Le droit a la ville: Addressing Spatial Injustice and Hostile Geographies through the Application of Lefebvrian Philosophy in Contextually Capitalist Urban Planning Models

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Executive Summary

Within a capitalist context, a number of spatial and societal inequalities manifest themselves through the processes of urban planning. The most central of these problems lies in the lack of accessibility and openness within the processes. Existing planning ideologies exclude and marginalize sectors of the population and remove them from the design and implementation of urban habitats. This paper will attempt to create methods for democratizing urban planning through the application and interpretation of principles within the Right to the City philosophy, as developed by French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre. These principles pertain to the incorporation of participatory planning models, land use reform, and sustainable development practices within the larger urban planning processes that exist within a capitalist context.

My research will first address and interpret the Right to the City philosophy through a review of the literature put forth by Lefebvre, David Harvey, and others. Case studies of urban planning, in both capitalist and socialist contexts, will be reviewed in order to compare and pinpoint the direct structural flaws within the processes of urban planning that create spatial injustices and reinforce a strict top-down approach to design and development. This paper will also examine the national Right to the City Alliance as an example of possible approaches toward more democratic urban planning.

Facilitating more bottom-up processes of urban planning, coupled with principles of land reform and sustainable development, are capable of delivering the physical construction of geographies back into the hands of those that directly inhabit its space.

The cohesive incorporation of these principles will help deliver a democratized right to the city for all urban dwellers.

Introduction

For centuries, the city has been routinely crafted and refined in the hopes of representing the pinnacle of culture and civilization. Cities represent both the geographic and social center of humanity's continued growth and innovation. As stated by urban sociologist Robert Park:

> The city is man's most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart's desire. But, if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself.[1]

The city has also continued to work as an apparatus for social and cultural urbanization that has been coupled with the intrinsic human quest for Utopia; a real and achievable place free of qualm and quandary. However, the pathway to such an ideal is neither uniform nor concrete. Differing political and social ideologies have crafted and manipulated numerous opposing forms of the pictorial urban landscape and aesthetic.

Since the rise of Paris in the Second Empire of the 1840s and 50s, modern capitalist planning philosophy and design has become the preeminent model for city development and expansion throughout most of the world. Although the goals of planning have shifted over time, the predicating principle behind planning in a capitalist context has been simple: maintain a strict top-down approach that assures the rights of property and profit. This narrowed focus of planning has rendered the capitalist city

[1] Robert Park and Ralph H. Turner. *On Social Control and Collective Behavior.* Phoenix, 1967. p. 3.

incapable of effectively and equitably cater to the basic needs and desires of the central urban populace. In doing so, many cities that have followed this design schematic have become highly stratified culturally, socially, economically and have systematically removed any sense of palpable community or urbanity. Within these processes of capitalist urban development, planning struggles to achieve spatial justice or social equity. In this context, spatial justice can be understood as the creation of equitable geographies that produce and influence positive social relations[2]. Instead, these cities create a system of spatial injustices that further marginalize certain sectors of the population including immigrants, low-income individuals, and people of color. Furthermore, the lack of democracy within the rigid processes of modern urban planning have further alienated a plurality of the population from their ability to become fully and truly involved within the decision making process. In short, the urban planning models developed within the hegemonic capitalist context have carried no concern for any semblance of spatial justice and have consistently worked to deny certain marginalized sectors of the urban population of their right to the city.

The purpose of this study is to understand and advance democratic planning and right to the city philosophy as theorized by Henri Lefebvre. To do this, I provide a critique of the heavily capitalist infused ideologies that have infiltrated urban planning processes and unearth practical means by which the process can be made more wholly democratic and participatory. I then explore the ways in which Lefebvre's right to the city philosophy is utilized and incorporated into contemporary models of urban planning through three democratizing principles: participatory planning, equitable land use reform,

[2] Edward Soja. Personal Interview. 31 Mar. 2010.

and sustainability. Each of these suggests forms of democratic planning. Participatory planning could create a new methodological paradigm that emphasizes community involvement in strategic urban development, while land use reform would place the administration and use of land back into the hands of the people. Applying sustainability practices to these principles encourages social progress, recognizes the needs of all members of a given community, maintains effective protection of the surrounding natural and built environment, makes prudent use of precious natural resources, and is capable of maintaining a rich and secure level of economic activity and employment. Progressing towards all of these ideals will help to incorporate all persons toward attaining a more universal right to the city.

Methodology

In order to address how right to the city principles can be implemented within an urban planning model in order to advance democratic ideals, the intrinsic links between cities and capitalism will be reviewed through an analysis of the works of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey and others. Such a framework will help to show how spatial injustices and social inequalities, such as gentrification and displacement, manifest themselves within a capitalist system across neighborhoods. I then review the literature on subjects of modern land use design, social welfare, equity, and public participation to illustrate the motivations and aims of capitalist urban development and the ways in which it creates inequities and undemocratic processes. I integrate these perspectives to conduct a case study of Paris during the Second Empire following the fall of constitutional monarchy in France and Georges-Eugene Haussmann's complete reconfiguration of the Parisian urban landscape. This case study will help to establish and pinpoint the specific

capitalist practices, designed through undemocratic forms of planning, that create spatial and social injustice within a system that adheres to a strict top-down urban planning philosophy.

With this historical framework and background in place, I examine alternative planning approaches through literature and case studies in a subsequent comparative analysis on urban planning in both a capitalist and socialist context. The studies will include a historical analysis and modern day critique of downtown Los Angeles as a representation of the pinnacle in modern capitalist planning, which will be measured and compared against the new Venezuelan urban development of Caribia that is presently being designed as a new "Socialist Utopia" just outside the city limits of Caracas. The Los Angeles case study will help to provide a practical point of reference for the history and current state of problems associated with capitalist-based planning philosophy and the lack of an open participatory process. Conversely, the Caribia case study will detail how planning within a socialist context works to address some of the spatial and social justice issues, but inevitably falls short in creating a working right to the city for all urban dwellers, as it maintains a similar top-down ideology in planning and design. This analysis will help to provide further understanding of how differing political ideologies affect urban planning aesthetic and design and the differing levels of priority that are placed on social, cultural and economic rights and interests.

The next section of this paper examines the national organization, the Right to the City Alliance, as an example of possible approaches to addressing spatial justice issues and democratizing the planning process through the application of Henri Lefebvre's right to the city principles. This section will provide research and analysis on the Right to the

City Alliance in the United States and their efforts to advocate for and pursue the development of Lefebvre's philosophies into urban planning policy and practice. A history of the organization and its organizational structure will be put forth and case studies of the actions developed by member organizations in Los Angeles and Miami will be reviewed as a means of locating the specific ways in which Alliance organizations address issues pertaining to right to the city and democratic planning.

Drawing on literature, case studies, and the current work being forged by the Right to the City Alliance and its member organizations, I point to approaches and ways forward for democratic planning that is capable of better meeting the needs and desires of a given population and providing a right to the city for all urban dwellers. The primary recommendations in this study draw from both the capitalist and socialist philosophies enumerated in earlier sections, but also proceed a step further in proposing that no set of planning theories or designs can truly meet the needs of the people until right to the city principles are applied within the processes of urban planning and communities are more adequately engaged in the processes of city building.

The preeminent urban planning philosophies of our time have failed to successfully fulfill the needs and desires of the population by routinely denying the right to the city for all urban dwellers. The implementation of democratized planning, land use reform, and sustainable practices would progressively work toward addressing and solving many of these issues.

Lefebvre and The Right to the City Principles

The right to the city, a term crafted and defined by noted urban sociologist Henri Lefebvre, carries a much deeper meaning that the simple availability of public goods and

resources. It involves a more harmonious equality in the accessibility and open availability of affordable housing, education, public space, transportation, employment, and most importantly the Democratic process.

Lefebvre first developed the concept and principles behind his right to the city theory in his 1968 book, *Le droit á la ville.* The theory focuses on reshaping the dynamics of urban space to create more democratic and equitable power relations. Lefebvre advocates for the restructuring of urban power dynamics by taking power from capital and state interests and transferring it to the hands of urban inhabitants. As humans, we produce and inhabit hostile geographies and we have the right to change them to make them more just. The theory goes on to further entail the right to "urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of moments and places"[3]. The term has also taken on a more broad definition in recent years to describe many of the social movements taking place in urban environments that are based around specific ideas of difference and othering. Lefebvre is also careful to clarify that his theory is meant to apply to all urban dwellers and not just citizens. All those who inhabit a city, regardless of legal status, should be afforded a fair and equal right to the city[4]. Providing equal access for all urban dwellers to the participation in urban politics and inclusion in decisions that shape their environment is vital towards securing the right to the city for a given metropolitan population.

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[3] Henri Lefebvre. *Le droit a la ville.* S. 1 :S.n., 1968. p. 18
[4] Henri Lefebvre, Eleonore Kofman, and Elizabeth Lebas. *Writings on Cities.* Cambridge, Mass. USA: Blackwell, 1996, p. 158-9

Much of the recent empirical research that has focused around the "Right to the City" theory of Lefebvre has taken focus in questions of spatial justice and imagination. This research has touched on a number of themes including: public/green space, public transportation, immigration, civic participation, land use and design, and financial exclusion or "moneyspace"[5]. Researchers have also employed this concept to describe and articulate many social movements that have manifested themselves within urban environments. As mentioned earlier, these movements are based on specific identities of difference such as class, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age, disability and homelessness. These movements have typically been centered on seeking claims of economic, environmental, social, and spatial justice[6].

Despite its broad and comprehensive contextual uses, some critics have pointed to specific limitations within the "Right to the City" theory as developed by Lefebvre. One of the most commonly noted limitations by scholars such as Mark Purcell includes its singular focus on the local scale. "As we discover, narrate, and invent new ideas about democracy and citizenship in cities, it is critical to avoid the local trap, in which the local scale is assumed to be inherently more democratic, just, or sustainable than larger scales"[7]. Purcell and other critics argue that simply localizing governmental decision-making processes does not necessarily translate into a fully democratized populace. Noted political and social geographer Edward Soja also echoes this sentiment: "At multiple scales, geography has effect on our lives. We cannot focus solely on struggles

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[5] *Urban Policies and the Right to the City*. Rep. New York: UNESCO, 2005., p. 3.
[6] Ibid. 3-4.
[7] Mark Purcell. "Urban Democracy and the Local Trap." *Urban Studies* 43.11 (2004). p.1.

of community organizing at the local level"[8]. Following the understanding that all scales are social productions, the local scale is no more inherently or naturally just than scales of greater magnitudes such as regional, national, or even international. "With respect to the right to the city, avoiding the local trap means we must move beyond a right to the city and think more in terms of a right to inhabit space"[9]

Capitalism and the City: The Ties That Bind

The near inescapable link between modern cities, urbanity, and Capitalism has been long and depressing. In order for a city to manifest itself, there must exist a collective of individuals within a confined geographical space. These concentrations invariably create surpluses in the forms of capital (wealth) and production (work supplied by the people). Since these surpluses are typically extracted from the hands of many and their control being placed in the hands of a few chosen elite, urbanization must intrinsically and systematically be labeled as a class phenomenon[10]. Capitalism manifests itself within the urban narrative in such a way that inherently creates a system of advantages and disadvantages. This process thusly creates an enormously unbalanced power dynamic containing a rigid hierarchy and social structure that tremendously reduces the ability of the people to access both their individual and collective right to the city.

David Harvey goes on to further elaborate on Lefebvre's thoughts by stating that the right to the city infers the ability of humanity to remake one's own image and identity

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[8] Edward Soja. Personal Interview. 9 March 2010.
[9]Mark Purcell. "Urban Democracy and the Local Trap." *Urban Studies* 43.11 (2004). p. 2.
[10] Henri Lefebvre, Eleonore Kofman, and Elizabeth Lebas. *Writings on Cities*. Cambridge, Mass, USA: Blackwell, 1996. p. 147.

within the manifestation of urban design itself and vice versa[11]. Instead of using their accumulated assets to assure the right to the city for all, the elite choose instead to pursue their own indulgent self-interests which affords them a monopoly of control on the planning and aesthetic of a given municipality. They re-invest their accrued capital into the city by transforming the urban infrastructure to cater toward economic interests that will further their own wealth as opposed to the wealth of society. Such modifications are typically carried out through the displacement and gentrification of neighborhoods, which in turn often forces local populations to acquiesce and move out on the periphery in order to find adequate and affordable living situations. "The perpetual need to find profitable terrains for capital-surplus production and absorption shapes the politics of capitalism"[12]. In other words, capitalism must routinely annihilate surrounding space in order to insure its own continued re-production.

