents in the neighborhood.14 Heartbreaking is the fact that their landlord of Polish descent is the Points of Agreement, the Anti-Harassment provisions within the Affordable Housing section refers to clarification at a later date, saying, “The administration agrees to the anti-harassment provisions provided separately, as part of a follow-up corrective action.”

Kern-Jedrychowska’s study also revealed that the large percentage of Poles living in Greenpoint are particularly vulnerable because of the old style practices between tenant and landlord. For example, “many residents said in interviews that they had not signed a lease, claiming that it is a common practice between Polish tenants and
and Polish landlords, who in Greenpoint often live in the same building. If harassment policies take place with tenants who actually have leases with their landlords, the practice must be substantially worse for tenants without leases. When Greenpoint real estate prices started increasing in 2007 and new landlords were purchasing buildings, it would seem natural for the non-leased Polish tenants to bear the brunt of the harassment by the new landlords. In 2014, new tenants moving to any Brooklyn neighborhood would demand the protection of a lease (as would the landlord), but such pragmatism was not apparent among the Polish population in Greenpoint throughout their settlement in the neighborhood.

Finally, Kern-Jedrychowska poses a fundamental question that truly strikes at the heart of the systematic squeeze happening to the Polish community in the core of the neighborhood. That question is: “But how long can Greenpoint survive as a Polish neighborhood for Polish immigrants?”

The petition was rather ambiguous, considering it seemed to violate laws that intend to fight discrimination of affordable housing. Rather than discriminate, it appeared that his objective was simply to preserve and protect the fiber of the community, as he and his supporters view it.

CONCLUSION
The 2005 rezoning has had a rippling effect on the Greenpoint neighborhood and has affected more than just the Polish population. Rezoning has brought more business and residential density to North Brooklyn… but at what cost? Can we place a price tag on the loss of culture? Can we recreate the authentic flavors and smells of the Polish restaurateurs and kitchens that have packed up and left in a neighborhood that is growing faster than many imagined, surrendering to the strong wave of development and was continuous to be the only choice for many Poles.

FURTHER STUDY
This area of study is far from complete, as the migration of Polish culture away from Greenpoint continues. Major developmental areas within the Points of Agreement such as Domino Sugar (Affordable Housing) and the Waterfront Esplanade (Open Space) could potentially change the landscape of Greenpoint more than what we have seen already since 2005. Further study could access the success stories of Polish cuisine, art, and culture within Greenpoint since the 2005 rezoning. This type of study could mildly negate the general analysis that Greenpoint is losing most of its Polish ethnicity. Additionally, financial assistance can be found at institutions like the Polish and Slavic Federal Credit Union at 100 McGuinness Boulevard. This credit union provides support to businesses, investors and individuals who are members of Polish foundations or alliances.

The tide of the neighborhood has certainly turned away from embracing authentic first generation Polish storefronts and instead rushes to embrace startups, trends, and multi-investor business models. Lastly, charting Polish business closures based on reason could result in interesting findings. Since the 2005 rezoning, the ratio of Polish business owners who closed because they were ready to retire, could not afford their rent, or simply decided to move to another neighborhood due to a developing neighborhood could provide insight into the real force of change. Each reason could paint a different picture of the individual business versus the trend. Regardless of the reason, the lonesome Polish dinners and $3 beers will be harder to find as the cultural landscape of Greenpoint changes.

Chris was born and raised in Ellenville, NY and studied English and Philosophy at Binghamton University. He is currently assisting the Court-Smith BID Steering Committee with their BID formation process and is also a Fellow at Brooklyn Borough Hall working on land use projects.
Art & Planning

by Mia Moffett

A history of urban planning would not be complete without mentioning the various artists and visionaries who have influenced the formation of our physical and social world. Artistic and creative minds have always been prominent in the development and beautification of our cities. While art was once focused mainly on ornamentation to enrich the visual landscape and expressions of religious and political propaganda, artists in the post-modern world use art as a public involvement tool and a means of increased engagement in the communicative planning process.

Within the last century this movement from public works and documentation to process-oriented urban planning has opened the door for new creative means to explore future planning. Interactive art events are not only a way in which the public can engage in planning activities and voice their opinions, but also a means for planners to step outside their everyday thinking and become more creative and engaged with the public themselves. These conversations can allow for greater community involvement and a less top-down technocratic approach to planning.

Planning in the post-modern world strives to be a broad and diverse activity, allowing citizens to directly participate in the decision making process. This movement has been influenced by various art movements such as the American Neo-Avant-Garde and European Situationist art movements which strove to create “situations” or experiences of life that would critique and undermine the capitalist hegemony.

From the Dutch Situationist artist Constant Nieuwenhuyzen, to the British artist Michael Craig-Martin, to the American artist Berenice Abbott and her “Document of the City” work, to the contemporary artist Seward Johnson, the motto of these artists is to use their art to communicate their views to the public. They had the explicit goal of deconstructing the urban environment in order to fully understand it and build a new society. The Situationist artist Debord created a deconstructed map of Paris, which has been updated and built upon with current technology by contemporary artists Rory Hyde and Scott Mitchell.

MODERN APPROACHES

More and more painters, graffiti artists, printmakers and multi-media artists work to allow us greater understanding of our current urban environment while envisioning a better future. Public engagement as an artistic practice has become so prominent that California College of Art in San Francisco offers social practice as a concentration in its Master of Fine Art program. This in turn has influenced other MFA programs to follow in their footsteps. These programs offer classes on social theory, theories of politics and theories of public space to encourage their students to engage with their community and have an active voice in the world around them through their artwork and processes.

Concepts of public engagement have been promoted not just in arts education, but in the museum art world as well. The Noguchi Museum held an exhibition from October 2011 to April 2012 entitled “Civic Action,” consisting of four artists’ visions for the development of Long Island City, Queens, where the Noguchi Museum is located. The goal of the exhibit was not necessarily to create projects that would actually be built, but to “spark an ongoing dialogue” between the creative sector, urban planners, and the community.

They “explored visionary scenarios that would enable the community to continue to coexist alongside light manufacturing and residential communities inherent to the area.” They “invited artists and the public were invited to build their ideal city through models, sculptures, collages, drawings and texts. These visual representations helped the common man to understand these complicated theories. Situationists also used graffiti and public art as a means of engaging with and communicating their views to the public. They had the explicit goal of deconstructing the urban environment in order to fully understand it and build it anew. The Situationist artist Debord created a deconstructed map of Paris, which has been updated and built upon with current technology by contemporary artists Rory Hyde and Scott Mitchell.

