

# THE WAGNER PLANNER

Newsletter of the NYU Urban Planning Student Association



MAY 2006

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

A letter from the editors  
By Uma Deshmukh and Susan Willets, p. 2

Social Housing Debate in France and the United States  
By Mike Gedal, p. 1 and 8

Bimkom: Community-Focused Planning in East Jerusalem  
By Becca Nagorsky, p. 3

Profile of the 2006-07 UPSA Board  
Compiled by the editors, p. 4-5

Advice for Last-Minute Summer Internship Seekers  
By Susan Willets, p. 6

Evaluating Nicaragua's Multi-Level Planning Process  
By Uma Deshmukh, p. 7

Our Dearly Departed Graduates  
Photos, p. 9-11

## Touché: Sixty Years of Social Housing Debate in France and the U.S.

By Michael Gedal  
Staff writer

In the fall of 2005 we were inundated with images of brown and black faces suffering the consequences of poor planning, first when levees broke in Louisiana, and then when housing projects erupted in fire and violence in the suburbs of France. Americans and French alike were forced to acknowledge the uncomfortable reality that poverty, economic exclusion, and spatial isolation are still very much linked to race, despite attempts to correct inequities in recent decades.

American and French perspectives on these subjects can also be linked together. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the French press chided the U.S. for its failure to address a longstanding "racial problem." When rioting shook the *banlieues* of France a couple months later, the American press responded with a harsh critique of French social policy and racial attitudes. These exchanges were only the latest in a longstanding Franco-American dialogue on social housing planning and policy that began in postwar Europe.

### The Foundations are Laid

The first shot in this cross-Atlantic debate was fired by the dedi-

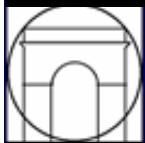
cated Modernist, Le Corbusier. In response to decaying urban centers in the U.S. and the *bidonville* slums that ringed France's large cities, the Franco-Swiss planner and theorist proposed to raze decayed urban dwellings and erect "Towers in the Park." These mega-structures were intended to clear away urban clutter and squalor by imposing geometric and social order on the living environment.

Le Corbusier's grand vision for social housing soon hopped the Atlantic. Postwar "urban renewal" programs in the U.S. began to take the form of massive super-block developments constructed in center cities. American architects, planners, business leaders, and politicians were sold on Modernist housing projects' proffered promise of social and economic progress.

The machinery for postwar U.S. housing policy was put into place in 1949 when Congress passed the Housing Act, which famously declared that every American deserved a "decent home and a suitable living environment." The Act established for the first time the federal government's role as provider of housing. As part of this role, federal government financed slum clearance, relying on the power of eminent domain to demolish residential structures in poorer neighborhoods. The neighborhoods selected for

(France continued on page 8)

Urban Planning Anytime at: <http://www.nyu.edu/wagner/urbanplanning>



THE WAGNER PLANNER  
<http://www.nyu.edu/wagner/urbanplanning>  
April 2006

*The Wagner Planner* is the independent student newsletter of the Urban Planning Student Association (UPSA) of the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at NYU. *The Wagner Planner* is edited and produced by *The Wagner Planner* staff and the Editors-in-Chief, Uma Deshmukh and Susan Willetts. All currently enrolled MUP students, alumni and faculty are encouraged to submit material to *The Wagner Planner*. Just send an email to [uma.deshmukh@nyu.edu](mailto:uma.deshmukh@nyu.edu) or [susanwilletts@nyu.edu](mailto:susanwilletts@nyu.edu).

#### This Issue's Contributors

*Michael Gedal* (*writing*)

*Becca Nagorsky* (*writing*)

*Uma Deshmukh* (*writing, editing*)

*Susan Willetts* (*writing, editing*)

*Julia Chan* (*photography*)

*Kate Bender* (*editing*)

*Carrie Knudson* (*editing*)

*Douglas Adams* (*photography*)

## A letter from the editors:

**W**ith the close of the academic year, we would first like to extend our congratulations to all the graduates of the Class of 2006! Another year rapidly came and went, and as one class departs to join the professional world of planners, another class of students prepares to join the ranks in Wagner's Urban Planning program. This in- and out-migration of Planning students at Wagner strangely mimics that which we see and experience in all of our world's urban areas, as old residents leave and new ones arrive, creating an ever-flowing and constantly regenerating exchange of ideas, activities, and resources.