On the international level, the tremendous amount of progressive and free market economic development that has taken place over the last one hundred and fifty years has led to a continuous decline in overall quality of life for the general population. The riches that are coupled with tourism and consumerism have blinded urban developers and local governments. Modern cities and urbanization have become characterized by catering to market niches that serve only themselves and completely transform and comodify much of the urban landscape. Focus has been placed primarily placed on the power of the dollar and grandiose high rises while often ignoring the ideas of communal equality and sustainability that help foster truly cohesive communities. The continued outward mobilization into open terrain and the individualism trumpeted by capitalist

[11]David Harvey. "The Right to the City." *New Left Review* 53 (2008). p. 1.
[12] Ibid. 3.

regimes has deeply inhibited the development of unique urban identities. Capitalism has coaxed people into solely living for their own personal self-interests rather than the betterment of collective society they live in as a whole. “Under these conditions, the ideals of urban identity, citizenship, and belonging – already threatened by the spreading malaise of a neo-liberal ethic – become much harder to sustain”.[13]

The modern capitalist city creates a further problem in fostering and exacerbating negative issues that are common to all cities such as the generally unbridled proliferation of pollution and waste. Two of the primary principles of free market laissez-faire economies are the ideas of perfect competition and continuous profit growth.[14] Enterprises are routinely under pressure to provide their services at cheaper prices as a means of cutting the competition and increasing profit margins. This constant need to lower the costs of production can often have harmful effects on society. For instance, an industry may develop a new technology that allows for faster production of their product but simultaneously increases a negative social externality in the form of harmful pollution. Industry alone reaps the benefits of this increased production while society is left to deal with the social cost of the pollution which can include increases in illness, rising healthcare costs, and damage to the surrounding environment and ecosystem. The capitalist business will only put measures in place to prevent such negative consequences if they do not negatively infringe upon their bottom line. Capitalist cities often encourage such practices in order to coax businesses into their area as a means of generating greater and more diverse tax revenues. Again, priority is placed upon profit rather than the

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[13] Ibid. 8.

[14] Jacob Viner "Adam Smith and Laissez Faire." *The Journal of Political Economy* 35 (1927): p. 198.

people. These combined factors make the development of a self-sustaining capitalist city that is capable of fully catering to the social needs of society a relative impossibility.

The City of Light: Paris During the Second Empire and the Rise of Modern Capitalist City Planning and Design

Paris in 1848 was a city rife with social, economic, and political problems and possibilities. Political and social struggles had ravaged the city since the fall of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815 and corruption and cholera were running rampant. The city's population had ballooned to just over one million citizens and the Parisian proletariat was becoming restless[15]. A crisis was developing all across Europe that involved capitalism overaccumulation, which involved massive surpluses of both capital and labor that lacked an effective means of bringing the two together for profit[16]. This phenomenon hit France and Paris especially hard. The working class began to team with socially progressive members of the bourgeoisie in clamoring for the return of Paris and all of France to become a social republic again.

To make matters worse, Paris had done little to modernize their economic, government, and social structures since the 18th century. The physical infrastructures of Paris were also in shambles as the city had seen little growth or structural modification since the medieval era[17]. This left the city completely incapable of handling any type of new capitalist growth or development. As historian Louis Chevalier wrote:

> In these years Paris looked around and was unable to recognize itself. Another, larger city had overflowed into the unaltered framework of streets, mansions, houses, erecting factories and stockpiles in gardens and courts where carriages had been moldering quietly away, packing the suddenly shrunken streets and the

[15]David Harvey. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 2003., p. 95.
[16] Ibid. 94.
[17] Ibid. 95.

> now overpopulated gothic graveyards, resurrecting and overloading the forgotten sewers, spreading litter and stench into the adjacent countryside.[18]

Paris had failed to keep up with the times and was now behind much of Europe in terms of physical infrastructure and upkeep. Radical changes needed to be put into place immediately or the French capital would inevitably become irrelevant culturally, socially and economically.

That necessary change slowly began to take shape starting in the 1840's. A number of social movements initiated by the working class began to instill fear into the local Parisian bourgeoisie. A number of the wealthy landowners began to accept the idea that state intervention would be vital for the modernization of Paris, but a stubborn collective remained mired in archaic fiscal conservatism in a selfish attempt to protect themselves and their assets. The majority of these conservatives would flee the city in 1848, which flung the already struggling city into an even greater level of general depression[19]. With their abdication, and socialist sentiments alive and well amongst the working classes, a change in leadership for the country was inevitable. The populist Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte was elected president of France in 1848 through universal suffrage. In December 1851 he would stage a widely supported coup that would grant him dictatorial powers and the title of Emperor Napoleon III. Within months, he would declare the beginning of the Second Empire of France[20].

With the new empirical declaration came sweeping renovations to the antiquated social institutions and physical infrastructure of Paris that were carried out with

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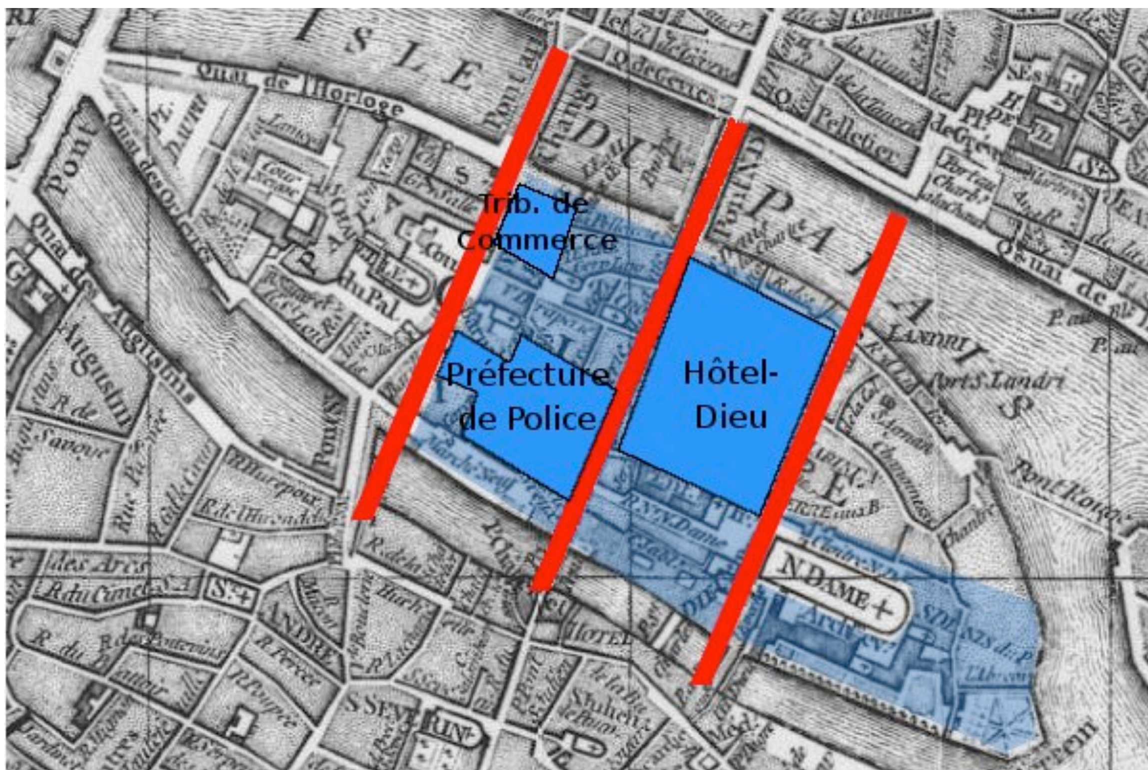
[18]Chevalier, Louis. *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. New York: H. Fertig, 1973, p. 45.
[19]David Harvey. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 97.
[20] Ibid. 97-8.

dictatorial fervor. Napoleon understood that Paris must strive to adjust to a burgeoning and demanding form of capitalism with a number of complex political and economic interests that could help to liberate the life and culture of Parisians. In 1853, the city of Paris was delivered into the hands of architect and civic planner Georges-Eugene Haussmann. Haussmann was known to be somewhat of a maverick and cavalier in his application of urban planning. "He was incredibly energetic and well-organized, had a great eye for details, and was prepared to subvert the opinions of others while making absolutely no concessions to democracy".[21] With a strong backing from the Emperor, Haussmann had fairly free reign to revolutionize the city in whichever ways he saw best. Such a consolidation of power in the implementation of planning rendered the marginalized portions of the Parisian population as unable to become involved within the process of development. Until his dismissal from his post in 1870, Haussmann worked relentlessly and tirelessly to implement his new concept of commercial urbanism into the city center of Paris.[22] His revolutionary ideas associated with commercial urbanism would mark the formulation of modern capitalist urban planning and design that followed a strict top-down ideology and approach.

[21] Ibid. 99.
[22] Ibid. 101.

Figure 1: The Île de la Cité region of Paris as transformed by Haussmann. The area featured newly widened avenues (red), buildings (dark blue) and light commercial areas (light blue).



Source: *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, p. 105

One of Haussmann's first main objectives was to re-organize spatial relations within Paris. The surpluses of capital and labor power that were burgeoning in the late 1840's were to be absorbed through a detailed and complex program of massive long-term investment in the local built environment. The primary focus of these investments was the amelioration of space and social relationships.[23] Surplus capital was pumped into new housing developments and large department stores that required tremendous amounts of intensive labor. Roads and avenues were widened and made more grandiose in an effort to encourage consumption and further provide economic outlets for businesses. France was able to become a stronger economic player on the world stage as

[23] Ibid. 109.

well through railway expansion, road development, and serious investment in telegraph and communications improvements. These were all seen as vital to help facilitate financial transactions and international markets.[24] Industry in the city was able to open up tremendously with this new burgeoning infrastructure. Paris became the central link for rail and telegraph for France as well as much of Western Europe that led to a tremendous sum of new revenue being pumped into the city. The increase in regularity, volume, and speed of goods flows allowed for the proliferation of big business operations in terms of production and distribution. New sewage systems, parks, monuments, schools, public space, housing, and hotel development could all be traced back to this revenue.[25] Tourism in the city became very popular and a greater variety of quality food and other goods poured into the city from northern Africa and places as far away as the Middle East. Both the working class and bourgeoisie experienced a renaissance in the early years of Haussmann's reign. This opening of Paris cultivated a general increase in the overall quality of life of many Parisians, but still denied them the opportunity to participate within the processes of urban planning and design.

Another component of Haussman's plan involved the annexation of the suburbs in neighboring regions. He believed that doing so would work to effectively create a more coordinated and efficient metropolitan Paris. Coupled with this plan was the creation of a sophisticated hierarchical territorial administration that reinforced a top-down ideology. Under this system, Haussman was situated firmly in control at the top and then power was centralized through his lieutenants who governed each of the twenty districts that comprised the metropolitan area. Haussmann utilized this system to help implement his

[24] Ibid. 109-10
[25] Ibid. 111.

idea of "extroverted urbanism in which the public life of the boulevard became a highlight of what the city was about".[26] While the expansive size of these new boulevards did help to foster a more cohesive urbanity, they were designed more for the purpose of increasing the flow of capital than the flow of people. By catering to dollars rather than the citizenry, the social equity of Parisian society became more stratified. Haussmann's designs became a spatial framework around which industrial and commercial development, housing investment, and residential segregation could cluster and play out their own trajectories, and thusly define the new historical geography of the city's evolution.[27] While Haussmann may not have been directly responsible for the changes that occurred in Paris at this time, it was his designs that helped to marginalize under represented portions of the population and facilitate the economic and social problems that plagued the city.

The newly crafted space relations had profound effects on the Parisian economy, politics, and culture. The rapid and persistent compression of space meant that there was no place to hide from the process of urbanization. Privacy and intimacy was routinely infringed upon in the name of creating a "better and more perfect" vision of Paris that fit Haussmann's idyllic decrees. For instance, a number of slums located in the city center were systemically purged in order to create a new series of grandiose and gaudy department buildings that further reflected the ideology of placing the rights of property over the rights of the individual.[28] The phantasmagoria of this capitalist culture blinded Haussmann and others to people's loyalties to and identifications with space. While Paris

[26] Ibid. 111-13.
[27] Ibid. 113.
[28] Loc. cit.

continued to become a paradise for tourists and monetary interests, the needs and incorporation of individual citizens continued to be placed as secondary.

Another major component of the Haussmann grand plan was the credit system he designed and implemented in order to fund his grand expansion of Paris. It was his belief that universal credit was the way to economic progress and social reconciliation.[29] The formation of the Credit Mobilier was one of the more controversial centerpieces. In order to keep up with the pace of Haussmann's rapid expansion plans, a steady stream of capital had to be effectively procured and placed into the hands of developers. The Credit Mobilier was a type of investment bank that held shares in a variety of companies and worked to help them establish the necessary finances for their large-scale undertakings. Many individuals, including some in government, became suspicious that this type of institution was the beginning of slow evolutionary path to "state monopoly capitalism". The thesis, first developed by Karl Marx, is defined thusly:

> Big business, having achieved a monopoly or cartel position in most markets of importance, fuses with the government apparatus. A kind of financial oligarchy or conglomerate therefore results, whereby government officials aim to provide the social and legal framework within which giant corporations can operate most effectively.[30]

In essence, the new corporations bringing in capital to the city were getting extremely cozy with the local government. The credit financing institutions helped to develop and feed an insatiable appetite for economic speculation in the city of Paris. "The credit system was rationalized, expanded, and democratized through the association of capitals, but at the expense of often uncontrolled speculation and the growing absorption of all

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[29] Ibid. 118.
[30] David Leslie Miller. "Georges Haussmann." *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.

savings into a centralized and hierarchically organized system that left those at the bottom even more vulnerable to the arbitrary and capricious whims of those who had some money power".[31] While the grand changes that occurred in Paris during this time would not have been possible with such financial institutions, they would also inevitably lead to the economic collapse of the city around 1870.