MODERN APPROACHES

More and more painters, graffiti artists, printmakers and multi-media artists work to allow us greater understanding of our current urban environment while envisioning a better future. Public engagement as an artistic practice has become so prominent that California College of Art in San Francisco offers social practice as a concentration in its Master of Fine Art program. This in turn has influenced other MFA programs to follow in their footsteps. These programs offer classes on social theory, theories of politics and theories of public space to encourage their students to engage with their community and have an active voice in the world around them through their artwork and processes.

Concepts of public engagement have been promoted not just in arts education, but in the museum art world as well. The Noguchi Museum held an exhibition from October 2011 to April 2012 entitled “Civic Action,” consisting of four artists’ visions for the development of Long Island City, Queens, where the Noguchi Museum is located. The goal of the exhibit was not necessarily to create projects that would actually be built, but to “spark an ongoing dialogue” between the creative sector, urban planners, and the community.

They “explored visionary scenarios that would enable the community to continue to coexist alongside light manufacturing and residential communities inherent to the area.” They “invited artists and members of the Building and Planning Agency, the National Heritage Board and the National Museum of Architecture. The goal of this workshop was to "investigate social consequences and explore value-enhancing methods through extended dialogue processes." They believed these artists could achieve greater engagement and commitment from citizens than the planners could on their own by creating a space somewhere between public and private where people who do not usually interact could come together.

One of these means of converting included a three-room apartment in which all the walls were painted as a blackboard and participants were encouraged to fill the walls with their ideas. In 2011 another Swedish project, H+ Open Source Placemaking in Helsingborg, created artist residencies and public art projects to engage the public in their participatory planning methodology. Planners built a stage on which artists and the public were invited to build their ideal city and share ideas of what they wanted for the future of Helsingborg.

Planners and community groups can also follow what sociologist Edward W. Soja suggests, “if they aren’t going to use their own opportunities as publics or bureaucrats, then all else fails, the visionary thinking of artists has become public policy.”

Another team created the project “If Only the City Could Speak,” in which “a special innovation district is created to encourage a place where urbanists of all kinds were allowed to explore alternative futures of our urban systems.” This plan acknowledges the city as the center of experimentation and innovation and seeks to create a specific district for people to come together and reexamine the way we view the city and future city planning. While such districts occur organically on a regular basis, this plan was for an intentionally planned artistic district where experimentation was encouraged.

Historical Context

Since its invention in the mid-1800s, photography has played an integral role in the public’s understanding of the urban environment. In 1890, Jacob Riis’s photographs of tenement conditions in lower Manhattan in How the Other Half Lives brought about social and physical change by exposing slum conditions in lower Manhattan in 1890 to better-off New Yorkers. The architectural photographer Berenice Abbott used her photographs of New York City to prove the value of Photographer Constant Nieuwenhuyzen created a project titled “New Babylon” in which he created a new urban theories of collective land ownership, automated work, and freedom of movement, which he believed would allow humans to live freer lives. He expressed these theories through models, sculptures, collages, drawings and texts. His visual representations helped the common man to understand these complicated theories. Situationists also used graffiti and public art as a means of engaging with and communicating their views to the public. They had the explicit goal of deconstructing the urban environment in order to fully understand it and build a new society. The Situationist artist Debord created a deconstructed map of Paris, which has been updated and built upon with current technology by contemporary artists Rory Hyde and Scott Mitchell.

MODERN APPROACHES

More and more painters, graffiti artists, printmakers and multi-media artists work to allow us greater understanding of our current urban environment while envisioning a better future. Public engagement as an artistic practice has become so prominent that California College of Art in San Francisco offers social practice as a concentration in its Master of Fine Art program. This in turn has influenced other MFA programs to follow in their footsteps. These programs offer classes on social theory, theories of politics and theories of public space to encourage their students to engage with their community and have an active voice in the world around them through their artwork and processes.

Concepts of public engagement have been promoted not just in arts education, but in the museum art world as well. The Noguchi Museum held an exhibition from October 2011 to April 2012 entitled “Civic Action,” consisting of four artists’ visions for the development of Long Island City, Queens, where the Noguchi Museum is located. The goal of the exhibit was not necessarily to create projects that would actually be built, but to “spark an ongoing dialogue” between the creative sector, urban planners, and the community. They “explored visionary scenarios that would enable the community to continue to coexist alongside light manufacturing and residential communities inherent to the area.” They “invited artists and members of the Building and Planning Agency, the National Heritage Board and the National Museum of Architecture. The goal of this workshop was to “investigate social consequences and explore value-enhancing methods through extended dialogue processes.” They believed these artists could achieve greater engagement and commitment from citizens than the planners could on their own by creating a space somewhere between public and private where people who do not usually interact could come together.

One of these means of converting included a three-room apartment in which all the walls were painted as a blackboard and participants were encouraged to fill the walls with their ideas. In 2011 another Swedish project, H+ Open Source Placemaking in Helsingborg, created artist residencies and public art projects to engage the public in their participatory planning methodology. Planners built a stage on which artists and the public were invited to build their ideal city and share ideas of what they wanted for the future of Helsingborg.

Planners and community groups can also follow what sociologist Edward W. Soja suggests, “if they aren’t going to use their own opportunities as publics or bureaucrats, then all else fails, the visionary thinking of artists has become public policy.”

Another team created the project “If Only the City Could Speak,” in which “a special innovation district is created to encourage a place where urbanists of all kinds were allowed to explore alternative futures of our urban systems.” This plan acknowledges the city as the center of experimentation and innovation and seeks to create a specific district for people to come together and reexamine the way we view the city and future city planning. While such districts occur organically on a regular basis, this plan was for an intentionally planned artistic district where experimentation was encouraged.
in which she placed fill-in-the-blank stickers around vacant buildings in New Orleans, Louisiana. Passerby were encouraged to write on blank stickers and place them on abandoned buildings to give their voice as to what they wished the building could be. Planners regularly hold meetings in which they invite the public to give feedback about what they would like to see in their neighborhoods, but this project took it one step further and went to the public. Many people do not have the desire or time to attend public meetings. Frequently, they do not even know these meetings are occurring. Projects such as “I Wish This Was” are successful because they make it easy and fun for citizens to give their input.

In September 2014, artist Rick Lowe was named a MacArthur fellow for “Project Row Houses” in Houston, Texas. In 1993 he and a group of artists purchased 22 derelict row houses in Houston’s Third Ward and converted them into an arts and community support center. The area, which was once blighted, is now a vibrant community with arts education programs, studio spaces, a young mothers mentorship program, organic garden, and a design incubator for the future of the area. He is also working on another artist-driven redevelopment project, the Watts House in Los Angeles, part of a larger Watts-Katrina rebuilding in New Orleans, and a community market Dallas. Lowe has achieved results in communities that would be difficult for non-native planners to do in the same amount of time. His work has been described as “social sculpture” and is encouraging more artists to follow in his footsteps and create socially engaging art, which benefits their communities. In this way he turns urban renewal into an art form.

