GLOBAL CITIES, INEQUALITY, AND THE PUBLIC REALM

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On the cover: Les Halles redevelopment. © Joan Byron

Global Cities, Inequality, and the Public Realm

Joan Byron[1]

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1 Introduction: Equity in the Public Realm in Global Cities

"Although income equality as a concept does not jibe with market economy, we can seek to achieve quality-of-life equality." Enrique Peñalosa[1]

The new parks, bikeways, Bus Rapid Transit lines, libraries, and schools that Enrique Peñalosa built during his three-year term as mayor of Bogotá, Colombia, did indeed prioritize quality of life in that city's poorest neighborhoods, and their impact has been real, and lasting.[2] Seeing them brings European precedents to mind, and Peñalosa cites his own experience of public space in Paris as an inspiration for public realm improvements as a pragmatic response to inequality in his growing but still-poor city. As mayor, he could not provide every Bogotán with a middle class income or a new house — but he could effectively "distribute quality of life through public goods such as parks, plazas, sidewalks."

The same European precedents have inspired North American urbanists as well. We return from visits to Europe's capitals excited by the experience of refurbished and expanded transit systems, new bicycling infrastructure and pedestrian spaces, and repurposed waterfronts, often enlivened by trophy architecture. But we are much more likely to emulate their forms than to employ them to mitigate the deepening inequality that has accompanied

Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Queens
Michael Appleton/The New York Times/Redux

the growth of successful U.S. cities. European examples are used to illustrate arguments for density, transit-oriented development, walkable streets, and more. And in seeking to replicate them at home, we often insert them into circumstances where they deepen what are already stark disparities in quality of life in U.S. cities, and advance a design-driven and uncritical narrative of urban creative class triumphalism.

In the United States, urban public realm[3] innovations are often both enabled by and contribute to rising land values in well-off areas. Less affluent areas suffer not only from their inability to sponsor such improvements with private wealth, but also from their isolation from centers of power.[4] Even

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[1] Enrique Peñalosa, quoted in "Can We Design Cities for Happiness?" by Jay Walljasper, 2010, http://www.shareable.net/blog/can-we-design-cities-for-happiness

[2] For this discussion, I am applying a broad definition of "global cities" that includes not only centers of the production of highly specialized services (per Saskia Sassen), but also political and cultural hubs, and cities that serve as international gateways, per Aaron Renn in http://www.newgeography.com/content/003292-what-is-a-global-city

[3] "Public realm" refers to the full range of urban spaces available to the public — including traditional, municipally owned and operated spaces like streets and parks, as well as the expanding range of hybrid spaces — plazas, esplanades, transit lines and stations, public housing complexes, etc. — that may be open to the public but owned and/or operated by quasi-public or private entities.

[4] http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/18/nyregion/new-york-parks-in-less-affluent-areas-lack-big-gifts.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

when funding comes from private sources, public agency bandwidth — the formidable investment of staff brainpower in the problem-solving and deal-making needed to shepherd a vision like the High Line in New York City to reality — is disproportionately allocated to projects in privileged quarters. Similarly transformative projects, such as the completion of the Bronx River Greenway, languish for lack of the political will needed to overcome the inevi-

The High Line, Manhattan
Teresa O'Connor, SeasonalWisdom.com

table bureaucratic obstacles.[5] In New York City, public spaces for the rich are lavishly designed and lovingly maintained, while spaces used by the poor are neglected, sold off, or at best, grudgingly built out and minimally kept up.[6]

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[5] The Bronx River Greenway, envisioned as an eight-mile linear park that will provide South Bronx residents with access to its namesake river, will remain a series of disconnected green spaces until an impasse over indemnification between state and local governments and Amtrak is resolved. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/arts/design/bronx-river-now-flows-by-parks.html?ref=michaelkimmelman

[6] Michael Powell of the *New York Times* paints an evocative picture of the disparate treatment of rich parks and poor parks in New York City: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/02/nyregion/in-queens-an-oasis-neglected-by-the-city.html. And New Yorkers for Parks "2012 Report Card on Large Parks" evaluated the maintenance of 43 major parks and concluded "…that the Parks Department simply hasn't had sufficient resources to keep up with the maintenance demands of 29,000 acres of parkland", while its 2013 White Paper calls for a more equitable distribution of resources among the city's parks, and for greater transparency about the financial contribution of public-private partnerships. Both documents available at: http://www.ny4p.org/
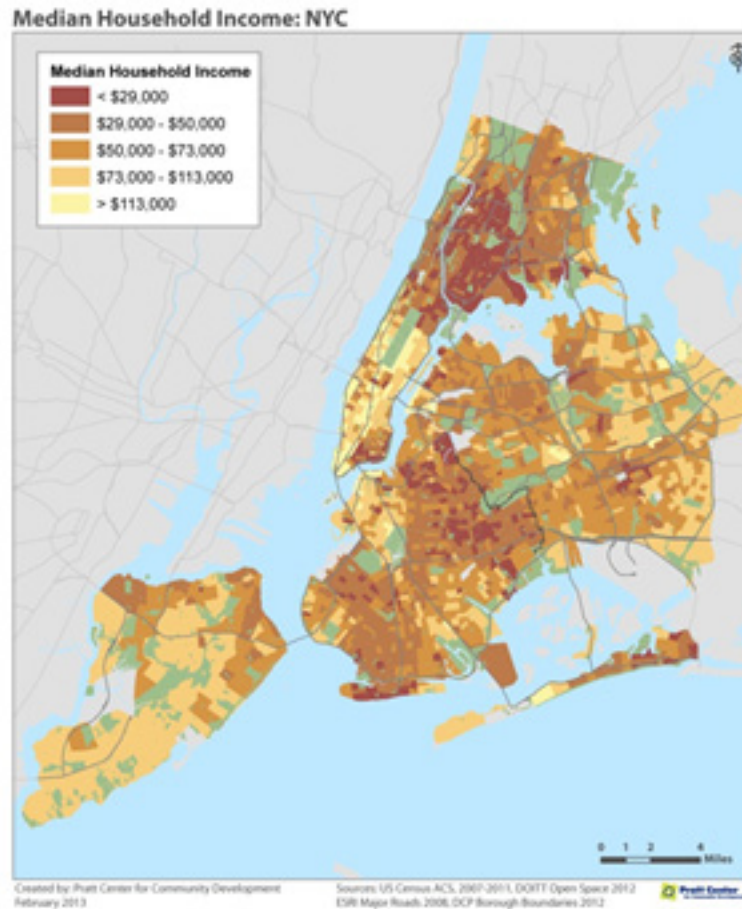
U.S. cities often rely on quasi-privatized models, like park conservancies and Business Improvement Districts, to finance the development and maintenance of new parks and streetscapes, institutionalizing a paradigm under which high-quality public spaces are the preserve of those most able to pay. Public private partnerships exist in Europe, but they are typically used to finance large-scale infrastructure and development projects, not to fund and oversee the maintenance of public space.

Instead, the municipal governments of the European cities that I visited all formalize a commitment to a more egalitarian vision of the public realm by creating public sector planning and delivery entities tasked with the articulation and implementation of that vision, and through substantial and ongoing public investment in transit, parks, and streetscapes. In Paris and Amsterdam, I also visited major projects for the improvement and reconfiguration of public housing projects, whose locations and designs are now viewed as having

exacerbated the economic and social isolation of low-income and immigrant groups.

Background

My fellowship inquiry was driven in part by a reflection on the economic and physical transformation that New York, my home city, has undergone, particularly under the administration of Mayor Michael Bloomberg. As New York City prepares to select its first new mayor in 12 years, many evaluations extol his administration's embrace of de-industrialization, its aggressive remaking of the physical city, its advancement of large-scale redevelopment projects, its emphasis on architectural and urban design quality, and its expansion of the public realm, including the addition of 750 acres of new parks. Yet during the same period, economic inequality has increased, and spatial segregation by race and ethnicity has persisted.[7,8] The quality of life in New

Median Household Income: NYC

Median Household Income
< $29,000
$29,000 - $50,000
$50,000 - $73,000
$73,000 - $113,000
> $113,000

Created by: Pratt Center for Community Development February 2013

Sources: US Census ACS, 2007-2011, DOITT Open Space 2012 ESRI Major Roads 2008, DCP Borough Boundaries 2012

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[7] U.S. Census data, cited in "Income Data Shows Widening Gap Between New York City's Richest and Poorest," *New York Times,* September 12 2012 http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/20/nyregion/rich-got-richer-and-poor-poorer-in-nyc-2011-data-shows.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&smid=tw-nytimes&_r=0

[8] While New York City overall is among the most racially diverse U.S. cities, neighborhoods within the city remain extremely segregated. Richard Alba and Steve Romalewski of the City University of New York's Center for Urban Research, http://www.urbanresearch.org/projects/hardly-the-end-of-segregation. Analysis by the NYC Department of City Planning's Population Bureau shows that racial concentration persists, though it has shifted geographically (especially from iconically black neighborhoods like Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant to outlying areas in southeast Brooklyn and southeast Queens.) http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/demo_maps_2010.shtml

