On the Practical Relevance of Marxist Thought

By Renee Toback

Progressives and socialists get very different press today than we did thirty years ago. What is unchanged from thirty years ago, however, is the status of "socialism" in the United States and the usefulness of Marxist analysis.

When I received the first issue of Planners Network thirty years ago, I was a graduate student at the University of Iowa and the newsletter was a few typewritten pages. Idealistic students and professors studied Mao and the contradictions of capitalist development. Activists struggled; "poor people" had movements and advocacy planners. It was a heady time and optimism was in the air. [Cont. on page 9]
The SEVENTH GENERATION

"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations." - From the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy

The Socialist City, Still
By Tom Angotti

Some thirty years ago when Planners Network started, many progressive planners proposed or discussed socialist alternatives to capitalist urban development and planning. Central planning in the Soviet Union, China and the emerging socialist nation of East Europe was a reality although there were differing judgments about the merits of these regimes. Many progressive planners went to Cuba and were inspired by the possibilities of revolutionary power. In the US, the civil rights, anti-war and new social movements were significant political forces and generated interest in socialism and Marxism. Superseding and unusual then to contemplate the prospect of planning without private property, even in North America. Marxist analysis was more commonly used to look at urban class and racial divisions often though the main theoreticians were European—North Americans have always had a strong pragmatist bent—Marxist categories were often used in urban analysis.

The Soviet Union is no longer and the mass movements have dispersed. With the Reagan Revolution, the entire political spectrum shifted to the right TINA ("There Is No Alternative") is touted as the only alternative. US free-market capital rules a global empire. The US model of sprawled, segregated urban development is spreading across the globe. The failed socialist alternatives are criticized for being utopian. Progressive planners in North America take part in the debates about New Urbanism, smart growth, equity planning, environmental justice and other major issues. But there's virtual silence when it comes to the themes of socialism and Marxism.

Is Marxism relevant today as a theoretical or practical reference for progressive planners? What does dialectical and historical materialism have to offer in explaining urban phenomena and charting the course for progressive planners that deal with issues such as displacement, environmental justice, transportation equity, housing equity and participatory democracy? What can we learn from the history of socialist cities? In charting alternatives to capitalist urban development, is there a place for socialist alternatives, and if so, what is it?

This issue of Progressive Planning offers some answers to these questions.

Marxism Isn't Religion
In this age of fundamentalism led by the Christian Coalition and its friends in the White House, all problems, including urban problems, are reduced to the supposed battle between good versus evil. The unregulated "market" is good and "planning" is evil. This simplistic dualism results in a simplistic public discourse about urban planning.

Marxism is commonly treated as simply an alternative of dogma. I never was religious and distrust all holy texts. So did Marx, who didn't like being called a Marxist. People use scriptures all the time to the bliss of the cruelest atrocities. So I'm not going to defend "Marxism."

Marxist fundamentalism isn't the answer to right wing fundamentalism. Yet this is the "Marxism" that is most often taught in Political Science 101, and too often proposed by self-declared Marxists. Those who simply reduce all problems to the struggle between an angelic working class and demonic capitalist class (or vice versa) belong in Bible School or on a throne. Dialectical and historical materialism, the basic methodology of Marxist thought and action, reject the use of simplistic dualisms, abstractions divorced from practice, and static social and economic categories.

Morris Ziff points out in this issue, in terms somewhat less than those not familiar with Marxism, how important methodology is to both our political and professional practice. Our all-American pragmatism pushes us too quickly to "make do" without evaluating the underlying class and social forces we're working with. Pragmatism is no doubt one of the occupational hazards of all practicing professionals, but it can create serious problems when it's used to shape political strategies. In her article, [footnote on page 11]
Looking at Participatory Planning in Cuba... through an Art Deco Window

By Marie Kennedy, Lorna Rivera and Chris Tilly

Last January we sat with about thirty Cubans in a community arts center in Boyeros, on the outskirts of Havana, Cuba. The group included artists, teachers, social workers, government officials, architects, engineers and health professionals, all working in Boyeros. We were leading a three-day participatory planning workshop to help this group identify ways that the 1930s Art Deco arts center, currently under renovation, could be used to spark broader community development.

As the first day drew to a close, we felt good about the day’s work. We had turned the Cubans loose in a small group exercise that used art to explore community problems and possible solutions. When the small groups presented their skits, poems and drawings, there was much laughter along with acute insights on life in Boyeros. Following time-honored popular education principles, we kept the focus on the Boyeros community and left our Boston planning experiences off the table. But when it came to evaluating the day’s work, the recurring comment was, “We would like the collaborators from Boston to tell us how they do planning at home.”

Since shortly after its 1959 revolution, Cuba’s variety of socialism has featured both large-scale planning (physical, economic, social) and massive popular participation through active mass organizations and frequent mobilizations. Participatory planning, however, has remained more elusive. Experiments in participatory planning finally began to emerge and then multiply in the late 1980s and 1990s, spurred by the disappearance of Soviet influence and by the economic crisis that paralyzed standard planning methodologies predicated on plentiful resources. Given the country’s high level of collective consciousness and organization, participatory planning would seem like a natural approach for planning in Cuba. Nonetheless, serious obstacles to participatory planning remain, including the veneration of “expertise,” which took us by surprise at the end of the first day of the workshop. Our January workshop can serve as a useful window through which to look back at the uneven history of participatory planning in Cuba, and forward to future possibilities.

A Brief History of Community Planning in Cuba

Every socialist country has had to manage a set of tensions surrounding popular participation: How to balance local initiative with a set of national priorities? How to reconcile the goals of equality with opportunities for communities to shape their own development? How to facilitate widespread participation without opening the door for internal and external foes of the revolution? Cuba, along with the other countries of the former Soviet bloc, resolved these tensions by leaning toward centralization and top-down planning. But over time, Cuba has incorporated more decentralization, consultation with ever larger numbers of people and channels for bottom-up influence.

On the whole, the Cuban state tends to operate in the advocacy rather than transformative planning paradigm—that is, it acts for the people rather than empowering the people to act for themselves. Many good things have happened as a result: excellent schools; a health care system that is the envy of much of the world; and widespread distribution of benefits like adequate and affordable housing. But there have also been negative results: slum clearance and the dispersal of residents with no regard to the social networks destroyed in the process; universal policies applied regardless of regional and historical differences; mandated “color- and gender-blind” equality that doesn’t touch the complex roots of racism and sexism.

Mass organizations such as the network of neighborhood-based Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) also operated in a top-down manner, primarily mobilizing people for campaigns in order to carry out centrally determined objectives. Rarely have these organizations employed methods to empower their membership to craft the program of action.

In 1976 Poder Popular (Popular Power) was introduced, creating 169 local government authorities. For the first time, individual citizens were allowed to nominate candidates for public office and elect representatives—by direct secret ballot—to a government body, the municipal councils. As with the mass organizations, however, the primary role of the municipal councils, which lack budgetary control, has been to carry out decisions made centrally and to communicate between their constituents and the central organs of the state.

In the last decade-and-a-half, several factors have influenced the development of participatory democracy in Cuba: the economic crisis that resulted from the collapse of the Soviet bloc; the reforms of the 1990s to confront that crisis; and renewed US hostility toward Cuba. In general, the reforms have provided openings for more participation in local decision-making and to some extent have geo-graphically decentralized power within a system that is still highly centralized.

At the beginning of the “Special Period” (as the period of economic crisis from 1989 through the 1990s was termed), Popular Power was augmented by the establishment of neighborhood-based and elected Popular Councils. These councils are made up of volunteer delegates elected in each neighborhood and represent the main economic, social and service institutions, such as the CDRs and the FMC. These neighborhood-based councils support the work of their delegate to the Municipal Council, working closely with residents to identify and advocate for local issues. In 1992, constitutional reforms also established a more direct electoral system for the National Assembly, although candidates for the Assembly are still nominated through a process largely controlled by the Cuban Communist Party. Meanwhile, new institutions were promoting participatory community development strategies. The first government-linked source of such activity was the Grupo Jovenel de Intervención de la Capital (GDIC, Group for the Comprehensive Development of the Capital). In 1988, the GDIC was created and charged with improving life in Havana. GDIC immediately established Neighborhood Transformation Workshops in three neighborhoods, focusing primarily on physical improvements. With the onset of the Special Period and the related scarcity of building materials, attention shifted to the social needs of communities. The goal of the workshops became the integration of social and physical planning with broad participation in decision-making. Staff of the workshops was broadened to include sociologists and community organizers in addition to architects and engineers.

A major campaign to develop effective participatory community planning methods was launched. Marie, along with planner/activists Merri Ansara and Mel King, facilitated an early two-week seminar with about forty staff members from the twelve workshops operating in 1993. They found that the main barriers to participatory planning were essentially two sides of the same coin: residents expected to have their needs met on the basis of decisions made by experts and professionals who were educated to fix problems for people. But in the Special Period, experts could no longer fix things, given the sudden and drastic reduction of resources. Marie introduced her seminar by saying: “You’re going to love this, because it gets you off the hook. Your role will be to help people to set priorities and design strategies, not to solve problems for them.”

Because of the basic values of Cuba’s socialist political culture (social justice, equality, freedom), many of the workshops (of which there are now twenty) have far outpaced their counterparts in the US to put decision-making power in the hands of those most affected by the problems being addressed. For example, the work with women and youth in Atarés could provide a model for...
Perhaps the greatest strength that brought community-based planning is the collective spirit that Cuba has cultivated.

The examples of the GDC and the MLK Center have spilled over to some Popular Councils and other organizations and the Boyeros Workshop is their outgrowth. But while sociologist Miren Uriarte reports that hundreds of other participatory community development projects are currently underway, participation remains the exception rather than the rule.

The Boyeros Workshop: A Window on Participatory Planning Today

We ended up in the high-ceilinged, airy Art Deco meeting room in a Boyeros workshop through a collaboration between Common Ground, a US-Cuba solidarity and exchange organization; Alberto Faya, the municipal coordinator of the Cuban Writers’ and Artists’ Union (UNEAC) in Boyeros; architect/planner Gina Rey, former director of the GDC. Also helping to pull together the meeting were Juan Puentes, director of the art gallery located in the Center, and Carmen Montecagudo of the Center for Exchange and Reference on Community Initiatives (CERIC). A Cuban NGO linked to UNEAC that supports arts-based community work.

Faya’s energetic organizing brought more than forty people to the workshop over the three-day sessions, twenty-five to thirty each day. Based on discussion with Faya and Rey, we set our main goals as helping to build the group (only a dozen of this group had met together before) and to teach participatory techniques by example. We did lots of small group work, including groups led by sectors (men, artists) and mixed groups. We also used plenty of presentations, report-backs and discussions. We incorporated arts-based activities (such as role-playing and a cultural presentation) that participants would like to see, both to link the activities to the arts-based development strategy and simply to keep the sessions lively. We used daily evaluations (private, with the facilitator, and evaluation sheets) to guide planning for the following day’s activities. For instance, we set up the mural in response to a request that there be more graphic illustration of the workshop’s ideas. And yes, we did end up talking about our own planning in Boston.

The three days spotlighted some of the strengths that Cuban socialism brings to community-based planning and also some of the obstacles. Perhaps the greatest strength is the collective spirit that Cuba has cultivated through decades of education, exhortation and collective activity. The prospect of planning for Boyeros was daunting, given the fact that the area is diverse, dispersed and largely rural, and especially given the continuing resource constraints of the Special Period. But the workshop was optimistic about the work, generating creative ideas for using the arts to bring people in the community together to improve their lives. An initial brainstorm on this topic came up with suggestions including the promotion of arts-based tourism (though opinions differed on whether tourism would be a positive) using the arts in mental health therapy and smoking prevention; artist fair; street theater; concerts; and special activities directed at youth and seniors, including a dicotomeca (tumba or Cuban slang for an old person). The group’s ability to imagine solutions for problems facing all parts of the community was indeed impressive.

A second strength was the organizational base that participants brought to the undertaking. Cuba has highly organized workers, farmers, women, neighborhood residents. For instance, young people with artistic talents receive state-sponsored training and then a salary, and become members of their local workshop participants were connected to each other and to a broader set of people in the community through well-established organizations, and in many cases were also office workers. The workshop experiences, we finally broke down and did it. After we told about organizing around welfare, homelessness and the living wage, the first response was, ‘Ah, so there is an economic crisis in the United three half’s well.” A fruitful exchange resulted, and we concluded that refusing to talk about our experiences had flowed from an overly rigid interpretation of popular education methodology. In avoiding the cult of the expert perhaps we had fallen into the cult of the community.