It seems that it is this very fluidity that deeply enriches our planning program, our city, and our world. At Wagner each year brings new and inspiring students with unique experiences to share and unlimited knowledge to learn, while each graduating class sets out to introduce cutting-edge perspectives of planning into the field. In the midst of the current frenzied and turbulent debate about the national immigration policy, the value behind transitions and global exchange seems to have been sorely missed.

Thus, this issue of the Wagner Planner explores urban planning in both an international context, looking at social housing in France, collaborative planning in Jerusalem, and multi-level planning in Nicaragua, while also incorporating stories and images focused on the exchanges and transitions taking place right here in our very own planning program. As we say goodbye to the Class of 2006, we proudly welcome the new and talented Board of the Urban Planning Student Association (UPSA) and offer tips for those last-minute summer job seekers, only in anticipation of the next phase of migratory transitions that promise to further enhance our school-wide, city-wide, and world-wide community.

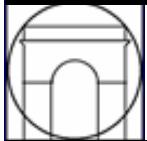
We hope you enjoy the final issue of Wagner Planner for the 2005-2006 academic year, and as we, ourselves, transition out of our roles as your editors-in-chief, we wish you all a safe and exciting summer!

Yours,

Uma Deshmukh and Susan Willetts



Your Wagner Planner editors, Susan and Uma



## ***Bimkom: Planners for Planning Rights: An Organizational Profile***

By Becca Nagorsky

Staff writer

**L**iving in Israel last year, I came across a unique organization, *Bimkom*, that looks at social justice issues in Israel through the lens of urban planning and strives to ameliorate inequalities through incisive planning. I attended a forum it held on the future of East Jerusalem and was impressed with the dialogue it initiated on extremely sensitive and controversial political issues. There are so many layers inherent in any issue connected to Jerusalem; religious, inter-cultural, political and *Bimkom* makes a concerted effort to handle them responsibly. My intention in writing this profile is not to comment on politically controversial situations, but to present an interesting model of a way to bridge the gaps among planning, politics and actual people.

*Bimkom*, the Hebrew word for "instead of," is also a play on words for its similarity to the words for "in a place," an idea with clear relevance for planners. The organization was founded by a group of architects and planners and is based on the principles of putting citizens at the center of the planning process. In order to achieve this goal,

*Bimkom* strives to enhance equity in decisions regarding resource allocation and development, ensure transparency in the planning process, and promote public participation. Neighborhoods and villages turn to *Bimkom* for planning support against unjust municipal policies and to provide viable alternatives. Its use of community-based planning, especially in a context which makes that planning tool especially unlikely, is commendable and could serve as a viable template for local governments and community groups around the world. In this article, I profile one of its biggest projects. More information is available on its Web site at [www.bimkom.org](http://www.bimkom.org).

### **Isawiyya**

Isawiyya is a neighborhood in East Jerusalem next to the Mount Scopus campus of Hebrew University. East Jerusalem, the largely Palestinian half of Jerusalem, was annexed to the Jerusalem municipality following the 6-Day War in 1967 (See <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/Maps/GreaterJerusalemE.html> for a map). Because of the continuing uncertainty of the future of East Jerusalem in the final status of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, municipal

planning for East Jerusalem has been limited, and restrictive growth limits have often been imposed. Other political concerns have also stymied comprehensive planning, ultimately resulting in a situation where growth has been stunted, or has occurred illegally in neighborhoods like Isawiyya.

In 1991, the Jerusalem municipality approved an outline plan for Isawiyya, but it didn't allow for sufficient growth, particularly for community buildings and commercial areas. Additionally, the plan left out some areas and designated others as open space, thereby making structures in those zones illegal and in danger of condemnation.