The absorption of labor and capital surpluses through Paris' grand reconstruction had all manner of negative effects on both society and built environment. Displacement, segregation, gentrification, rising rents, and overcrowding all became general plagues upon the city. While Haussmann is undoubtedly not solely to blame for the epic rise and fall of Paris from 1850-70, it was his leadership and guidance that served as the leading cause of a number of social and economic problems that slowly grew and grew as time progressed. His stubbornness in believing that Parisian society could only be furthered through the influx of capital interests and speculation blinded him to a number of social needs and welfare that plagued many citizens. These problems were compacted through the financial institutions that Haussmann helped put in place to finance his vision. The over speculation by the Credit Molbilier and others helped plunge Paris into economic turmoil in the late 1860's and full-fledged depression by 1870. Despite its obvious problems, the Haussmannization of Paris would last long after his removal from authority in 1870. His legacy has continued on and many of his principles are still utilized in the capitalist forms of urban planning philosophy and design that still exist in our contemporary world.

[31]David Harvey. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 2003., p. 124.

Imposing a Vision: The Inherent Problems in Planning

> It is a popular delusion that the government wastes vast amounts of money through inefficiency and sloth. Enormous effort and planning are required to waste this much money.[32]

The processes of urban planning, regardless of political context, are inherently complex and are often developed in such a way that keeps the majority of the public restricted from access or a voice in the overall process. Cities are complex ecosystems that are intrinsically unpredictable and can even become chaotic. "Since even the near-term future of chaotic ecosystems cannot be foreseen, any attempt to plan the distant future will fail"[33]. No one is capable of fully compiling and putting together the data necessary to create proper long-term processes in neither a capitalist nor a socialist context. Through research of the processes associated with urban planning, I have been able to establish a number of primary problems that plague the system regardless of political context.

One of the principal problems associated with the processes of urban planning involves the system of modeling that has become inbuilt within urban design practices. Instead of attempting to truly plan and predict future outcomes, contemporary urban planners have often attempted to create a vision and impose it upon the future and the built environment. Models are often formed as an attempt to try and break down and simplify the process. This is done because the realities are often too complex and sophisticated to deal with on a stand alone basis and a system of models are utilized in order to simplify many of these processes. Instead of comprehensively planning for all

[32] P.J, O'Rourke. *Parliament of Whores*. London: Pan Book, 1992, p. 36
[33] Randal O'Toole. *The Best-laid Plans: How Government Planning Harms Your Quality of Life, Your Pocketbook, and Your Future*. Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2007, p. 45

resources, planners have typically focused on one or two primary resources that are paramount to a specific area or region. While these models may prove useful for planners when designing specific elements for a metropolitan area, they often oversimplify certain problems and do not provide the proper detailed analysis and data collection that are required in order to create truly functional and sustainable plans for an urban geography.

Another common that can beset all forms of urban planning regardless of philosophical context involves the "fad problem". This entails the replication of popular urban planning models and designs without the proper analysis pertaining to their feasibility and sustainability within a given geography. Sometimes fads can be positive such as with smart growth and sustainable development, but can also have negative geographic and social consequences such as with suburban sprawl and hard zoning laws. The systems of urban planning often become naturally complex due to political and bureaucratic interference, and fads represent a gross form of oversimplification to rectify and catalyze the process in order to speed up the implementation of plans and ideas. These fads are often utilized as a substitute for site-specific planning for a given built environment. Urban planning is meant to measure a wide variety of difficult to measure social benefits, and implementing popular design strategies is often easier and less costly than performing the necessary research to test feasibility and practicality. The implementation of design practices that prove to be positive for a city like Portland may not have the constructive consequences in a city like Wichita or Akron. Demographics, built environment, and urban geography are often overlooked in order to simplify and expedite the process of planning.

The other common problem with regards to planning processes regardless of political context pertains to a lack of democracy within the many spheres and phases of urban planning. As the case studies show, urban planning is inherently undemocratic and efforts to attract the public typically draw in a select group of people who have a special interest in the outcome of the plans. Therefore, those that reflect on these design and planning schemes are not necessarily representative of the community as a whole. They are often not directly affected, geographically or socially, by the plans being implemented. Through the facilities and outlets that are currently in place, a tremendous time commitment must be made for an individual to exercise their voice and be recognized. Special interests have the time and resources to get involved which inevitably skews the planners' thoughts and perceptions in terms of community needs assessments. Many planners may also exclude the public and community at large because they feel they do not have the necessary skill sets or intellectual capacity to provide real and positive insight into the planning process. This relative top-down ideology within the planning process is fairly universal in both planning in a socialist and capitalist context.

Planning Within a Capitalist Context: The Case of Downtown Los Angeles

Today, downtown Los Angeles represents the financial and economic center for the city and much of southern California. High-rise office skyscrapers, luxury apartment condominiums, and heavy automobile traffic dot the urban landscape. The area has slowly evolved over time to become the glowing business capital of the Los Angeles metropolitan area. As the topography of the landscape has evolved, so has the resident population and demographics. The transformation of downtown Los Angeles acts as an

ideal representation of urban planning within a wholly capitalist context. The lack of democracy within the local processes of urban planning has created a convoluted and perpetuated state of spatial injustice for local immigrant, low-income, and other marginalized community groups.

History

The history of downtown Los Angeles is both rich and complex. Spanish explorers first settled the area that comprises downtown Los Angeles around 1781, and over time, the area slowly began to grown as settlers became increasingly attracted to the area. In the later half of the 19th century, the area experienced a large population boom that was driven by vast tracts of cheap and easily accessible land, newfound transportation lines in the form of railroads coming in from the Midwest, and tremendous promotion by land developers and venture capitalists. By 1896, the city of Los Angeles' population had swollen to nearly 100,000 residents and an influx of capital was being pumped into the infrastructure of the city by developers and other investors[34].

In order to meet the needs of the ever-growing local population, an explosion of development began to take place in the downtown area starting as early as the 1910's. This development was often done in a wholly undemocratic fashion, with only wealthy investors and special interests being given a voice in the politics of development. The continuously growing railroad tracks in and around the area furthered the expansion and development for the central core of the city. Local trolleys and rail ran for over 1,100 miles around Los Angeles and other parts of Southern California[35]. A number of banking institutions flocked to the downtown area to move in and develop their headquarters. The

[34] "The Historic Core of Downtown Los Angeles." Los Angeles Conservancy, 2010.
[35] "A Forgotten Part of Los Angeles History." Pacific Electric Subway, 2000.

Spring Street Financial District would become home for Bank of America, Crocker National Bank, and the Los Angeles Stock Exchange[36]. These major financial institutions helped to anchor the economic well being of the area and provide employment to thousands. As business began to flourish in the area, more and more of the local population began to flood into the central core. The area known as Bunker Hill, an extremely wealthy residential neighborhood located in the heart of downtown, became increasingly serviced by large flagship department stores and grandiose hotels that catered directly to their affluent wants and desires[37]. This type of development left low-income and other marginalized community groups without equal access and opportunity to goods and services. As the 1920's rolled around, the automobile began to become an increasingly popular form of transportation. Trolley cars began to have to compete for road space with automobiles as they began to become a preferred form of transit for a wide variety of individuals.

The area of downtown Los Angeles began to suffer in the wake of World War II. The increasing suburbanization of Los Angeles coupled with the proliferation of the automobile and highway systems led to a tremendous decrease in investment for the downtown area. Such reactions further crippled the urban poor that resided downtown by further extracting vital resources and social outlets. The financial institutions that had proven so vital to the lifeblood of the area in the first half of the century began to move out to the suburbs where land was cheaper and more accessible for workers. The

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[36] Cecilia Rasmussen. "Wall Street of the West Had It's Peaks, Crashes." *Los Angeles Times* 11 June 2000.
[37] "The Historic Core of Downtown Los Angeles." Los Angeles Conservancy, 2010.

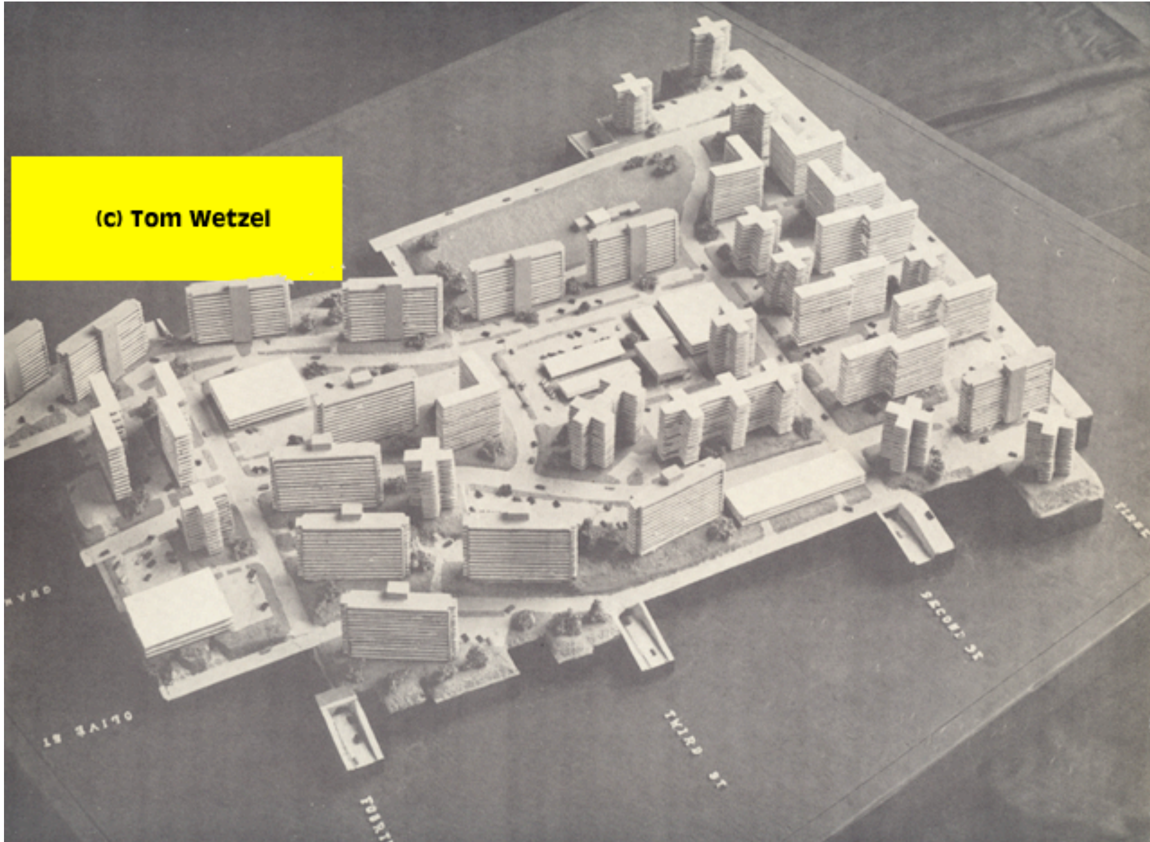
population of the downtown area began to plummet and a number of prominent historic buildings were demolished in order to make way for tracts of parking lots as demand increased[38]. Again, these actions were enacted without any input from local community members. Low-income residents began to increasingly inhabit the area in and around Bunker Hill and much of the affluent citizenry fled the central core of the city for the surrounding suburbs. Pedestrian traffic in the area was minimal and the area became a stop-and-go destination for most residents of Los Angeles. For downtown dwellers, a right to the city was non-existent.

Attempts to reverse the blight and lure businesses back to the downtown area began in 1955 with the Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project. A number of questions and issues surrounded the area. Whose turf was this going to be? Would development cater to the wealthy elite or the common downtown worker? The initial plan for Bunker Hill was developed under the mayoral administration of Fletcher Bowron in the early part of the 1950s. "The first Community Reinvestment Act [CRA] under Bowron planned to remove all the old buildings on the hill, in the slash-and-burn style of urban redevelopment of that era"[39]. The initial CRA proposal put forth by Bowron called for a commercial high-rise apartment development that would be designed and oriented towards creating affordable housing for downtown workers. The process was even made democratic as local community members were asked to provide input into the design. "The consultants hired by the Bowron CRA did a proactive study of the housing needs

[38] Loc. Cit.
[39] Tom Wetzel. "Los Angeles Downtown History Tour: Part 2."

and preferences of downtown workers, and came up with a plan for apartment high rises on the hill that would have rents affordable to downtown workers”[40].

Figure 2: The 1951 CRA Model for Bunker Hill created by Mayor Bowron. The affordable apartment towers can be seen on the hill on the left side of the model.



Source: “Los Angeles Downtown History: Part 2”.