A related issue was participants’ habituation to a particular style of teaching—lecturing rather than popular education. We were asked repeatedly, “Tell us your techniques,” and had to reply repeatedly, “These are our techniques. We prefer to demonstrate them rather than talk about them.”

The Cubans in the workshop were deeply immersed in an approach based on service rather than organizing, perceiving their role as serving people rather than mobilizing or empowering them. This was obvious from the outset in who was invited to the workshop: the room was full of people serving professionals. Artists, teachers, doctors and social workers were there; housewives, industrial workers, students and farmers were not. The representatives of the mass organizations such as the women’s federation, were paid staff members who defined themselves as social workers. In discussions of disadvantaged populations, these professionals sometimes slip into blame-tying and blaming the victim, as when a social worker acting out a cigar-puffing, willfully unemploye, unowed pregnant teen drew guffaws from the assembly.
Reflecting on how all of this limited the discussion, we devoted a portion of the final day to an exercise on “who’s not in the room.” We facilitated a brainstorm of social categories not represented in the room, followed by a vote to choose the five most important (the results included farm workers, industrial workers and young people who were neither working nor in school).

Then we formed five breakout groups corresponding to these categories, instructing them to role-play members of the category, discussing how they would like to relate to the arts in general and the art center in particular.

The results were fascinating and ultimately quite powerful. Despite their deference to our expertise, the participants were unable or unwilling to do the role-play, and instead talked about their experience as students and as groups in the third person. Thinking empathetically about what those absent might want was a stretch. One art teacher told us later, “That was the hardest part of the entire workshop.” But they stretched. For example, the farm workers’ group suggested bringing arts activities out into the countryside, linking the arts center to the annual agricultural fair that takes place a short distance away; promoting the revitalization of rural cultural traditions such as folk music, wearing the guayabera and cooking traditional foods; and bringing a representative of farm workers onto the planning group. The people representing industrial workers proposed that the workers help with the rehabilitation of the arts center and the production of art materials, and that the artists help decorate the factories to make them more pleasant work environments.

**Cuban Socialism and Participatory Planning**

In summary, thanks to the strengths in the Cuban planning tradition and in spite of its weaknesses, we and the other participants counted the workshop a success. Everybody came away energized and with new ideas. A subcommittee group for the arts center project was solidified, expanding well beyond the small core of artists that had met previously. And the outputs of the meeting, carefully typed up from flip charts and post-its and circulated among all participants, constitute a rich-lode of possible priorities and strategies for the planning group to mine.

This kind of experience is being repeated all over Havana, and increasingly in other parts of Cuba. In the best cases, such as the Azuarez Neighborhood Transformation Workshop, community-based planning has become institutionalized and is taken on tough issue after another. But even those best cases are limited by the fact that decision-making above the local level is still tightly controlled. And in too many neighborhoods, officials use the rhetoric of participation while maintaining traditional, top-down planning practice.

Despite the difficulties, we came away convinced of two things. First, participatory planning has much to offer to Cuban socialism. And second, Cuban socialism, with its long collective tradition and strong infrastructure of mass organization, has much to offer to participatory planning.

**Toback** (Cont. from page 1)

The exuberance of the 1970s is long gone, replaced by the gloomy specter of apathy and depression. But we must recognize that both are imports. In many ways, thirty years later, we are light years ahead of where we were.

In the 1970s, the left was easily dismissed as a “youth movement.” McCarthyism had decimated the left and progressive activism was dismissed as a “generational conflict.” Mainstream planners as well as influential business and their political partners dismissed socialism as an ideological fantasy bound to end in disaster. Today, socialism is considered to be a “failure” and has lost its status in intellectual and academic discourse. But we have numerous respected Marxist and socialist leaders inside and outside the academy. We have and are experienced activists now with perspective and wisdom gained through years of work. We no longer believe we are inventing the wheel; we know we’re in this for the long haul and that the new day will not dawn tomorrow.

We also focus on concrete policy alternatives and implementation of particular projects rather than broad societal restructuring. While there is a qualitative difference in the dynamic of today’s discussions of alternatives to capitalist development, that discussion remains vital.

The Circuit of Capital

Marxist analysis is as useful today as it ever was. One of the most basic Marxist tenets is the circuit of capital: The general formula for economic interaction in a non-capitalist society is C-M-C. People produce commodities (C) for use; they exchange them for money (M) in order to trade for other commodities (C) that they do not produce but wish to consume. This is the general understanding of the use of money in society and the rationale for labor. One produces and trades to satisfy individual desires for material goods. Money is a convenient token, easily stored and a standard measure of value.

While the vast majority of people see the exchange of goods in the marketplace as an efficient way of meeting human needs, the Capitalist has an entirely different agenda. Commodities are in it not to satisfy human needs but to accumulate capital for themselves. Marx describes how capitalism distorts the experience of the market and in the process conceals the reality of capitalism. He illustrates the Capitalist circuit of capital, C-M-C (not the C-M-C of non-capitalist society).

The dynamic of capitalist society is the use of money (M) to produce commodities (C) in order to acquire more money (M). Thus in C-M-C the goal is to accumulate assets. The purpose of the market is not to trade products but to amass wealth as capital to better compete in the marketplace. The success of a capitalist enterprise is measured not by the production of useful items but by the ability to increase capital, thereby gaining greater ability to accumulate money and capital. The engine of capitalist prosperity is expansion, innovation, and growth.

This framework is directly applicable to understanding “hot” urban issues and questions of social planning. The contradictions of workplace reform and the rights of workers clearly illustrate the contradictions of capitalism and the value of a dialectical approach. Mainstream economics tells us that the goal of the economy is production for the enhancement of human wellbeing and human happiness. It also tells us that the pursuit of profit is the path by which the “invisible hand” guides individual self-interest to the satisfaction of human needs. Simply stated, mainstream economics tells us that the production of commodities is directed by the demand for those commodities. They make it appear as if the circuit of C-M-C dominates. Individuals get what they want by producing what others want and engaging in trade.

When we look at the world of work under capitalism, we see overwork accompanied by unemployment, environmental destruction, disease and occupational injury. Even among those who succeed in the marketplace, we see overwork and burnout caused by stress, sleep deprivation and overwork. When we ask, “Why?” the obvious response only leaves us more confused. Overwork and stress are an inevitable result of the struggle to succeed, the conflict between work and family life. The requirement to work harder, longer and “smarter” drains leisure for us. The question then is, how is it that the market mechanism produces misery in pursuit of the social good?

Marx describes how capitalism distorts the experience of the market and in the process conceals the reality of capitalism.
"Successful" redevelopment efforts are central to the destruction of low-income neighborhoods and tied directly to the circuit of capital.
Lessons From The Socialist City

For most of the twenty-first century, billions of people throughout the world lived in cities where capitalist growth was not the driving force. In the Soviet Union, China, and parts of East Europe and scores of less developed countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America that in myriad and diverse ways set out to develop cities and economies based on social cooperation rather than competition, there were many experiences worth looking at. In attempts to build socialist cities there were many successes and failures, but too often urbanists and planners in the West hear only about the failures, if anything. A balanced assessment of these experiences can offer us many important lessons.

In socialist cities, housing, public transportation, health care and education were offered at virtually no cost to the users. There were experiments with cooperative living. Tenants were rarely evicted. Private vehicular traffic, all the environmental and public health problems that come with it, was minimal. There was no slums and residential segregation by class and race was relatively limited.

In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, planners created over a thousand new towns following comprehensive master plans. Unlike the West, planned cities were actually built (of course, usually not as they were planned), and comprehensive planning was the rule, not the exception.

We also know the serious problems with socialistic city planning. Some of these were the same old problems that came with capitalism, aggravated by insensitive technocrats in power. Urban residents were tenants of top-down urban planning and had little say in shaping or changing their neighborhoods. Old neighborhoods were summarily wiped out by planners and replaced by planned communities. Those displaced people usually got free housing in new buildings in exchange. Many new problems emerged in the socialist cities. Stability of tenure became stagnation and lack of mobility. Elimination of the socialist housing crisis gave way to a socialist housing crisis where government planners simply did not divert enough resources away from production, which itself became inefficient, and when they did they were unable to meet the rapidly changing needs of individuals and households with seriatly-produced industrial housing.

The housing crisis was perhaps the main social problem underlying the collapse of the Soviet system and was intimately related to structural deficiencies in production, a lack of real democracy and the growth of inequalities. The Soviet system collapsed from its own inertia, but it was pushed into oblivion by a much stronger, better organized and more powerful force—the US and its Cold War allies. Svaged, unregulated capitalism swiftly filled the void left by the Soviet collapse and in a short decade reduced much of the old Soviet Union to Third World status. With the collapse of the social welfare system, life expectancy dipped sharply, mobility rates spiked and the big cities sputtered CBDs, traffic jams and smog, ghettos and gold coasts.

To many who saw no hope or inspiration for a democratic socialism in the Soviet Union, its collapse wasn’t mourned. But to everyone who at any time dared to dream of alternatives, of a Utopia, this was an historic setback. Now we have TINA: There Is No Alternative. Accept the inexorable march of capitalist development, let the “market” decide, and planners get out of the way.

The two articles in this issue about Cuba (Kenedy, Rivers and Tilly; and Hamberg) illustrate the many urban innovations in one socialist country still trying to hold on to the social welfare gains they made over almost four decades. The approach of these authors is balanced as they reveal the dilemmas and contradictions faced by communities and professionals in Cuba. We can see here how socialism is no utopia but a real struggle to end exploitative relations among people and improve the quality-of-life for all.

Community Versus Class Struggle?

Catalanian urbanist Manuel Castells was one of the first Marxists to analyze contemporary urbanization and community struggles, starting with his classic work, The Urban Question. Castells, however, expressed a more sophisticated version of dualist thinking with his critique of community struggles, which he saw as divorced from class struggle. To be sure, there are enough reactionary and exclusionary community-based organizations around to lend credence to this theory. But we also have a good share of reactionary and exclusionary labor unions.

Many struggles to improve community life—from the suburban fights against Wal-Marts to central city fights against displacement and gentrification—lead people to confront corporate control over their lives. Some are militant and consciously anti-capitalist, many are not. The same can be said for union struggles. There’s nothing innate to community struggles that make them any more prone to narrowness, backwardness or conservatism. We need only look at the community movements in Latin America for examples of highly organized, class-conscious community movements. And in this age of hyper-consumerism, capital is being confronted more and more at the point of consumption, not just the point of production.

Keep Utopia Alive

Practicing urban planners face a real ethical dilemma. They are simply stuck with serving developers (“the market”) or can we serve broader interests and help diminish inequalities? Don’t try to answer this question in the abstract. First develop a relationship with social movements that are struggling to develop both the theory and practice of alternative forms of urban living that don’t rely on capitalism’s drive for profits. There is no shortage of community-based organizations struggling for a more open, democratic society, building new relations of cooperation and solidarity among people. There are little pieces of utopia: progressive local development corporations, non-profit and employee-owned enterprises, community land trusts, co-operative and mutual housing, consumer and credit co-ops, and so forth. All have severe limitations in an economy and society built around corporate greed. But they are a testing ground for an alternative society. And as Derek Chisholm argues in this issue, progressive planners need to make a personal commitment to put their progressive ideas into practice.

In her article, Jan Roelofs underlines the importance of utopias to progressive urban planning and gives us a useful sketch of history and theory. We should keep in mind the critical critique by Friedrich Engels of utopian thinkers of his day. The problem, he said, was that they created their ideal communities from the real ongoing political struggles. They tried to create socialist enclaves by turning their backs on the revolutionary struggles and the working-class as a whole. Too many Marxists have taken this critique out of context and adopted the simplistic dualism of reform versus revolution. History shows that the two can and must be understood as a dynamic relationship.

Tom Angotti is Co-Editor of Progressive Planner and Professor of Urban Affairs & Planning at Hunter College, City University of New York.


Get On the PN Roster 2003

In 1998 PN published its last PN Roster. We plan to develop a new roster in 2003. We are exploring options for a password protected version on the web but there will possibly be a print version. For those of you who remember the old rosters, they were terrific networking resources. We will use the PN address list as the basis for the roster but it is much better to have more information about each member, particularly a brief bio. Remember, PN is a network and it is only as strong as its members.