Similar to Rick Lowe, the artist Theaster Gates revitalizes urban areas by combining art and urban planning through the work of his non-profit The Rebuild Foundation. The Rebuild Foundation “helps neighborhoods thrive through culture-driven development by activating abandoned space with arts and cultural programming.” Gates holds two degrees in urban planning, but instead of working for a development firm or community board, he prefers to use his artistic vision to activate abandoned and underutilized spaces for the benefit of communities in Chicago, St. Louis, and Omaha. His most successful project was the Dorchester Projects in which he restored abandoned buildings on the South Side of Chicago into cultural centers. He is also the Director of Arts and Public Life at the University of Chicago and has exhibited his work across the U.S. and internationally.

Proving that socially engaged art is not only beneficial for urban environments but for the art world as well, Theaster Gates was ranked 40th in the list of the one hundred most influential people in the art community by the arts publication ArtReview in 2013. He is also very active in public arts projects and was recently awarded a million-dollar installation grant for Chicago’s South Side 59th Street subway terminal by mayor Rahm Emanuel. This is to be the largest public-art project in Chicago Transit Authority history. His entire art career has been focused on making art to benefit the public, not to be shown in a gallery and sold to private collectors.

Many other artists are also choosing to use art instead of formal planning to engage with their urban environment. Following in the footsteps of Berenice Abbott, photographer Nathan Kenzinger writes the column “Camera Obscura” for the real-estate development website “Curbed.” His work frequently explores parts of New York City that are unseen, undocumented and abandoned. He views his work “as documenting a pivotal time in the history of New York City and the country, as we transition away from the aftermath of the industrial revolution and attempt to return to the water, even while dealing with centuries of pollution and the resulting climate change and rising sea levels caused by that pollution.”

He explores polluted waterways such as Newtown Creek, the Gowanus Canal, the South Edgemere wasteland, and the rapidly disappearing industrial architecture of Long Island City and the Brooklyn Waterfront, places that he believes will be either demolished or underwater in a few years when “life along the coastline will be completely changed, and these photographs will have a much different meaning.” His exploration and documentation records a time in New York City that will be soon lost to future generations and his work is a commentary on development along waterways that have an uncertain future.

Elizaher Hamby is another New York City-based artist working on the edge of urban planning. She recently exhibited “Alphabet City” at the Casita Maria Center for Arts and Education in The Bronx. Within her colorful prints she creates an alphabet utilizing the footprints of common New York City buildings. Her idea is that these shapes reflect the social, historical, and architectural moment of their creation and that this tells the stories of the lives they have contained. By considering this code, residents “can take ownership of the idea they are both actors in and interpreters of the story of the city.” Her work aims to add a level of legibility to the urban environment in a way that is instrumental instead of didactic. Along with her printmaking, Elizabeth is also involved in organizing open space planning activities such as “Boogie on The Boulevard,” three car-free Sundays in August 2014 along the Grand Concourse in the Bronx.

Another art project that succeeded in being able to reach more citizens than traditional planning methods is Variable City by artist Julia Mandile. Variable City was created to investigate utilizing performance art as an urban planning tool. The artist and an urban design team spent two years researching and interviewing users of Fox Square, an underutilized public space in Downtown Brooklyn, before beginning their performance. They then staged several ‘Public Interventions’ in which twelve performers donned in bright orange outfits engaged with the public and invited them to reconsider the identity of the site, express their ideas and envision a new future for Fox Square. Many pedestrians stopped to engage with the colorful actors in stark contrast to the difficulty the research team had encountered while seeking interviewees a few months earlier dressed in plain clothes. Of this finding Krasnow wrote, “We determined that the variable of ‘performance’ as an acutely responsive medium can affect people’s attitudes and physical trajectories, while at the same time can cause reactions to site occurrences.”

CONCLUSION

Involving artists in the planning process to work alongside urban planners as was done in Sweden can help to encourage planners to think in new creative ways that they had never before considered. Planners should follow the work of artists who are acting as urban critics such as the Situationists, Nathan Kenzinger, Andrew Lynch and Elizabeth Hamby to help them think in ways they had not before considered. The creativity and approachability of artists can help to create a more dynamic and collaborative planning process.

Bringing artists into the planning process will help to reach a broader audience of citizens who do not attend public meetings and charettes or never hear about them to begin with. Public art as decoration in urban environments will always be important with regard to the beautification of our spaces, but its role as a public engagement tool will be its lasting effect. Artists as an interested but less-biased third party can act as mediators between planners and the public. They can do this by directly requesting community input as Candy Chang has done or as Rick Lowe and Theaster Gates have done by moving their studios into the urban environment. When the end result of an art piece is a better urban environment, everyone benefits: artists, planners, elected officials, and of course the public that uses these spaces. It is impossible for planners to reach every person affected by future developments and plans, but these art events can make public involvement fun and easy to do and therefore can engage more people. If we as planners want to effectively engage the public, art can be a powerful tool.
In New York City, there is a lot of evidence that affordable housing is in short order, especially for working class and poor New Yorkers. It’s reached the point of being a plight. New Yorkers need to look only at a skyline that’s quickly being reshaped by new high rises like 432 Park Avenue. At 1400 feet, it is said to be the tallest building in the world, and it is the second tallest building in New York, right behind One World Trade Center. It would run you $95 million to own a penthouse looking down on the Empire State Building—a crash pad that’s already been sold twice. Its cheapest condos will start at $7 million. Not surprisingly, there is little in the way of affordability in that tower. The vertiginous pace that 432 Parkrose is naturally interpreted as a potent symbol of our city’s priorities.

Still, affordability is a touchstone topic for Mayor de Blasio. While his campaign platform focused on “The Tale of Two Cities,” he promised a plan that would simultaneously address the affordability crisis. He plans to keep our minds open to new ideas. This city’s housing stock has a lot of big issues to contend with. Still, if new ideas are what we want, there is no lack of examples to look to. New York is certainly not the only city to have an affordable housing crisis.

The UK, especially southern England, is also known as “New Towns,” of the 20th century is remembered for its Garden City—a project largely made possible by the Help to Buy program. The conservative’s plan had supported more than $59 million to build new housing and where these buildings would be built. Increasingly, outside of mainstream politics, commentaries are questioning the basic definition of affordable housing and its usefulness in solving the current housing shortage.