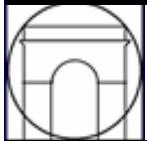
*Bimkom* began its work in Isawiyya in 2004 by meeting with community and business leaders to get a sense of the community's needs and the way they felt about their neighborhood. Planners then conducted a community-wide seminar, attended by 80 residents, to determine what they viewed positively in Isawiyya and what they wanted to remain within the context of the new plan. From here, the work became more specific and committee-focused.

The biggest conflict that emerged was over public land. Residents of Isawiyya didn't have a realistic mechanism for expropriating land for public purposes and had difficulty deciding if it should be a voluntary allocation from property owners or if a larger power such as the municipality should be responsible for accruing land. Other issues of disagreement surfaced with regard to the distribution of commercial space and public parks: whether they should be concentrated in a central location, or dispersed throughout the community.

Ultimately, the plan that resulted from the collaboration of *Bimkom* and Isawiyya is viewed as a model for East Jerusalem. Because it had the buy-in of Isawiyya residents and leaders, the plan has legitimacy on the ground, and is also seen as a feasible option by Israeli planning institutions. Most importantly, it introduced the idea of community-based planning to Israelis and Palestinians, and included a population that is often not involved in the political process. By successfully negotiating a complex political and cultural situation to produce a truly viable vision for Isawiyya, *Bimkom* set an example for collaborative urban planning that has the potential to influence the way people interact with their urban environment around the world.



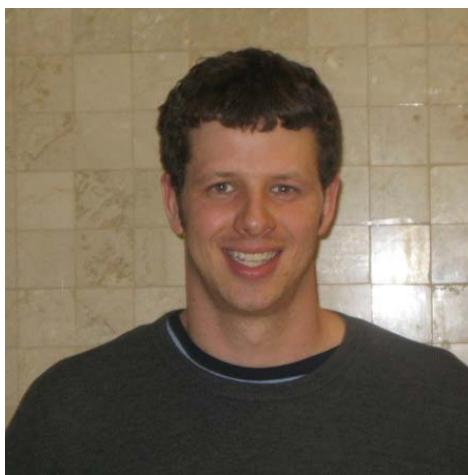
Social justice group *Bimkom* works to improve municipal planning in East Jerusalem through community collaboration.  
Photo courtesy of [orthodoxanarchist.com](http://orthodoxanarchist.com).



## Meet Your New UPSA Board for the 2006/2007 Academic Year!

Below are profiles and contact information for the new UPSA Board.

Mike Davis - President  
(mdd273@nyu.edu)



Mike was born and raised in Wilkes-Barre, PA. After graduating from Penn State, Mike did four years of citizen organizing at an environmental nonprofit in Boston. As a planner Mike is interested in sustainable communities, affordable housing and engaging citizens in decision making. As UPSA President, Mike hopes to strengthen relationships with Wagner alumni in the planning field in order to improve students' access to valuable and relevant internship opportunities. Mike is already hard at work with faculty at Wagner to ensure that students will obtain more technical skills prior to graduation, through classes and workshops with professionals in the field. Mike loves being outdoors, including biking, hiking, skiing, fishing and just enjoying the peace and quiet. He also enjoys shootin' the breeze about politics.

Kate Bender - VP of Operations  
(krb280@nyu.edu)



Kate is from a suburb of Kansas City and got her undergraduate degree in political science from Brown. She lives in Brooklyn and is interested in city management, economic development and downtown revitalization. Her goals for the year are to provide opportunities for planning students to learn about a range of careers in the urban planning field and to continue UPSA's grand tradition of general frivolity.

Himanshu Mistry - VP of Professional Development  
(hjm220@nyu.edu)



Him is an urban designer from Quincy, Mass. He received his Bachelor's of architecture and a post-graduate degree in urban design in India. He is interested in physical and environmental planning, urban design and sustainability. Him's goals for the coming year are to bring in skill-based workshops and career resources.

Renuka Vijayanathan - Treasurer  
(rv478@nyu.edu)

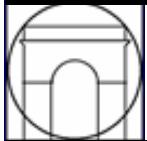


Renuka is a former Environmental Engineer who has recently joined Wagner to pursue her Master's in urban planning. She has enjoyed helping plan events like Steve Duncan's Undercity presentation and hopes to invite other interesting urban planning members to speak at UPSA events. She also wants to ensure that the current incoming Urban Planning class feels just as welcome and connected as she feels to fellow Urban Planners. In her free time, Renuka enjoys traveling, nature, and flamenco dancing.