As ideal as it may have seemed, this democratically designed ideal would never come to fruition. Mayor Bowron would be run out of office by the downtown elite through a nasty campaign run by the Los Angeles Times that focused especially on the Bunker Hill redevelopment issue[41]. When Mayor Bowron was removed from office, his democratically designed CRA plan went with him. The elite and affluent members of downtown took immediate action to curb the development. “What the downtown elite

[40] Loc. Cit.
[41] Loc. Cit.

wanted was for the working class to be moved off the hill, and the terrain dedicated to financial district expansion, elite housing, and cultural monuments that catered to the interests of the elite classes"[42]. Inevitably, local planners caved to these special interests and abandoned the more democratically and just design plans. The project that was ultimately chosen was designed primarily for slum clearance and to re-inject capital investment into the downtown area. The campaign drove out the low-income residents that had come to inhabit the previously wealthy and affluent area and re-developed the land for commercial enterprises and skyscrapers that would dot the central portion of the downtown landscape. Most of the residents were removed from the area with little warning or financial compensation. The inclined hill was physically flattened and leveled to make development easier and less costly[43]. The height limitations for buildings in the city were removed in 1957 that allowed for further high-rise development in and around downtown. During the 1980's, one or two skyscrapers would be constructed and completed each year. The Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project is the longest such campaign in the history of Los Angeles and currently not scheduled to be fully completed until the year 2015[44].

To this day, much of the residential development downtown caters solely to the special interests of the affluent classes. For instance, many of the high-rise skyscrapers located in the downtown area do not reach full occupancy and a 1999 study found that the vacancy rate in such buildings was roughly 26%[45]. This statistic represented one of the

[42] Loc. Cit.
[43] Pat Adler. *The Bunker Hill Story*. Glendale, Calif.: La Siesta, 1968. p. 21-3
[44] "The Historic Core of Downtown Los Angeles." Los Angeles Conservancy, 2010.
[45] Kathryn Maese. "Cracking the Code." *Los Angeles Downtown News* 28 Mar. 2005.

highest vacancy rates in all of the United States. To combat this in recent years, many developers have turned the older buildings into adaptive reuse projects that attempt to transform old office space into upscale loft housing. The high level of demand for such housing has led to a very competitive and high priced market that has continued to displace low-income individuals from the downtown area. In an attempt to maintain more equality in the housing market, the city of Los Angeles has attempted to create a number of incentive based policies for developers to create mixed-income and mixed-use buildings in the area. In a 2005 interview, City Planner Jane Blumenfeld attempted to articulate this point by stating, “We are trying to make it attractive to build [downtown] and get this added affordable housing that we normally wouldn’t have. We need an adequate amount of lower-income housing so that in 20 years the year downtown area doesn’t become an exclusive neighborhood”[46].

A lack of democratized principles in this contextually capitalist form of planning can also be seen in other contemporary downtown improvement projects. In recent years, a number of commercial developments with the intention of bringing commerce and consumers back to the central business district. One of the most expansive and expensive of these undertakings has been the Grand Avenue Project. The project, which first received approval from the Los Angeles City Council and Board of Supervisors in 2007, was designed to feature over 3.6 million square feet of development, roughly 2,500 residential units, a new 16-acre civic park, streetscape improvements and a variety of open outdoor public spaces[47]. The Grand, as the project has come to be named, called for a budget of roughly $3 billion with a central location in the downtown area across from

[46] Loc. Cit.
[47] "Project Overview." Grand Avenue Project Committee, 2009.

the Disney Music Hall at the corner of 1st Street and Grand Avenue. The project has been broken up into three distinct phases, with Phase I focusing on the rehabilitation and development of the civic park along with small retail and residential developments (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Phase I of The Grand Avenue Project

Source: “Phase I Development”. The Grand: Downtown LA. 2010.

After receiving approval from the local government and securing funding from a variety of public and private sources, the project was designed with the intention of being completed by 2009. Local residents and community members were not consulted or

involved at all in the planning of the project. Numerous setbacks and a loss of investors have led to the project being routinely put on hold. Ground has still yet to be broken on the project, and latest estimates have the project being completed no earlier than 2012[48]. Critics of the project contend that such a large, government-backed project will further gentrification within the downtown area and force many small, family owned businesses to shut down. Others point to the lack of a solid community benefits agreement being pinned to the project that would secure certain guaranteed levels of affordable and low-income housing and provide assistance for the homeless that currently reside in the area[49].

Another downtown improvement project developed in recent years that has failed to implement more democratic and participatory design strategies can be seen in the L.A. Live entertainment complex. Centrally located across the street from the Staples Center, the L.A. live project has been billed as, "A one of a kind entertainment campus that will provide benefits for Los Angeles' residents, commuters, and tourists"[50]. The campus features a number of upscale restaurants, commercial shopping, concert and music venues, office space, and luxury condominiums. This "renaissance" that has been brought to the core of downtown Los Angeles carried a total price tag of roughly $2.5 billion that included plenty of private investment, but local taxpayer revenue as well[51].

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[48] Cara DiMassa. "Grand Avenue Project Needs Extension." *Los Angeles Times* 10 Feb. 2009.
[49] *Grand Intervention*. Rep. Los Angeles. The Norman Lear Center, University of Southern California.
[50] *Vision*. L.A. Live, 2010.
[51] "Nokia Theatre at L.A. Live Launches New Era For Live Entertainment." [Los Angeles] 17 Oct. 2007.

This system of providing public funds to a project that lacks the input of a public voice embodies a form of taxation without representation

Construction on the massively complex project began in the September of 2005. The first phase of development on the project featured the cornerstone of the campus, the Nokia Theatre and Nokia Plaza. The 40,000 square foot Nokia Plaza serves as the central core of the L.A. Live campus and features a number of large LED screens that beam advertisements down on to shoppers. The first phase of development also included a retail plaza for shopping and underground parking garage that will hold a fraction of the projects roughly 4,000 parking spaces[52]. The second phase provided further luxurious amenities to the sprawling campus including ESPN television studios, numerous restaurant and arcade complexes, nightclubs, and a Grammy museum. The third and final phase of the project included 54-story Ritz Carlton hotel and a number of other ancillary office buildings and upscale residences[53]. The hotel is scheduled to open its doors before the start of summer, which will mark the completion of the L.A. Live project. Such an up-scale project would in no way cater to or benefit the local population.

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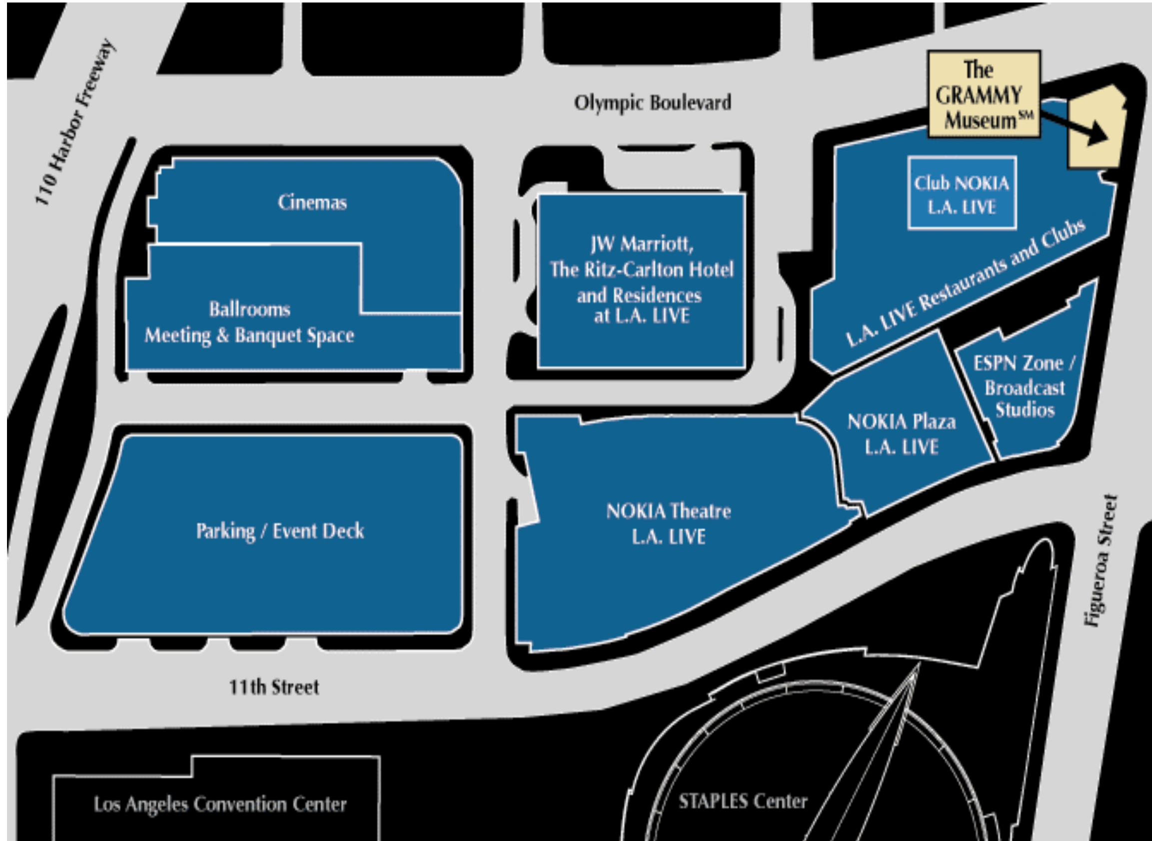
[52] *Introduction, About Section*. Nokia Theatre at L.A. Live, 2010.
[53] Christopher Hawthorne. "It Has No Place." *Los Angeles Times* 3 Dec. 2008.

Figure 4: Campus map of the L.A. Live project located in downtown Los Angeles



Source: "Location". Grammy Museum Website. 2010.

The process in building such a grandiose project was not met without its share of opposition by local community based organizations, advocates, and community members. The L.A. Live project was designed with the purpose of catering to a clientele that was much wealthier and affluent than the surrounding resident population. The project would create a number of problems for local community members including displacement, rising rents, loss of parking, increased traffic and noise pollution, and other environmental costs. Local residents had faced similar problems just a few years prior when the Staples Center sports complex was being developed in the late 1990's[54]. Initially, the developers of the project had no intention of incorporating any type of

[54] Scott Cummings. "Mobilization Lawyering: Community Economic Development in the Figueroa Corridor." *UCLA Public Law Series* (2006). p. 17.

consultation, aid, or benefits package that would directly involve and positively impact the surrounding community members. However, community organizing by a number of organizations, including future Right to the City Alliance members, would change all of that.

The announcement of the development for the L.A. Live complex came in May of 2002 as the owners of the Staples Center announced their intentions to build a Sports and Entertainment district directly across from the building[55]. Almost immediately, mobilization efforts were undertaken by local organizations in order to protect the rights and help negotiate a community benefits package for the nearby resident population. Forcing the developers to address the community needs into their planning and building processes was viewed as paramount by the organizations. Such actions would help democratize the process and make it more equitable for oft-marginalized interests. This group of organizations formed a collective alliance as the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice (FCCEJ) and was comprised of a number of organizations from various backgrounds and models. SAJE, LAANE, ACORN, AGENDA, and the Esperanza Housing Corporation and numerous other organizations aligned themselves and lent support to the Figueroa Corridor Coalition. The coalition also aligned themselves with local labor unions that were involved in the development of the complex, which would inevitably supply them with a key point of leverage when it came to negotiating a community rights agreement for the project[56]. The labor unions in Los Angeles carry a tremendous amount of influence with local government officials and could prove instrumental in helping the FCCEJ acquire the most comprehensive community benefits

[55] Ibid. 18.
[56] Ibid. 18-9.

package possible. To achieve this goal, the FCCEJ and its allies set forth on negotiating a community benefits agreement with the developers of the new Sports and Entertainment District. A community benefits agreement, commonly referred to as a CBA, is a legally binding contract under which the developer provides specific community benefits in exchange for the coalition's promise to fully support the project[57]. By creating a CBA that is legally binding, developers are held much more accountable for completing the community arrangements that they guarantee.

While the primary negotiating team that was working on the CBA for the Coalition was made up of organizers, the process was democratized to ensure community members had their fair share of input as well. The FCCEJ put together a team of neighborhood leaders who attended all meetings with the developers, provided feedback on proposals, and conveyed the information they gathered back to the local community. After trading proposals back and forth for a number of months, a final agreement was reached between the FCCEJ and the developers on May 30, 2001. "Under the agreement, FCCEJ agreed both to release its right to oppose the development project (which included bringing lawsuits, taking administrative actions, and expressing public opposition) and to provide affirmative support for the project"[58]. Contained within the agreement were promises of local affordable housing construction, parking permit provisions, park and recreation development, local hiring and job training programs, and living wage

[57] Greg LeRoy, Julian Gross, and Madeline Janice-Aparicio. *Community Benefits Agreements: Making Development Projects Accountable*. Rep. Good Jobs First and the California Partnership For Working Families, 2005. p. 5.
[58] Scott Cummings. "Mobilization Lawyering: Community Economic Development in the Figueroa Corridor." *UCLA Public Law Series* (2006). p. 23.