There is one large national plan that has straddled the political aisle, leaving only the fringes out—specifically the left wing of the Liberal Democratic Party and far-right UK Independence Party. The Help to Buy program, passed midway through 2013, offers subsidized loans to people looking to buy newly constructed homes under 600,000 pounds. Over the past year, it has financed or plans to finance the construction of just over 25,000 homes, 92 percent of which are owned by first time homeowners. Conservative and Labour Party politicians claim it is a reasonable, large scale plan that creates jobs and health at the same time. Critics worry it is manipulating the market in a huge way, while not coming close to meeting the goal of 200,000 new homes. Finally, there is a growing left wing voice, mostly outside of traditional political circles, that is calling for the government to skip private developers all together and directly contract with local councils and developer. This city’s housing stock has a lot of big issues to contend with. Still, if new ideas are what we want, there is no lack of examples to look to. New York is certainly not the only city to have an affordable housing crisis.

The UK, especially southern England, is also known as “New Towns,” of the 20th century is remembered for its Garden City—a project largely made possible by the Help to Buy program. The conservative’s plan had supported more than $59 million to build new housing and where these buildings would be built. Increasingly, outside of mainstream politics, commentaries are questioning the basic definition of affordable housing and its usefulness in solving the current housing shortage.

The Conservative case against Section 106 agreements is bolstered with some important anecdotal evidence. They have claimed that it hampers construction of new housing, especially by individuals building personal homes, or “self-builders,” a group that brings a lot of political mileage in a party that idolizes individual entrepreneurs. Conservatories claim building homes has too many bureaucratic hurdles in the way and is unnecessarily expensive, thus the easiest way to spur more construction is to remove governmental roadblocks. Local Councils are financially dependent on these taxes and they have indicated at government meetings to relax pressure on developers. This includes the Liberal, Labour, and Tory controlled councils.
More sophisticated analyses have also made the case that Section 106 agreements, combined with strict zoning laws, have manipulated the market in favor of the wealthy. One effect has been the massive increase in the cost of land over the past several decades—the real cost of land across England has multiplied 15 times in the last sixty years. Conservatives say this is because the amount of land zoned for housing and commercial development is greatly reduced in Greenbelts outside of cities. While these areas were meant to provide open space and recreation to average city dwellers, some analysts have claimed they have become a form of discriminatory zoning favoring the wealthy who can buy access to land within the Greenbelt. Essentially, a privileged golfer’s paradise.[12]

Liberal Democrats and Labour Party policy makers see Section 106 agreements as necessary and a cornerstone of their agenda. With Section 106 agreements, they have created an important revenue stream to local councils and for the construction of new affordable housing. Proponents point to other positive repercussions on civic life, specifically, strong taxations of luxury homes cut down on absent home owners who are generally not present to be civically engaged. Second, unused homes of the wealthy, but has also onerously taxed middle-income and poor renters.[13]

Section 106 agreements continue to be one of the most effective ways in the UK to tax the wealthy and redistribute money to the poor and middle class. An important critique of affordable housing construction outside of the traditional conservative vs. liberal dichotomy is gaining traction in newspapers, if not much in political circles. The Guardian has begun questioning the whole idea of affordable housing as a concept. One notable analysis by commentator Robert More is rooted in a critique of Margaret Thatcher and her neo-liberal policies of the 1970’s and 80’s. Thatcher oversaw a shift in government policy from government construction of the majority of housing units to what she called a “property-owning democracy.” In Council Houses, all tenants rented and had no opportunity to own their homes. Thatcher allowed tenants to buy their apartments at reduced prices. At the same time, the wealthy has multiplied the government’s role in constructing housing. In its place, private developers handled new construction and the “market” provided guidance.[14]

More and The Guardian are criticizing the government’s definition of affordable housing: housing priced at percent of local market rates. This is a metric defined by what developers and landlords are able to charge, not what tenants and prospective homeowners can afford to pay. The paper claims that widespread government support of affordable housing policy, through subsidies and cash benefits, will create a “benefit-dependent” society, because cash benefits will be the only way a huge percentage of citizens will be able to afford to have shelter. It predicts a country of people with greatly reduced freedom as they are shackled to mortgages.[15]

Today, The Guardian contends that “Thatcher’s idea is now at a point of crisis. House builders are not building enough houses.” However, the paper goes one step further than its Conservative, Labour, or Liberal policy makers by saying that supporting the widespread mortgaging of homes is changing the fundamental character of Britain for the worse. It has in-debted its people and made the country dependent on inflation (normally considered detrimental) as a major vehicle to build wealth. Furthermore, they see it at the root of perverse legislation like the bedroom tax, which was meant to tax the second, unused homes of the wealthy, but has also unequally taxed middle-income and poor renters.[16]

So, in an attempt to balance policy, The Guardian and More are demanding a return to an earlier time to balance policy that has drifted too far in favor of the wealthy. They are calling for the government to increase its role in the housing market through increased planning and compulsory purchase (similar to Eminent Domain in the United States) of land in an effort to set aside land for affordable housing and the government led construction of new transportation options for new developments. Without this, property owners are all too likely to sit on real estate investments as prices rise exactly when land is needed the most.

The debate around affordable housing in the UK is getting richer, and commentators are analyzing every aspect of it. While the call for serious government intervention in the housing market is growing as newspapers like The Guardian publish articles and op-eds on the subject day after day, week after week, it has yet to have a tangible effect on policy. The government remains focused on its Help to Buy program and an emphasis on local autonomy through Section 106 agreements. This has been widely ineffective at spurring housing construction where it is needed most: Southern England and London. There are few to no signs that the government will show serious interest in solutions that leave out, or go against, the wishes of private developers. [17] Eric Petersen received his Master’s of Science in Urban Affairs from Hunter College in 2014. Currently, he researches housing policy with the New York State Association for Affordable Housing.

Skateboarding and Its Influence on Urban Space by Meira Harris

The history of skateboarding is critical to understanding its power. Skateboarding began as an innocent sport of surfers and suburban kids, but grew to be conflated with illegal action. The first movement toward this grittier image was the popular use of empty swimming pools as terrain in the 1970s. Much of the skateboarding that took place in these found structures was actually trespassing, as the pool owners did not permit skating in their pools. This created an image of skateboarders as outlaws, which has yet to be broken.[10] This article explores the evolution of skateboarding’s image from its origin to present day, how legalizing skateboarding is destructive to the skater image, how policy and economic implications made an impact by examining Skateistan and how skateboarding could be used for good in cities like Detroit.
By skating in pools, skaters created "transition" skating, which refers to the curve from horizontal to vertical terrain, but it can also be seen as transitional from the innocent, surfing sport into the edgy, trick-related activity it became. A large part of the appeal of skateboarding is its criminality and rebellion against the expectations of society. Using pools as terrain suggests a counter-cultural attitude among skaters. Skaters saw empty pools as more than the single-purpose feature of mainstream society saw. By repurposing existing space for a new purpose, the transgression of skaters was twofold: they denied swimming as the sole purpose for pools while breaking the law by trespassing.