Samelys Lopez - VP of Community Affairs  
(sl1551@nyu.edu)



Samelys is a second-year planner who became interested in urban planning as a profession after directing constituent services for an elected official in the South Bronx.



## *Meet Your New UPSA Board (cont.)*

**Jane DeLashmutt - VP of Academic Affairs**  
(jsd300@nyu.edu)



Jane is a second-year Urban Planning student. She graduated from St. Mary's College of Maryland in 2000 and moved to New York in the fall from Baltimore. Jane is interested in affordable housing, community development and economic development. Her goals are for the coming year are to provide opportunities for students to express what they have found to work and not work at Wagner, and to encourage the addition of classes in which urban planners express interest (e.g. affordable housing finance and policy)

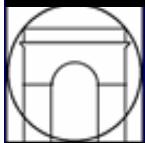
**Becca Nagorsky - VP of Outreach**  
(rn559@nyu.edu)



Becca is from Chicago. She received her BA from McGill University in Montreal with a major in psychology. She likes everything about cities.



A portion of "The Theater of Life" mural by Os Gemeos, which is located directly west of the Stillwell Avenue Subway Station at Coney Island.  
Photo courtesy of Julia Chan



## A Little Advice for Those Last-Minute Summer Internship Seekers

By Susan Willetts  
*Staff Writer*

**M**any Wagner planners may have already lined up internships for the summer now that classes have ended, but others are still searching for that perfect job opportunity. David Schachter, Wagner's assistant dean of career services and experiential learning, said the benefit of internships is that, unlike full-time jobs, they can offer "a taste, a flavor" of what career opportunities are available, and they are a great way to gauge students' interests.

Even if you are immersed in summer school classes, don't rule out taking on a summer internship as well. Schachter encourages students to do both, and maintains that they can only enhance each other. He said the theory learned in the classroom helps inform work experience, and the real-life experience can improve classroom discussions.

But remember that if you decide to seek a summer internship, it is never too early to start looking. That is because many public service-related organizations do not offer

defined summer internship programs, and so the time-consuming process of networking becomes all the more important.

Schachter said networking is an invaluable way for students to expand their professional contacts through low-risk social activities. The purpose of networking is not necessarily to land a job, he said, but instead to find people with similar interests who can lead to potential career contacts. "They may know someone who knows someone," Schachter said, and that can pay off in the future.

If you are interested in an organization that does not offer a specific summer internship, Schachter said, don't give up. Conduct as much research as possible on the organization, and identify the unit you are particularly interested in. Reach out to someone in that unit to set up an informational interview. This interview is not intended to result in a job offer, Schachter said, pointing out that "if you ask for a job, the conversation is done." But an informational interview can be a crucial way to gather data about the organization, receive helpful advice and, above all, be remembered positively. Such a conversation can lead to a job opportunity later on.

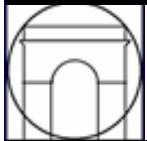
Wagner students should approach the search for a summer internship just as they would any other job, Schachter said. He said the biggest mistakes Wagner students make in the job or internship search is not doing their homework, not understanding how employers make hiring decisions and assuming that their qualifications will be as apparent to the interviewer as they are to themselves. Also, students should be prepared to answer both typical and not-so-typical questions during the interview.

If all this advice sounds a bit overwhelming, perhaps a good place to start would be Wagner's Office of Career Services. While OCS does not offer any programs specifically geared toward "summer" internships, it does provide a range of ongoing programs and services to help students improve their chances of gaining internships and employment regardless of the timing. These include a variety of "How To" guides to help students and alumni in their career planning, dealing with such topics as resume writing, networking and interviewing and negotiating offers. These guides can be found at <http://www.nyu.edu/wagner/careers/resources/howto.php>. OCS also offers a number of workshops and one-on-one advisement services. If you haven't already, check out the OCS Web site to discover all the office has to offer for your career development.