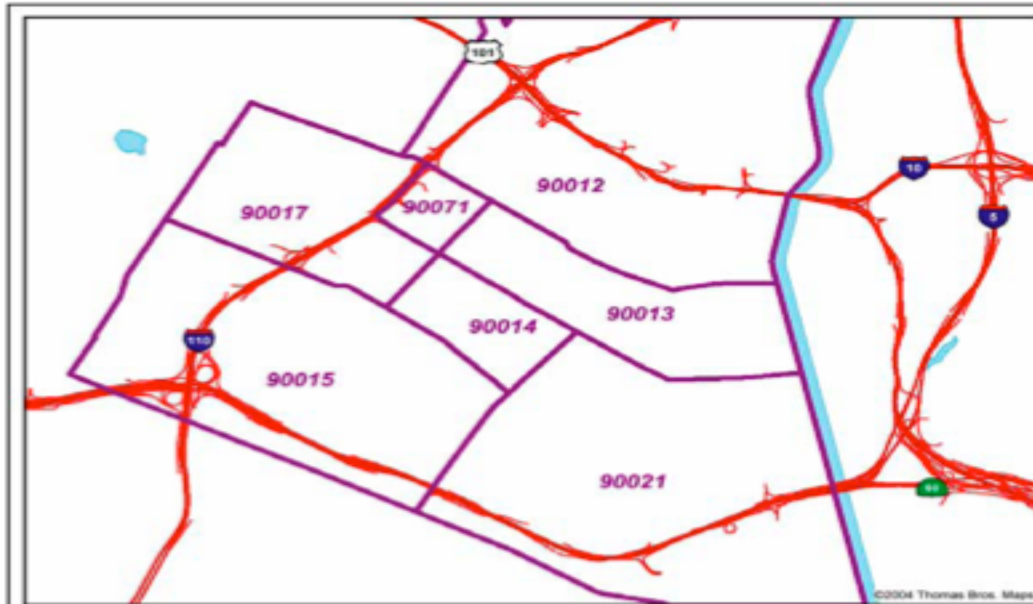
guarantees for local employees[59]. By reaching a settlement, the developers and coalition of community organizations were both able to get what they want by means of a more democratic, if not forced, process. The agreement allowed for the developers to secure government subsidies and funding and move forward their project without opposition that typically slows down permit and zoning processes. On the other hand, the local community was able to secure a tremendous package of benefits that would guarantee that the community would reap some semblance of reimbursement for the negative consequences of the site's construction. The success of the FCCEJ in securing this agreement helped spawn the proliferation of similar types of agreements in other local areas of Los Angeles that were subjected to similar types of new, large-scale urban developments.

Demographics

For the purpose of this paper, I will define the downtown area of Los Angeles physically and demographically as to include all urban dwellers located within zip codes 90012-90015, 90017, 90021, and 90071. This represents the same geographic indicators that were utilized by the Downtown Center Business Improvement District for their 2008 study on the demographics of the downtown area (see Figure 5). The area encompasses a number of historic neighborhoods including Chinatown, Pico Union, Little Tokyo, Bunker Hill and Chavez Ravine.

[59] Ibid. 24.

Figure 5: Downtown Los Angeles, as defined by Zip Codes



Source: "Downtown Los Angeles Demographic Study 2008". The Los Angeles Downtown Business Improvement District. 2008, p. 4.

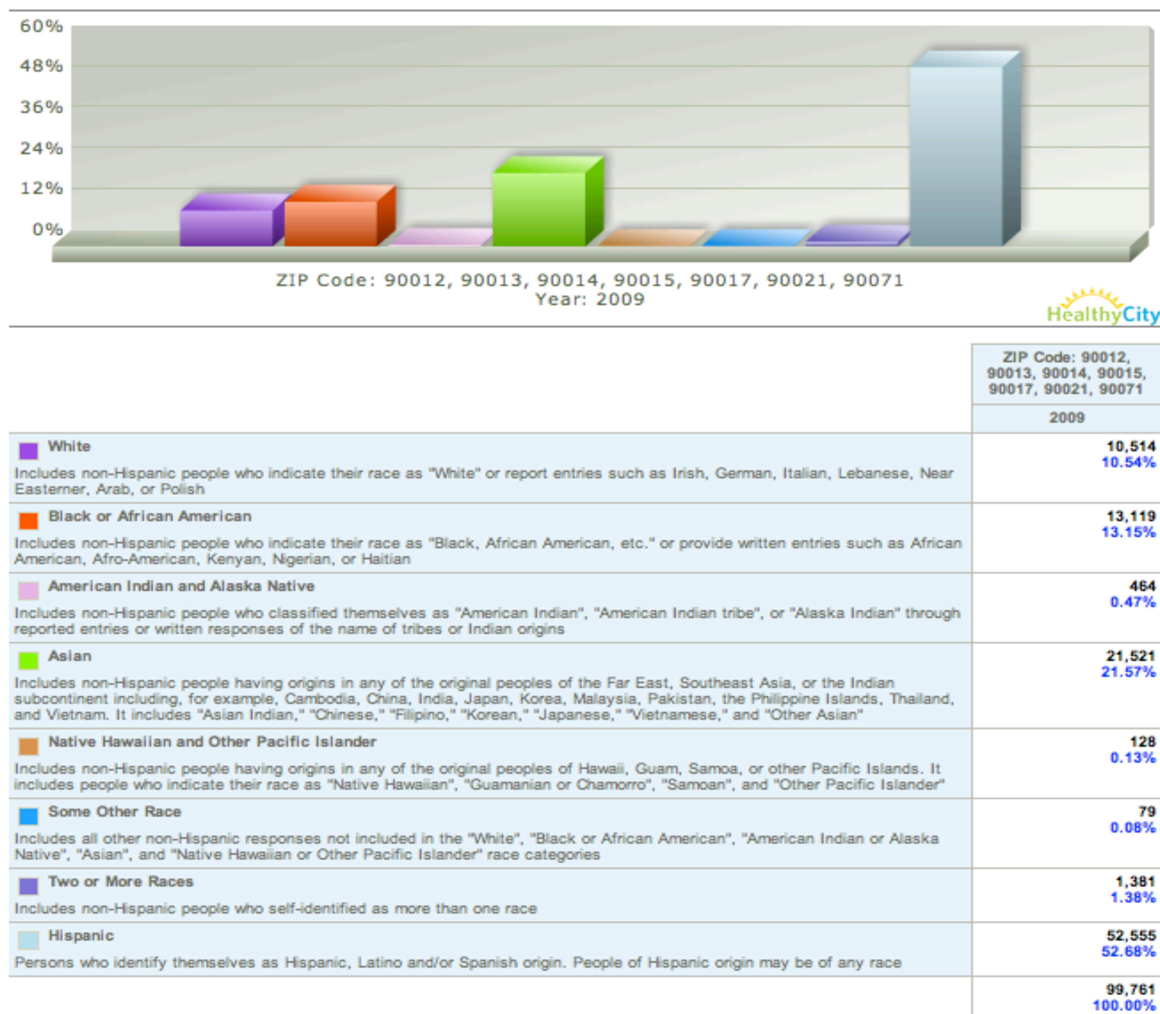
Various freeways bound the region on three sides, and the Los Angeles River represents the eastern boundary. The 101 Freeway runs along the northern border, the 10 Freeway marks the southern boundary, and the 110 Freeway comprises the western barrier of downtown. These four physical boundaries create a square-like geographic space that represents an area of roughly 5.3 square miles[60]. This region comprises a number of areas that are zoned for business, residential and commercial uses. In total, the area within the defined geographical boundaries maintains a residential population of roughly 40,000, but as many as 500,000 individuals inhabit the area during peak hours on workdays[61]. This swell in the overall population can be attributed to the heavy influx of

[60] *Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood*. City-Data, 2008.
[61] *Downtown Los Angeles Demographic Study 2008*. Rep. Downtown Center Business Improvement District, 2008 p. 3.

day workers to the area from surrounding neighborhoods, Los Angeles County, and the rest of southern California.

The demographics of downtown Los Angeles have also greatly evolved over time. Today, the area is a melting pot of ethnicities and nationalities from all over the globe. As of 2009, the total resident population within the eight area codes that comprise downtown Los Angeles totaled 99,761, with roughly 20,000 residents under the age of 18. Of the total population, over 50% identified as non-white Hispanics (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Ethnic Breakdown of Downtown Los Angeles Region (2009)

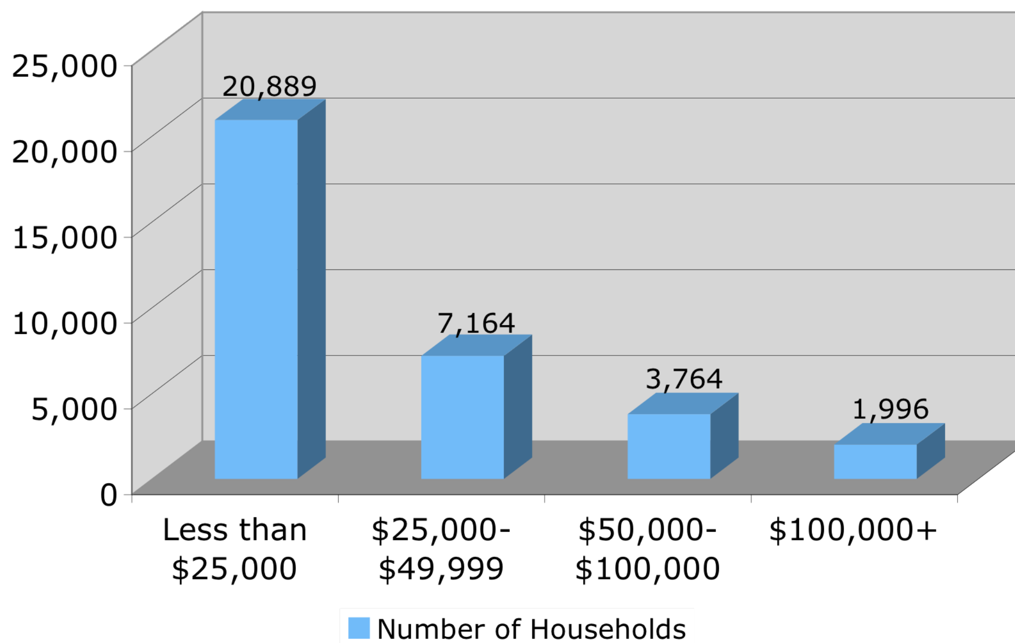


	ZIP Code: 90012, 90013, 90014, 90015, 90017, 90021, 90071
	2009
White Includes non-Hispanic people who indicate their race as "White" or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Near Easterner, Arab, or Polish	10,514 10.54%
Black or African American Includes non-Hispanic people who indicate their race as "Black, African American, etc." or provide written entries such as African American, Afro-American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian	13,119 13.15%
American Indian and Alaska Native Includes non-Hispanic people who classified themselves as "American Indian", "American Indian tribe", or "Alaska Indian" through reported entries or written responses of the name of tribes or Indian origins	464 0.47%
Asian Includes non-Hispanic people having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam. It includes "Asian Indian," "Chinese," "Filipino," "Korean," "Japanese," "Vietnamese," and "Other Asian"	21,521 21.57%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Includes non-Hispanic people having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands. It includes people who indicate their race as "Native Hawaiian", "Guamanian or Chamorro", "Samoan", and "Other Pacific Islander"	128 0.13%
Some Other Race Includes all other non-Hispanic responses not included in the "White", "Black or African American", "American Indian or Alaska Native", "Asian", and "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander" race categories	79 0.08%
Two or More Races Includes non-Hispanic people who self-identified as more than one race	1,381 1.38%
Hispanic Persons who identify themselves as Hispanic, Latino and/or Spanish origin. People of Hispanic origin may be of any race	52,555 52.68%
	99,761 100.00%

Source: HealthyCity.org, Nielsen Claritas Inc.

The resident population in the downtown area has a relatively low household income when compared to the rest of Los Angeles. According to 2009 statistics, roughly 45% of the resident population survived on a household income of $15,000 or less. Furthermore, roughly 83% of the local population survived on household incomes that equaled $50,000 or less per year (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Annual Household Income Breakdown of Downtown Los Angeles (2009)



Source: HealthyCity.org, Nielsen Claritas Inc.

<u>Asset Mapping</u>

As these statistics show, the area of downtown Los Angeles is predominantly comprised of low-income communities of color. History has shown that these types of neighborhoods are often at the greatest risk for displacement, gentrification, abuse by local government for “re-development”, and exclusion from participation in urban planning. Local government and planning has also played a role in the inequality of the area by providing minimal amounts of public social and physical assets within the built

environment. Limiting these type of invaluable resources within a community severely limits the ability for urban dwellers to fully access their right to the city. As previously mentioned within the literature review, these types of community assets include public and open green space and the accessibility of public transportation. Democratizing the process of planning by engaging local community members could work to progressively solve some of these inequities.

Figure 8: Parks and Open Space Acreage per 1,000 people in Downtown Los Angeles

Source: HealthyCity, Nielsen Clartias, 2009.