Despite the illegal nature of "transition" skating, its growth actually led to purpose-built structures. With the newfound interest in bowl-shaped structures, urban planners began building skate parks to accommodate the sport. It is likely that intolerance for skateboarding encouraged officials to create these parks. By pulling skaters off the streets, planned skate parks took away from the illegitimacy of illegal, guerrilla skate spots. Though "transition" skating began as an attempt to reconstruct terrain, its popularity incited city planners to create skate parks.

By the late 1970s, there was a movement back toward street skating. Ocean Howell, skateboarder and scholar on the subject, claims that Justin Herman, the Robert Moses of Los Angeles, created street skating by building large streets and plazas. Constructions under his plans, such as Justin Herman Plaza, contained rails, ledges, and benches. Skateboarders defaced these, which questioned urban planners’ authority to make space with a specific purpose. Skateboarders were making a statement with their actions. In this case, Justin Herman attempted to prevent the sport in his plaza, which marginalized its chief occupants: skaters. They, therefore, made for the streets, in order to circumvent the boundaries of the plaza. Skaters were becoming contrarians fighting for access to public space in a manner of their choosing.

With the beginning of this new form of sanctioned street skating in plazas in the late seventies, city dwellers and officials grew tired of skateboarders on the street, and even more skate parks were created to counteract the rise of street skating. This was an alternative to Justin Herman’s plans. As opposed to building a plaza so that it could not be skated (but was then skated anyway), skate parks gave skaters a place that was away from the streets and away from non-skaters. Planners were attempting to remove the undesirable from the public eye. By building special terrain for skaters, city planners tried to dictate the users and uses of space.

Once again, skateboarding lost its popularity in the 1980s. This is credited to oversupply, hyper-focus on the sport, and lack of space. Though the mainstream culture rejected skateboarding, there was still an underground presence. Members of this following skated in more abandoned spaces, such as the empty pools and plazas where they had skated illegally in the past. There was a decrease in funding to skate parks because of limited use and exorbitant insurance prices for parks. Lack of use could also be traced to the rise of many, the entrance fee that was generally charged in skate parks.

New technology, including new skateboarders and parks, allowed for more tricks, which led to injury. Therefore, skater insurance became quite expensive and unattainable for most skate parks. Most park officials were unwilling to pay for the necessary insurance to keep the park open to the skaters. These parks began to close down, striking the match for underground skating, skateboarding in abandoned public spaces, and also in urban plazas. Found space, rather than built, was on the rise.

The most noteworthy plaza used by skaters was Philadelphia’s LOVE Park, which has been a source of conflict in the city since the 1990s because of bans on skating. In 1965, architect Vincent Kling and city planner Edmund Bacon built LOVE Park—officially called JFK Plaza—across from City Hall, a central location within the city. Frustrated with the commerce-focused redevelopment of Philadelphia in the 1950s, Edmund Bacon conceived the park as an open, public space. Though there were no special accommodations for skateboarders, the park was built with cascading granite staircases, which were ideal for skating. By the 1980s, it was “the most famous natural skateboard park in the world,” and practitioners visited from across the globe to skate the site. Professional skateboarders shot photos there for skateboard magazines, perpetuating the popularity of the park.

From the time it was finished, skaters and homeless people were the main occupants of the park. Many Philadelphians were content with this despite the disapproval from many city officials. In 2000, Mayor Nutter, the First Lord of Philadelphia, proposed a ban on skateboarding in LOVE Park, citing danger to fellow patrons and damage to the site as his reasons for the prohibition. When first passed, the ban was not strictly enforced, so the skateboarding population was unaffected.

The city’s reputation among skaters prompted ESPN to host the X-Games—their extreme sports competitii—in Philadelphia for the next two years. This brought in necessary revenue for the city to renovate JFK Plaza, repairing the damage from the skateboarders and, ironically, enforcing the ban. City officials tried ineffectively to pacify the skaters by suggesting FDR Park, a purpose-built skate park. The terrain of LOVE Park, which had once been a global skateboarding hub, became strictly prohibited through physical restrictions such as planters and wooden benches that had divides in the middle and small pieces of metal on railings or ledges. These new renovations made LOVE Park more hospitable to non-skaters yet were highly contested by the skaters.

The general dissonance between skaters and non-skaters begs the question: should skaters be allowed to skate wherever they want if they’ve been provided with a purpose-built, legally sanctioned space that satisfies the same purpose, or is the re-use of public space as well as that of illegal space part of the very fabric of skating? If the city of Philadelphia replicated LOVE Park, would it matter that skaters could not use the original? Research has found that the making of an effective skate spot is determined by “accessibility, trickability, sociability, and compatibility.” This means that in order to be successful, the spot must have a central location where skaters can easily meet, which provides obstacles to perform tricks and also allows for the skaters to use the space as a social meeting place and also in urban plazas.

Paine’s Park, a space in Philadelphia, is an example of planners’ attempt to accommodate the nuanced needs of skaters. Paine’s Park, opened in 2013 as a mixed-use park with space reserved for skaters and pedestrians alike. The design suggests that skaters can share space with pedestrian...
The National Skateboarding Association (NSA) is an organization in the United States that attempts to improve the image of skateboarding. In 1981, Frank Hawk, father of legendary pro-skater Tony Hawk, created the organization with the goals of improving recognition of skateboarding as a sport internationally and to centralize skateboarding information and records for the global community. In 1991, Don Bolstick, then president of the organization, said he wanted the sport to be "more professional and more accepted...similar to Little League."

In this manner, the NSA attempted to rid skateboarding of the rebellious element that made skating controversial. While the image of skateboarding can be a deterrent for many people to accept it as a sport or a positive aspect of a city, it is also what attracted many people to the sport.

City accommodations challenge the rebellious core of skateboarding. From the early years of skateboarding, appropriation of space has been a constant feature. Skaters have trespassed onto private property since the 1970s, using empty pools, drainage pipes, and other abandoned areas as their terrain. In essence, skateboarding has long been a transgressive sport. And though skating is stifled by bans, the sport stands to lose its grittiness, which some see as an essential quality of the sport.

There is reason to justify the push toward legalization. In the case of LOVE Park, it was only after the post-X-Games renovation that the park became inhospitable and the city sought to end skateboarding in the area. Because they were being specifically targeted, skaters asked that the city accept them as rightful users of the park. Since they had helped build the park’s reputation, it only made sense that they should be welcomed as legal users. In this way, skaters will not be persecuted or prosecuted for their actions while redefining the traditional use of space. In this way, skaters’ voices will not be stifled as legal users. In this way, skaters’ voices will not be silenced as legal users.