York's prosperous core has never been higher, while poor and working-class residents have been pushed by rising housing costs to neighborhoods where transit service is poor, where waterfronts remain barricaded by noxious land uses (themselves often relocated from more valued areas), and where parks that lack wealthy patrons are overused and under-maintained.
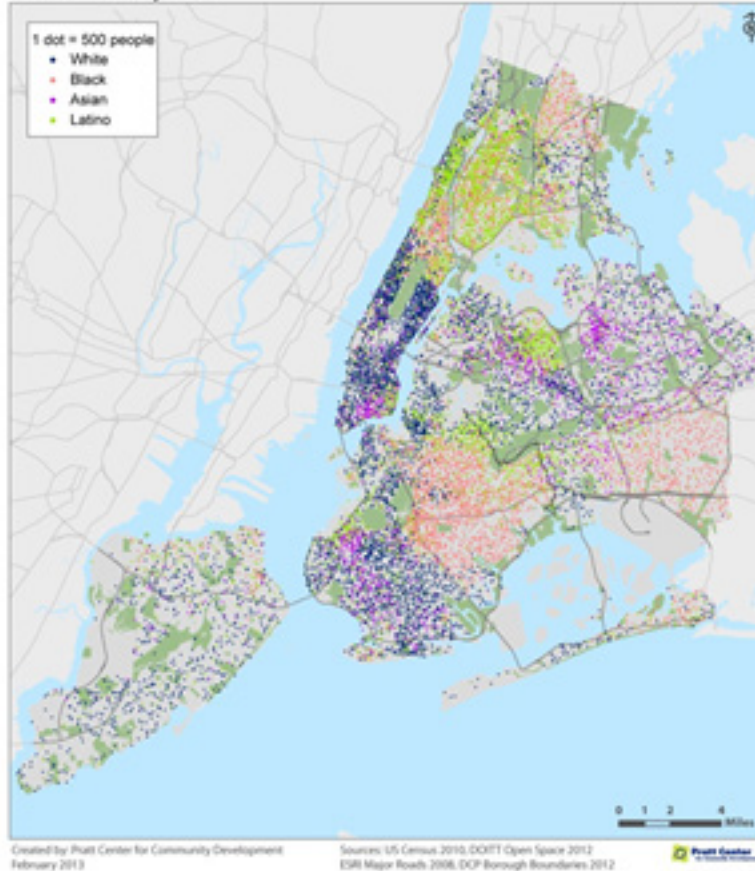
Research Questions

New York's transformation has been driven by forces of global economic competition, and represents an intentional and strategic response to conditions also confronted by mayors of other global cities. I framed my inquiry and research approach

Race/Ethnicity: NYC

1 dot = 500 people
- White
- Black
- Asian
- Latino

Created by: Pratt Center for Community Development
February 2013

Sources: US Census 2010, DCP/TT Open Space 2012
ESRI Major Roads 2008, DCP Borough Boundaries 2012

0 1 2 4 Miles

ment, etc.)? Are these cities embracing or resisting practices (such as public-private partnerships) that have increased inequality in NYC? What role do residents themselves have in shaping public spaces?

Methodology

My fellowship enabled me to see first-hand many public spaces in poor and working-class areas of London, Paris, and Amsterdam, and to meet with individuals within and outside of city governments who are envisioning, designing, and building them. Planners, designers, and analysts working both within and outside of government in all three cities generously shared their time and insights in describing their respective cities' goals and accomplishments in reshaping the public realm. Interviews with them provided an orientation to key projects and a must-see list of sites. They also helped me to understand the ways that leaders of each city understand the relationship between social and economic stratification and the physical public realm, and frame strategies that may not address the underlying causes of disparities, but that can help to buffer their worst impacts.

to allow me to explore the degree to which European cities facing similar challenges have made different choices about investments in the public realm, and the degree to which those choices might illuminate a wider set of options for New York City (NYC) going forward.

Given the seemingly inexorable growth of income inequality in global cities, I wanted to know whether Europe's cities are intentionally using public realm investments to mitigate economic inequality and social exclusion. What kinds of approaches are they using? Which are succeeding, in what ways, and how do they reinforce other strategies (income supports, education and employ-

I was then able to visit many sites — parks, streets, squares, and housing projects — in which public realm projects are completed, in progress, or contemplated, most of which are very far from the tourist tracks of these well-visited capitals. Traveling mainly by bike enabled me to cover a lot of

ground while also experiencing streetscapes and street life first-hand.

Summary of Key Lessons and Conclusions

Acknowledging that national-level differences provide U.S. cities with fewer fiscal resources and weaker policy tools than their European counterparts may enjoy, a number of lessons about equity in the public realm are readily translatable to the U.S. context, and especially to the case of New York.

- **Leadership matters.** Global city mayors can and must identify the challenges created by inequality, explicitly commit to addressing them, and set goals against which their public realm programs and projects can be measured. The London Olympic Plan firmly grounded the entire Olympic effort in the long-term project of the regeneration of the Lea Valley, and set deliberate goals for the convergence of East Londoners health and prosperity with those of the rest of the city. Even where accomplishment has fallen short of aspirations, the values informing the plan remain a touchstone against which current and future administrations can be held accountable.

- **Building and maintaining the public realm is a public responsibility.** Reliance on private entities — Business Improvement Districts, parks conservancies, and other types of public-private partnership (PPPs) — has evolved in New York and other U.S. cities from a pragmatic means of attracting private funding into the public realm (and, argued proponents, freeing public money to better maintain parks in less affluent places) into a precondition for the expansion and enhancement of public spaces. While this form of quasi-privatization has made

some inroads in Europe, none of the cities I visited allows private entities to drive public realm policy to the degree that we have in New York.

- **Align planning and delivery entities with intent, and match resources to need.** Whether a special-purpose entity like the London Legacy Company, a municipal planning agency like Amsterdam's DRO, or a regional-level body like the Île-de-France IAU, each of the areas I visited had a substantial professional planning staff in place whose portfolio and authority enabled it to carry out a comprehensive mission, and to engage local stakeholders in decision-making, and other government and private entities in implementation. The structuring of the Olympic planning and delivery entities, in particular, illustrates that a large-scale project can be undertaken in collaboration with even very powerful external partners, but without ceding control to them.

- **Building an equitable public realm takes more than hardware.** Long-term and substantive engagement of residents in shaping and sustaining public spaces requires the development of social capital, and this demands time and trust. Engagement may be initiated either from within government, as it was in Clignancourt and Bijlmermeer, or from outside it, as with London Citizens. But for engagement to help drive real change, government entities must be willing to shape their plans around locally-defined aspirations and priorities, something that seldom happens around major public realm initiatives in New York.

2 Background: Urban Public Space as a Battleground in Global Competition in New York, London, Paris, and Amsterdam

Success as a contemporary global city comes at the price of growing economic polarization. Even in countries that have intentionally preserved middle-class employment in manufacturing and in the public sector, the 21st-century urban growth paradigm has moved major cities of Europe and North America inexorably toward a less equal distribution of incomes. Knowledge-based industries have concentrated in the developed world's top-tier cities, many of which have specialized in one or more growth sectors — finance, technology, entertainment, etc. And while income growth has concentrated in their upper economic tier, the numbers of people employed in low-wage service jobs have grown even more quickly, as these sectors employ both incumbent workers shed by contracting mid-wage industries, and newcomers who are drawn from all over the world.

Table 1

Gini Coefficients for Selected Cities	
Amsterdam	0.31
London	0.32
Paris	0.33
Los Angeles	0.51
New York	0.54
Bogotá	0.60
Moscow	0.62
Johannesburg	0.75

The Gini coefficient is a simple measure of income inequality; it compares the actual distribution of income in a country, region, or city, with a hypothetical equal distribution. Perfectly equal distribution would result in a Gini equal to zero; perfect inequality would yield a Gini of 1.[1]

Economic polarization may be accepted as inevitable by urban political leaders worldwide, but national politics determine the degree to which it is mitigated by public policies, such as income support, as well as by national funding of urban

[1] Gini data: New York and Los Angeles (for 2009) U.S. Census; London, 2005, Greater London Authority

public services, from education to transit. Because European cities rely less heavily on local tax revenue to fund their capital and operating expenditures, they are less constrained by the pressures of fiscal competition with their neighbors than their U.S. counterparts. U.S. mayors must constantly engage in the balancing act of keeping taxes low while keeping the quality of public services high; competition also drives them to prioritize the services that are valued by the footloose individuals and companies they seek to attract and retain. In Europe, both European Union and national funding of urban infrastructure and services frees city and regional governments to make a broader range of choices about local expenditures in the public realm than is available to U.S. cities.