As the map shows, the majority of residents within the downtown area have less than six acres of public green space per 1,000 people. The largest expanse of public green space that appears within the downtown area is Pershing Square, located between 5th and 6th street in the heart of downtown. The park is only one square block in size and has become increasingly inaccessible over the years due to the preference given in planning to cars over pedestrians. Seeking input from the community could help make the space more open and viable for local residents. Many subtle aesthetic and physical changes, such as adding walkways that lead into the center of the park and replacing low lying shrubs with grass, could make the shared space a much more appealing and inviting realm for the public to invest in and utilize. A metro station has been made adjacent to the park in recent years, which has made it more accessible, but there are still plenty of improvements that can be done to increase universal access to such a valuable and viable resource. Increasing accessibility to an area like Pershing Square is also just a start. The proliferation of pocket parks and other viable open, public space is essential towards increasing spatial justice for residents within the downtown area of the city. Quality parks are vital resources for increasing social capital and developing more vibrant and cohesive communities.

The lack of access and availability to variable modes of public transportation has also severely limited the right to the city for urban dwellers that lack the financial resources to afford an automobile. At one time, Henry Huntington had created the largest interurban streetcar network in the United States for the city of Los Angeles, but the system was inevitably displaced by automotive technology and a perceived public desire

for increased freedom of movement[62]. Again, rather than seeking out the voice of the local community, planners simply created perceptions of local desires and then implemented them into the transportation designs. Today, the Metro and Rapid Transit systems that exist within the city are very slow and disjointed, featuring a primarily low-income, immigrant population of riders that utilize the public transportation to get to and from their places of work. Creating a more diverse series of destinations that would allow riders to use the rapid transit system as more than a home-to-work resource, could allow for further gains in terms of social capital, spatial justice, and equal and opportune access to the city for all urban dwellers.

Planning Within a Socialist Context: The Case of Caribia

History and Ideology

In November of 2006, President Chavez and the Housing Ministry of Venezuela put forth a plan to create a series of new metropolitan developments with the intention of revolutionizing the urban landscape through physical and social structures. The idea was to fully incorporate socialist models and ideals into nearly every aspect of the city. From architecture to agriculture, the overarching goal was to develop a modern utopia grounded in the principles of resound and progressive equality for all citizens in an urban setting. While it is not scheduled for completion until sometime in the year 2012, the construction of Caribia just outside the national capital of Caracas represents the initial prototype for this grand plan as crafted by Chavez. When completed, the city of Caribia will be able to house a residential population of roughly 100,000 people. The current plan involves taking citizens from one of the poorest and most decrepit neighbors in

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[62] Jonathon E. D. Richmond. *The Mythical Conception of Rail Transit in Los Angeles*. Rep. University of Sydney, 11 Nov. 1996. p. 2.

Caracas known as Federico Quiroz, and moving them in to the newly constructed residential complexes once the city is fully completed[63]. Federico Quiroz is located in an area of the city that is prone to heavy flooding and mudslides and the city of Caribia would offer the residents much safer and protected residences.

The fundamental driving force behind the Caribia experiment was to develop a new urban atmosphere that is both environmentally sustainable and fully capable of providing equal social rights to the city for all citizens. Chávez has numerous plans built in to the design for Caribia that will completely separate it from the hegemonic social structures that exist within cities in capitalist contexts. First and foremost, Caribia will seek to provide every individual citizen with an identical voice in matters of local politics. Each of the roughly ten housing complexes built within the city, will feature their very own community council[64]. These councils will be developed in such a way as to provide every person who lives in the complex with an equal say in all community issues that affect their area. The councils themselves will be responsible for dealing with common issues that plague all urban geographies such as crime and drug use. The hope is that this type of structure will remove any form of elitism that would exist within such a community structure.

The sense of equality that Caribia is to evoke can further be seen in the city's basic geography. Each housing tenement is comprised of four story apartment complexes (See figure 8). Every apartment will feature the same general layout: 72 square meters

[63] Loc. Cit.
[64] Sarah M. Llana. "Chavez Seekks Changri-La with 'Socialist Cities'" *Christian Science Monitor* (2008).

divided into three bedrooms, a living-dining room, kitchen, bathroom, and laundry area[65]. Such a simple yet practical design eliminates one of the main issues that typically increase stratification amongst contemporary social classes. However, such uniformity has the potential to perpetuate a system of monotony that could hinder Caribia's cultivation of a unique and diverse new urbanity. This type of near perfect equality in housing rights is very unique to the pre-planned "Socialist Eutopia". As stated earlier, driving capitalist ideologies encourage grandiose development and concentrates more affluent housing tracts in certain sectors of the city. In Caribia, a university, hospital, sports complexes, state run factories and parks will also be featured in such a way as to allow more universal access for every citizen of the town. However, Chavez and his advisors crafted all of these design elements with no input from those that are to inhabit the new city.

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[65] Radio Nacional de Venezeual. "President Chavez Verified Progress of Caribia Socialist City". Press Release. 2008.

Figure 8: A partial aerial site plan model for Caribia development. Red roofed apartment complexes can be seen with attached green space for farming and gardens.

Source: "Foro Latinomericano", SkyScraperLife, 2009.

This unique vision for Caribia is further revolutionary in the Housing Ministry's dedication towards making the city completely self-sustaining. Environmental consciousness was paramount to Chávez when he and his advisors began to develop their layout of the city. With regards to food, every set of apartment complexes will feature gardens and small fields that will serve as staging grounds for crop production. Every local housing unit in Caribia will be responsible for maintaining and cultivating their own little plot of appropriated land[66]. Not only does this help to embrace a sense of community within the city, but it also gives every citizen a sort of personal investment within the society. This personal investment instills within the society a greater sense of belonging and motivation to maintain a positive city structure. Chávez was quoted as

[66] Juan Forero. "Chavez'z Socialist City Rises." *The Washington Post* 27 Nov. 2007.

saying, “The socialist cities are ecological cities for the family, for the people…not for consumerism”[67]. These policies put in place will make Caribia nearly completely self-reliant and capable of surviving without the high levels of outside tourism or consumerism that plague most capitalist urban centers.

However, this is not to say that the vision for Caribia that Chávez has laid forth has not met its fair share of critics, both nationally and abroad. The main detractors say that the President is being too dogmatic and headstrong in his rush to build Caribia and the rest of his pre-fabricated “socialist cities” without first seeking consultation from community members and the Venezuelan citizenry. Little outside consultation has taken place, and that has led many to believe that the utopian dream will lack certain necessary functionalities. How can a city funded on principles of social equity not incorporate the people within the planning process? One local urban planner from Caracas was quoted as saying, “The majority of socialist cities built in socialist countries have failed. When you create something by ideological decree, it is usually incapable of fully responding to the needs of the people. Cities have their own origin, develop on their own and have their own dynamic”[68]. Critics argue that the artificial and undemocratic fabrication of this type of city is unnatural and will eventually lead to its downfall. Messing with the natural, organic city dynamic may have negative repercussions with regards to sustainability. Skeptics also point to some fundamental flaws with regards to the requirements demanded upon Caribia’s population. For instance, how is a mechanic, who has worked solely with cars his entire life, supposed to forget everything he has learned and take up a

[67] Sarah M. Llana. "Chavez Seekks Changri-La with 'Socialist Cities'" *Christian Science Monitor* (2008).
[68] Juan Forero. "Chavez'z Socialist City Rises." *The Washington Post* 27 Nov. 2007.

more agrarian lifestyle cultivating his own personal food supply? It is these type of issues, they argue, that will eventually lead Caribia and the rest of the "socialist city utopian enterprise" to fail, unless some changes are made in the city's social and cultural dynamics.

Comparing the Two Models

In terms of promoting and exercising democratic planning principles, both political contexts have failed. This universal top-down ideology, which can be seen across both political contexts, has created an inherent system that is incapable of delivering the right to the city to all urban dwellers. Certain sectors of the population remain wholly excluded from the process and this effectively removes their voice from the urban environment. As seen in the case study of downtown Los Angeles, urban planning within a capitalist context is inherently unconcerned with issues of spatial justice and equity and therefore sees no need to incorporate a democratized social component into the planning process. Planning within a capitalist context asks, why seek to engage the voice of the people when the rights of property and profit are paramount? The preeminent principle of urban planning within this context is to fracture, change, and rebuild in order to increase forms of efficiency and profit. Moreover, development within a capitalist context is wholly designed around allowing the free market to take effect and guide planning, and is therefore not rooted in any type of coherent form of concrete urban planning principles. While the case study of Caribia shows that the planning model within a socialist context does address some of the flaws that manifest themselves within the capitalist context, it still falls short in incorporating an inherently democratic system of planning that directly places power back in the hands of the people

to design their own urban environment. Without a voice in the processes, the citizens of Caribia cannot fully access their right to the city. The urban environment that surrounds them was not created through their own image, but rather the idyllic decree of a single man. Until these inherent issues in the processes and structures of planning are addressed, a universal right to the city cannot be fully attained, regardless of associated political context.

When it comes to evolving current planning practices towards creating a more coherent right to the city platform, there are a number of inherent advantages that Caribia has in creating improved and more equitable forms of spatial justice. The most obvious and apparent is the development's location in relative splendid seclusion and lack of a pre-existing built environment. The city of Caribia is being constructed in an area that has not previously been touched by any sort of urban development. Therefore, it is essentially a blank canvas on which the city and its population can truly paint a picturesque dream with no limitations that can come with an existing built environment. An area like downtown Los Angeles must work to manipulate and transform over one hundred years of urban planning that has manifested itself in the current stratified and disjointed infrastructure that exists today. This makes new and progressive development more difficult as it must be capable of working within these given, pre-existing limitations. While it is not impossible for an area like downtown Los Angeles to make strides towards addressing issues such as spatial justice and inequality, the solutions must be able to work within the confines of existing conditions that have been developed throughout the city's urban planning history. This is not to say that the model of Caribia is wholly ideal. The processes by which the physical and social environment of the city

has been created are entirely undemocratic and the public is granted no power in forms of decision making and planning. For both of these case studies, more democratic and participatory engagement in the planning process must be realized in order for their respective urban populations to attain a truly unequivocal and universal right to the city. Organizing around this central ideal can help move all urban environments towards the ideal as theorized by Lefebvre.

Organizing for the Right to the City

Due to the structural inability of urban planning within a capitalist context to facilitate design initiatives that are capable of advocating and supporting spatial justice, the struggle for increasing the urban populations' right to the city has been taken up by a number of community based organizations in large urban centers across the United States. From Los Angeles to Miami, San Francisco to New York City, groups are engaging in coalition building as a means of advocating for spatial justice and mobilizing the struggle of urbanizing human rights within the United States. In January of 2007, over thirty organizations from seven major cities across the country came together in Los Angeles to adopt a unified and cohesive framework around these very issues.

The national summit of organizations that took place in Los Angeles was driven by the goal of grounding human rights in the real lives and struggles of communities in the United States and utilizing this human rights framework to unite and elevate community-organizing initiatives for more democratic civic participation[69]. The summit was led by the Miami Workers Center, the Los Angeles organization Strategic Actions

[69] Gihan Perera. "Claiming the Right to the City: A Question of Power." Right to the City Alliance, 2008. p. 1.

for a Just Economy (SAJE), and the Tenants and Workers United of Northern Virginia, but also featured organizations from Boston, New Orleans, New York City, and San Francisco. All of the attending organizations at the conference faced similar pressures of displacement and gentrification within their respective communities[70]. The issue of gentrification is not inherently local to one specific city or region. Instead, it is an inbuilt consequence of planning within a capitalist context that plague all major metropolitan areas within the United States. The consequence of gentrification is due in large part to the lack of democratic and participatory planning models that actively engage all residential communities and neighborhoods. This universal problem served as a unifying rallying point for all Alliance members. However, gentrification was not their sole unifier. Each organization shares devotion for the advancement of more democratic civic participation and right to the city principles to ensure that neighborhoods exist to serve the people rather than capital.

The conference featured debate, discussion, and exploration into the issues that have fostered tremendous spatial inequality within many metropolitan areas of the United States and potential campaigns that could help move the urban environment toward solutions that would facilitate more progressive and equitable designs of urban planning theory and practice. Groups discussed the many ways in which neo-liberalism and the privatization of land use had allowed for entire cities to be turned over to land developers with no real stipulations or promises of socioeconomic and spatial equality. These developers solely sought profits with no regards for issues of social justice and welfare. The member organizations quickly realized that a number of the issues that they were all

[70] Loc. Cit.

fighting within their respective cities including housing, transportation, education, LGBT rights to space, and rights of culture, are all inextricably related and should be included within campaigns toward establishing the "Right to the City" movement[71]. Uniting all of these partner organizations under a common platform and strategy was seen as vital for the development of power and mobilization. This national coalition could provide a much more dynamic and cohesive front than splintered factions operating on isolated, localized fronts.