In Afghanistan, Australian skateboarder Oliver Percovich began teaching skateboarding to children in 2007. When he arrived in Kabul, Afghanistan with his skateboards, the kids in the city wanted to learn how to skate. Since there was sufficient interest, he proposed grants and found interest from international governmental bodies and private donors to create Skateistan, a program to teach children how to skate. With the donations, he was able to bring more skateboards, hire more teachers, and build an all-inclusive indoor skate park. This program is targeted at girls and working children as a way of bringing skateboarding to kids that would ordinarily not be able to exercise. Additionally, Skateistan’s development aid programs connect children who might not otherwise have opportunities for education or cross-cultural interactions with resources.

For bankrupt Detroit, skateboarding could prove to be a worthy investment as well. Proposed by Detroit residents Kevin Kreuse and Garrett Koehler, the ESPN X-Games could come to Detroit, bringing with it an estimated $80 million dollars worth of revenue in just one extended weekend.

In 2010—when the X-Games were hosted in Los Angeles—Micronomics, an economic consulting firm, found that the games “produced up to $50 million in identifiable benefits to Los Angeles.”

This was broken down into three categories: direct spending by visitors, direct spending on set-up and production, and a multiplier impact of added capital. This last category refers to an effect where outside capital adds to the income of the individual workers in the city, and thus increasing their propensity to spend. The multiplier effect, which in the 2010 X-Games in Los Angeles had an impact of about $9 million to $12 million, would be more challenging in Detroit. In order for capital to travel throughout the economic system of the city, there would need to be more businesses in place than there are now. D2D is a new organization that works to address this need by connecting businesses to one another on a local level in Detroit.

By making sure that the revenue stays local, skateboarding could be a huge bolster to Detroit through the X-Games. Hosting the X-Games in Detroit is a reasonable option for ESPN to consider and would greatly benefit the city. There would be no need for Detroit to raise funds, as the X-Games are sponsored. Because of the nature of skateboarding, only a limited amount of building would be necessary, as the skating competitions would prefer to use the existing infrastructure. Any already built structures in the city would be beneficial, as skateboarders could use them in the future.

The current state of Detroit and its many abandoned spaces echoes the history of skateboarding and could thus lend edginess to the competitions.

Skateboarding is in a state of flux, as both a powerful policy tool and a rebellious sport. As a policy tool, the government would benefit from the creation of skate parks and programs to encourage skateboarding. By bringing the X-Games to Detroit, skateboarding and the commercialism that comes with it could stimulate economic development. In Afghanistan, skateboarding is connecting underprivileged children to a helpful institution that promotes education and exercise for girls. In the United States, physical education programs are including skateboarding as a way to engage children who prefer independent activities to team sports. But by institutionalizing skateboarding, the edginess—a large part of the appeal—is lost.

The power of skateboarding as a policy tool is too great to pass up, but considerations can be made to retain its rebelliousness. The suggestions that have been included regarding physical education, Skateistan, and Detroit, as X-Games host, should be implemented. On the other hand, skate parks relegate skaters to marginalized spaces where only perpetuate and reinforce their fringe status in society. Skate parks carry within them an implicit denial to other forms of public space where skaters should be welcomed as legal users. In this way, skaters will not be persecuted for their actions while redefining the traditional use of space. In this way, skaters’ voices will not be stifled by systematically shutting down their alternative views of the public world.
The Decline of Intercity Bus Service in Rural America

A Pressing Equity Problem
by Jeremiah Cox

The number of destinations served by the US intercity bus industry has been on a severe decline, dropping in the past 30 years from 11,820 stops in 1982 to 2,423 in 2008. This is an equity problem because it affects the poor, who can’t afford the high costs of automobile ownership, and the elderly and disabled, who are physically unfit to drive. Buses also provide connections to the intercity bus network to reach the rest of the nation. Perhaps some of these people can drive themselves short distances or rely on family and friends to reach the nearest bus stop, but they are unable to complete long distance trips using their own cars. This paper will cover the history of the decline of intercity bus service, the equity problem it has created, and steps taken at improvements in select states since 1991 when the federal government required states to dedicate a small amount of their 5331(F) Rural Area Federal Funds to rural intercity bus service.

The main reasons for the decline of intercity bus service in rural areas are the building of the interstate highway system, deregulation of the intercity travel industries—rail, air, and bus—rising fuel prices, and increasing rates of automobile ownership. Before deregulation in 1982, private, for-profit companies operated intercity bus travel in the US as a regulated monopoly. The largest of these companies was Greyhound Lines, which competed with the various local franchised companies that formed the Trailways Transportation Network. The Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) regulated all lines and routes under the Motor Carrier Act of 1935. The act was intended to prevent the oversupply of transportation, under the assumption that if too many competitors competed on the same route, none would make any money on the service. This model made public carriers publish and adhere to fares and routes. When a new carrier wanted to enter a market, existing companies could contest the new carrier’s routes, and if the existing carrier proved it was providing adequate service, the new carrier would be rejected and denied access to the routes. The regulation caused a stable landscape for intercity bus service. The operators serving profitable routes between big cities were also required to provide bus service to unprofitable rural routes through numerous small towns. The bus network connected the entire country with intercity bus service. The first decrease in service started in the 1960s when the initial interstate highways opened and through-traffic was rerouted out of downtowns. Federal regulations allowed these stop discontinuations because getting off at every exit to service stops would have been slow and impractical. Furthermore, increased in car ownership harmed intercity bus travel, by decreasing ridership, with the addition of more and more multiple car households. The total number of destinations served across the US by intercity buses numbered 11,820 in 1982 at the start of deregulation, down from 15,040 in 1977. The passage of the Bus Regulatory Reform Act of 1982 allowed bus carriers to exit marginal markets easily. It also opened the industry to competition by removing the hurdles of regulation for routes and fares. In 1984, William E. Thomas successfully predicted that deregulation “would remove the last means of public transportation giving access to these towns.” Deregulation immediately caused service cuts to 2,154 locations in 1983. Cuts slowly continued through the 1980s and 1990s, including discontinuations after a driver strike that led to the bankruptcy of Greyhound in 1990. Bus service had a particularly hard time in 2004 and 2005; Greyhound discontinued service to 267 stops in 18 states, most left without other intercity services. In Oregon, 35 stops were cut and only two of these locations had commercial air or rail service. Their discontinuations accounted for 10 percent of all Greyhound stops nationwide, but only 2.5 percent of ticket sales and 2.8 percent of revenue. These cuts continued into 2005 with 150 stops, including 64 in California alone. Newspaper articles announcing these cuts noted hardships such as an elderly woman in Goldendale, Washington who used the bus twice a week to get to Portland and veteran patients who used the bus to reach the nearest veterans hospitals.