The results of those choices are immediately apparent, even to a casual U.S. visitor to London, Paris, Amsterdam, or any other thriving European city. From the preservation of historic buildings and open spaces, to the insertion of innovative new architecture and amenities, to the ubiquity and efficiency of public transportation, the quality of the public realm in Europe's cities is at the core of their attraction — not only for tourists, but in global competition for financial and human capital. Many of Europe's global cities have an enviable physical legacy on which to build, of course, but decisions they have made from their post-World War II reconstruction through the present have burnished that legacy, in sharp contrast to the plethora of anti-urban policies that contributed to the degradation of U.S. cities during the same period. In common with other European capitals, London, Paris, and Amsterdam largely excluded major highways from their cores, and have used both regulation and public investment to aggressively steer and shape land development. The urban planning cultures established in each city during the post-World War II period (and the social democratic political values that underpinned them) set the stage for the spectacular projects each undertook beginning

in the 1980s, often involving the redevelopment of maritime and industrial sites on their waterfronts.

The physical transformation of urban waterfronts mirrored and was driven by economic transformation. In particular, de-industrialization, along with technological changes in shipping (containerization and bigger ships that required new and much larger port facilities) made historic harbor areas obsolete. Leaders of global cities embraced the opportunity to dramatically make over these waterfronts. The scale and complexity of projects like London's Docklands, Amsterdam's Ost Harbor, and Paris' Grands Projets required the coordination of large-scale public and private investment, based on more market-driven programming than the revitalization projects of earlier decades.[9] In these and other cities, such ambitious projects opened up millions of square feet of residential, commercial, and recreational space uses that were needed to attract the young, educated workforce upon whom the cities' new economies relied. In New York, the same dynamic has given us Battery Park City and the World Financial Center, and more recently Brooklyn Bridge Park, and the redevelopment of the Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Long Island City, and Queens waterfronts.

While the governance, planning, and financial mechanisms that put these projects in place differ among cities, the striking similarities in their programming, scale, and economic rationale reflect the shared imperative of girding the physical city for global economic competition.

Glam waterfronts: London Millennium Bridge and Saint Paul's Cathedral
Joan Byron

If repurposed waterfronts and other high-end public spaces look the same from country to country, the public spaces used by poor and working class city-dwellers reflect differences. While most of the income growth in global cities has occurred at the top of their economies, most of their population growth has been at the bottom. And as low-wage workers have flocked to successful cities, the price of housing in those cities' historic centers has soared out of reach. Though long-established social housing developments have allowed the centers of some European cities to retain a measure of economic diversity, low-wage workers,

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[9] *Les Cahiers #146*, published in June 2007 by L'Institut d'Amenagement et d'Urbanisme de la Region d'Ile-de-France, *Large-Scale Urban Development Projects in Europe: Drivers of Change in City Regions.* The essay "Strategies, Stakeholders, and Large-Scale Projects: A Few Pointers" by Paul Lecroart analyzes major redevelopment projects in nine European cities from the 1990s through the present, and draws a useful distinction between projects driven by the desire to attract external capital and resources, and those intended to address internal needs.

especially immigrants, are most likely to inhabit outlying areas whose physical quality sharply contrasts with their cities' well-tended cores.

After World War II, decolonization brought large numbers of Africans to France, South Asians and West Indians to Great Britain, and Surinamese, Antilleans, and Ghanaians to the Netherlands. Amsterdam and Paris protected the architectural integrity of their historic centers by consigning large new housing developments to their outskirts. Much of London's social housing ended up better-located, ironically, because the World War II bombing of the city left many large sites open for redevelopment. For many years, the large housing developments of Paris' *banlieues*, in contrast, have isolated immigrants and their descendants from the amenity and opportunity of the city's core. Amsterdam planners long spoke of the huge Bijlmermeer development in the city's south-east as "our Pruitt-Igoe," a social and architectural disaster. Beginning in the 1990s, both cities have undertaken makeovers of what they view as their most egregious social housing failures.

The quality of the public realm in poor and working-class neighborhoods, as well as the degree to which political leaders and planning agencies define and address its shortcomings, and the processes through which residents them-selves are engaged, vary among the three cities I visited: London, Paris, and Amsterdam. Those differences reflect the interplay among the different systems of values that underlie each country's political system, including:

- Values regarding economic equality and social integration;

- Values regarding design and quality of the built environment;

- Values regarding planning, and the roles of government and private entities; and

- Values and cultures regarding participation by residents in planning and implementation of changes.

Table 2 provides a very schematic and subjective comparison of those values across cities.

Contrasts among the three cities I visited abound. But I found them all to be much more like each other than they are like New York.

Table 2

	London	Paris	Amsterdam	New York
Equality and social integration	Moderate	High	Very High	Low
Design and quality of the built environment	Moderate to Low	Very High	Moderate	Low
Strong government role in urban planning	Moderate	High	Very High	Low
Strong culture of participation by residents in planning decisions	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Financing of public realm improvements via PPPs	Moderate	Low	Low (except High in social and market-rate housing)	High

3 Cases: London, Paris, and Amsterdam

London

Economically, socially, and culturally, London is New York's near twin. Our two cities are rivals for dominance in the financial sector, and that sector's ascendancy since the 1980s has brought unprecedented wealth to our respective top tiers, even as other industries that drove growth from the 19th through the mid-20th centuries have contracted, and our economies have polarized into high- and low-end services. In both cities, that polarization is reflected in sharp spatial segregation; you can emerge from any subway stop or tube station, look around, and with a modicum of street smarts, pinpoint at what level on each city's income scale you have stepped out.

London and New York are similar as well — and distinguished from many European capitals — in their ethnic and racial diversity. Over generations, waves of immigrants, first from former British colonies, and more recently from Eastern Europe, have become Londoners; their counterparts an ocean away have become New Yorkers. Though racism and discrimination continue to be pervasive in both the United States and the U.K., citizens of each country's pre-eminent city generally manage to tolerate each other and get on with their lives.

From the Olympic Bid to the Olympic Legacy

Visiting London in June 2012 afforded the opportunity to explore some of the outcomes of a high-profile competition between New York and London — the 2012 Olympics. London's bid succeeded in part because the integration of the development of the Olympic Park and the regeneration of East

Riders on the Overground — a circumferential transit line, refurbished and extended to connect Outer London boroughs

Joan Byron

London's Lower Lea Valley was hard-wired into the proposal from its inception.[10] While the Olympic Park itself was off-limits to urban tourists like myself during the frenetic final weeks before the games, a number of individuals who played key roles in the development of the Olympic Legacy plan and the enhancements already delivered in the Host Boroughs were available to meet and gave generously of their time and thoughts. I was able to see for myself the public realm improvements in the communities surrounding the park, as well as the local and regional-scale transit improvements completed for the Games.

Dan Hawthorn, head of the Greater London Authority's (GLA) London 2012 Unit, described

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[10] Conversations with Mark Brearley, head of Design for London, and Dan Hawthorn, head of London 2012 Unit of the Greater London Authority, and the Convergence Document, cited below.

New Canal Park, Hackney
Joan Byron

the relationship between the GLA[11] itself and the agencies established to deliver the Olympic Games, the major venues, and the legacy developments. By separating both the Olympic Delivery Authority (responsible for building and then reprogramming the major venues) and the Olympic Legacy Corporation (responsible for regeneration projects in the communities surrounding the Olympic Park, and for the redevelopment of the Park itself after the Games) from the London Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG), the Greater London Authority was able to maintain control over the design and execution of the plan, and ensure that the interests of its nominal "customer," the International Olympic Committee, did not override the long-term vision of the Olympics as a vehicle for regeneration. He and other commenters pointed to the consistency of vision that was

maintained through the seven-year development process between the 2005 award of the games to London and their remarkably successful presentation in 2012, even through the transition from Ken Livingstone's Labor mayoralty to Conservative Boris Johnson's election in 2009.

Each of the permanent major venues was conceived and designed with a post-Games business plan; while not everything has gone smoothly, major structures including the Aquatic Center, the Velodrome, and the Olympic Stadium itself are on track to become viable public facilities, with relatively lucrative uses in some cross-subsidizing low-cost access to others.[12]

The London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) is responsible for the redevelopment of the 560-acre Olympic Park itself. The park's 20-year buildout will create a total of 10,000 housing units, commercial space and public facilities supporting 8,000 permanent jobs, 252 acres of new open space and permanent sports venues.[13] Importantly, the redeveloped Olympic Park will be integrated into the surrounding communities by new transit, cycling and footpaths, and roads. Most of these improvements were in place before the Games opened; their completion constituted a significant

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[11] The Greater London Authority (GLA) was created by the 1999 act of Parliament that re-established London city government, which had been abolished under Margaret Thatcher's prime ministership in 1986. The GLA is London's permanent administrative authority; the act also established an elected mayor and legislative assembly.

[12] Until early 2013, the Olympic Stadium itself was caught between competing re-use proposals; professional soccer ultimately prevailed over LOCOG chair Lord Seb Coe's vision of a permanent track and field facility.

[13] Figures are for the Olympic Park footprint itself; much more development is anticipated in the surrounding area.

downpayment to communities that were at the same time burdened by one of Europe's largest construction projects.

Eleanor Fawcett, head of design for the LLDC, led the pre-games design and execution of projects "outside the blue fence." These ranged from the restoration of the iconic Hackney Wick sign to the construction of canalside parks and cycle paths. The book *Stitching the Fringe*[14] documents not only the physical projects but the processes of community engagement that conceived and shaped them.