One of the primary accomplishments of this first meeting of the Right to the City Alliance in 2007 was the formulation of a set of principles (See below). These principles advocated for the production of living conditions that meet the needs of *all* people. This goal would ultimately manifest itself in the form of twelve essential principles centered on everything from land use to reparations:

Principles of Unity for the Right to the City Alliance	
Principle	**Details**
Land for People vs. Land for Speculation	The right to land and housing that is free from market speculation and that serves the interests of community building, sustainable economies, and cultural and political space.
Land Ownership	The right to permanent public ownership of urban territories and land use.
Economic Justice	The right of working class communities of color, women, queer and transgender people to an economy that serves their interests.
Indigenous Justice	The right of First Nation indigenous people to their ancestral lands that have historical or spiritual significance, regardless of state borders and urban or rural settings.

[71] Loc. Cit.

Environmental Justice	The right to sustainable and healthy neighborhoods and workplaces, healing, quality care, and reparations for the legacy of toxic abuses such as brownfields, cancer clusters, and superfund sites.
Freedom from Police and State Harassment	The right to safe neighborhoods and protection from police, immigration, and vigilante repression.
Immigrant Justice	The right of equal access to housing, employment, and public services regardless of race, ethnicity, and immigration status and without threat of deportation by Immigration and Customs Enforcement or employers.
Services and Community Institutions	The right of working class communities of color to transportation, infrastructure, and services that reflect and support their cultural and social integrity.
Democracy and Participation	The right of community control and decision making over the planning and governance of the cities where we live and work, with full transparency and accountability, including the right to public information without interrogation.
Reparations	The right of working class communities of color to economic reciprocity and restoration from all local, national, and transnational institutions that have exploited or displaced the local economy.
Internationalism	The right to support and build solidarity between cities across national boundaries, without state intervention.
Rural Justice	The right of rural people to economically healthy and stable communities that are protected from environmental degradation and economic pressures that force migration to urban areas.

Source: 'Claiming the Right to the City: A Question of Power', 2008, p. 13

These principles must be coupled with proper organizing and planning in order for its ideals to become fully capable of being applied to the urban environment and replicated in areas all over the United States. Since their initial conference in 2007, the Right to the City Alliance has staged a number of subsequent conferences, panels, and campaigns on

both local and national levels. In June of 2007, over 300 leaders from member organizations across the country descended upon Atlanta to attend the first ever United States Social Forum as a part of the Right to the City Alliance. This represented the first true business meeting for the Alliance and membership structure becomes fully established and ratified for the organization. In February of 2008, the Alliance organized its first nationwide mobilization, scheduling a "March on the Mayors" in Miami as an alternative to the annual US Conference of Mayors being held at the same time[72]. As of 2009, the Alliance had swollen the ranks of its membership to over forty organizations that span eight different cities across the United States.

Organizations involved with the Right to the City Alliance are recognized in two different categories: core members and allied members (See below). Core members are, "Organizations within RTCA regions/cities that are building a base of grassroots leaders in low-income, working class communities of color to strategically challenge neo-liberal economic policies"[73]. Core members are also expected to help provide political direction for their regional/national network, engage in fundraising activities, attend national meetings, and support right to the city principles of democracy and civic participation. Allied members are defined as, "Individuals and organizations actively supporting base-building through technical assistance, legal, research and media support, and fundraising"[74]. These individuals and organizations support national/regional/local campaigns at the direction of Core Member organizations and the national steering committee. They are expected to fully promote right to the city principles and represent

[72] *Our History*. Right to the City Alliance, 2010.
[73] *Right to the City*. Community Voices Heard, 2010.
[74] Loc. Cit.

the Alliance with positive energy and support. The formation of these distinctions helped to create a more fluid ideological framework that effectively divides responsibilities towards creating more unified and cohesive actions toward attaining democratic principles.

Right to the City Alliance Members (2010)		
City	**Core Members**	**Allied Members**
Boston	• Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE) • Centro Presente • City Life – Vida Urbana • Chinese Progressive Association	
DC Metro Area	• One DC • Tenants & Workers United (TWU)	
Los Angeles	• East LA Community Corporation (ELACC) • Esperanza • Koreatown Immigrant Workers Association (KIWA) • South Asian Network (SAN) • Strategic Alliance for a Just Economy (SAJE) • Union de Vecinos	• Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles
New Orleans	• Dirty Dozen (D12) • Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) • Safe Streets	
New York City	• Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) • Community Voices	• Pratt Center for Community Development • Urban Justice Center

	Heard (CVH) • Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals For Community Empowerment (FIERCE) • Families United For Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE) • Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES) • Make the Road NY • Mothers on the Move (MOM) • New York City AIDS Housing Network • Picture the Homeless • West Harlem Environmental Action Inc.	
Miami	• Miami Workers Center (MWC) • Power U • Vecinos Unidos	• Florida Legal Services
San Francisco Bay Area	• Chinese Progressive Association, San Francisco • Just Cause Oakland (JCO) • People Organized to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights (PODER) • People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER) • St. Peter's Housing Committee • South of Market Community Action Network	

	(SOMCAN)	
Providence	• Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) • Olneyville Neighborhood Association (ONA)	
National/Other		• The Advancement Project • Center for Media Justice • Center for Social Inclusion • DataCenter • Planners Network

Source: "Who We Are", Right to the City Alliance, 2010

The work developed and put forth by the Right to the City Alliance helps to demonstrate the type of power that can be generated through the mass organization of members of the working class community. The Alliance acts as a tremendous networking tool for these organizations to create a more coherent and unified voice in the development of right to the city initiatives that pertain to urban planning, social policy, and spatial justice. As stated by Harmony Goldberg, "These networks reflect a growing tide of resistance against the impact of neo-liberalism on urban communities in the United States"[75]. The strategies utilized by RTCA members are directly rooted in place-based community organizing methods. Unifying marginalized persons and communities towards a more cohesive voice can help advance and force developers and planning departments to recognize the needs and desires of a given community or neighborhood. The progress of this type of place-based community organizing strategies directly represents a movement towards democratic planning in action.

[75] Harmony Goldberg. *Building Power in the City: Reflections on the Emergence of the Right to the City Alliance and the National Domestic Worker's Alliance*. *Right to the City Alliance*. 2008. p. 7.

Action on the Local Front: The Case of Los Angeles

The men and women associated with the Los Angeles regional network of the Right to the City Alliance were some of the most influential and pivotal in founding the national organization. Many local community organizing leaders at the time, such as Gilda Haas at SAJE, were part of a local consortium of individuals that saw the necessity in bringing together a human rights framework on issues of land ownership, housing and public health. The sought to not only seek changes within the processes of local government and planning, but to bring real change and impact to the structures and overall power dynamic of the decision making process. According to Haas, "It was clear to me that if we didn't work with issues of power, it wouldn't make a difference"[76]. To create real and true progress on the local level, organizing needed to be done on a variety of fronts including spatial justice issues, fair economic development, and the institutional dynamics of power.

The People's Planning School, launched by SAJE in 2007, is a primary example of the type of campaigns local Alliance organizations utilize to advance the principles of democratic and participatory planning. The People's Planning School was created as a direct response to the political and economic transformation of the Figueroa Corridor around downtown Los Angeles. Residents in the area had long been subjected to displacement, gentrification, and marginalization through the encroachment of developers. The purpose of the school is to prepare local residents to take leadership in struggles of land use and development. The program helps them gain the skills necessary to effectively view and critique the plans coming into a community, and more

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[76] Gilda Haas. Telephone interview. 31 Mar. 2010.

importantly, how to create, design, and advocate for their own planned vision[77]. SAJE recognized a need to develop an organizing approach that could directly address the needs of the people in the redevelopment of the Figueroa Corridor area. The transformation of the Figueroa Corridor drew interest from a wide range of parties. "Slumlords are poised to cash out and sell their properties to developers, the University of Southern California is engaging in a master-planning process, which will have a deep, and long-term impact in the community. While USC conducts their process, the Los Angeles Planning Department is redrawing their South and Southeast Community Plans"[78]. What was noticeably lacking was a plan that would truly represent and voice the concerns of the local residential population. The People's School was designed as a forum for community members to create a vision of what they wanted the transformation of the Figueroa Corridor to look like in order to create more equitable forms of benefits. The plans and issues designed by the community were eventually brought before the City Council during their consideration of the Figueroa Corridor development project. The community did not belong to USC or the Los Angeles Planning Department, but rather the actual population that inhabited the area. By having direct knowledge of the space, local residents are the individuals best prepared to address community needs through planning. Developing this type of unified vision and plan for a community based directly off of member input helps to advance forward the ideals of democratic planning. It works to directly engage community members and develop the proper facilitations for their voice to be heard at a larger level. The Planning School is still being utilized by

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[77]."People's Planning School: Mark Cecil-Corbin." Making Sense, 2008.
[78] *People's Planning*. SAJE, 2008.

SAJE today as a means of continuing to create unique, people-centric visions of neighborhoods and space.

A number of individuals who worked within the Los Angeles regional network also engaged in conversations and meetings with individuals from other cities as a means of sharing information and developing more cohesive relationships to eventually take the campaign to more of a national level. This type of communication is essential to help the individuals involved in campaigning and organizing to learn from one another and create more unity within the overall alliance above the local level. According to Haas, "A really important thing was visiting people and making trips to visit each other to help spread ideas and bring the organization together"[79]. Bringing the regional networks together as a much more cohesive and unified force on the national level has been a primary goal for Alliance leaders. Los Angeles Alliance leaders have attended recent national events and workshops in Miami and Rhode Island as a means of continuing this level of communication and sharing best practices for developing campaigns centered around the advancement of democratic and participatory planning.

Action on the Local Front: The Case of Miami

The Miami regional network of the Right to the City Alliance has been another vital and extremely successful local battleground for the organization. Miami Workers Center executive director Gihan Perera has led the local efforts and their campaigns have been primarily focused around issues of immigration, economic, and social justice. However, some of their most impressive campaigns have come in combating the ever-increasing levels of gentrification within Miami and the surrounding areas. One of their

[79] Gilda Haas. Telephone interview. 31 Mar. 2010.

most significant and ongoing campaigns has been focused around the historical neighborhood of Overtown located just to the northwest of downtown Miami.

Overtown is one of the oldest and most historic communities in all of the Miami-Dade area. In its heyday, the predominantly African-American neighborhood had a vibrant middle-class population of roughly 40,000 people. However, in the 1960's a series of highways and freeways were developed through the core of the neighborhood causing the displacement of hundreds of families, all in the name of progress and capitalist driven urban development. The neighborhood's population and resources were decimated, and much of the remaining middle class chose to flee the area for more suburban residences. In total, more than 10,000 people were removed from the area, mirroring the abandonment that took place in many metropolitan areas across the country during the time period in the support of industrialization, commercialization, and working middle-class whites[80]. Today the neighborhood is one of the poorest and most neglected areas in all of Miami. More than 50 percent of area residents live below the federal poverty line, the median annual income for the area rests at just under $14,000, and approximately 90 percent of the resident populations are renters[81].

While the local government and commercial interests have long neglected this neighborhood, it has recently become a major area of interest for the city and developers. The urban renewal initiatives that have taken place in Miami since the 1980's have worked to try and restore the downtown area of the city and bring wealth and commerce back to the core. This "revitalization" of the city has made Overtown extremely valuable

[80] Samara, Tony Roshan, and Grace Chang. "Gentrifying Downtown Miami." *Race, Poverty and the Environment* (2008): p. 1.
[81] Loc. Cit.

due to its close proximity to downtown. The immediacy of a poor, Black neighborhood to downtown has long stood in local government's eyes as a glaring obstacle towards progressing plans for urban renewal. Instead of engaging the local population, local government would just prefer to move around them. The value of the land has attracted a number of developers to the area seeking to instill new affluence through luxury condominiums and shopping centers. Mayor Manny Diaz has long sought to cement the city's position as an economic, political, and cultural hub that is capable of attaining "world city" status. He views these types of urban renewal and redevelopment projects as paramount in attaining such a lofty goal, while holding little concern for local social welfare costs.

At the center of this redevelopment front has been the fight to preserve local public housing. In 2007, a number of local Right to the City Alliance members confronted and challenged the local government's failures in filling vacancies in public housing. "Miami has one of the highest levels of vacant public housing in the nation yet has done little to fill these vacancies, suggesting that the city would rather allow the empty units to fall into despair, condemn them, and 'redevelop' them"[82]. These local organizations have banded together to create a "Fill the Vacancies" campaign that has been led by the flagship Miami Workers Center. The waiting list for public assistance in housing has swollen to over 40,000 people in the Miami-Dade area and yet the Board of County Commissioners has allowed many public housing units to remain vacant for as long as five years[83]. There exists an egregious lack of concern for the safety and well

[82] Ibid. 2.
[83] Loc. Cit.

being of the local resident population. Instead, the rights of capitalist driven commercial interests are taking precedent.

The developer that has attracted the most negative attention has been the Detroit based Crosswinds Communities. Crosswinds is a deeply politically connected, privately held residential housing and development company that had been seeking approval to build a large tract of luxury condominiums in the Overtown neighborhood. The firm sought to develop these luxury homes on a plot of publicly owned land that had previously remained vacant for twenty years. The city handed over the land to the developer in a completely uncompetitive, no-bid process. Such a calculated decision was made without seeking any input from the existing community. The minimum yearly income to qualify for a home in the Crosswinds development was $40,000, which is nearly three times as high as the median family income for the resident population of Overtown. These housing options would be entirely unaffordable for residents within the local community. Power U and a number of locally based community organizations immediately began to organize around the issue and put forth every effort to slow, if not completely stop, the development. A study conducted by Jen Wolfe-Borum at Florida International University could cause as many as 6,000 residents to be displaced by the construction of the Crosswinds condominiums[84].