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Sound Theory and Political Savvy

By Morris Zeitlin

Progressive planners are practical utopians. We do what we are forced to do to earn a living but are inspired by what we could and should do. This contradiction can be a source of both stress and strength in the daunting and bewildering time in which we live—a time of transition from an obso- lessing social order to a higher, yet dimly visible one on the horizon. To understand the often con- founding events and changes, and our perplexed selves, we need to understand the current times in the context of history.

Pragmatism Rules

The ideology dominating our social environment makes it difficult to do this. The pragmatist outlook restricts vision to the here and now, to thinking and doing what is practical within the existing social order. It regards social innovation as an impractical, utopian project, from childhood to maturity, the media targets our minds to make us obedient subjects, obscuring our understanding of history lest it threaten the social order of the ruling class it defends.

Pragmatism focuses on particulars and limits the scope of our vision. It can help to relieve traffic snarls but its blindness to general conditions is sure to choke highways. It is a static philosophy validated only by and predicting any forward thinking. Out of sync with nature’s and society’s laws of motion, it is alien to the scientific objectivity and comprehensive scope planners need.

Marxism, on the other hand, is a dynamic philosophy. Based on a dialectical analysis of history, it searches for relations within and between wholes. In the words of Marxist philosopher Bernal Ollman, “It uncovers relations among what is, and what should be and what can be done about it all.” It allows us to knit together into a comprehensive whole what pragmatist thinking and analysis “con- sign to separate mental compartments.”

Here lies the conflict between the humanitarian aspirations of progressive planners to make cities serve the people and the automatic chains capitalism shackles us with. Our humanism leads us to holistic perceptions of the world, the nation, the city, the neighborhood and the people in the global community. Holistic Marxist theory teaches us that the crises of American cities are local manifestations of the general crisis of capitalism, modified by the particularities of local, regional and national geography, politics and economics.

What Can We Do?

How can we cope with the vexing duities in our jobs? This calls for ongoing deliberation in the pages of PC Magazine, but here are a few thoughts to kick off the debate.

Progressive workers can best overcome the conflict between job demands and political wisdom through committed activity in labor unions, people’s organizations and progressive politics. In our privileged positions as planners in establishment offices, we can sometimes influence policies and pass on information useful to working-class organizations.

The history of progressive planning has helped us learn the limitations of focusing on single and local issues. Today the horizons between local and global, and particular and general, grow increasingly blurred. Neighborhood struggles disconnected from the bigger working-class struggles yield limited good. Indeed, they often end in disappointment when City Hall dishes out a few favors or battles are lost. To expect local officials to heal the many ills of poor neighborhoods diverts people’s attention away from the origins of their problems—ruling class national policies.

Even the big gains some planners have achieved within rare reform-minded city governments do not warrant belief in the would-be political powers of progressive planners. Reforms that are granted by the powers-that-be when they are hard-pressed in a crisis are soon withdrawn when the crisis is over. Only reforms wrested by sustained class struggle have proven lasting.

We need a broad aristocratic approach in our work that illuminates the urban terrain, articulated people’s needs and possibilities and debunks the cunning of officialdom and its accommodating media. We need to invent shrewd strategies and tactics as an integrated part of the general class struggle we will find our own full strength.

Some, viewing the present statically, may hesitate, saying that labor and popular movements do not foster a broad progressive coalition. Marxism, however, teaches us to see the upsurge of these movements as an upsurge in a counteroffensive for social progress. Witness the recent anti-war demonstrations that brought out millions of people.

Capitalism appears to be reaching its zenith. It spread globally to exploit all it can and now has nowhere else to expand to survive. By the logic of its own system, it will stagnate and shrink. The more brutally it tries to delay its doom, the greater the resistance it will incur. In these times we need to make the most we can while it retreats, honing our professional abilities, improving our organizational means and skills and seizing arising possibilities.


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Socialists and Cities:  
Disurbanists, Garden Cities and City Planning

By Joan Roelofs

Socialist theory has had much to say about cities, especially if we consider the broad range of socialisms. One version of socialist theory, the Marxist, became dominant while the others were consigned to the dustbin. However, out of compost and worse grow many healthy new plants.

One way to look at varieties of socialism is to place them on a continuum with, at one end, those that emphasize outcomes (e.g., utopian, communitarian, Fabian) and at the other end, those that emphasize agency (e.g., syndicalist, Marxist–Leninist).

Utopian Communities

Marx and Engels labeled early nineteenth century socialist theorists like Heerlæ Saint–Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen as “utopian,” and this characterization has persisted, leading to dismissal, ridicule, and the assumption of generality of their doctrines. Yet not only are these traditions rich in very sane ideas, they are the source of many concepts deemed original to Marxism. One might reasonably charge that the utopian socialists didn’t want cities at all and that even Marxism is limited in its thinking about cities (in the Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels state that socialism would “end the separation between town and country”).

Robert Owen, a Scot, and Charles Fourier, a Frenchman, were communitarian theorists of the nineteenth century who believed that human settlements should be self-sustaining communities that combined agriculture and manufacturing and provided for the material, educational, recreational and social needs of their inhabitants. While Owen and Fourier did not reject technology, culture, or trade, they also, like the Luddites, did not embrace the type of mechanization that existed merely to produce cheap goods for export and high profits. They rejected the growing capitalist industrialization because it exploited workers and destroyed nature, aesthetic values, and community.

The utopian welcome “appropriate” technology. Mass production techniques were deemed to destroy the quality of work life; craftsmanship, on the other hand, could provide satisfaction and produce abundance for all. Poverty would be eased through the elimination of waste (including middlemen, capitalists, governments and various other parasites) and by collective consumption. Rotation in work and companionship would make necessary labor a pleasing experience. Fourier’s ideal diet—based on peas, beans, vegetables, fruit and small animals, including farmed fish—would eliminate the capital, labor, and land-intensive operations of growing wheat and raising cattle. There would be no need for chemicals, as soil fertility would be insured by composted manures and nitrogen released by growing legumes.

The decentralized communitarian settlements were to include all the positive attributes of cities without the isolation, extreme division of labor, and alienation caused by the useless or harmful activities that characterized contemporary urban life. Individuals would participate in a variety of tasks (based on personal preferences), and only those tasks necessary for a civilized existence. The culturally-based sexual division of labor would be ended, as provision for all needs would occur in a seamless manner. It has been said of Fourier that his vision of Fourierism was like “a combination of the Talmud, gardening, gardening, gardening, politics and child care, education, the arts and small craft enterprises were the major occupations in his society; yet there was nothing austere or antifunctional about Fourier’s ideal. The two centers of his educational system were to be gastronomy and opera, the latter because its creation required many human talents and skills, including management of complex enterprises.

Community settlements such as the Oseba Community and Brook Farm in the United States embraced urban cultural forms such as theater and science. Furthermore, they had ecological advantages: collective consumption; avoidance of unnecessary consumption of non-renewable resources; and a permanent location, which is inherently nurturing. Nevertheless, the US communitarian movement declined in part after the Civil War because it couldn’t produce goods as cheaply as assembly line production. It didn’t matter that the community’s internalized social services, health care, or stewardship of the land.

Utopias and the Environment

William Morris’s description of an anarchist utopia, News from Nowhere (1880), written in response to the “technocratic” Looking Backward (1888) of Edward Bellamy, was partly an urban story. Nevertheless, it influenced British socialist thought and current environmentalists. Morris noted that the advantages of a steady state economy and the pleasures to be derived from useful work. All that was necessary for life could be produced in a leisurely manner. If creativity makes one human, he showed that it did not require massive projects. However, in A Factory as It Might Be, he allowed that “machines of all kinds ingeniously and best approved kinds will be used when necessary, but will be used simply to save human labor.” Human passion and body rhythms such as nuptiality would be liberated.

British socialism generally emphasized, perhaps more than other varieties, capitalism’s destruction of the environment, and the wasteful, unhealthy mass consumption it fostered, especially through advertising. Liberal reforms, beginning in the 1880s and 1890s, focused on child labor, mines and factories. Yet the persistent misery of workers, including rural labor, and the shock created by the Irish famine, led many people (of all classes) to question the system. In 1885, the Great Britain contrasted starkly with the emerging Victorian splendor of crystal palaces and bourgeois prosperity. Detailed testimony can be found in two works: Friedrich Engels’s Conditions of the Working Class in England (1845) and The Housing Question (1872). Charles Booth’s surveys, published as Life and Labor of the People in London (1886–1903) shocked middle-class people out of complacency and recruited some to socialism.

Unlike capitalists, many socialists argued that “free trade” (enforced by imperialism) worsened British living standards by destroying its agricultural base, flooding the country with cheap imported food, and de-skilling native craftspeople. In addition, they assumed that their competitive advantage would soon be lost as industrialism spread. Socialists and anarchists, such as Robert Blatchford (a leader of the Independent Labor Party) and Prince Peter Kropotkin, believed that Britain would soon be forced to produce its own food, and that this was both feasible and highly desirable. Thus, they rejected the role of the city as imperial capital.

In addition, British socialists disdained the flesh-pots of cities, and created clubs to hire workers into the fresh air, bicycling through the countryside and/or making their own music. Nevertheless, the socialists were not all puritanical, for the movement included liberals of sexual desire, such as Edward Carpenter, a vegan, vegetarian, and gay, and a member of Morris’s Socialist League. The rejection of oppressive nineteenth century dress and the slavery to superfluous household goods were significant issues. Blatchford’s Mereefy England (1884) described how socialism satisfies the condition of the working classes after a century of industrial revolution. He describes the cheap, degraded and ugly nature of food, dress and home, and admonishes:

Instead of making the most of your room you will persist in crowding your house with hideous and unnecessary furniture. For instance, one family of household gods. You are a victim to your furniture, and your wife is a slave. Did it ever occur to you that your only use for the bulk of your household goods is to clean them?

Garden Cities

Ebenezer Howard, author of Garden Cities of Tomorrow (1898), was a towering influence on city planning worldwide, but he was only a semi-socialist. He was a follower of Henry George (who proposed taxing away urban land value and wished to combine the advantages of town and country, as well as those of capitalism and socialism) to the latter. Howard proposed modernizing blighted Britain by creating new self-contained cities. Community facilities and public transportation were to be within walking distance of all residents. Some elements of Howard’s concept—such as the “Condition of the Working Class in England (1845) and The Housing Question (1872). Charles Booth’s surveys, published as Life and Labor of the People in London (1886–1903) shocked middle-class people out of complacency and recruited some to socialism.

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of "Garden Cities," and planning generally, especially in France, the United States (e.g., Garden City and Forest Hills Gardens, New York) and pre-Soviet Russia. Lewis Mumford's decentered bioregional vision of small communities reflects Howard's influence.

Today the entrance to Welwyn Garden City is a railroad station/shopping mall named The Howard Centre. Howard would enjoy its architecture of "Crystal Palace" green, but the shops within are chain stores such as Marks and Spencer; and many of the town's residents commute to work, albeit by the handy railroad. During weekdays the lovely

Decay of Capitalist Civilization (1923), asserted that "under capitalism it is impossible to create an interest in production that is not also an interest in decay and destruction." They contrasted this situation with the independent freedom, energetic pre-capitalist age, who "raised their own crops and made their wares largely for their own use." They found "domination by an imaginary group of no real benefit to workers. As Georgists, they indicted capitalism for exploiting not only workers but also the land and its natural resources.

Beatrice Webb had studied the trade union and cooperative movements and appreciated their role in the protection of workers and consumers. She did not believe, however, that a socialist city could be based on these voluntary associations; only government would concern itself with future generations, or provide for public health, education, and the disadvantaged. Consequently, the Webb's Constitution for a Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain (1920) proposed a bicameral parliament: one house was to protect the environment for the present and future generations. Nevertheless, they believed that municipal government would be most important in a socialist Britain by extending collective action to all of life's necessities, including collective farms. The Webs were so enamored with cities as the central unit in a future socialist society that their honeymoon traveling around Britain collecting data for their massive study of local government. The Fabians are correctly identified with bureaucracy and expertise, but they did not promote large, faceless, unaccountable bureaucracies. Paid, full-time, elected city councils would oversee the socialized industries, in contrast to the shumtains and contractors who duly serving as "unpaid local representatives."