> *"The four key aims of the programme are to:*
>
> - Connect local communities to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park
>
> - Add new amenities to existing public spaces
>
> - Create new spaces to support successful future developments
>
> - Strengthen pride in established neighbourhoods."

According to their planners' accounts, the Olympics served as the indispensable catalyst for the redevelopment of the Lea Valley, which appears as a visible rift in London's fabric created by historic concentration of heavy industry and infrastructure. Environmental cleanup and the undergrounding of numerous high-voltage electric transmission lines required enormous investment by the national government, which only a project as bold as the Olympic bid could have justified.

More than Growth: "Convergence"

I met as well with Liz Fenton, head of performance and review for the Host Boroughs Unit,[15] and her colleagues responsible for Host Borough public health and employment strategy and also with Kim Chaplain of Workplace Stratford, the agency responsible for maximizing access to games-related jobs for host community residents, who suffer from high rates of poverty and unemployment.

To U.S. eyes, it is impressive that the Olympic plan includes a Convergence Document, which not only laid out broad aspirations for convergence of the health, prosperity, and life chances of East London residents with those of their neighbors across London, but also set quantitative targets for increasing educational achievement and incomes and for improving public health. [16] A report on progress as of 2011 shows that most initiatives have fallen short, and staff of the Host Boroughs Unit were candid in discussing the challenges they faced. The convergence plan has made available some new resources, which have enabled the boroughs to build their capacity for strategic planning and to coordinate their efforts (making it harder, for example, for real estate developers to play the boroughs off against each other in negotiations.) Social marketing campaigns have led to modest gains in childhood immunization, breast-feeding, etc. But hoped-for increases in sports participation have not materialized, and lack of access to affordable post-secondary education has placed the best new job opportunities out of the reach of many east Londoners.

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[15] The Host Boroughs Unit was established by the GLA to coordinate Olympic-related regeneration activity within the six London boroughs — Barking & Dagenham, Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest — whose boundaries lie within and contiguous to the Olympic Park.

[16] *Strategic Regeneration Framework: An Olympic Legacy for the Host Boroughs,* October 2009 http://www.hackney.gov.uk/Assets/Documents/strategic-regeneration-framework-report.pdf

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[14] http://www.londonlegacy.co.uk/the-park/around-the-park/

Stratford Broadway: "Small Retail Units to Let," six weeks before the start of the 2012 Olympic Games

Joan Byron

Host borough businesses were also failing to realize the gains they had expected. Local shopkeepers were grumbling that the International Olympic Committee was vigorously enforcing rules prohibiting anyone but its corporate sponsors from using the word "Olympic" in any commercial promotion. Stratford's old-school shopping center was dwarfed, and drained, by the Westfield mega-mall that opened in 2011. Six weeks before the opening of the games, window signs on Stratford's high street offered vacant retail units for rent.

At the same time, area rents are rising. Some social housing developments now charge up to 80 percent of market rate. The low rate of production of new affordable housing, along with policies that give employed households priority for subsidized units, have led to increased overcrowding. In Tower Hamlets, only 35 percent of 2,000 recently completed new housing units are affordable, while 20,000 families remain on the waiting list.

External critics have also noted that the Convergence Plan's measurement tools fail to account for gentrification and displacement; if improvements and new development bring newcomers who skew income and social indicators upward, the plan's metrics will overstate its achievements.

Though the risk of displacement is real, it has not yet widely taken place; a large-scale reproduction of Charles Booth's 1889 map of poverty in London hangs on the Stratford borough office wall, a reminder of the degree to which poverty remains stubbornly anchored to place.

London's Public Realm: Beyond the Olympic Legacy

Without strong design leadership, it is unlikely that the public space improvements brought about by the Olympics would have remained as true as they have to the regeneration vision that powered the bid, nor would they have been as extensive and as physically transformative as they have indisputably been for the surrounding communities, and for London as a whole. Credit for this accomplishment is due in some measure to Design for London

(DFL),[17] a small and agile team established by the GLA to guide the planning and design of projects meant to bring coherence to the city's vast and unruly public realm.

Even as the Olympic project progressed, DfL was simultaneously responsible for a vast number of small-scale interventions across the city, many of which are likely to have at least as great an impact on the daily lives of nearby residents as the Olympic Park. Mark Brearley, head of DfL since 2008, spoke with me about its

Improved streetscape and typical shopfronts in Barking
Joan Byron

work to improve the quality of London's 600-odd high streets, the social and economic hearts of the vast agglomeration of villages that the city is comprised of. Many were already struggling against competition from malls and chain stores when the summer 2011 riots broke out. What began with a shooting by police of a young man in Tottenham spread to scores of commercial areas in London and beyond, ultimately resulting in five deaths and £200 million in property damage.

In response, Mayor Boris Johnson committed £70 million to long-term improvements in the most affected areas. An additional £50 million has been awarded for locally initiated projects aimed at increasing the attractiveness and economic competitiveness of local high streets. While no one in or

outside of government expects that good design alone will overcome the sense of economic and social exclusion deepened by a stubborn recession, the £120 million commitment represented by the Mayor's Regeneration Fund and the Outer London Fund demonstrates a recognition — by what in British terms is a conservative mayoral administration — that the gulf in economic opportunity and quality of life between London's rich and poor areas must be addressed.

Design for London's role has been to coordinate the work of public entities and private consultants, and to provide a unifying vision. For high streets, the vision's key elements are simplicity — de-cluttering of streets, and the use of simple and durable materials that can be well-maintained without resorting to U.S.-style private underwriting of expenses. I visited a number of projects where parks, squares, and high streets have been regenerated with a workman-like touch. But the clean new detailing of

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[17] In January 2013, the Greater London Authority announced plans to eliminate Design for London as a unit, eliminating most of its staff and merging the remaining positions into a new Regeneration Unit within the London Development Agency.

streets in Leyden, Barking, and other places makes for a jarring contrast with the content of working-class street economies, in which every known means of extracting money from poor people's pockets jostle for space. Every other store seems to be a pawnshop, a betting parlor, or a payday loan operation. Good design may indeed help to instill positive feelings about one's neighborhood, but no one, including the staff of Design for London, would claim that streetscape quality alone is sufficient to overcome London's entrenched disparities.

London Citizens: A Healthy and Equitable Public Realm Requires more than Hardware

If London is the European city whose economy — and depth of economic disparity — most closely resemble those of New York, it is fitting that an emerging activist movement also bears a striking family resemblance to its U.S. counterparts. London Citizens, a coalition of local groups trained in U.S.-style community organizing, waged a campaign that forced the London Olympics contractors, subcontractors, and vendors to pay all workers a London Living Wage, defined as the hourly rate required for a Londoner to provide for a family's basic needs with earnings from a 40-hour week, now £8.55 per hour (the U.K.-wide minimum wage is £5.93 per hour.) London Citizens is now working to extend the Living Wage to workers in other low-wage sectors like health care and building maintenance.

Inequality in the public realm is linked to racial and economic disparity, but it can also be generational. Mark Brearley at Design for London spoke of the use of open spaces by a mix of ages as a hallmark of community health. Young members of London Citizens recognize this as a life-and-death matter, with gang violence effectively putting public spaces off-limits to young people in many parts of the city. In response, they are mobilizing citywide to reduce gang crime among London youth.

During my visit, I sat in on a planning meeting for the group's CitySafe Campaign. The campaign is focused on local high streets, where young leaders recruit shopkeepers to identify their stores as Safe Havens for young people fearing or fleeing from attacks. A series of events they called "The 100 Days of Peace" (modeled on an ancient Olympic tradition providing safe passage between countries during the 50 days before and 50 days after the games) was launched with a spectacular dance flash mob in Euston Station on June 9, 2012.[18]

London Citizens' work is a reminder that a city's public spaces are a fabric woven not only of transit lines and streetscapes, but from a web of social and economic relationships that can be strained by inequality, or strengthened by shared commitments to fairness and inclusion.

Paris

Paris boasts a historic center whose quality makes it the most visited city in the world. Its incomparable wealth of buildings and public spaces has been embellished, beginning in the 1980s with *les Grands Projets*.[19] More recent projects, like the Parc Bercy, with the Passerelle Simone-de-Beauvoir, and the Frank-Gehry-designed Cinémathèque Française carry the now-standard program of urban waterfront transformation to new design heights. Other kinds of amenities have come as well. The Velíb bikeshare system's overwhelming success has led to its emulation in cities from Quito, Ecuador, to Hangzhou, China — even, finally, in New York.

The unmatched beauty and architectural distinction of Paris' inner arrondissements make the contrast with conditions in many of its banlieues all the more stark. The poor design, lack of basic

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[18] http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ApdmTzyFlYM

[19] *les Grands Projets*: the Louvre Pyramid, Musee d'Orsay, Parc de la Villette, Arab World Institute, Opéra Bastille, Grande Arche de La Défense, Ministry of Finance and the Bibliothèque Nationale.

commercial services, and isolation from the city's center of much of the region's stock of public and low-income housing contributed to violent disturbances in 2005 (Clichy-sous-Bois) and 2007 (Villiers-le-Bel).