Figure 9 : Sketch of the design for the Crosswinds development in Overtown

[84] Jen Wolfe-Borum. *Can Our Workforce Afford Housing in Miami-Dade County?* Florida International University, 2006.

CROSSWINDS
in
Overtown Miami

Downtown Overtown: This drawing by UDA illustrates intense highrise development along NW 1st Avenue and Metrorail, stepping down to the smaller scaled buildings of Overtown's Folklife Village. Drawing provided by Collins Center for Public Policy.

Source: Collins Center for Public Policy, 2007

In order to help mobilize and centralize their organizing efforts, local community organizations working on the campaign called upon like-minded allies in the firm's home base of Detroit. Previous developments by the Crosswinds corporation had destroyed low-income neighborhoods of color in the Detroit area and the Miami organizations vowed to prevent a repeat in their area. Organizations from the two cities sent representatives back and forth to gather information and discuss strategies for combating the development. When a public hearing on the issue of the development was held in Miami, residents from Detroit were on hand to provide testimony on the damage that can be caused by such projects. This helped to emphasize the fact that gentrification is not

just a local or regional fight and bring together organizations to create a more unified front. Over the next couple of years, a series of legal proceedings and hearing took place over the contested land in Overtown. The issue was eventually brought before Miami-Dade county board of commissioners in March of 2006, and the panel voted unanimously to stand by a previous development deadline of August 1, 2007 that all but ended any chance of the development being built in Overtown[85]. This degree of action helped to fully showcase what the Right to the City Alliance chapters could work together towards the advancement of a common and unified cause.

Lessons Learned from RTCA for Democratic Planning

As the case studies of Miami and Los Angeles can attest to, the Right to the City Alliance has been able to develop a far-reaching collective of organizations that have proven capable of fostering positive change within a local context. One of the most positive consequences of this national network has been the increased communication and information sharing between organizations in different geographic regions. While local context makes every campaign waged by Alliance organizations unique, the issue of spatial justice is universal. This outlet has allowed different regional networks of the Alliance to communicate and translate best practice principles for campaigns with similar aims and motivations. In doing so, organizations can more precisely allocate their time, energy, and resources towards creating optimal solutions. This is extremely crucial for the Alliance to effectively manage and navigate the non-profit system. With financial resources and personnel constantly in short supply, the allocation of resources must be

[85] Desarae del Campo. "County Votes to Stand by Overtown Development Deadline." *Miami Today* 30 Mar. 2006.

done in as precise a manner as possible in order for the organizations to maintain a sustainable and efficient organizing model.

The Alliance has also proven to be highly successful in developing a collective leadership from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. As Gilda Haas attested to, "One of the real strengths [of the Alliance] lies in the intelligence of the people who lead and how committed they are to the principles"[86]. Bringing together individuals trained in a variety of avenues in urban planning, community organizing, and public policy are better able to mount comprehensive campaigns through calculated action. Furthermore, the diversity of leadership creates even more ample and dynamic avenues for information sharing both between and within different chapters. This array of perspective is essential for maintaining a broad organizational scope. A narrower focus would take away from the complexity and unique model that has been fostered by the Right to the City Alliance. Simultaneously, the Alliance must remain dedicated toward building and cultivating active leadership from within the collective membership. This bottom-up mentality allows members to not only foster, but also maintain a deep and resounding sense of efficacy toward the organization and the initiatives they are fighting for. Member leaders are also a vital resource in relaying information to the community at large and the encouragement of new member participation. Involving the people in the process of attaining the right to the city is equally important as achieving a universally positive end result.

As stated earlier, what makes the general model created by the Right to the City Alliance all the more unique has been their dynamic ability to construct and maintain

[86] Gilda Haas, Personal Interview, 31 Mar. 2010.

unity across varying degrees of difference. The organizations represented, and the members themselves, come from an extremely eclectic collection of social and political philosophies. The Alliance has routinely sought to unify this myriad of models by focusing on dialogue and shared practices. Difference is not only accepted, but also encouraged within the broader practical formation of the Alliance. Organizations invest themselves in practical work on a concrete set of issues and initiatives rather that focusing on managing a convoluted theoretical framework. This allows political difference to be handled within a central format of unity building as opposed to fostering faction.

Moving Forward: Advancing the Right to the City and Democratic Planning

In order for the right to the city movement to continue progressing forward, changes must occur on within the current infrastructure of planning models. This involves a deconstruction of the rigid hierarchy of planning departments towards more democratized practices that encourage public participation. Simultaneously, the strictly systematic government controlled processes of urban planning must evolve to better accommodate a philosophy that is predicated on placing the values and rights of the people before those of property and profit. A cohesive progression of these initiatives, coupled with the active campaigns of community coalitions like the Right to the City Alliance, have the capacity to create a sustainable model for planning in all forms of associated political contexts.

Moving Toward a Bottom-Up Model of Planning

In order to create more socially and spatially just geographies, contemporary planning models must evolve to allow for greater transparency and accessibility to the general public. In this regard, democratizing and decentralizing the planning process is paramount. As the case studies of Los Angeles and Caribia have both shown, there currently exists an inherent top-down approach in the planning and development of space, regardless of political context. This approach has routinely served to limit the capacity and ability of individuals to manifest the urban environment in their own image and vice versa, which is one of the preeminent principles of the right to the city philosophy. Ideally, the city should be a physical reflection of the values and beliefs of those that inhabit a given urban environment and community. Therefore, the general population needs to be granted greater access within matters of urban design, planning, and implementation. To this extent, the people living within a defined geographic location are the individuals that are most capable and best equipped to allocate space for different purposes, as they are the individuals that maintain the greatest level of physical, social, and emotional investment intrinsically tied to that space. Invariably, a bottom-up urban planning philosophy implies a more sophisticated engagement between urban planners and the local population.

Moving towards a more bottom-up and democratic process of planning can be achieved in a variety of ways. First and foremost, planners should seek to actively engage the communities that they are representing. In Los Angeles, a small number of proactive individuals and organizations are beginning to apply these principles in certain communities and neighborhoods. One particularly effective outlet towards achieving this

goal is participatory planning. Participatory planning entails taking scale models of communities to the people and allowing them to physically allocate and shape the designs of development. James Rojas, who has worked as a transportation planner in Los Angeles since 1997, started a non-profit known as LAtino Urban Forum that seeks to directly inform and incorporate marginalized groups in the urban planning process through participatory planning projects[87]. One of Rojas' most successful and innovative community projects is a planning game he refers to as, "Place It". This game utilizes recycled materials such as Lego pieces and other tools as interactive building blocks in order to create a model for an urban community. "Members of the community can rearrange the models as they please to better describe their preferences and have a fuller understanding of the planning process"[88]. Activities such as participatory planning and mapping allow for communities to become directly involved in the physical construction of planning space. Utilized within local planning departments, these practices would allow for community members to take a more active voice in the planning process. In turn, urban planners could utilize the experiences to collect data on common needs and desires. Events such as these could be openly advertised and take place on weekends in easily accessible public forums in order to bring in the largest possible audience of local community members. All urban dwellers should be allowed to engage in this type of participatory planning regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, or legal status.

To further increase the transparency of the planning process, community members should also be allowed to become more actively involved in the implementation and

[87] Fred Camino. "Metro Planner Enters Pepsi Contest to Fund Nationwide Interactive Planning Workshop." *The Source* (2010).
[88] Loc. Cit.

monitoring of development. Even the best action plan created through participatory tools does not fully guarantee equitable and just solutions to community problems. The failure of local governments to properly implement best design practices can often be attributed to a lack of collective will by urban planners and planning institutions. Therefore, communities should be routinely given updates on the progress of development and allowed to engage in public forums that are capable of addressing questions or concerns. To address these issues, some cities have begun to turn to interactive social networks as a means of informing the people on planning developments. For instance, the Department of Plannoing, Building, and Code Enforcement in San Jose, California, has recently started utilizing a Facebook page as a means of updating the local population on new initiatives and planning developments[89]. These forums could also be utilized as a means to gather information on changing or augmenting planning design if community needs are not being properly and proactively addressed. Local governments and planners must be subjected to these public audits in order to ensure that they are being held accountable in creating more spatially just development that better accommodates the wants and desires of the people. Upon the completion of a project, planners should also solicit feedback from the community in order to gauge their evaluation of the project. These practices will allow contemporary urban planning to better avoid such pitfalls as "fad planning" and the influence of special interest groups.

Sustainability

Sustainability is another feature that could be more prominently infused within urban planning practice and design to further increase democratization and the right to

[89] *Department of Building, Planning, and Code Enforcement*. City of San Jose, 2010.

the city for all urban dwellers. It is imperative to formulate both local and national planning frameworks that encourage an integrated approach toward putting quality of life and sustainable development on the urban agenda. To this end, urban planning, transport, environmental, economic, social, health, and community interests must be willing to work on dismantling the barriers that exist between them, and re-focus their energies and resources towards collaborating on development for the greater good.

Creating more sustainable development does not mean focusing solely on environmentally conscious design practices. Sustainable development means ensuring a more just urban environment that is capable of improving the quality of life for all urban dwellers both now and for generations to come. Public policy and planning must work cohesively on a variety of fronts to achieve this goal. Planning offices should seek to support development that encourages social progress and recognizes the needs of all members of a given community, maintains effective protection of the surrounding natural and built environment, makes prudent use of precious natural resources, and is capable of maintaining a rich and secure level of economic activity and employment. Catering to all these needs, rather than specific interest groups, will help facilitate universal increases in social, political, and economic justice that can be justified and maintained for extended periods of time. Making planning and development more sustainable will allow cities to better allocate their resources towards facilities that can directly impact and increase issues of spatial justice.

Urban Land Reform

Focusing on urban land reform is another practical method by which local governments and planning offices can immediately and directly democratize planning

processes and help establish a right to the city for all people. The idea of urban land reform is predicated on the principle of redistributing land and land rights from the hands of the few to the hands of many. Doing so creates a more dynamic and democratized sense of ownership of space. The development of community land trusts, such as the one that came out of the Miami Workers Center campaign around the Crosswinds project, is one of the most thorough and comprehensive means of creating more spatially just and stable residential communities. Community land trusts are non-profit, democratic, community-based membership organizations that are given a section of land by local government to own and manage for community benefit[90]. Land trusts are especially effective in low-income neighborhoods because they are able to express community values through development lease terms and operating principles. This means that they are capable of directly ensuring that new development will carry community benefits along with it. Further added benefit is created in the ability of land trusts to maintain long-term affordability in terms of housing because they can secure sustainable land and property values. These actions takes certain tracts of land out of the hands of speculative markets and puts them back in direct control by the people. Directly entrusting the development of land to the people that inhabit it is the penultimate means of creating a right to the city for all urban dwellers.

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[90] Beverley Keefe, Gilda Haas, and Paige Cowett. *The Figueroa Corridor Strategy for Urban Land Reform*. SAJE.

Conclusion

This study was designed with the intention of understanding and advancing forms of democratic planning and equitable rights to the city as theorized by Henri Lefebvre. Case studies of urban planning in both a capitalist and socialist context showed that neither model has been able to fully address and create proper facilities that allow for a universal right to the city for all urban dwellers. As the studies showed, both political contexts have maintained an undemocratic, top-down ideology in urban planning. Neither political context has been able to fully incorporate democratic planning ideals that would help guarantee a right to the city for all sectors of the urban population. Urban planning within a capitalist context allows the free market to dictate urban land use and design, and while planning within a socialist context concerns itself with creating greater senses of social equality, it also utilizes a top-down approach to the processes of planning that innately removes the voice of marginalized persons in formulating fair and just development. This study therefore concludes that the problem of spatial inequity is inherently rooted within the un-democratized and centralized forms of planning, rather than a specific political context. Furthermore, this study provided a comprehensive analysis of the relative abilities and campaigns of community based organizing centered on the issue of right to the city. A national coalition of these organizations, collectively known as the Right to the City Alliance, have been able to wage a series of campaigns within the local context that have been directly rooted in organizing around a human rights framework that works to better incorporate underrepresented communities within decision making processes.

There are lessons to be learned from this study for urban planners and planning departments. For them, this study reveals that the government-controlled processes of urban planning must become democratized and transparent as a means of more adequately incorporating the general population into the folds of planning and spatial construction. Urban planners must also work to directly and comprehensively engage the communities they represent in order to develop a more accurate assessment of the concerns facing urban dwellers. Creating a more bottom-up process of urban planning, coupled with principles of sustainable development and urban land reform, would help deliver the physical construction of environment back into the hands of those that will directly inhabit its space. With the cohesive evolution of these principles and processes, we can create more spatially just forms of geography and space that are capable of addressing and providing a democratized and direct right to the city for all persons.

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