While the search for a summer internship can be frustrating, keep at it, and above all, remember there are many ways to land that potentially rewarding career development experience. Continue checking all those job sites, but keep your eyes and ears open for networking opportunities too; in the long run, you may reap even greater rewards.



Coney Island's Parachute Jump was built in 1939 for the New York World's Fair in Flushing Meadows; it has been a landmark since 1977.  
Photo courtesy of Julia Chan



## Analyzing a Multi-Level Planning Process in Nicaragua's Department of Boaco

By Uma Deshmukh  
*Staff Writer*

Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Latin America. With a long and volatile social and political history and frequent devastating natural disasters, the country is faced with the difficult challenge of development and poverty alleviation as it strives to compete in a globalized economy. Further compounding the problem, Nicaragua's historically centralized government has lacked an efficient and equitable planning system, leading to the implementation of inappropriate and unsustainable local and national development projects that have failed to advance the country's physical, social and economic infrastructure.

As a result, in 2000, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) began working with the Nicaraguan Government to establish a coherent multi-level planning system in which the local and central levels of government work together toward common development objectives. The goal of this new system was to create an intermediate department-level planning body to facilitate the realization of suitable and locally-demand projects, which would support plans for future development and ultimately advance the country's economy.

Five years later, in 2005, UNCDF began an evaluation of the multi-level planning system, in order to determine the level of collaboration that has been taking place be-

tween the central and local governments in the elaboration of public investment projects. As part of this evaluation, my Capstone Team - Ann Fuller, Alyssa Holmgren and I - had the opportunity to conduct a detailed case study in Nicaragua's Department of Boaco to examine how this new process has actually played out in one of the country's 15 departments.

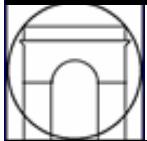


A view of the Department of Boaco in central Nicaragua.  
Photo courtesy of Uma Deshmukh

Nicaragua's other departments. Our findings suggested that a significant amount of locally demanded projects are, in fact, being approved for national financing, and some inter-governmental communication appears to be taking place. But at the same time, true collaboration, negotiation, information-sharing and project co-financing is *not* occurring between the local and national levels. Thus, it appears that the new process has been successful in achieving some goals while faltering on others.

Ultimately, however, in light of Nicaragua's long history of political corruption and inefficient and inequitable planning, the country has come a long way in its efforts to increase political will, participation and transparency in its public investment planning process. With the introduction of forums for dialogue and communication as critical elements of the new system, the culture of planning can gradually change and the level of participation can slowly increase, suggesting that a more optimistic future lies ahead for Nicaragua's public investment planning system.

Through extensive field work, data analysis and interviews with key planning officials at the local, departmental and central government levels, we found that the new planning process has yielded an array of positive, negative and inconclusive outcomes, calling for further research in

**(FRANCE *continued from page 1*)**

demolition and subsequent housing mega-structures disproportionately included ethnic groups with less political clout, such as blacks, Latinos, Italians and Jews.

France's experience with postwar social housing did not involve razing the city center, but instead established social housing at the peripheries of its cities. This locational decision was partly an intentional planning strategy, following Le Corbusier's vision for satellite "garden communities" in the suburbs, locating workers close to factories and industrial parks.

Historic and demographic developments also played a role in French postwar planning. A massive rural-urban migration in the late 1940s put increased pressure on France's urban housing supply, which was already diminished by the war. Rural migrants to cities who were attracted by the prospect of industrial jobs were often unable to find suitable housing in developed areas. Thus many newly-arrived residents settled on the unimproved city edges, creating improvised suburban communities known as *bidonvilles*. By the early 1950's, public awareness of the decrepit conditions of *bidonville* slums helped generate support for Corbusian-style public housing projects outside city limits.

The early relationship between French and American planners and policymakers with regard to social housing policy could be seen as almost symbiotic. For example, New York City planner Robert Moses adapted Le Corbusier's futurist principles for the automobile-hungry, suburbia-bound middle class. Likewise, the mayor of Lyon, France, Louis Pradel, was so impressed after visiting Los Angeles that he insisted on modernizing Lyon following these same Modernist principles.