The Webs imagined that all social classes would eventually see the superiority of socialism and a peaceful transition would occur. Remaining inequalities would be trivial as all would enjoy a nationalized system. Their plan was doomed for many reasons. In addition to capitalization's wiles, the Fabian cultural offerings were not very attractive to the working-class. Middle-class British, socialist and otherwise, the towns of "socialist realism" in an attempt to lure the working-class away from music halls, gambling, seaside postcards, traveling carnivals, and honest books.

The socialist citizen was to enjoy the pleasures of social reform activism, bicycling, hiking, gardening, amateur dramatics, folk dancing, crafts, music making, rowing (no motor boats) and similar pursuits.

The outcome-oriented socialists saw capitalism as one among many causes of social problems; its elimination would benefit a diverse group of miscreants. Their task was to continue the radical thrust of the French Revolution by getting rid of archaic and rotten social institutions in order to promote a society of equality and happiness, while reversing environmental degradation. The socialist city would restore community, and provide adequate space for family, friendship, culture, recreation, and fine healthy dining.

Socialism and US Cities

US socialists were among the agency-oriented socialists of the early 1900s. They were influenced by Marxists, Fabians, Ebenezer Howard, and Edward Bellamy. Electoral victories in cities produced socialist mayors and city councils; the largest city to have a socialist government was Milwaukee. Although this phenomenon has been derided as "sewer socialism," these city governments were impressive in many ways. First, there was universal agreement that their governing was honest and efficient, in contrast to most US cities. Secondly, municipal ownership and operation of public services is no mean feat, as we might realize in an age of privatization. Low costs and customers to public sector enterprises generally. Third, these cities extended the range of what was considered to be public services. Perhaps the fabric tactic of "creeping socialism" was at work. Milwaukee provided a municipal program of workers compensation and unemployment insurance, and dental and medical care for public school children. Such developments were threatening to capitalism, and urban reform was absorbed into the Progressive movement to become technocratic incrementalism under the auspices of John B. Rockefeller's University of Chicago. New electoral systems supposedly directed at corruption, such as at-large and nonpartisan elections, helped to disenfranchise local socialist parties.

The New Deal "new towns" for the unemployed, organized by the US government's Resettlement Administration, reflected socialist planning ideals. Perhaps the most famous of them, Jericho Homesteads, had many socialist residents as well. However, once the government released the towns, either disappeared or turned into ordinary suburban. Paradoxically, today's co-housing communities (in Denver and elsewhere), and even US gated communities, both almost entirely composed of middle-class people, embody some of the communalist ideal.

Other notable attempts at socialist (or communists) cities in the capitalist world are post-World War II Bologna, Italy, and Porto Alegre, Brazil. Contemporary social democratic city planning in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and the Netherlands provides other models, with significant ecological as well as social goals.

Soviet Cities and the Disenfranchised

Is there an ideal Marxist city? The early, utopian phase of the Russian Revolution produced two urban models, both intended to end the separation of town and country. Soviet planners of the 1920s were influenced by theories of "communed," bioregional communities, modern architecture, Charles Fourier, and Ebenezer Howard. The prospect of constructing a new civilization stirred the imaginations of visionaries throughout the world. Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright created designs for the young Soviet Union.

One Soviet group, the disenfranchised, believed it desirable to abolish traditional cities forthwith, and distribute population throughout the country in agricultural communes. Moscow's Ginzburg proposed a Green City to decentralize Moscow. The disenfranchised differed from the nineteenth century

New electoral systems supposedly directed at corruption helped to disenfranchise local socialist parties.

utopians in their enthusiasm for industrial technol-

ogy in both manufacturing and agriculture, they embraced automobiles and tractors. There would, however, be much collective consumption. People might live in small cottages, or co-ops, and central facilities would be used for dining and recreation.

The urbanists, inspired by modernist architecture and Le Corbusier, proposed new cities of 50,000

people. Industrial workers and farmers would live in high-rise housing and have short commutes on public transportation. Whatever the spatial orien-
tation, the Soviet planners agreed that communal households would replace families, to free women from domestic slavery, and to provide more work-

ers for the public sector. Some thought this should occur gradually, so that small kitchens shared by families might co-exist with the communal dining rooms, and small mechanical washing machines would be available to wash clothes (because the planners knew that the laundries always lost socks). Sooner or later, marriage would be abolished and children raised collectively.

This intense collectivization was intended to be lib-
erating. In N.A. Milutin's Sotsgorod: The
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**Problem of Building Socialist Cities, all adults were to inhabit an individual residential cell so that "the intimate relationships of people will become their own private affair independent of any direct property considerations." This individual unit had necessary equipment only to end man's enslavement by his possessions." Baudrillard principles of built-ins and design for efficiency and hygiene were highly regarded by the Soviet avant-garde. Fresh air and natural daylight prevailed and:

"Every kind of cornice, fretwork, open shelf, etc. must be avoided as a source of dust and infection (contamination). . . . The same holds true for the various ways with which our inhabitants do so love to perennialize their dwelling, turning it into such a dusty accumulation of useless trash.

The room would be used for sleeping and bathing, and study; and there would be friendly conversations with friends, intellectual projects, etc. Books would be available by adapting the American system of organizing libraries, including interlibrary loan. Every citizen should have the possibility of requesting for himself any book in the country. This system would cut down tremendously on the number of books which had to be printed and at the same time would allow anyone who wished to receive any book. "There would be collective provision for fun and games (including chess and billiards) although work hours were forbidden: people should exercise outdoors, and ice skate or ski in the winter. Culture palaces, cafés, and sports facilities (e.g., tennis, volley Boule) would be available in parks. Along with sailing, rowing, and motor boats.

While the elaborate structures with individual rooms were not constructed, Le Corbusier-style apartment blocks incorporating services and shops, situated in parks, public transportation, and "culture palaces" were common in Soviet cities. In the 1960s, a communal apartment building was "purposely built," designed by architect Nathan Osterman. Although it had self-selected residents, it was rumored that they did not live happily ever after.

Contemporary Marxist theorists, such as Manuel Castells, David Harvey, and Henri Lefebvre, mostly critique the capitalist city but do not provide concrete suggestions for building a truly socialist city. Some who believe that socialist cities must be the product of working-class struggles see their germ in the barrios (villages) created by displaced peasants inside of Mexican City and other cities of the South. There the "informal economy" includes operatives engaged in major appliance repair and the recycling of junk into useful objects. One could posit a socialist aim in producing pseudo brand-name items, which retain not only the use value, but also the snob value, while eliminating long supply lines and the super-profits of remote corporations.

What do theory and history suggest about the possibility of a socialist (and ecological) city— even if everyone is willing? The answer depends on one's concepts of socialism and ecology. From a personal perspective, the prospects look ominous. Cities have been parasitic on the countryside and to a lesser degree even on themselves and other cities. While social integration can be achieved within cities, judging by the urban experience of the Global South, they remain functionally segregated, hamstrung by technocratic rationality, reinforcing the alienating division of labor. There may also be irreconcilable inequalities among cities, leading to a permanent class of those from the "boom-boom's" self-sufficiency on the communitarian or garden city plan, or a place where one, without too much commuting, could "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening and criticize after dinner" (Karl Marx, The German Ideology) might look much more like the decentralized settlements of the utopians.

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**No Es Fácil (It’s Not Easy): The Dilemmas of Cuban Housing and Urban Policies**

By Jill Hamberg

What does revolutionary Cuba's experience with housing and urban policies offer for progressive planners in developed or developing countries? Lots of dilemmas. It's not always easy, or no es fácil—an often-used expression during Cuba's economic crisis of the 1990s—to balance competing principles and beliefs about broad objectives, such as egalitarian and equitable development, with specific housing-related goals.

**MYTHS ABOUT CUBAN HOUSING AND URBAN POLICIES**

To begin with, let's look at several myths and stereotypes about Cuban housing and urban policies:

**Myth:** The government nationalized all housing and continues to own it.

**Reality:** In the years soon after the revolution, tenants were made into homeowners, and today the vast majority of Cuban households own the place where they live.

**Myth:** The government builds all housing.

**Reality:** Two-thirds to three-quarters of all units created since the revolution were "self-built," not state-built. "Created units" include subdivisions of, or additions to, existing units as well as conversions from non-residential uses.

**Myth:** The government controls urban growth by strictly regulating where people live by an internal passport system.

**Reality:** People are free to live where they want, except for some limited regulation on migration to and within Havana in the last few years based on housing availability. Urban development is largely fostered through economic and other policies.

**Myth:** Cuba has pursued a largely pro-rural and anti-urban strategy.

**Reality:** Except for some anti-urban rhetoric in the late 1960s, policy has been decidedly pro-urban.

**MAJOR POLICIES FROM 1959 TO 1990**

In the years right after the revolution, evictions were halted, most rents were reduced, and urban land speculation was largely controlled. Through the 1960s, the Cuban Reform Law two things happened. First, tenants became homeowners by ammortizing the purchase price of their units through rents. Landlords were able to keep their own and one second

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More details on page 37 of this issue of Progressive Planning.

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**Urban and regional planning was designed to:**

Promote balanced regional growth by de-emphasizing Havana and directing resources to other areas, including specific growth poles, as part of a comprehensive development strategy.

Diminish urban-rural differences by improving living conditions in the countryside and concentrating the rural population in small settlements.

Foster the development of a settlement network with a hierarchy of urban and rural settlements of different sizes and functions; and

Ensure rational land use in towns and cities through comprehensive urban planning.

This strategy was largely successful. Havana, which had one-fifth of the country's population in 1959, continued to grow, but at a much slower rate. Most development occurred in provincial capitals and smaller cities. Rural areas were slowly "urbanized." But there were also unintended consequences. The relative neglect of Havana led to building deterioration and eventually collapses. In the absence of functioning land values and with relatively plentiful and cheap fuel until the early 1990s, many new industries, institutions and housing located on the outskirts of urban areas, preserving existing downtowns but leading to a form of "socialist sprawl."

The 1984 (and 1988) Housing Laws converted leaseholders into homeowners, legalized most illegal and ambiguous situations of self-help buildings and others, permitted private rentals, fostered self-building by both individuals and newly permitted housing cooperatives (which never got off the ground) and allowed free-market buying and selling of land and housing (which was quickly restricted). These laws also updated existing legislation reg-
After years of intentional neglect of Havana, the late 1980s witnessed a big upsurge in building in the capital.

inner city slums remained. And an increasing num-
ber of families lived in homeless shelters or in con-
demned— but still occupied—dwellings. In rural
areas, there had been a sharp drop in the number of
thatched roof huts (babasos) and substantial
improvement in basic services, but there were still
some units with dirt floors and lacking infrastruc-
ture.

Housing was free or very cheap for most house-
holds. Credit was available for part of the cost of
self-building or repairs. The purchase price of new
state-built units was heavily subsidized, and buyers
were given low-interest fifteen-year loans, but such
subsidies, as well as severe materials short-
ages, suggested that the government built less housing
and usually allocated it to high priority areas and
workers in key industries. Moreover, self-building
and repairs were potentially quite expensive if done
town. Private renting, although not widespread among Cubans, could also be costly.

The 1990s Crisis and its Impact on Housing

By 1993 the economic crisis—known in Cuba as the "Special Period"—resulted in the contraction of the
country’s economy and the reduction of imports by 75 percent. Food, transportation, employment and energy shortages rapidly replaced housing as the most pressing issues. Measures to

address the crisis were successful in reviving the economy, but today it is still not back to 1989 lev-
els. These measures included a cautious expansion of self-employment; the growth of foreign invest-
ment through joint ventures, including real estate; the legalization of dollars which created a dual cur-
cency situation; and some decentralization in public administration (through the creation of the "People's Councils" (Consejos Populares) on page 4). Bicycles became the most common way to com-
pensate for the drastic drop in bus service. The cri-
is itself and some of the policies designed to address it led to growing inequality among Cubans.

New State-Built Construction

For the first decades after the Cuban revolution, the Construction Ministry built most housing, but it was given much lower priority than economic development and community facilities. Prefabricated and semi-prefabricated building was emphasized because it was thought to be faster.

Four- and five-story structures and occasional high-rises in larger cities were given priority in an often unsuccessful attempt to increase density and pre-
serve agricultural land. In most cities, new housing was built in outlying vacant areas, with some inner
city infill starting in the 1980s.

