

On the Ground

Observations from Harvard

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Take-off

From above you get the big picture.

Looking down upon the Netherlands – don't blink or you'll miss it! – you see the graphics that man has imposed on the land and the glistening waterways that sometimes obey this controlled system but sometimes also go their own way. Every time I fly over my adopted country I am struck by what an imposing work of engineering artistry this whole orchestrated Dutch landscape is.

Looking down upon America – for hours – I am always overwhelmed by the sheer immensity of the country, and also by the persistence of the residents in trying to get a grip on all that space. Or rather, by the way the land has been transformed to suit man's needs. The enormous surveyors' grid marches relentlessly across the land until it is forced to bow its head in the face of a river or a muscular mountain range. Man manifests himself too in the endless urbanization that pays no heed to either topography or environment. See for example my hometown Los Angeles, four times on the cover of this book, crawling in city-block increments up and over mountain ranges.

I mean to say: from the air you have an overview, you see patterns and connections. You understand differently, perhaps better, what you are looking at. That is how I hoped to use my time as a Loeb Fellow at Harvard: to get the big picture, to make global connections. The fifteen chapters of this book are an attempt at just that. On the Ground investigates various topical issues in land use and planning in the United States. As it turns out, they are surprisingly relevant for the Netherlands today.



Loeb Fellows 2006-'07; from left to right: Andreas Wolf, Denise Arnold, Cathy Crenshaw, Brian Kuehl, Ulises Diaz, Tracy Metz, Steve Lewis, Debbie Frieden, Damon Rich and Betsy Otto.
(Photograph by Armando Carbonell)

Back to school

His picture hangs downstairs on the wall of the dining room: John Loeb, a Harvard graduate of 1924 who went on to become a wealthy Wall Street banker. John had always remained involved with his alma mater. It was to him that the university turned when American cities fell on hard times in the sixties. Race riots, poverty, white flight – Harvard felt that its Graduate School of Design (GSD) had to help find a solution. Until then John Loeb had no particular interest in urbanism or the GSD's modernist ideology. The story goes that he asked: "What do they design there, ladies' hats?"

But Loeb became fascinated by the urban crisis of the times. So much so that in 1970 he gave a substantial endowment to Harvard for the Loeb Fellowship, which has as its mission "the improvement of the built and natural environment." Every year since then, ten mid-career professionals are given the opportunity to spend an academic year taking classes, meeting with professors, doing research, attending lectures, in brief broadening their knowledge base and gathering new insights. And all we have to do in return is go home and make the world a better place.

No small task.

For the academic year 2006-'07 I am one of the lucky ten. The rest of our group includes Denise Arnold, architect and urban designer from Chicago; Cathy Crenshaw, developer from Birmingham, Alabama; Ulises Diaz, architect, photographer and activist from Los Angeles; Deborah Frieden, project manager of the new De Young Museum in San Francisco; Brian Kuehl, attorney and consultant from Wyoming; Steve Lewis, architect; Betsy Otto, environmental planner

with the American Rivers Association; Damon Rich, founder of the Center for Urban Pedagogy in New York; and Andreas Wolf, architect from Germany. Like Andreas, I count as a foreign fellow: I was born and raised in the US, but my professional life has developed mainly in the Netherlands.

Some of our class have taken this opportunity to make a clean break and have given up their jobs.

Others have, as I have, taken a leave of absence and are using this year to deepen and broaden our professional knowledge. Some have come with their families, others on their own.

I arrived alone for the first semester – my husband was able to join me for the second semester - and live with two other Fellows in a charming old clapboard house, each with a room of our own. At our age that takes some getting used to, but it turns out to be surprisingly easy and we soon have a happy little household. The house is named Doebele House, after the first curator of the fellowship, Bill Doebele, and it is the social center of the Fellowship. The living room, dining room and kitchen downstairs are the scene of our weekly dinners with an invited guest, parties, our monthly pizza & movie night, and of course countless work sessions and b.s. sessions. Cambridge, across the Charles River from Boston, is a very comfortable place. It is an atypical American city in that most everything is within walking distance. During our visit for orientation the previous May the streets were filled with the heady perfumes and colors of lilac, wisteria and cherry blossom; now as the academic year gets under way we are waiting for the famous fall colors of New England.