Today, intercity bus travel is undergoing a renaissance, with the exception of service to rural areas. For the first time in over 40 years, in 2007, bus ridership actually increased by 6.9 percent. However, between 2005 and 2009, the number of U.S. rural residents nationwide who lived within 25 miles of a bus stop fell to 78 percent from 89 percent. New ‘Chinatown’ and cut-throat bus companies in the U.S. today have increased service by using an express-service model: running non-stop or one-stop intercity express routes and selling tickets using variable pricing over the internet, generally with $1 fares for the first few seats on each bus. Greyhound has tried to follow this model with its new Greyhound Express routes and BoltBus subsidiary, ending its “once a day milk runs to tiny hamlets,” which refers to a basic transportation option. In 2012, CoachUSA—Megabus’s parent company—purchased the bankrupt Kerrieville Bus Lines, which operated routes in rural Texas for over 80 years. It incorporated the routes into Megabus, operated them for a year, found the routes unprofitable and inconsistent with the express-service Megabus business model and abruptly canceled the rural services. This particular example shows that the Megabus model does not work for local frequent-stop services and only works for express downtown-to-downtown intercity routes.

The lack of intercity bus service is an equity issue

The decrease in intercity bus service—five-fold since 1968—is an equity problem, disproportionally harming our most disadvantaged, the elderly, the disabled, and the poor. A 2004 study by the Surface Transportation Policy Project found that 21 percent of Americans over the age of 65 don’t drive, and 50 percent of these non-drivers stayed home on a given day because they lack transportation options. Compared to other drivers, the elderly also make 15 percent fewer trips to the doctor, 59 percent fewer shopping trips, and 65 percent fewer trips for social, family, and religious activities. A 2013 Brookings Institute study found that only 14 percent of the elderly living in rural areas reported having any kind of transit services within a half-mile. A study by Greyhound in 1990 found that 64 percent of its riders who took the bus were disadvantaged because they didn’t have access to a vehicle or didn’t have one they felt comfortable taking on a trip over 600 miles. Of these riders, 22 percent were from households without a vehicle at all, compared to 9 percent of the total population without a vehicle. Intercity bus service allows people to no longer rely on their cars and avoid the high costs of car ownership. Increasing intercity bus service is important for our disabled and aging population. For the adults with disabilities, 31 percent have been found to suffer from inadequate transportation, compared to 13 percent of the general population. Additionally, “of the nearly 2 million people with disabilities who never leave their homes, 560,000 never leave home because of transportation difficulties.” It is unknown how many of these individuals are also seniors. The average senior will outline his or her ability to drive by 7 to 10 years, and 23 percent of this population lives in rural areas. The elderly are also unlikely to move to places with better transportation options, with most “staying in place” for retirement. In 2004 a report stated that the elderly and disabled accounted for 20 percent of all travel limits, especially those with vision impairments.

A 2005 study on rural intercity transportation by the Surface Transportation Fund in 2011 found, which is that “Americans in the lowest 20 percent income bracket, many of whom live in rural settings, spend about 42 percent of their total annual incomes on transportation, compared to 22 percent among middle-income Americans.” Intercity bus service can lower these extremely high costs. The poor, rural Americans who do have vehicles are prone to having unreliable used cars and trucks they are not comfortable with taking on long trips. These vehicles are also likely to be on the brink of losing their driver’s licenses because in many states licenses can be suspended for debts unrelated to driving such as failing to pay child support (active in 43 states) and bouncing a check (active in 11 states). Improving intercity bus service is part of the solution to this problem of poverty and improving the lives of the elderly and disabled. This is one improvement than can be made to provide equitable transportation for all.

Small steps at improvements: Greyhound’s interlining for a feeder connection system and federal subsidies beginning in the 1990s

Greyhound has been trying to help replace its discontinued rural intercity bus stops since the late 1980s with other services through partnered interlining with local bus providers. Interlining refers to the direct connection of services with...
through ticketing offered between two or more bus operators. In 1987, Greyhound Lines had a large ceremony in Dunlap, Tennessee, which announced the new Greyhound Rural Connection Program. The program relied on connecting an existing publicly operated van service, which ran four times a week, to directly enter the Chattanooga Greyhound station and connect with its busses. Through this program Greyhound soon added and reinstated service to over 850 rural and small communities. Most of the routes and interlining agreements were short lived. Starting in 1990, the agreements ended when Greyhound had a prolonged drivers strike, causing the company to declare bankruptcy and cut even more service. The turmoil ended most parts of the Rural Connection Program.

At the same time, Congress and the Federal Government recognized the problem with these rural intercity bus cuts and created a framework of limited federal funds to subsidize these services. In 1991, Congress began providing federally matched subsidies for rural intercity bus service under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). Under ISTEA, states are required to designate 15 percent of their Section 5311(f) funds—"formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas"—to subsidize rural intercity bus service, unless the Governor certifies that the service is already adequate after consulting with the private intercity bus service providers. ISTEA defines rural intercity bus service as bus lines open to the general public that can carry baggage and make meaningful connections to the national intercity bus network. The program requires states or other private entities to match 50 percent of federal funds for operations and 80 percent of funds for capital expenses. Funding to each state is allocated through a formula that considers 80 percent of the funding based on rural population and 20 percent of the funding based on the state’s area. The required local match comes from state or local funding or even from the private companies such as Greyhound, making a match using a complex formula for route miles. Today, the amount of 5311(f) funding is modest, and all except six states—Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Virginia, South Carolina, and Hawaii—use their 5311(f) funds for operating subsidies. In FY 2013, the program provided $19.96 million to subsidize service to rural routes. Congress has realized this lack of intercity bus service and has decided to subsidize it.

Currently, Greyhound continues to promote connecting services with subsidized services operating as Greyhound Connect in eight states and interlining connections, with locally operated regional bus services throughout the country and offering passengers a single ticket on multiple carriers for their entire journey. Greyhound Connect and the new 5311(f) funds haven’t done enough to stop the decline in rural bus service since the number of stops has continued to decrease.

CURRENT STATE-BASED SOLUTIONS USING 5311(F) FUNDS

States use their limited 5311(f) funds for operations in two different ways: directly subsidizing either for-profit bus carriers or creating public service line with Greyhound, or by setting up their own network of state-operated feeder routes into rural areas. Examples of the routes come from across the country with localities, states, and even the carriers themselves providing the required 50 percent matching funds to the federal subsidy.