Construction labor shortages, especially in Havana, led in 1970 to the creation of the microbrigades, which in their original incarnation consisted of thirty-three employees from the same workplace who built housing for their fellow workers. Apartments were allocated by worker's assemblies to those with the greatest housing need and "merit." Although organized by public agencies, the micro-
brigades represented a form of "collective self-help." Building volunteers continued to receive their regular salaries, but they and others in the workplace worked longer hours than usual. This "sweat equity" was reflected in lower rents.

But aside from problems of quality, microbrigades presented several other obstacles. The right to form microbrigades until the mid-1980s was restricted to key economic sectors, leaving people with low pri-

ority jobs with few ways to aspire to a state-built unit. It allowed some people to "escape" but had little effect on existing slums, which continued to deteriorate. Although not all units were allocated to

those who actually participated in building, it was generally understood that those with the greatest need would volunteer and be given first dibs on apartments. Because housing developments were in outlying areas, the journey to work often increased substantially, and this did make sense to have doctors and teachers spending several years as low-skilled construction workers when their pro-
fessional expertise was desperately needed? By the early 1980s, however, these residential zones were largely limited to Havana and building lagged.

In the late 1980s urban building boom, new vari-
anions on the microbrigades were initiated. One con-

sisted of brigades (called social microbrigades) of community residents who built infill structures or rehabilitated slums in their own neighborhoods. Members were given leave from their regular jobs, but continued to receive the same salary. Another was workplace-based brigades—made of a few workers each from different workplaces—that built
infill housing closer to their workplaces. And finally, there were brigades of residents of homeless shel-
ters. But housing brigade members were often pulled off housing jobs to help state brigades com-

plete higher priority community facilities, leaving thousands of units under construction when the Special Period began, and many still have not been finished.

Despite an impressive number of units built, there were serious problems with all three programs. Quality was suffering from unskilled (microbrigade) or unmo-
vated (Construction Ministry) labor. Materials shortages were exacerbated by endless delays in delivery, lack of local production and occasional thefts that in turn stretched out the construction process interminably. In some cases, completed units remained unoccupied because electricity, water or sewer hookups were delayed. In response, the agriculture, sugar, defense and interi-
or ministries started to build housing for their own workers in the 1980s, and by 2000, the Construction Ministry was down to building only a quarter of all new publicly created units—and that included microbrigades.

Appropriate Technology

In response to severe materials shortages, a Cuban version of appropriate technology, called bajo con-

sumo (low-energy consumption), was developed. This minimizes the use of imported materials or

materials that required the use of imported energy resources (e.g., cement, metal, transportation of materials, crates) or scarce materials like wood. These innovations are of local materials (such as clay bricks, stone walls); soil cement

blocks; bricks and roof tiles; wood substrates (e.g., bamboo, by-products of sugar, rice); vaulted roofs; and the on-site manufacture of elements. In addition, several prefab systems were adapted to use less cement, metal, etc.

Appropriate technology is hotly debated among Cuban architects and planners. Since most units are one or two stories, some argue that the low density will increase infrastructure and transportation costs. There is also concern among some about the quality and durability of bajo consumo technolo-
gies. Indeed, it is hardly used in Havana, but wide-
spread elsewhere.

Design and Site Planning

The building design and site planning of new develop-
ments have also been subject to stiff criticism from Cuban planners. Monotonous site plans using
enormous superblocks, with excessive once-un-

scaped land between buildings and almost identical building types, unwittingly contributed to a nega-
tive image of what "socialist" planning means. After some late-1980s developments around Havana—
most notably Las Arboledas and Villa Panamericana—demonstrated that attractive designs could be achieved even with semi-prefab-
cicated elements, by 1989 the government of Cuban New Urbanism emerged that featured buildings facing the street, more varied designs, a better relationship to existing terrain and more diverse facades and building shapes that included materials present in the eastern provincial capital of Bayamo, where adjoining lots are assigned to different agen-
cies that each design their own buildings within general guidelines. Infill buildings have even been added to existing superblocks. And after years of a one-size-fits-all approach—which was seen as egal-
tarian—projects that address the needs of the eld-
ery and disabled are underway.

The mid-1990s climate of experimentation led to an innovative concept of "key and blue" buildings and new elements in a locally generated program in the eastern province of Las Tunas. It has since spread to other provinces in eastern Cuba and was being considered for national implementation before a series of hurricanes and tropical storms in the early 2000s destroyed or damaged tens of thou-
ands of units that are still waiting for top priority for repair or replacement. The Prieto Housing Construction Movement (Movimiento Popular de la Construcción de Viviendas - MPVC) focuses on the use of local materials and promotes materials that are required to be used in the construction of new homes. There is some self-building for unsilled work (leading to discounts in sales price to residents) while skilled labor comes from the local construc-
tion department of several municipalities. Materials are distributed to work sites when they are needed.
ready to be used—a Cuban version of "just-in-time" production. Construction is community-based rather than workplace-based. All new units replace existing ones, and there is involvement and assis-
tance from other members of the community. Buildings are incremental, with no preset completion deadlines to meet (which often leads to poor qual-
ity); residents can live in the new units even if they are not totally completed. So far the focus has been on new single-family construction in rural settle-
ments, houses near main roads and in outlying areas of towns and cities. Each participating mun-
icipality assigns a town, neighborhood or stretch of highway to assist (a sort of Cuban "adopt-a-high-
way" program).

Self-Building

Some two-thirds to three-quarters of all housing units in Cuba are created through the efforts of residents, although official figures on completions are somewhat lower. Officially recognized self-
building continued during the Special Period, often with alternative technologies. But work on many units or additions was halted or severely slowed because of lack of materials at reasonable prices and the need to devote family income to

Some two-thirds to three-quarters of all housing units in Cuba are created through the efforts of residents.

essentials such as food. Illegal construction of dif-
ferent sorts (including remodeling, shantytown additions and subdivisions) continued and possi-
ably increased because of lax building and zoning
enforcement.

Habitat-Cuba, a housing-related NGO that began in the early 1990s, initiated the Community Architect Program in Holguin province using the participa-
tory design methodology of Argentine architect Rodolfo Livingson for working with residents who are building or remodeling their own units.

The program spread throughout the country and was officially transferred to the National Housing Banking Institute in 2000. The method was also used for participatory planning at the block and subdivi-
sion level. However, by the early 2000s, commu-
nity architects started devoting less time to design because of new self-building restrictions and more time on documents legalizing self-building and appraisals for exchanges and inheritance.

New regulations issued in fall 2000 more strictly regulated self-building and imposed higher fines and other penalties for violations. These mostly related to overbuilding by the "new rich"—with
dubious sources of income and materials, and to
disorderly illegal building, such as shantytowns.
The new regulations more tightly control self-
building by requiring that only locally obtained
ized materials for construction and repair be
determined by community-based commissions.
Priority is given to emergency repairs and com-
pleting units already started. Building permits are conditioned on demonstrating legal access to suf-
ficient materials to complete a project. The net effect has been that officially sanctioned self-
built units were set at 10 percent of its 2000 level. There has been considerable debate on many aspects of the regulations among architects, planners and officials in charge of implementing them.

Upgrading Versus Shantytown Clearance

Despite the difficulties of the Special Period, there
has been some new emphasis on maintenance, repair and rehabilitation of multi-family buildings. For instance, Place Cayo Hueso was a major effort in the Havana neighborhood of Cayo Hueso. Government ministries were assigned to repair facades and do structural work, while residents were sold materials for interiors. The method, which had varying degrees of success, expanded to other Havana neighborhoods and other selected cities around the island, and served as a partial model for the MPCI in Las Tunas.

The previous policy regarding shantytowns was
clearance, either when relocation housing became available elsewhere or by new construction on-
site. Because there were few resources, however, little was done, and residents were even discour-
aged from improving their dwellings since they were eventually slated for elimination. During the 1990s, new and existing shantytowns grew. Policy shifted to clearing only those shantytowns or indi-
vidual houses in dangerous or inappropriate loca-
tions (e.g., in flood plains or under power lines). The rest are to be improved.

The main form of inner city slums consists of
rooms with shared cooking and sanitary services. By the late 1990s, rehabilitation programs for replacement were under way. Individual buildings were mostly targeted, but sometimes also in con-
njunction with surrounding buildings, or the block or neighborhood, especially when there are resources available from foreign NGOs or from
cross-subsidies from historic districts. Aside from the perennial materials shortages, the major barri-
cr to more aggressive rehabilitation is the lack of temporary or permanent relocation units.

Historic Preservation

Since the mid-1990s there has been a major increase in the rate of preservation and restoration of landmarked buildings and districts, especially in Old Havana. It has been facilitated by a mid-1990s law establishing the role of the historicist’s Office of the cities of Havana, Santiago, Camagüey and Trinidad as a developer with the right to tax all enti-
ties in the historic areas. Havana’s Historicist’s Office is also administering the credit, hotel and construction businesses. Most of the taxes (and profits in the case of Havana) do not get into the general budget. They are used for further restoration and as a cross-
subsidy to rehabilitate deteriorated but less historic nearby areas.

Displacement and relocation are also issues in his-
toric preservation. Cuban architects and planners also debate whether only these four areas should have a local dedicated revenue source when so many other areas—historic or otherwise—have great needs.

Foreign Real Estate Investment

Most real estate joint ventures have been in hotels, other tourist facilities, offices and apartments. Although all in Havana and other tourist areas. Apartments were originally for sale only to foreign-
ners (e.g., diplomats, business people, snowbirds), but since 2000, those units without sale contracts were able to be rented.

There have been many drafts of a law governing real estate investment and ownership rights, but still no final version presented to the Cuban parlia-
ment. There are numerous issues to be resolved. For instance, if buyers obtain a foreign loan or mort-
gage, what happens if they default? Who should own the ownership rights be regarding sales and inheri-
tance? What happens if a foreigner marries a Cuban or wants to sell a Cuban? What about a Cuban who becomes a Venezuelan citizen and buys an apartment? What would be the relationship between laws and regulations governing housing for Cubans (the 1988 housing law and subsequent amendments and regulations) and those regulating foreigners buying or renting from joint ventures? What is the demand for these units? Is it saturated yet? How are land values to be set?

In addition to these legal issues, some Cuban archi-
acters and planners have criticized foreign real estate investments for poor design, high density and ques-
tionable zoning decisions. They are also concerned about the geographic impact of investment: most housing and offices are concentrated in one or two areas in Havana. And, of course, there has been debate about building projects going to real estate development for foreigners so that Cuba can earn hard currency rather than affordable housing for Cubans. As of 2001, the policy was to finish units under construction, but there may not be new starts.

The period since 1990 has been one of both aus-
terity and creativity in housing policy. It hasn’t been easy. And the good news is that as the economy picks up, housing is once again one of Cuba’s most pressing problems.

Jill Hunsberg teaches at Empire State College in New York and has written extensively about Cuban housing policy.

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Building Alternative Communities:
A New Middle Path for Urban Planners and Progressives

By Derek T. Chisholm

One way to achieve radical, progressive goals is for people to live in accordance with their principles. Urban “lifestyle anarchists,” for example, create off-the-grid cooperatives. Lifestyle choices, however, while very possible to implement, have a minimal impact on society.

Another way to achieve radical, progressive goals is through social revolution. But while a transformative revolution in the United States would have a tremendous impact, it is not very likely given present-day conditions. So though it might be clear that true change requires revolution, it is not so clear how we can “work toward” a revolution.

One answer may lie in a concept known to social ecologists as “alternative institutions.” These institutions can help bridge the gap between the society of today and the new society envisioned by the diverse groups collectively known as progressives. Building alternative institutions can be a middle path that progressives and urban planners can follow.

It is clearly not enough for an individual household to attain independence in terms of energy and food production. It is clearly not enough for an individual household to participate in democratically operated institutions such as cooperative buying clubs. Furthermore, it is insufficient to participate on the one hand in the current culture of gigantism and consumerism, while covertly organizing a revolution with the miniscule handful of people sufficiently disenfranchised and visionary enough to entertain such a notion. The middle path is one along which a visionary network of people organize to develop alternative institutions that have the necessary magnitude to constitute a leap forward.