Last night, after yet another animated gathering, this time with students, someone said to me: "Don't forget to breathe!" That is indeed how it feels. The

first weeks are overwhelming, as we try to find our way around and figure out how everything works, from the washing machine to the Byzantine registration process at the Harvard Business School. The hardest part is choosing which interesting things to do and which to reluctantly abandon. How can you possibly choose on one Wednesday evening between Rem Koolhaas at the GSD, Noam Chomsky at MIT and the conductor Daniel Barenboim at Arts & Sciences? And how about all the authors who pass through Cambridge to give a talk at the Harvard bookstore? Let alone the option of staying home preparing for tomorrow's class or going out for a beer with your Loeb pals? It is cause for exultation and despair in equal parts. Every now and then we reassure each other that the Loeb Fellowship is in fact a submersion course in time management. The consolation, says curator Jim Stockard, is that there are no wrong choices. In the meantime we wallow in riches both intellectual and financial: CNN just had an item stating that Harvard's resources amount to over 29 billion dollars.

Personally I have decided that this is the moment to gather some context for all the bits and piece of knowledge that I have acquired on the fly as a journalist and writer with an interest in architecture, urbanism and landscape. And it is a perfect opportunity to learn more about the revitalization of American downtowns, as background for the book I am working on for the *Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research* on downtowns in the US and Europe. I feel utterly and gloriously privileged to be a Loeb Fellow. For me this is also a special time on a personal level: I haven't spent this much time in the States since I settled in the Netherlands in 1980. It is a voyage of rediscovery.

When John Loeb and his wife Frances were still alive, the Fellows went to New York to have lunch with them in their Park Avenue apartment every year on December 1st. The Loeb's have passed away, but we still have lunch together on that day and raise our glass to the photograph in the dining room downstairs. Thank you, Mr. Loeb!





CityPlace is the new downtown – *downtown lite* – of West Palm Beach, Florida. The fact that it is possible to create a new downtown in one fell swoop as a public-private enterprise, confirms the American conviction that you can always reinvent yourself.

Downtown Lite

Two men are sitting on the edge of the fountain, deep in conversation. One of them is smoking a cigar; the sharp odor wafts like a flapping flag over the square. They pay no heed to the people strolling by who have come here to shop, to have lunch, to go to the movies, or just to hang out. It is a spontaneous moment in an otherwise carefully scripted environment in which little is left to chance. This is CityPlace, the brand new downtown of West Palm Beach in Florida.

How so brand new? Isn't downtown by definition the oldest part of the city, the place where the city took root? No, or at any rate no longer. They are popping up all over the country, the new town centers designed and built as private profit-making ventures. To European eyes they look rather artificial; by American standards they represent the newest achievement in recapturing density and urbanity. The US, unlike Europe, cannot coast along on what it already has in the way of walkable urbanity. It either has to retrofit it in existing cities, or make it – from scratch. As one of the developers of these new downtowns said to me: "We are compressing one or two hundred years of citybuilding into twenty." Let us call this new place *downtown lite*.

Obviously these are entirely different downtowns from the historical city centers of Europe which have grown up organically over time – although they do take all their visual cues from Europe. And in contrast to a European city center, which belongs to everyone and therefore to no one in particular, they are privately owned and managed. CityPlace, therefore, represents an important trend in American urbanism, whereby public and private embrace each other and

hold each other in an iron grip. Equally important, it symbolizes the deep-rooted American conviction that people – and cities – can always reinvent themselves.