A Notable Counter-Example: Saint-Denis and the Plaine Commune

There are examples, however, of suburbs that have followed a different trajectory and that are undergoing a decades-long process of steady regeneration. Beginning in the 1990s, the Plaine Saint-Denis region has integrated spatial planning with economic development. The revitalization of a region north-east of Paris in what had seemed to be irreversible post-industrial decline is remarkable in that residents and businesses already inhabiting the area at the beginning of the process have been able to remain in place and benefit from growth. Though there have been some catalytic large-scale projects, most redevelopment activity has been fine-grained enough to strengthen rather than obliterate the area's existing assets.

New tram and station in Saint-Denis
Joan Byron

Paul Lecroart, senior urban planner at L'Institut d'Amenagement et d'Urbanisme de la Region d'Île-de-France (IAU),[20] worked on the plan in its early days and cites a number of factors in its success.[21]

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[20] L'Île-de-France is the French administrative region that includes Paris and its suburbs.

[21] http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/GRHS2009Cas-eStudyChapter08Paris.pdf

Most notably, he recounts, it was an exercise in "…constructive cooperation not only between different levels of government (central government, region, county, local authorities) but also between the public sector (the French Railways, the Île-de-France Transport Agency), the public transport company, public land owners such as the City of Paris or the French Electricity Board, the private sector (local businesses, developers, investors) and the local communities (citizens, associations.)"

From the beginning, the creation of a grid of green circulation and public spaces was an integral part of the plan. These were integrated with new residential and commercial neighborhoods, and with the improvement of existing pathways along the Canal St-Denis. The development of a new soccer stadium to host the 1998 World Cup was — unusual among stadium projects of that time — also integrated with the surrounding communities, and well-connected to new and upgraded transit lines that also bene-

fited the area. Written agreements among the central, regional, and municipal governments, and the PPPs who would build and operate the stadium itself, set terms for employment, for the mix of private and social housing, and for public investment in the needed infrastructure. Rather than becoming a typical "entertainment bubble," an island in a sea of blight, the Stade-de-France anchored and catalyzed an area-wide revitalization that continues today.

Thanks in part to the coordination of transit improvements — new regional rail service, extension of the #13 Metro line, and most recently, the construction of a circumferential tram line that will link area residents to growing centers of employment along the Périphérique — the area has continued to grow, adding 5,000 new housing units and 25,000 new jobs since 1998.

In areas where transit and open space development have lagged, problems of isolation and exclusion persist. After touring by bicycle along the Canal to the center of Saint-Denis, Paul Lecroart and I rode on to a public housing project in Stains. In addition to the poor access to transit and commercial services, the massive scale and poor design of the housing developments there have concentrated poverty within an already low-income area. The complex we visited is finally undergoing improvements to the building interiors, and to its internal circulation and connectivity within the site and to its surroundings ("désenclavement"). Aissata Maiga, the onsite manager of the renovation project, explained that the original design of the project included ground floor shops, but these were poorly planned, and most failed. Since few residents own cars, they are forced to walk long distances through the project's circuitous interior roads to access transit, employment, and basic necessities. The new design will provide easier access and accommodate new shops

Wedding celebration outside the Hôtel de Ville, Saint-Denis
Joan Byron

within the complex. But the project seems haunted by bad decision-making from its past, going from an underbudgeted, poor-quality renovation years earlier that yielded many complaints, to a hasty decision to proceed with a new plan, based on the availability of new funding from the central government.

The suburbs of Paris offer examples of failure as well as success, and some local governments seem determined to repeat past mistakes. In Créteil, to the south-east, housing blocks just outside of the Paris-Est Université campus are so dominated by drug dealers that Christine Lelevrier, the planning professor who was my host there, warned me not to take photos. Meanwhile, a new market-rate housing

development nearby resembles a U.S.-style condo community, complete with residential cul-de-sacs branching incoherently from deserted, multi-lane boulevards.

Community-Based Planning within Paris

Just inside of the Périphérique, I spent a morning with Bacary Sané, planner and *chargé de développement local* for the Quartier Porte Montmartre-Porte Clignancourt-Moskova, and his colleagues. This office, established by the Mairie de Paris, has the mission of integrating the physical and social regeneration of its very diverse 17th and 18th Arrondissement neighborhoods. Once a no-man's land outside of the wall built to protect 19th-century Paris from the Prussians, "la Zone" was cleared of squatter settlements after World War I, and Paris' first "habitations à bon marché," six-story red-brick housing blocks were built around large court-yards, and initially occupied by auto workers who had migrated to Paris from the provinces. A few longtime residents remain, now joined by Asian and African immigrants. The area's decline, driven by the disappearance of industrial jobs, mirrors the story of working-class neighborhoods across Europe and the United States, even to the level of old-time residents blaming newcomers for wors-ening conditions.

The area's proximity to the Périphérique as well as to railyards, factories, and busy local roads, led to its designation as a "Sensitive Urban Area." City authorities working separately on physical and social issues recog-nized the need for coordination, and Sané's office opened up shop in a local storefront.

Heading a professional planning staff embedded in its subject neighborhood enables him to far better grasp the realities local stakeholders face and the issues they prioritize. The quality of local schools is of paramount concern, and the first major building project, now under construction, will include a new school, a child care center, a support center for parents, and new housing.

Upgrading public spaces is more a matter of improving people's perception of their neighbor-hoods, and ultimately of raising expectations about public services. Putting better light fixtures in the park (and immediately replacing them when they are broken) helps to build a sense of order that residents felt was lacking. Over time, Sané has worked with property owners to find new tenants for storefronts, bringing a café and new shops to a street where there were formerly only kebab shops and taxi stands. As we walked past the shops, new sidewalk paving was being installed around new

Developer's sales office in Créteil, with graffiti additions to poster
Joan Byron

planters and furniture. When I asked whether such improvements might provoke fears of gentrification and displacement — as they might in a comparable New York neighborhood — he replied that trust and confidence have been established with and among local residents over several years before any physical improvements were undertaken. The sequencing of projects demonstrated that residents' priorities truly came first.

Bacary Sané and local residents in Clignancourt
Joan Byron

In addition to many informal interactions, Sané organizes monthly walks on which residents point out specific problems, such as the failure of the city department to clean the streets, or the illegal spillovers from the area's famous flea market into surrounding streets. He views residents' assertions that "they wouldn't tolerate this on Les Champs-Elysees," as evidence of appropriately rising expectations. Being able to access the agencies in charge and get results has built people's confidence in their ability to bring about larger change.

Becary Sané, the middleman in this process, admits that it can be a demanding role. The public agencies, he said, can be harder to deal with than the residents. As valuable as the placement of a planning office in a local community can be, there are inherent challenges in coordinating the work of citywide agencies that the planner does not control.

Amsterdam

More than one of my Amsterdam informants described the Netherlands as "the world's most planned country," in which centuries of struggle with the sea have demanded many cycles of collective decision-making about land use, infrastructure, and livelihood. Tracy Metz, journalist and author of *Sweet & Salt: Water and the Dutch,* posed the question when we met of whether the cohesion of Dutch society has enabled its strong planning culture, or perhaps that cohesion has itself been brought about by the never-ending imperative of planning. Either way, the Dutch public realm has been a textbook for the world not only on water management, but on transportation, street design, and and the public realm at large.

Amsterdam's core is tightly built and intimately scaled. Most streets are too narrow for cars to move much faster than walking speed, and a parking management scheme requires visitors and residents to obtain permits. There is no free on-street parking; a 24-hour transient permit costs €39,60, a rate that makes parking at garages outside of the A10 ring road attractive. Parking policy is thus an effective substitute for congestion pricing, gener-

ating revenue while creating a strong incentive for anyone entering the city to do so by transit.

Amsterdam's cycling infrastructure is legendary; transportation plans now address "bike clutter" by encouraging the construction of underground cycle parking below new buildings. According to Juliane Kürschner and Ton Schaap of Amsterdam's planning department (the Dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening, DRO), cycling accounts for over 50 percent of kilometers traveled within the city center.

The distance from the center to new developments to the east and south makes cycling a less viable option for some trips, but all of the new development areas are located near existing and planned transit lines. The integration of transit and development planning is even deeper in Amsterdam than it is in other European cities. I saw projects on the outskirts of Paris, for example, whose location and design incentivize car ownership. Transit may be available nearby, but has clearly not driven planning decisions in those cases. New projects in Amsterdam, by contrast, put most residents within convenient walking distance of the city's comfortable and efficient trams, whose network is continually being expanded as an armature of new development. Amsterdam's planners are committed to providing a full range of mobility and connectivity options, even to residents of developments far from the city center, as a means of mitigating what might otherwise be major spatial disadvantages.

Bart van den Heijden, a DRO transporta-

tion planner, discussed long-range possibilities for Amsterdam that include extending the Metro north to IJburg and south to Schiphol airport (a connection that would be valuable to the airport's many blue-collar and service workers.) But like others I interviewed, he noted that the financial crisis and recession have made it more difficult to undertake transit and land development projects at the scale that was common in the past.