Communities as Laboratories

In The Limits of the City, Murray Bookchin writes: “City planning finds its validation in the intuitive recognition that a burgeoning market society cannot be trusted to produce spontaneously a habitable, sanitary or even efficient city, much less a beautiful one.” While he is right that “the market” cannot be trusted to produce a sustainable and just society, it is also true that even well-intentioned city planners cannot produce such a society.

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Communities as Laboratories

In The Limits of the City, Murray Bookchin writes: “City planning finds its validation in the intuitive recognition that a burgeoning market society cannot be trusted to produce spontaneously a habitable, sanitary or even efficient city, much less a beautiful one.” While he is right that “the market” cannot be trusted to produce a sustainable and just society, it is also true that even well-intentioned city planners cannot produce such a society. Planners are answerable to elected bodies that are beholden to professional developers and constrained by the social and economic motives of modern capitalism.

To a limited degree, however, the market is able to produce communities that embody progressive principles. The proposals for these communities, however, cannot come from government planning staffs or from conventional pro-development real estate developers. The responsibility for envisioning, planning, and building these communities falls to the progressives.

Traditional Marxist theory focuses heavily on economic analysis and the need to reappropriate the means and modes of production. While it is important to maintain a focus on the production side of economics, there is also a need for revolutionary thinking about the consumption side. Chief among our consumption choices is housing. But to understand housing progressive have to become familiar with the whole community development process, something most activists are unfamiliar with. This requires going beyond the mainstreams of modern activism—protesting, promoting, criticizing, and subsidizing. Progressives have learned many valuable lessons about solar power, building techniques and group decision-making, to build an entire community requires learning new lessons about real estate law, long-term financing, civil engineering and transportation planning.

In the beginning, alternative communities may have modest goals. Even if residents live “normal” lives, the neighborhood can still be designed with heightened ecological consideration, minimal paved spaces and other amenities made popular in the New Urbanist movement. Because of market constraints, these New Urbanist niceties seldom go beyond being window dressing of large houses with antiquated architectural details. From the successes of smaller communities, progressives can learn what is needed to reach the next level for alternative communities. At this level there should be enough residents (citizens) and land to include cooperative markets, car-free villages, limited autonomous justice systems, property-sharing agreements and independent energy production. Progressives can then begin to proclaim “it is possible.” Without taking this next step, there is no “laboratory” for the exploration of revolutionary issues that are larger than personal choice and more applicable than general economic theory.

Activity is often defined, even within activist communities, by what is opposed rather than what is proposed as an alternative. Progressives, therefore, often best know how to articulate what the future should not be, but when questioned about a vision of the next society, theories of progressives often devolve into generalizations. Responses to questions about alternatives may consist of well-articulated answers about new kinds of social relations, but not social systems. Rarely do progressive alternatives deal with systems—of justice, property, wages, or other vital urban systems. Yet until there are laboratories for the study of these matters, it will be very difficult for any progressive movement to engage in more than social criticism. Developing and living in alternative institutions, the laboratories of social ecology, will begin a new phase of movement toward a revolutionary new society.

Building New Villages

Murray Bookchin, among others, has insightfully dissected the constrained parameters within which government-sponsored urban planning can occur. Rarely could city planning transcend the destructive social conditions to which it was a response. Furthermore the overwhelming pragmatic mentality of bourgeois society muted city planning’s visionary outlook; one could deal with the “facts of life” to get anything done, not with utopian schemes.

Government planning has been shackled by the relentless paradigm of “market needs,” as if every trend and characteristic of our society is the racial result of an invisible body of consumers. On the contrary, this same “market” has developed into an inequitable mechanism for providing an excessive supply of products with which consumers are deeply dissatisfied. Left with no other alternatives, the consumer chooses from the lot provided—e.g., unsupervised tract housing in sterilized subdivisions devoid of trees, markets and public gathering space. This same “progressive” consumer must then drive to where the trees are and to shop where the shops are, and must go online to find virtual public spaces for civil discourse.

Twenty years ago, local planners and elected officials may not have been very open to development proposals that did not fit with the ordinance code because the code has not yet caught up with progressive planning ideals. For instance, in many zoning codes there are no provisions for mixing uses in order to, for example, locate a small corner market in a residential area; for using alternative building materials; or for establishing cooperative housing arrangements.

Role of Progressive Activists

Progressive activists should be able to speak with a modicum of authority about new, revolutionary social relations. This is only now possible because radical organizations have served as a laboratory for the testing of our principles of non-hierarchical relations. The development of alternative communities and systems will provide new laboratories for testing other principles. Otherwise, it will not be possible to formulate anything more than abstract theories of how communities should interact.

I hope this can be a call for activists to come together and start the long process of developing these alternative institutions. First steps will need to include visioning, laying organizational foundations, and educating oneself about highly technical, development issues. It will not be long until the next steps will include property acquisition and building projects. Later years, these “first villages” will be seen as the seeds from which the greater alternative institutions will grow, emerging into the complex systems required to sustain our dreams.

Derek Chisholm has worked in government planning offices and nonprofit environmental organizations, and has been involved in grassroots activism for fourteen years. He lives in Portland and can be reached at Derek@go.com.

Progressive activists should be able to speak with a modicum of authority about new, revolutionary social relations.
Book Review: Andy Merrifield
Dialectical Urbanism: Social Struggles in the Capitalist City

Review by Arturo Ignacio Sanchez


Andy Merrifield is interested in constructing a modern Marxist politics of the city. To do this he moves beyond what he terms a “utopian alternative” and towards a “practical dystopian politics.” This approach represents a shift in emphasis from the economic thrust of the mature Marx to the humanism of the “young Marx.”

Merrifield addresses a range of contemporary critical debates that have emerged around such pivotal issues as the tensions between globalization and place-based urban politics; the increasing importance of racial and ethnic difference and alienation of identity politics; and the larger theoretical questions of “identity politics in the Grassroots.” The city of Los Angeles is presented as a barometer for the grassroots struggles around the growing income divide and the social movements for a living wage. Finally, New York is presented as a canvass for sketching the contradictions associated with economic growth, income concentration in a world-class corporate city and growing levels of pauperism and homelessness.

In this book, Merrifield highlights how the historical differences associated with specific urban places affect the alignment of local political forces. He successfully highlights how the top-down forces associated with globalization are modulated by the bottom-up experiences of everyday folks. And by highlighting the variable role of human agency in the local urban political process, Merrifield minimizes the primacy of economic determinism and presents a balanced and nuanced view of the city as a prospective and fertile site for progressive grassroots politics.

In taking this position, the author informs his narrative to the whole nation. He argues that, despite footloose market imperatives that crisscross national boundaries, history, difference and the lived experiences associated with place still matter.

This book describes how the East New York ghet
to was created, the way its housing was destroyed, how educational resources were withheld and municipal services cut back. This is one of the most significant stories of the New York City’s history. In this city, the fight against the downloading of jobs and the fight against gentrification, are not only a struggle for a better quality of life, but also a struggle for the preservation of a community that has been under attack for decades.


to. How East New York Became a Ghetto

This book analyzes how the East New York ghetto was created, the way its housing was destroyed, how educational resources were withheld and municipal services cut back. This is one of the most significant stories of the New York City’s history. In this city, the fight against the downloading of jobs and the fight against gentrification, are not only a struggle for a better quality of life, but also a struggle for the preservation of a community that has been under attack for decades.

In 1960, East New York was 85 percent white. By the end of 1966, it was close to 80 percent black and Puerto Rican (now, well over 90 percent). The blacks and Puerto Ricans channeled into East New York were subjected to bank reclassing, property neglect, block-busting and vicious exploitation. In the tenement “target area,” 100 of its 450 buildings were vacated, burnt out or demolished.

Adding 2,500 units of new and rehabilitated housing under a city program did not stem the tide of destruction. Foreclosed and burned out empty buildings dominated the landscape through the 1970s.

New housing construction began again in the early 1980s, led by the EBC (East Brooklyn Congregations) and other housing groups which created 2,500 new and rehabilitated units. Progress was also recorded in child care, health care and other services. And while violent crime has been reduced, the criminalization of the lives of African American and Hispanic youth is still vigorously pursued by the police. Many other issues are not new to be addressed if East New York is to recover from the shock and awe of gentrification.

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PN Bio: Xavier Morales

Sleepless in Phoenix

I’ve been involved off and on with the PN since I was in graduate school working toward my PhD. Currently, I manage PN’s list serve—I try the one to blame when SPAM gets through to our list, or when a message to the list gets bounced back for some inexplicable reason.

The Planners Network is one of the few spaces where I feel that my personal, community and academic goals converge. I am interested in assisting community-based struggles for justice. Through my work at the Arizona Prevention Resource Center (APRC) and through my consulting and volunteer activities, I have shifted my political space into a place that privileges the community’s role in the discourse surrounding planning and development issues. However, I am finding that putting systems into place is often not enough; some groups also need ongoing technical assistance to help them make their voices louder and more technically compelling in the political and economic arenas in which they seek to engage.

Since 2000, I have been involved with the APRC, whose primary mission is to enable communities to increase their qualities of life by assisting them to engage in effective community-based prevention activities. As associate director, I basically do everything from administration to project development and management to managing our information technologies unit. In mid-June (2003) I unveiled a web-based GIS application that will allow non-technical users to analyze and report spatial data. I also am part of a development team that in 2002 was successful in drawing down over $120 million in federal grant dollars to help improve Arizona communities. Obviously, my work at the APRC is what allows me to pay my bills. On the volunteer front, I sit on the board of a community development corporation that is building low-income housing in an economically depressed neighborhood in central Phoenix. I also continue to work with environmental and economic justice organizations in the Southwest, including working with Dine Care and the Eastern Navajo Uranium Mineworkers to create a GIS that makes explicit the link between contemporary radiation-related illnesses with historical exposures in the Four Corners region. I have also been invited to sit on the Interagency Workgroup being formed to remediate and develop Kelly Air Force base in San Antonio, Texas. I also helped to organize and coordinate a group called Los Vecinos de Northwest Tempe. As a group, long-term Latino residents have been excluded from Tempe’s development process and have been dislocated twice in their lifetimes in the name of redevelopment, and are now facing a third dislocation as the city hides behind the veil of New Urbanist principles. Los Vecinos has quickly become a major player in Tempe’s latest neighborhood-friendly development initiatives. Lastly, I am collaborating with two colleagues from my Cornell days on the development of a pilot Regional GIS Center that will be directed by the community groups it seeks to serve. The goal of this center is to develop a community oriented webGIS that makes sophisticated spatial analysis accessible to a non-technical audience.

It was strange for me to try to get all of what I do into this small space. As is the case for many PNers, until you have to write something like this, you don’t realize why you are always so tired. But when you are in a community meeting (or a congres- sional hearing, for that matter) and from the back of the room you sit and observe as the members of the group that you worked with and are standing alone presenting data that you helped them collect, ana- lyze and report, it makes the bugs under your eyes much more bearable. It is even more rewarding when you see them then presenting data you did not help them collect and analyze because at that point, your job is done and it is time to seek out another group with which to collaborate.

Keep up the good fight! See you all on the listserv.

My email address is xhm1@cornell.edu.

PN Member Updates

Patricia Swann writes:

I recently received a nice letter from you guys bringing to my attention the fact that I hadn’t yet renewed, and asking for feedback on why. Since you asked...

I’m probably in the minority on this, but I liked the shorter format. I am totally overwhelmed with too many things to read these days. The thing I liked about Planners Network before was that the information was easily digestible. Occasionally I had to put it in the ‘to be read’ pile for one of the longer pieces, but most of the info was in the form of good interesting tidbits. Now it seems that ALL the articles are long, and very academic.

I still believe in the Planners Network principles, and I am amazed at what a few dedicated volunteers can accomplish. You can expect my check via snail mail soon. But I miss the shorter more inviting Planners Network quarterly.

(Editors Region: We agree with you that when shifted from a bi-monthly newsletter to a quarterly magazine almost two years ago, we did lose some of the networking functions that PN has always provided. The listserv and website partially fill the gap. We plan to start an on-line newsletter for members that will hopefully expand networking opportunities. See one call for email addresses below.)