**Cracks in the Facade**

However, by the 1960s, cracks in the Modernist planning façade started to appear, first in the American "Black Belt" projects (so-called because of their overwhelmingly African-American populations), and later in the "Red Belt" projects of France (so-called because of their predominance in Socialist and Communist localities).

U.S. public housing projects were first recognized as segregated "hyperghettos" with high concentrations of poverty, social delinquency, crime, and racial violence. When the social problems of America's decaying inner cities started to come to light, the Franco-American dialogue changed trajectory. The French viewed the existence of racially-based zones of social and spatial exclusion and violence as a purely American phenomenon. For instance, when the notoriously dilapidated and crime-ridden Pruitt-Igoe housing development in Saint Louis was demolished in 1972, just 18 years after being built, the French press touted this as proof of the problems inherent to American social housing.

But in the mid-1970s, problems with the French social housing model started to show as well. French housing projects were experiencing mounting levels of economic exclusion, racial tension, and violence, although less severe than in the U.S. The most noticeable social change in these

*cités* was the increasing presence of Arab and African immigrant workers and families.

The public debate surrounding social housing in France was ostensibly about social policy, but there were clearly racial undertones to the debate as well. In 1975, France's Minister of the Interior, recalling images of burnt-out buildings in minority neighborhoods of New York, bluntly proclaimed, "We will not tolerate the Bronx in France." But policy barriers could not keep the Bronx out of France forever. In the hot summer of 1981, the housing projects of suburban Lyon exploded in fire and violence. Televised images of largely Arab and Black rioters shook France and painted a fresh, fearsome picture of the city periphery as a place of violence, social alienation, and racial segregation. As feared, French housing projects had been transformed into ghettos, falling prey to what commentators referred to as the "American Syndrome."

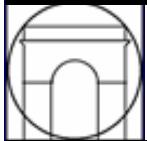
**The Failures of Modernist Social Housing**

The irony of housing policy in the postwar period in France and the U.S. was a total lack of consideration for the social effects of social housing designs. On both sides of the Atlantic, policymakers, planners, and architects ignored the psychological and social effects of their designs on the individual and the community, in deference to aesthetics and a faith in abstract planning theory. In design terms, Le Corbusier's Tower in the Park failed on several counts. The "parks" surrounding Modernist mega-structures were intended to encourage personal interactions and community-building, and to provide recreation. In actuality, these vast public spaces served to alienate residents from both their physical surroundings and their neighbors. Residents felt no sense of ownership over these public spaces which, in turn, transformed them into sterile, unused spaces that intensified a sense of social isolation and neglect.

By the 1980s, the trans-Atlantic dialogue had come full circle. Housing projects in the American Black Belt and French Red Belt were now recognized for their similarities - the mega-structure designs and high levels of crime, poverty, social exclusion and segregation - rather than their locational differences.

As housing and social policy debate continues in industrialized countries, the role of race and social exclusion in planning decisions is sure to remain prominent. In Europe - and in France in particular - the rapid growth of immigrant populations will continue to heighten the need for planning that is sensitive to social policy. The United States' pressing problems in this regard were underscored by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which painted a vivid face on social and racial inequality.

The hopeful result is that planners in both countries will increasingly recognize that their roles extend beyond design to social planning. Modernist social housing design failed in part because its planners failed to test and validate the social and psychological impacts of their plans. Going forward, planners and policymakers in the France and U.S. need to create a planning environment in which social realism trumps grandiose theories.



MAY 2006

THE WAGNER PLANNER

9

## Congratulations Wagner Graduates!



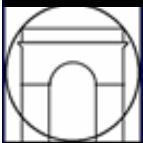
The New York University - wide graduation was held in Washington Square Park.

Complete with Bagpipers and all...



As graduates watched and waited.

*Photos courtesy of Douglas Adams*

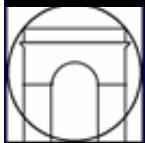


MAY 2006

THE WAGNER PLANNER

10





MAY 2006

THE WAGNER PLANNER

11