The largest post World War II housing and commercial development has taken place outside of the city's core, with large-scale corporate office parks developing in Zuidas (the South Axis); some development has also followed the working port, which has moved to the north west, leaving the inner harbor and Eastern Docklands areas also open for commercial and residential development. The latest large-scale development initiative is IJburg, a series of artificial islands being constructed in the IJmeer, east of the city center.

The land on which these projects are taking place is publicly owned, and is leased for development under terms that specify a mix of affordable,

24-hour underground bicycle parking, near Leidseplein
Joan Byron

middle-income, and upper-income housing. Leasing rather than selling the land provides stronger mechanisms for enforcement of affordability and other planning specifications than is common in the United States, where developers usually acquire sites outright, even when governments have invested significantly in infrastructure and environmental remediation.

IJburg
Joan Byron

IJburg in particular reflects Amsterdam's current planning goal of accommodating a young professional and creative class, and retaining them as they have children, rather than allowing them to relocate to "overflow" municipalities like Almere and Lelystad.

Critics see this as a plan for gentrification, consistent with initiatives to clean up Amsterdam's image as a destination for drug tourism. Anna Nicoleava and Dana Dolghin, researchers at the Vrije Universitiet Amsterdam, pointed to funding cuts in services for vulnerable populations including the homeless, and to increasingly strident anti-immigrant rhetoric, as consequences of the post-2008 recession. Their assertion that Amsterdam's center is more or less fully gentrified and/or given over to tourism is difficult to dispute. Still, the planning of new development, and efforts to address the deficits created by 1970s projects, appear to support Susan Fainstein's contention that "Overall, in relation to the three criteria of diversity, democracy, and equity [that define a Just City] Amsterdam remains

exemplary,"[22] far more so than either London or New York.

Bijlmermeer: Redesigning and Reconnecting a Failed Public Housing Project

A failed design concept — placing vehicle streets and parking on elevated decks, with pedestrian circulation below, as well as segregating residential and commercial use — made the Bijlmermeer housing project a difficult place to live in or to manage from its completion in 1975. Failures of elevators and trash collection systems — both critical to high-rise livability — and its isolation from transit and commercial services also contributed to its decline. By 1985, a quarter of the project's 12,000 housing units were vacant.

Bijlmermeer's residents were vocal about the shortcomings of the complex, but both surveys by its managers and government agencies[23] and accounts

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[22] Fainstein, Susan S., *The Just City,* 2010, Cornell University Press (p.164)

[23] The renovation of Bijlmermeer was carried out by the Municipality of Amsterdam, the City District of Amsterdam-Zuidoost, and Rochdale Housing Organisation;

by longtime observers affirmed that most of the 30,000 residents preferred to stay, though many conditioned that decision on the completion of significant alterations. A Multiculturalisation and Participation Bureau was established in 1996 to ensure that residents were able to participate effectively in planning for the reconfiguration of the complex.

Ultimately, buildings containing some 6,500 apartments were demolished, but 7,200 new units are being built. These new units will change the income mix of the project as a whole; with only 30 percent of the new units affordable at council rates and 70 percent available for rental or purchase at market rates, the new Bijlmermeer will contain 50 percent market and 50 percent subsidized units.[24] Because of the high vacancy levels that preceeded the makeover, no subsidized tenants will have been displaced.

Despite the huge scale of the complex, decision-making about its future was remarkably fine-grained, as was the integration of physical and social planning. The redesigned development includes spaces for adult education, vocational training, and job placement, a center for newly arrived immigrants, a women's empowerment center, and services run by and for immigrants from Surinam and the Antilles. Services and retail

Vocational and Technical Education Center, Bijlmermeer
Joan Byron

uses create a walkable, though lengthy, connection to the Metro station; additional shops and restaurants line what are now surface (rather than elevated) streets within the complex.

When I visited, Bijlmermeer's public spaces were enlivened by people of every age and many races. People were coming and going in the schools and community centers; others were shopping and eating in cafes; still others — seemingly a mix of black residents and white hipsters — were caring for farm animals in a cluster of pens and sheds.

I traveled to Bijlmermeer by bike, approximately seven miles from the center of Amsterdam. Before heading out, I stocked up with paper maps and topped up the data plan on my phone. Even in other European countries, my experience has been that cycling networks may be excellent in city centers, but quickly become illegible or disappear altogether in the urban fringe. Not so in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Bike paths cross the canal

[24] Bijlmermeer Renovation Planning Office (Projectbureau Vernieuwing Bijlmermeer), *The Bijlmermeer Renovation: Facts and Figures,* 2008

belt, then the A10 ring road without interruption; wayfinding signs point out railroad stations and town centers, and easily led me to my destination.

Leaving Bijlmermeer en route to IJburg, the bike paths meandered through marshes and fields. It was mid-afternoon, and children were riding home from school; parents were walking with kids; and veiled women in long skirts greeted other women in Western dress. Concluding my field research on equity in the public realm for the day, I thought again of a statement by Enrique Peñalosa:

Bike Path Near Bijlmermeer; new metro line and apartment towers in the distance
Joan Byron

> *Parks, plazas, pedestrian streets, and sidewalks are essential for social justice. High quality sidewalks are the most basic element of a democratic city. It is frequent that images of high-rises and highways are used to portray a city's advance. In fact, in urban terms, a city is more civilized not when it has highways, but when a child on a TRICYCLE is able to move about everywhere with ease and safety.[25]*

[25] Enrique Penalosa, *Urban Transport and Urban Development: a Different Model*, Center for Latin American Studies, University of California Berkeley, April 2002 http://clas.berkeley.edu/Events/spring2002/04-08-02-penalosa/index.html

4 KEY POLICY LESSONS FOR NEW YORK, AND BEYOND

Lessons from London, Paris, and Amsterdam on building an equitable public realm are both top-down (demanding leadership on values) and bottom-up (substantively engaging with communities and empowering grassroots organizations.) We can also learn much from Europe about the middle ground — the administrative means and methods by which an equitable public realm is funded, built, and maintained. While the PPP model, for example, is deeply entrenched in New York (and the United States), there are still ways that we can address the challenges of equity and democracy, even in a context where the national policies that mitigate economic inequality are weak or absent compared to Europe.

Creating an equitable public realm will not in itself address the underlying causes of inequality of which "rich parks/poor parks" are a symptom. But the public realm is the space in which civil society is born and nurtured. Michael Kimmelman, witnessing the uprising against development plans for Istanbul's Taksim Square, writes "The conflict over public space is always about control versus freedom, segregation versus diversity. What's at stake is more than a square. It's the soul of a nation."

Lesson 1: Leadership, Vision, and Values Matter

Public realm undertakings at any scale — Olympic Legacy or neighborhood regeneration — can and must be informed by values of equity and inclusion, and these values must be clearly articulated by a city's political leadership. Clarity about those values is all the more essential when projects involve partnerships among communities, governments, and private sector actors.

Under two successive mayors of opposing political parties, London's Olympic Plan was built around the explicit goal that: "Within 20 years, the communities who host the 2012 Games will have the same social and economic chances as their neighbours

across London."[26] So stated, the Games' convergence goals provided guidance for decision-making about the park itself, the legacy plan, investments in transit and infrastructure, etc. against which the project's leaders can be held accountable.

Absent such a touchstone, public realm projects become ends in themselves rather than a means of achieving a larger goal. Political leaders can lose track of what interest they represent in negotiations with private sector development partners, and are likely to adopt the partners' goals (e.g. delivering a profitable project) as their own. Clarity about values and goals allows cities to insist on project terms that advance their own planning and development visions.

Americans' resistance to proactive, government-led planning has meant that in most U.S. cities, including New York, developers take the lead in framing large-scale projects, and look to local government to facilitate the needed transactions. The provision of public amenities (and other goods such as employment commitments, affordable housing units, etc.) are negotiated, generally in response to public pressure, as developer concessions, rather than as elements integral to the achievement of a project's goals.

New York's next mayor has the opportunity to articulate goals for the achievement of a more equitable public realm — improving the quality as well as the quantity of park space available to all New Yorkers, and ensuring access to efficient and high-quality transit service for poor and working-class neighborhoods — and then to reorient public and private investment toward achieving those goals.

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[26] *Strategic Regeneration Framework: An Olympic Legacy for the Host Boroughs,* October 2009 http://www.hackney.gov.uk/Assets/Documents/strategic-regeneration-framework-report.pdf

Lesson 2: Private Money in the Public Realm — Can the PPP Model Deliver Equity?

When the creation of new parks, plazas, and promenades is driven by the desire to leverage development rather than to "distribute quality of life," we are likely to look to market-based models for their upkeep. But reliance on private resources to maintain public spaces is inherently regressive — the best maintained spaces will inevitably be those serving the most affluent clientele. In New York, initiatives to expand or improve parks and streetscapes are increasingly made contingent upon the availability of private funding. Dependence on PPPs to fund and/or carry out public realm maintenance responsibilities undermines political support for adequate public funding of maintenance. In addition, the governance of PPPs makes it difficult for them to be transparent about revenues, expenditures, programming, labor practices, etc. [27]

PPPs have been used to finance and construct large-scale infrastructure and development projects in London, Paris, Amsterdam, and many other European cities. But public spaces within such developments, once they are completed, have almost always reverted to public ownership and management.