Jason Gilliland has been appointed assistant professor in the Urban Development Program of the Department of Geography at the University of Western Ontario. Formally trained in architecture, planning and geography, his research focuses on various (and interrelated) aspects of housing, urban development and public health in cities. In an ongoing study of “live-work” spaces, Jason is investigating the morphological and social consequences associated with the transformation of non-residential zones and buildings into new uses. On another funded project, he is using a combination of geomatics techniques, visual surveys and focus group interviews to assess the “opportunity structures” for gambling in urban environments. Jason begins teaching at UWO in September 2003 and welcomes queries from conscientious students about geography speciffic to Canada. For more information visit www.uwo.ca/geog.

Ute Lehrer is moving on from being an assistant professor at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, SUNY Buffalo, to the Department of Geography at Brock University, Canada. She will continue her engagement at SUNY Buffalo. I have also been working in the Geography Department. Currently, Lehrer is finishing up a book manuscript on large-scale projects, image production and globalization, as well as a research project on “urban cow disease,” where she analyzes the political, economic and social aspects of the marketing strategies of cities. She is also involved in practices of contemporary neighborhood agendas that has mushroomed throughout many North American and European cities. On the teaching front, Lehrer also remains active. Her Fall 2003 study will be published in the Western New York Section American Planning Association 2003 Award for Outstanding Student Project. Under her guidance, thirteen students with many different talents worked on the initial phase for developing a master plan in the Town of Porter.

PN Steering Committee member Fernando Martí will begin a three-year Rose Fellowship in August at Mission Housing Development Corporation in San Francisco, winner in a national architectural and planning competition for the Generation One Young Family Housing workshops. Martí is a graduate in architecture and planner for the Mission Anti-Displacement Coalition’s “People’s Plan.” He is

We’ll be starting a monthly e-mail newsletter for PN members to keep the networking going. The e-letter will have member updates, jobs, conferences and other announcement. Often PNers in the same city ask us how they can get in touch with other PNers, and the best we can do is send them names and addresses. Email is also the best way to let you know when your membership/subscription has been renewed. If you don’t want to receive the e-letter, we can keep you off that list, but please send us your email address so we can contact you when we need to.

Send to pn@pratt.edu and in the subject line put “subscribe to e-newsletter.”
leaving Urban Ecology after two-and-a-half years on staff. Fernando is also on the initial board of the San Francisco Community Land Trust, which is on its way to becoming incorporated. This summer he will be co-teaching an affordable housing design studio at UC Berkeley, with Alex Salazar from Pyrosk Architects.

Joan Roelofs is a PN member, board member of Cheshire Housing Trust in Keene, New Hampshire, and professor emerita of Political Science, Keene State College. She is the author of Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism (SUNY Press, 2003), and Creating Cities: Building Just and Sustainable Communities (Boostramp Press, 1996). One of her interests is in the identification of non-toxic, durable, and easily maintainable building and interior materials for low-income housing, schools, public buildings, etc., and she welcomes correspondence from those with knowledge of these areas. What follows is an update about her involvement with the renovation and restoration of the Hampshire House.

THE RESTORATION OF HAMPSHIRE HOUSE: PN member Joan Roelofs found a bright spot last winter. As a board member of the Cheshire Housing Trust she participated in the purchase, renovation, and opening of the Hampshire House in Keene, New Hampshire. Built as a boarding house in 1914, it remains a single-room occupancy residence.

The house had eighteen single rooms, with shared bathrooms on each of the three floors and no kitchen facilities, plus a small apartment for a manager-owned by the late 1960s, the last private owners. Alex and Shirley Martinez purchased the property and continued for many years to operate it as a boarding house. By 2000, Mrs. Martinez was ill; Mr. Martinez was on in years and ready for retirement. The house, a handsome Dutch colonial with a slate roof, was in good structural condition, but needed major interior renovations, new mechanicals, systems, insulation, windows, etc., to meet current code requirements and to permit energy-efficiency measures. Alex Martinez wanted the building to continue serving SRO tenants, for whom alternative accommodation in Keene was practically nonexistent. He turned to Cheshire Housing Trust, a non-profit organization that provides affordable housing to low- and moderate-income residents.

The Trust was very happy to take on this challenging project, but there were many daunting hurdles. The building was historic, and any changes had to be sensitive to the original design as well as respect CHT's commitment to the use of sustainable building materials. The Keene CityCouncil was required to vote on the CDBG application, and in this frugal territory, the large cost of reconstructing eighteen rooms and an apartment was a matter of some concern. Furthermore, the house is on a street of elegant homes, one block from the Central Square, and there was fear that the locals might oppose the project. Fortunately, all the pieces came together, and funding was obtained from state (New Hampshire Home Finance Authority) and federal (CDBG) sources, and a mortgage from the private Bank of New Hampshire.

Hampshire House

Opening day in January 2003 unveiled a beautiful, functional, safe, and energy-efficient house. The slate roof and wooden siding remained; the interior wooden floors were refinished and prevailed throughout except in the bathrooms and kitchens. Volunteers removed and replaced the interior wooden trim, rejuvenated the fine 1920s wooden furniture, made new curtains, and laid small tile in the entrances. The apartment was readied for a manager to be hired by CHT. The renovation included new wiring, plumbing, heating system, sprinkler and fire alarm, intercom, windows, walls, doors, insulation, and lighting fixtures. Kitchens were added on each floor for tenant use, along with energy efficient coin-operated laundry machines. A handicapped accessible room was created.

In January 2003 an Open House was held prior to the return of the residents. Many of those involved with the project were there, including contractors, the architect, carpenters, CHT board and staff, volunteers, Mayor, City Councilors, state and city officials, tenants (not identified as such), a new manager, and Mr. Martinez with his children and grandchild. This was such a happy occasion, especially in contrast to the terrible national and international climate of the time. Reports indicate that the returning tenants were excited about the upgrading and thankful for their CHT-funded temporary relocation.

Roelofs' contribution, in addition to her legal responsibilities as a board member, was to offer suggestions for environmentally preferable lighting and building materials.

Contacts: Joan.Roelofs@verizon.net; Cheshire Housing Trust; cht@monad.net.

PN'er Neil Mayer writes Neil Mayer & Associates is a consulting firm undertaking projects in the fields of economic and community development and housing. He is a graduate of the University of William James' challenge to engage in "the moral equivalent of war." His work involves drafting comprehensive conservation and development strategies for the Dead Sea basin and the Gulf of Aqaba.

Another most interesting project, with a focus on the bridge between social and environmental concerns, has been the engagement of environmental NGOs in Armenia. Much of the population there is currently more impoverished than they were when Armenia was the most prosperous republic in the Soviet Union. As a consequence of the Armenian-Armenian wars another instance: it is believed that there is a widespread practice of government officials who supplement their meager salaries with bribes from developers, even when the developed severely degrade the environment. I must quote the Armenian Minister of the Environment, in response to a question I asked him during an interview about the issues involved between the economy and the environment in that "Newly Independent State." The minister's poetic—but accurate—response became one of the themes of our workshops with NGOs: "Poverty is poison to the environment."

From PN'er Yveline Massen: Six years ago I retired from my role as principal planner of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. Retire ment was not motivated solely by the fact that the administration had become quite tired of my insisting on the assessment of the differential socio-economic impacts of air quality programs and/or absence of programs, especially impacts on low-income neighborhoods and communities of color (examples available on request). Even after I left the agency, I was able to assist in establishing a special advisory committee, made up of representatives of Bay Area organizations focused on social equity.

Since retiring I have become even more involved with a number of projects that address concerns of environmental justice and social equity. I am on the board of directors of Resources for Community Development, a developer of low-income and special needs housing; the Social Equity Caucus of the Bay Area Alliance; I have sustained the building of Communities, Architects, and Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR), NorCal Chapter. I also am involved with production of the ADPSR national publication, New Village.

My most intense and interesting work since retiring has been abroad. I am a consultant to Friends of the Earth Middle East, a transnational consortium of Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs. Yes, they are still working together through all of the turmoil, trying to address the problems of environmental protection and sustainable development. I see the efforts of William James' challenge to engage in "the moral equivalent of war." My work involves drafting comprehensive conservation and development strategies for the Dead Sea basin and the Gulf of Aqaba.

CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITIONS

September 10-11, Boston, MA: Annual Conference of the National Network of Sector Partners. Learn how sector initiatives are proving to be valuable tools for enhancing employment and economic development opportunities for low-income individuals, families and communities.
info@nnscp.org, www.nnscp.org/events.htm.

info@railvolution.com.

October 17, Los Angeles, CA: 2nd Annual Transline California Communities Conference. The California Debt and Investment Advisory Commission presents a new series of educational courses on tools for financing community development and economic growth.
info@www.citidep.ca.gov/cdac/tools.htm.

November 2-4, Cambridge, MA: Sustainable Communities. Explore how various investment sectors stitch together to help build sustainable local economies. Educational panels and speakers will bring together angel investors, professional venture capitalists, venture philanthropists, foundations and others to examine the continuum of strategies for deploying risk capital to support social entrepreneurship at the community level.

November 5, Baltimore, MD: Re-inventing Community Development. Connect with peers and pros in development, finance, philanthropy and government while learning about new strategies, techniques, and successes from around the country in community development.
www.enterprisefoundation.org/resources/Trainin

PUBLICATIONS

America’s Newcomers, a report by the Lewis Mumford Center (Albany), summarizes what has been learned from Census 2000 about the 29 million immigrants living in metropolitan regions throughout the United States. People and Politics in America’s Big Cities, another report from the Mumford Center, explores the lag between changes in the racial and ethnic composition of cities and the representation of new groups in local politics. Both reports are available at: mumford1.dynnews.org/cen2000/report.html.

Writing from his jail cell, Richard M. Flood explores the racial political potential of the Almighty Latin Kings and Quetzal Nation—a so-called “street gang” active in at least 25 US states, as well as Puerto Rico, Mexico and Panama, with an estimated membership of 100,000 people. His essay, Towards a Theory of Revolutionizing Street Nation, can be found at Socialism and Democracy Online, www.sdotline.org/53/richard_m_flood.htm.

The City: From Self-Managed Movements to the Self-Managed City. Tom Wezkel advocates for “an alliance—a people’s alliance—of unions, tenant groups and other mass organizations coming together around a multiplicity of concerns that affect city dwellers in their daily lives.” Read more at: www.zmag.org/wetzkel.htm.

There was a reason they called it the Casino Economy. There’s lots of losers. Thomas W. Croft credits the late economist/urban planner Bennett Harrison with coming up with a perfect fit to describe the economy of the last decade. Find Croft’s article at: www.couterpunch.org/croft07032003.html.

What’s not available at the local Wal-Mart store: good jobs, good pay, and good benefits. That’s why the residents of one California community are trying to stop the retailing giant. Read about The Great Wal-Mart Wars at: www.alternet.org/story.php?storyID=16282.

What happens when an oppressed community moves into a neighborhood where another oppressed community lives—and starts gentrifying it? The documentary film Flag Wars is a poignant account of the politics and pain of gentrification. More information about the PBS film is available at: www.pbs.org/pov/pov03/flagwars/index.html. A related online discussion about gentrification and inter-group tension can be found at Shelterforce magazine: www.shelterforce.org/index/issues/129/POV.html.

(LOW) Power to the People: FM Mini-Stations

Put Neighborhoods on the Air. Low-power FM radio stations owned by churches, charities, environmental groups, schools and governmental agencies see the Davids to corporate the Goliaths Clear Channel and Viacom. Visit the Ford Foundation Report online at: www.fordfoundation.org/publications/lfr/report/view_flobeat.html.

After the dilapidation of urban modernism, what kinds of city and what forms of architecture await us? In an essay for the New Left Review, Frederic Jameson considers the work of Rem Koolhaas, the mega-developments of the Pearl River Delta and the conceptualization of ‘junkspac’ at: www.newleftreview.net/NLR25503.shtml.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The American Planning Association’s International Division has launched its new website. The division welcomes American planners with an interest in planning practice and urban development in other countries, as well as planners living and working outside the US who want to maintain contact with the American planning community, and others concerned with urban development worldwide.
www.planning.org/international.

The Indigenous Planning Network is proposing to form a new division of the APA to link planners of every tribe, native community and Indigenous group with each other through this division, utilizing newsletters, the internet, and conferences. Information at: www.planning.org/divisions/spn.htm. A background article on the Indigenous Planning Network can be found at the Planners Network website, www.plannersnetwork.org/hum/pub/archives/139/ipoja.htm.