The state of Michigan uses subsidies to fund bus operator Indian Trails to directly operate intercity routes in the northern, sparsely populated areas of the state. Southern Michigan has the population to support bus service on the open market. Each of the subsidized routes operates once per day. The total subsidies in 2011 were $1.8 million, with 53,000 passengers riding the busses. Subsidies for the first routes began in 1990 after a Greyhound strike led to the discontinuation of service between Grand Rapids and Traverse City. Indian Trails has been operating this route ever since, and is slowly taking over other routes and fixing gaps in service. In 2009, service was restored to Sault-St. Marie for the first time since 1991.

A second way of increasing local bus service and the number of stops on the national intercity bus network is by subsidizing shorter feeder routes that are operated by state and local agencies to provide connections to the intercity network in nearby locations. Washington State DOT’s (WSDOT) Travel Washington Intercity Bus Program is an example of a state implementing innovative practices to create new feeder bus routes with four operating today. All four routes fully interline with Greyhound. The four routes, which serve 22 communities, are all financed using 5311(f) funds, and were started when the state issued Requests For Proposals. All four routes currently use 20 person ADA compliant minibuses that were purchased using Federal Recovery Act funds in 2011. WSDOT runs a central reservation office and ticketing system and is in charge of unified branding, with each line’s unique logo appearing on the busses and on signage along each route. The routes all started extremely quickly. The Grape Line began in December 2007, restoring intercity service to Walla Walla after Greyhound cut it in 2004. The Apple and Dunengness Lines began in 2008, with the Gold Line added in 2010. Each route operates two to three times per day. WSDOT wants to expand the service and has identified three additional possible routes, but the current services are using up all of the federal 5311(f) funds dedicated to intercity bus service in the state, and WSDOT has been unsuccessful in finding additional funding.

One other simple solution that needs to be mentioned is flag stops, which are stops in extremely rural areas where ridership is low and often no one wants to get on or off. Flag stops require passengers to purchase a ticket in advance, asking for the bus to stop or not. This service option creates win-win situation because the bus doesn’t have to off the interstate at every exit except for when there are customers waiting, which speeds up travel. Unfortunately, Greyhound’s reservation system, even for interlining carriers, doesn’t have the ability to offer flag stops or directly inform drivers on the road if there are passengers waiting for the bus. However, many smaller carriers provide flag stops. A number of rural communities in Montana lost bus service when local carrier Rimrock Stages, which offered flag stops with advanced notice, was shut down by federal regulators and its major routes were replaced by the regional carrier Jefferson Lines, which won’t offer on-demand flag stops.

CONCLUSION

Intercity bus service in rural America has been on a severe decline since deregulation in 1982. Rural local routes haven’t become and will never become—because of low traffic volumes—part of the curbside intercity bus renaissance currently providing extremely low-cost unsubsidized travel in the nation’s top markets, so they will need to be subsidized. The lack of rural bus services has harmed our most disadvantaged citizens—the elderly, disabled, and poor—the most. As the case studies from Michigan and Washington State show, limited federal funds through the 5311(f) program can make a difference in the rural and intercity intercity services that serve rural areas, which were not well discussed here. Many of these provide individuals with a few trips per week or month to the nearest major town or city for shopping and health care appointments, and could be a secondary intercity connecting service. Increasing intercity train service, with plenty of stops in rural areas, is another option.

This issue overall seems to be overlooked by planners in urban areas who aren’t necessarily thinking about the importance of connectivity for rural residents outside their urban areas. This is especially true because of the competition between rural areas for federal funds. Intercity bus service everywhere in America will be increasingly important as the U.S. population ages and the average American outlives their driving abilities by 7 to 10 years. It is an important regional and national planning issue to ensure equity.

Jeremiah Cox is a MUP student graduating in the spring of 2016. He is a native New Yorker with a bachelor’s degree in Environmental Science from Colorado College. His main interests are transportation, planning, and sustainability. Check out his website at SubwayNut.com.
ON SEPTEMBER 21, 2014, 400,000 people in one place, on one day, to send a message. To the extent that we were involved, it was enabling that to happen—celebrities; it was about the people and bringing them together. The idea of the people’s climate march was to really make it a global thing—I think there are a lot of solutions. One of the ones we are invested in is divestment. I think a lot of the reason we haven’t seen political action on climate change is because the fossil fuel industry has a death grip on carbon and on the White House. They killed cap and trade when that came up. They have a stake in making sure that things continue along the status quo. Part of the solution, for us, is about weakening the fossil fuel industry; taking away their social influence, so that politicians will be ashamed to accept contributions from them; so that it’s more stigmatized than it has been in popular culture. The campaign that we’ve been pushing for to get pension funds and endowments in schools to divest their holdings from the fossil fuel industry could do a good job. We saw in apartheid, in South Africa, that’s a model that can actually work to bring about positive change. Many of our readers are in the field of urban planning and policy. What advice do you have for them going forward in addressing climate change? At the forefront of the march were the victims of Hurricane Sandy. They saw the effects of climate change and they’re not alone—it’s all over the world. Increasingly, as Hurricane Sandys continue, you can’t be the mayor of a city where something like that happens and continue to do nothing. I think events like that are going to place pressure on them to move for political action. From a practical standpoint, I think it’s important for urban planners and folks doing that kind of work to brace for the impact of what’s coming, to rebuild our communities so they’re more resistant to the next Sandy. So, it’s a two-pronged approach, you need leadership at the local and global level that address the problem of climate change, but also, what happened afterwards: the White House press secretary acknowledging the march the next day. President Obama referencing it in the speeches to the UN. I think it can give a lot of people hope that grassroots demonstrations actually work in terms of moving the needle and bringing this issue back front and center to the forefront of the media landscape in a broader circle. Climate Change is a global problem, but climate action happens locally. How do we make change at the local level? The morning of the march, we in New York woke up to news that de Blasio had committed to this aggressive plan to reduce emissions in New York City, primarily in the building sector. I think their goal is 80 percent by 2050, which in and of itself is interesting—I think it’s a sign these demonstrations work. It’s a global problem and I think the solution is in two parts. We definitely need leadership at the UN at the global level. After a week of pervasive new scientific evidence showing why we need to take this problem more seriously, that we need to be off fossil fuels by 2100…when you think about what needs to happen in order to get us to a place where we can do this and keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius, it’s clear we need concerted action now on a large scale, but then also on the local scale, especially given the absence of leadership at the state. I think increasingly you’re going to start seeing mayors, governors, and comptrollers start to take action in the ways that they can to address a problem that affects all of us. Is the solution regulation? The solution, broadly, is to reduce carbon emissions. There is a lot of ongoing dialogue and I wouldn’t say it’s any one thing—I think there are a lot of solutions. One of the ones we are invested in is divestment. I think a lot of the reason we haven’t seen political action on climate change is...
Learn more about the graduate program in Urban Affairs & Planning at Hunter College at www.hunteruap.org.