Inquiring about PPPs in meetings with city officials, I found no examples in Paris, Amsterdam, or even London, the most comparable among the three to New York, of public parks whose maintenance was even partially delegated to a private partner. Boris Johnson's London's Great Outdoors initiative, launched with his 2009 "Manifesto for Public Space," along with two detailed documents listing projects, phasing, and costs ("Better Streets," and "Better Green and Water Spaces") unequivocally assign responsibility for delivery and maintenance of their ambitious list of projects to public bodies. "Better Green and Water Spaces" goes on to say:

Public space is just that. It is by definition open and accessible to all. There should, therefore, be a presumption in favour of public ownership and adoption. There are other models of ownership and management, but the touchstone should be around unrestricted public access unless there are specific reasons against this, for example if the site is of particular importance to wildlife or important habitats where public access could be damaging or detrimental.[28]

Our own reliance on nonprofit conservancies to fund and operate public parks, and Business Improvement Districts to maintain streets and plazas, is now so deeply ingrained in New York City's systems for managing public space that it is unrealistic to imagine eliminating them. Park conservancy groups raise approximately $160 million per year from private sources; the New York City Parks Department's operating budget for 2013 is $337 million. The Central Park Conservancy alone now raises some $57 million per year, enough to fund about 80 percent of the park's operation. Most of this money comes from individual and corporate donors, who view the park as an amenity they enjoy and support, much as they do their favorite museum or orchestra. Those who are property owners benefit, of course, from the real estate value that proximity to New York's flagship park creates.

The PPP model has insidiously shifted our thinking about how public space is funded and managed, institutionalizing a system of winners and losers, and rationalizing the neglect of parks that are not surrounded by wealthy donors. Advocates for those parks are urged to think creatively, and to welcome developments that would privatize parkland in exchange for financial contributions to maintenance or repair work that should be

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[27] New Yorkers for Parks, *White Paper and Platform*, 2013, http://www.ny4p.org/advocacy/parksplatform, p.3

[28] London's Great Outdoors, http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/regeneration/londons-great-outdoors, Quotation from *Better Green and Water Spaces*, p. 6

public responsibilities. And partnerships in less affluent areas are often pressured to take responsibility not only for added-value services, such as ecological restoration and innovative programming, but for routine maintenance of paths, lawns, and plantings.

Can we Level the PPP Playing Field (Without Killing the Golden Goose)?

The October 2012 announcement of the largest single donation ever to the Central Park Conservancy — $100 million from hedge fund manager John Paulson — set off a public discussion of the inequities inherent in the conservancy model. Media stories have highlighted conditions in less-privileged parks, and some advocates are exploring ways that well-funded parks might be induced or compelled to share the largess of their donors. Some have called for a tithe on conservancy donations, with 10 or 20 percent of revenue transferred to a citywide fund meant to help close the gap between rich parks and poor ones. But the resulting pool of $16 million, or even $32 million, would spread very thinly over the system's 29,000 acres. Such a fund might sustain a small number of local initiatives, supporting core staff of new organizations who could catalyze volunteer stewardship and advocacy in diverse communities, but it could not fill the maintenance gap created by chronic underfunding.

Farm at Bijlmermeer

Joan Byron

New Kinds of Public Spaces Bring New Funding Challenges

On commercial streets, business improvement districts (BIDs) play a role analogous to that of park conservancies. BIDs can be created by a majority vote of property owners in a commercial district; once a BID is in place, all owners within that district are assessed a mandatory contribution that is collected by the City's Department of Finance, and returned to the BID. The BID, depending on its resources, may provide anything from basic sanitation and security services to elaborate amenities and programming, as the Times Square Alliance and other BIDs within Manhattan's Central Business District do.

New York's Public Plaza program, inaugurated by the Department of Transportation in 2008, seeks to transform streetscapes in additional neighborhoods by putting underused or poorly designed street areas, such as the triangular spaces created by oblique intersections, into active use. This creates amenities enjoyed by shoppers, residents, and workers, and also creates a safer and more

welcoming pedestrian environment, modeled on the numerous small squares and plazas that are among European cities' most delightful public spaces.

Sites for new plazas are chosen competitively, and each must be proposed by a private partner, generally a BID, that is organizationally and financially capable of maintaining the plaza once it is completed. Though the program's selection criteria aim to prioritize neighborhoods that are underprovided with open spaces, these same neighborhoods are often underprovided with money and capacity. Supporters of the program are now working to establish a model that will allow poorer neighborhoods to utilize the plaza program, exploring ways that the revenue and other resources of better-off BIDs might be shared.

The European Model: Public Funding for Public Spaces

Creative strategies could direct some increment of private funding to less-privileged parks and plazas, but the magnitude of the problem calls for a public solution. Increasing funding and staffing for park operations, with the goal of bringing all New York City parks up to a good level of maintenance, would be a fundamental step toward equity. Even with the restoration of several hundred positions in 2012-13, advocates estimate that approximately 1,000 new full-time staff equivalents would be needed to recover from cuts imposed in prior decades, and to maintain the 750 acres of new parkland added to the system since 2001.

The creation of dedicated revenue streams has been proposed as a way of overcoming objections to tax increases while tapping public concern for parks. In New York, the idea of a modest surcharge on sports ticket has been suggested, as has dedicating the $60 million per year in rents and fees paid by park concessions (which now goes to the City's general
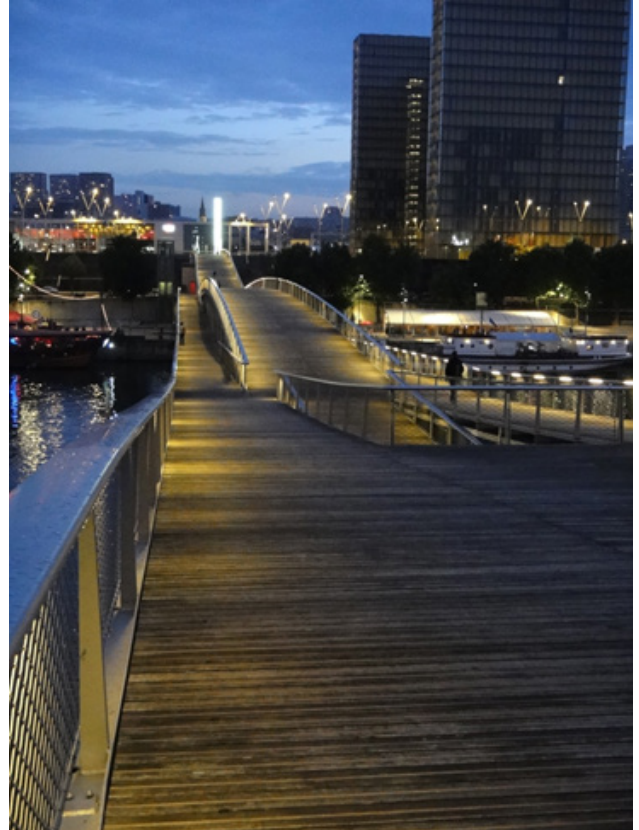
Passerelle Simone-de-Beauvoir and the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
Joan Byron

fund) to park maintenance. Amsterdam's parking fees and London's congestion charge are successful applications of dedicating "sin taxes" to funding transit. But in the United States, revenue raised by new, dedicated streams (for transit, education, and other purposes) has historically often been offset over time by cuts in support from general revenue.

Lesson 3: Establish Entities with the Authority, Capacity, and Resources Needed to Build and Manage an Equitable Public Realm

Achieving social, physical, and economic regeneration requires a long-term commitment of staffing and resources. Technical capacity needs to be

located where it is easily accessible by the population its work is to serve, and staff must possess the cultural competency to build effective working relationships. No less importantly, locally deployed planning units must have the ability not only to help stakeholders to articulate their own priorities, but to mobilize public capital and the cooperation of other government bodies to deliver. Examples include London's separate structuring of the Olympic Development Authority and the Olympic Legacy Company, the Île-de-France region's IAU and the Plaine Commune, Amsterdam's DRO and the Projectbureau Vernieuwing Bijlmermeer.

In Europe, holistic efforts have been more successful in advancing equity than those that are purely design-driven. The streetscape improvements coordinated by Design for London are well-crafted, but the underlying issues of poverty and isolation that they are meant to mitigate remain substantively unaddressed, and the mix of retail uses fails to deliver the "sense of good offer" that the cosmetic improvements were meant to support. By contrast, beautification of Clignancourt's streets followed long-term consultation and is being accompanied by the implementation of more substantial improvements, including nurseries and elementary schools that the residents themselves had prioritized. The re-making of Bijlmermeer also reflects a long-term engagement between residents and planners (as well a much deeper public and private investment), resulting in a far more comprehensive transformation over time.