New York Municipal Art Society launches ebulletin. Sign up for this free service and keep abreast on a range of issues pertaining to the waterfront, historic preservation, planning, zoning, as well as walking tours, boat tours, etc.
exhibitions and talks. Email laranas@max.org to sign up.

Women & Environments International Magazine, a Canadian magazine offering feminist perspectives on women's relations to their natural, built and social environments, is looking for submissions from north, south, aboriginal and minority communities around the world. Information on submitting articles to the upcoming special issue, 'Cities for Women', can be found by selecting the "participate" menu option at www.weenimag.com.

Internet Sites
Ask Henry is a search engine specializing in economics, politics and reform. www.askhenry.com

GreenMoney Journal covers socially and environmentally responsible investing and business. www.greenmoneyjournal.com

HUD's website is now available in Spanish. espanol.hud.gov/index.html

Inequality.org aims to circulate information about the divide in income, wealth and health. www.inequality.org

The Journal of Poverty is a refereed journal designed to provide a focused outlet for discourse on poverty and inequality. www.journalofpoverty.org

Mother Jones is an independent nonprofit whose role is committed to social justice implemented through investigative reporting. www.motherjones.com

Moving Ideas Network is dedicated to explaining and popularizing complex policy ideas to a broader audience. www.movingideas.org

The Progress Report is published daily by the Benjamin Banneker Center for Economic Justice and Progress. www.progress.org

Responsible Wealth is a national network of businesspeople, investors and affluent Americans concerned about deepening economic inequality. www.responsiblewealth.org

TravelMatters.org is an online tool that discusses the link between sustainable surface transportation and climate change and provides emissions calculators for individuals and transit planners. www.travelmatters.org

Working USA is a journal focusing on labor and society. www.workingusa.org

Resources on Progressive Urbanism, Marxism and Socialism
Council of Geologist Organizations. The geologist philosophy advocates equal rights for all and special privileges for none. www.progress.org/cgo

Historical Materialism is an interdisciplinary journal dedicated to exploring and developing the critical and explanatory potential of Marxist theory. "Unburdened by pre-1989 ideological baggage, Historical Materialism stands at the edge of a vibrant intellectual current, publishing a new generation of Marxist thinkers and scholars." www.brill.nl/m_catalogue_sub6_id17936.htm

In These Times is a national, biweekly magazine of news and opinion. www.inthesetimes.com

Jay's Leftist and "Progressive" Internet Resources Directory is a web portal 'for all who want to fight back and build together a better world.' www.nearav.com/left

Left Business Observer is a monthly newsletter on economics and politics in the US and the world. www.brill.nl/m_catalogue_sub6_id17936.htm

MAREMAIL is a worldwide moderated forum for activists and scholars in the Marxist tradition. www.maremail.org

Monthly Review. Since 1949 the Review has "spoken for socialism and against US imperialism." www.monthlyreview.org

New Left Review is a bi-monthly journal of the international Left. www.newleftreview.net

Rethinking Marxism is a journal of economics, culture and society. www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/econ/PM_test.htm

Socialism and Democracy is a semi-annual publication of articles, interviews, symposia and book reviews. www.sdonline.org

Z Magazine is an independent monthly of critical thinking on political, cultural, social and economic life in the US. www.zmag.org

Books on Marxist Urbanism
Manuel Castells, The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach (MIT Press, 1979)
Frederick Engels, Conditions of the Working Class in England (Progress, 1973); Socialism Utopian and Scientific (International, 1994); The Housing Question (Progress, 1975)
David Harvey, Social Justice and the City (Arnold, 1973)
Henri Lefebvre, The Urban Revolution (University of Minnesota Press, 2003)

Books on Socialist Cities
J. Beecher and R. Bienvenu, The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier (Beacon, 1971)
Paul Conkin, Tomorrow a New World (Cornell U. Press, 1959) (Resettlement Administration)
R.A. French and F.E. Hamblin (eds.) The Socialist City (Wiley, 1979)
M. Jaggi, R. Muller, S. Schmid, Red Bologna (Writers and Readers, 1977)
N.A. Millan. Sotogordo: The Problem of Building

Planners Network Student Campaign
Planners Network is launching a new student outreach campaign, and we invite all interested students to get involved. The Planners Network 2003-2004 Campus Drive aims to raise student awareness about progressive planning and provide support for students to organize local progressive planning events and initiatives.

The campaign hopes to demonstrate that, contrary to what students hear from professional planning associations and many professors, there is a viable alternative to the mainstream planning establishment and that planners can indeed be advocates for social change. We are therefore inviting students to join PN and establish local PN chapters, to better incorporate progressive principles and ideas into planning education and to create focal points for local planning action.

Students are encouraged to take action at both the local level and in the broader context of Planners Network, through a variety of activities:
  - organizing panel discussions, workshops, design charrettes, a speaker series, or other events;
  - producing newsletters, articles, or other publications;

Socialist Cities (MIT Press, 1974)
William Morris, A Factory as it Might Be (Mushroom Bookshop, 1994)
Bruce M. Stave. Socialism and the Cities (Kennikat Press, 1975)
Dorolés Hayden, Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communist Socialism (MIT, 1976)

Resources from the Planners Network Magazine Archives


Employment Opportunities
The Housing & Community Development Network in Trenton, New Jersey is looking for a Community Planning Specialist. Contact: Michael H. Barber at mbarber@hcdnj.org or go to www.hcdnj.org.

- working with faculty to develop a more progressive curriculum;
- engaging in critical projects related to local planning issues;
- contributing to the PN magazine, newsletter, list serve, or website;
- planning a workshop or event for the June 2004 PN conference in New York City.

Students who join PN and form a local chapter will be eligible to receive financial support and other benefits. PN can provide up to $500 per campus for student events, along with copies of Planners Network magazine, brochures, and student orientation materials. New chapters may also benefit from reduced PN membership deals, publicity on the PN website, and opportunities for networking with other progressive planning students and PN members.

Students at 14 universities have already started local organizing — for more information or to get in touch with a chapter near you, please email pnsstudents@yahoo.com.

Josh Lerner
For Planners Network
JOIN PLANNERS NETWORK

For our 25 years, Planners Network has been a voice for progressive professionals and activists concerned with urban planning and social justice. PN members in 38 states of the U.S. and 16 other countries receive this bimonthly publication, network online with PN-NET, and take part in the annual conference. PN also gives progressive ideas a voice in the mainstream planning profession by organizing assistants at annual conferences of the American Planning Association and American Collegiate Schools of Planning.

The PN Conference has been held annually each spring since 1994. These gatherings include workshops and panels with representatives from local and national levels. Recent conferences have been held in Washington, DC, East St. Louis, and Brooklyn, NY. Preparation involves networking and consultations with local communities. Many decisions are made at the local, national, and international levels. Recent conferences have been held in Washington, DC, East St. Louis, and Brooklyn, NY. Preparation involves networking and consultations with local communities. Many decisions are made at this level.

PN members pay annual dues. The minimum dues for PN members are as follows:

- $25 Students and income under $25,000
- $25 Subscription to Progressive Planning only
- $30 Income between $25,000 and $50,000
- $50 Income over $50,000, organizations, and libraries
- $100 Sustaining Members - if you earn over $50,000, won't you consider helping at this level?

Canadian members:
See column at right.

PN MEMBERS IN CANADA
Membership fees by Canadian members may be paid in Canadian funds:

- $35 for students, unemployed, and those with incomes $40,000
- $55 for those with incomes between $40,000 and $80,000
- $75 for those with incomes over $80,000
- $150 for sustaining members

Make cheques in Canadian funds payable to “Planners Network” and send to membership form to Barbara Rahder, Faculty of Environmental Studies York University, Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3.

If interested in joining the PN Toronto listserve, include your email address with payment or send a message to Barbara Rahder at <rahder@yorku.ca>.

PURCHASING A SINGLE ISSUE

Progressive Planning is a benefit of membership. If non-members wish to purchase a single issue of the magazine, please make a check for $15 or credit card information to Planners Network at 370 Dekalb Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11205. Please specify the issue and provide your email address or a phone number for queries.

Back issues of the newsletter are also available at $2 per copy. Contact the PN office at pn@pratt.edu to check for availability and price of back issues.

Copy the PN Reader is also available at $5 but there are no discounts available for bulk orders.

See ordering and contact information at http://www.plannersnetwork.org/html/pn-reader/index.html

PLEANNERS NETWORK ON LINE

The PN WEB SITE is at: www.plannersnetwork.org

The PN LISTSERV
PN maintains an on-line mailing list for members to post and respond to queries, list job postings, conference announcements, etc. To join, send an email message to maphonos@pratt.edu with "subscribe pn-net" (without the quotes) in the body of the message (not the subject line). You'll be sent instructions on how to use the list.

Progressive Planning ADVERTISING RATES:

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Yes! I want to join progressive planners and work towards fundamental change.
I'm a renewing member — Keep the faith!
Just send me a subscription to Progressive Planning.

My contribution is $ Make checks payable to PLANNERS NETWORK.

My credit card is Visa M# Card No.

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Name
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Street
City
Telephone
Email

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Planners Network
370 Dekalb Ave.
Brooklyn, NY 11205

INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS: Please send U.S. funds as we are unable to accept payment in another currency. Thanks.

By Ann Forsyth

The Planners Network Steering Committee and Planners Network Magazine editorial group met on July 26, 2003 in Brooklyn, New York. Also at the meeting were several current and former PN interns and members of the PN advisory committee.

Several decisions were made:

Magazine: The magazine will be renamed Progressive Planning; The Magazine of Planners Network. This is part of a strategy to increase subscription by firms, organizations, and libraries. We need someone to volunteer for the new role of development coordinator to take on the task of increasing subscriptions. The cost to subscribe to the magazine without becoming a member will be $25 for individuals and $50 for institutions.

In upcoming issues look for more regular columns. For example, Arturo Sanchez will be reviewing books—see the review of Dialectical Urbanism in this issue. While this review is of a single book, the more general pattern will be to briefly review a number of books of interest to PN readers including popular books on planning related issues.

Theme issues in 2003 and 2004 will include issues on physical activity, food, the 2004 Elections and convention cities of New York and Boston, and Canadian and U.S. urban policy. Overall, after some initial glitches, the operations of the magazine are running smoothly.

E-newsletter: With a quarterly magazine rather than a bimonthly newsletter, there is a need for a way to distribute more timely information and news from members. Norma Rantis, assisted by Ede Baron, has agreed to edit the new PN E-newsletter (PNEN). This will be a short edited newsletter emailed monthly to members. It will include material similar to the contents of the Resources section of the magazine, including jobs. The Resources section of the magazine will be reduced in size. If you want a copy of the PN E-newsletter, email pn@pratt.edu and indicate "subscribe to E-newsletter" in the subject line.

Campus campaign: Through faculty and direct emails, Josh Lerner has contacted students from across North America interested in creating student chapters of PN and organizing students around progressive issues. There has been a great deal of positive interest. See details elsewhere in this issue.

Conference: Next year's conference is tentatively set for New York on June 17-20, sponsored by Pratt Institute and Hunter College. The theme will be Rebuilding Communities and the focus will be on the U.S. and elsewhere: Ayse Yonder and Tom Angotti will be forming a conference committee.

Membership rates: Membership rates will stay the same except for Canada where the rate for students, unemployed and those with incomes under $40,000 will be reduced from $40 Canadian to $35 Canadian. This will make the amount listed in the brochure and the magazine the same.

Steering committee: Two steering committee members indicated that they wanted to step down: Barbara Rahder and Gwen Urely. Thanks to both for their service, particularly Barbara Rahder who has served as co-chair for several years. Norma Rantis, editor of the new e-newsletter, and Josh Lerner, main organizer of the campus membership drive, agreed to join the steering committees as interim members. Steering Committee member Richard Milgrom will become co-chair with Ayse Yonder, who has agreed to continue. Full elections will be held at the PN conference in NY in 2004.

Advisory committee: Chester Hartman agreed to create a plan for an expanded PN advisory committee.

In This Issue

- Special issue on Marxism, Socialism and Planning
- New book review column
- News from the steering committee meeting

Your Last Issue?

Please check the date on your mailing label. If the date is more than one year ago this will be your last issue unless we receive your annual dues RIGHT AWAY! See page 47 for minimum dues amounts.

And while you’re at it send us an UPDATE on what you’re doing.

MOVING?
Please send us your new address.