Planning, design, implementation, and operational decisions about public spaces in New York City — especially public parks, but also streets, plazas, etc. — is both highly centralized and administratively siloed. This is not simply a matter of willfulness on the part of the responsible departments — New York, a city of over 8 million people, has no unit of general purpose government with real authority over policies or budgets at any level more localized than City Hall.

Each New York City agency is headed by a commissioner, appointed by and serving at the pleasure of the mayor. Those commissioners each manage a system in which their own appointees direct a pyramid of career public servants, whose role is to implement policies and programs originating at the top. In contrast to quasi-parliamentary systems that give locally elected legislators a direct role in shaping the work of city agencies, New York's City Council exercises power primarily through its budgetary and legislative authority.

Each of New York's 59 Community Districts has a board that is appointed by elected officials and whose power is strictly advisory. Community Districts' populations are the equivalent of mid-sized U.S. cities, ranging from 35,000 to 200,000, but their budgets barely allow for the staffing they need to carry out their basic administrative functions (described on New York City's website as receiving resident complaints and processing permits for street fairs and block parties.)[29] Lacking both resources and real authority, New York's Community Boards tend to amplify rather than mitigate inequality.

Europe's global cities, in contrast, have intentionally created planning and administrative entities staffed by professionals of the varied disciplines needed for the work at hand, and have often physically located those entities in the communities that are the focus of their work. Bacary Sané's storefront offices in Clignancourt enable him and his colleagues to establish the formal and informal networks through which they learned what issues most concerned local residents, and to understand those issues by living them on a daily basis.

At a larger scale, the distinct lines of authority and accountability set up for London's Olympic agencies

[29] Mayor's Community Assistance Unit, *About Community Boards,* http://www.nyc.gov/html/cau/html/cb/about.shtml

enabled the Olympic Delivery Authority to focus on the venues, and the Legacy Corporation to focus on the project's long-term regeneration goals, and leave the management of the relationship with the International Olympic Committee in the hands of the Organizing Committee (LOCOG.) And I know of no U.S. counterpart to the regional planning authority and know-how embodied in the Île-de-France's Institut d'Amenagement et d'Urbanisme.

Transparency and Accountability: Preconditions for Public Realm Equity

The absence of local-level government entities that would give New Yorkers an effective voice at the neighborhood level, along with the disparities between affluent and poor communities in private resources and access to power, has allowed parks serving low-income neighborhoods to be neglected, while large-scale development projects that have privatized parkland have moved forward. Reforms that would create greater transparency and accountability on decisions about park funding, development, and management have been proposed by New Yorkers for Parks, a civic organization dedicated to supporting the creation, protection, and improvement of New York's public parks.[30] Key provisions of its 2013 mayoral platform would:

- Overhaul the way parks capital and operating budget is funded, establishing a dedicated capital budget and baselining park maintenance as a critical city function;

- Limit and better regulate the privatization (alienation) of parkland, mandating earlier public notification and acre-for-acre replacement of any alienated parkland;

- Increase transparency, accountability, and efficiency, including reporting (in standardized form on a public website) the cost of

maintaining each park and the amounts of public and private funding spent in each. PPPs would also be required to report their annual revenues and expenses and other fiscal and governance information in a simple and consistent format on the Parks Department's website;

- Integrate parks planning into neighborhood and citywide comprehensive planning, and consider parks as part of a broad network of public spaces that also includes plazas, greenways, school playgrounds, public housing developments' open spaces, etc.[31]

While these measures would not in themselves bring about equitable development and maintenance of parks and other public spaces, the level of transparency they would establish is certainly an important prerequisite for further reform.

Lesson 4: Public Realm Equity Requires More than Hardware

The social capital represented by the young people of London Citizens CitySafe project or the sense of local agency established by Bacary Sané's office in Clignancourt is essential to the success of physical regeneration, and can only be accumulated by the intentional building of both capacity and trust over time. Jean-Pierre Charbonneau, an urbanist who has consulted on projects in Copenhagen, Lyon, and Istanbul, speaks of the "know-how" about urban space that Parisians have accumulated since the 19th century as having enabled residents and small business owners, mainly African hairdressers, to successfully pedestrianize his street in the 10th Arrondissement with minimal capital expenditure,

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[30] New Yorkers for Parks, *Parks Platform 2013*, http://www. ny4p.org/advocacy/ParksPlatform2013/Parks%20Platform%20 2013%20-%20White%20Paper%20.pdf

[31] Far from the case today; city agencies now spend many months refining plans for private developments within public parks — at least in poor neighborhoods — and view the public review and approval process as a necessary but easily surmountable obstacle http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/29/sports/soccer/abu-dhabi-sheik-is-said-to-be-on-track-to-own-new-soccer-team-in-new-york.html?hp

overcoming the initial skepticism of local authorities.

Genuine collaboration between authorities and communities can enable multi-leveled, nuanced consideration of what might otherwise be intractable problems, including those that may be visibly manifested in the condition of the built environment, but whose roots reach deeply into underlying social and economic conditions. The regeneration of troubled public housing developments, such as Bijlmermeer, has succeeded when planners took seriously the perspectives of residents, including those who wanted to continue to live in the complex but wanted to see its deficits addressed.

Such successes are not possible, however, when governments or developers have already formulated not only the problem but its solution, and employ the techniques and vocabulary of participatory planning to legitimize a foreordained outcome. The planning process for the next incarnation of Les Halles demonstrates that *faux* public participation happens even in Paris when the stakes are high enough. The official public engagement process was structured to exclude the mostly young and black *banlieusards* who worked, shopped, and socialized in the much-maligned 1970s mall (which itself had replaced the renowned 19th-century food market.)[32]

Democratizing the Public Realm and Building Social Capital

Revisions to New York City's charter in 1989 intentionally centralized power, and gave a decisive advantage to the city's executive branch, partly in reaction against the "ungovernable" New York of

"The Hairdressers' Street," Paris
Joan Byron

the 1970s and early 1980s.[33] That New York that was also economically and fiscally in what seemed to be irreversible decline, as were almost all other U.S. cities in that era.

But New York's story took a different turn. The economy transformed, bringing decades of overall growth that has left a few people vastly better off, and a larger number struggling. Though buffeted by recession as well as by disaster, New York is today the master of its own fate to a much greater degree than most U.S. cities. In their forthcoming

[32] Camille Gardesse, *La "concertation" citoyenne dans le projet de réaménagement du quartier des Halles de Paris (2002-2010) : les formes de la démocratisation de l'action publique en urbanisme et ses obstacles*, Université Paris-Est, Dec. 2011, http://www.latts.fr/hal/liste-des-publications-de-camille-gardesse

[33] The 1989 Charter's diminution of the power of the Borough presidents and elimination of the Board of Estimate was also a correction of what courts had found to be the institutionalized under-representation of New York's most populous boroughs.

paper, "Toward a 21st Century City for All," John Mollenkopf and Brad Lander write:

> The growth of New York City's population and economic output since the nadir of the mid-1970s has been rooted in factors that have both increased the need for inclusion and upward mobility and provided the resources to achieve it: the shift to an advanced services economy, the growth of immigrant communities, and the key role of public investments in civic and economic infrastructure.

As a city, we can not only make a wider range of choices today than those available to us 20 years ago; we also have better tools to inform those choices. When the 1989 charter was voted in, the Mayor's Management Report was delivered in binders of green-and-white-striped printouts, summarizing data rolled up from each city agency's far-flung outposts. Decentralizing authority was

incompatible with maintaining accountability, so, with good reason, city leaders went for accountability. By 2013, the Bloomberg administration has brought data-driven public management to unimagined levels — but in service to an ever more centralized management model that is often the antithesis of transparency.

Under the next administration, those tools and techniques can be deployed to achieve new goals. Technologies (open data, user-friendly analytics, and social media), cannot replace face-to-face interaction but can catalyze it, enabling us to devolve not only the execution of policies but their definition and elaboration, while maintaining accountability. In tandem with the transparency measures advocated by New Yorkers for Parks and others, there is the potential for communities to get hard data about capital and maintenance expenditures for each of the city's 1,700 parks, playgrounds, and recreation facilities.

Experiments in participatory budgeting, based on models developed in Brazil, suggest that we are capable of engaging communities in decision-making at a far more substantive level than the focus-group sessions that have bred cynicism and "planning fatigue" in many downtrodden neighborhoods.

New York City is also home to a rich ecosystem of grassroots and civic organizations; European planners who visit are consistently struck by the culture of activism here, and seek to learn what lessons they might apply in an era of right-shifting politics and growing fiscal constraint in their home countries.

Particularly where low-income residents have organized around open space equity as an issue of economic and environmental justice, grassroots leadership should be better valued and cultivated than has been the case under this administration. Such organizations provide much more than a channel for communication between neighborhoods and City Hall. They build the capacity of residents to grapple with the complex trade-offs that shaping and managing the public realm entails. Bacary Sané in Paris told me that "participation is a school." As New York and other U.S. cities face the challenges of globalization, sustainability, and, increasingly, of resilience and adaptation in the face of climate change, the lessons we can learn in that "school" will serve us in the shaping of our public realm, and much more.

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