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It was already busy at CityPlace this afternoon and as the evening falls, people come flocking. Cars crawl through the streets, they are cruising and people-watching. There are horse-driven trams and a carriage ready for anyone who wants a taste of old-style mobility. The palm trees are wrapped in festive strings of lights and the white plastered façade of the theater that used to be a church is brightly illuminated. On the steps leading to the megaplex people are coming and going. On the square with the fountain the jazz band is getting ready to play, all the shops are open and in the restaurants people are lining up for a table.

But if you walk down the street and cross to the other side, all of a sudden you are on a windy empty lot with a small electrical plant and an election poster lying flat on its back in the dusty grass. You have fallen off the edge, as it were; the illusion of cozy vibrancy is shattered. This is physical proof that the new downtown is not yet an integral part of the city, but a project. Within the property lines the care and maintenance are maximum, outside they are non-existent.

Not everyone finds the far-reaching influence of the private sector on citybuilding a comfortable or self-evident situation. At a conference at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy Allan Mallach of the National Housing Institute spoke out as an adamant opponent. He is convinced that this is part of the backlash against government's perceived failure at urban renewal. Understandable though that may be, it has

gone too far. "Government has gotten into bed with the developers", he said. "It has become de facto a partner or even an agent of the private sector, thereby compromising government's ability to act as the voice of the greater good."

CityPlace is a fascinating hybrid, a mixture of open-air leisure and shopping, residential and public space. It is very clear that people enjoy coming here and meeting each other in an informal fashion – on the square and on the streets, sitting on the benches, during the countless events that are organized here. The public space is privately managed and therefore well-kept. But this public character is not disinterested: it is hyper-designed and at the beck and call of the commercial interests that have made it possible. The two men on the edge of the fountain – are they just sitting there to have their conversation, or are they actually killing time until their wives finally come out of the shops?

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West Palm, about an hour and a half drive north of Miami, is the poor cousin of the much whiter and wealthier town of Palm Beach, where multi-millionaires moor their yachts. That competition, plus the lower than average income level in West Palm, made it difficult to keep the urban economy in West Palm up to speed. Not only did a lot of buildings in town stand vacant, but there were a lot of empty lots too, which always makes a somewhat desolate impression.

In the mid-eighties a developer had quietly assembled a large amount of land here, 73 acres all-told, for an ambitious project called Downtown/Uptown. When his plans fell through in the real estate depression of the early nineties, the city was left with a double-edged inheritance: there was a

good-sized piece of land available on a central location, but the market had become skeptical. That changed when Nancy Graham became mayor in 1991. She saw this as an opportunity to create a new downtown for West Palm Beach. But is it even possible to build a downtown from scratch? Her answer is firm: "We had no choice." You can tell by looking at her that she was up to the job: this girl from rural Tennessee – now a decisive, elegant lady in her mid-fifties – won't take no for an answer.

"I did not want the city to have too much financial exposure," Graham says. "I convinced the state of Florida to lend a city money for the first time to buy land. And we as city government required the developer to pay back the loan." In order to make it attractive for the developer he was allowed to buy the land – but only after the project was built. What was also special was that the city granted the building permits, usually the prerogative of the developer in the US. Moreover, the city borrowed over one hundred million dollars in bonds in order to get development started, a common financing strategy called Tax Increment Financing (TIF). In effect the government borrows money from the citizens as an advance on the added value that the new project will generate.

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CityPlace, like so many other new town centers, is clearly inspired by Europe. On its website www.cityplace.com the new downtown invites us to come shop "in a place where old-world architecture, beautiful fountains, and sidewalk cafés create an atmosphere strikingly reminiscent of a European town center." Graham: "The design was already three quarters done when we organized a trip to a series of cities in Italy. That led to several changes in

the design of the fountain, the landscaping, the arcades, everything."

Great effort has been made to suggest that the Mediterranean-style façades are composed of all separate buildings, with various different colors and materials and heights, but you don't have to look really closely to see that they were built as one long wall.

Mayor Graham also understood that in places like these, which can bear an uncanny resemblance to one another, old buildings can contribute a distinctive element. She insisted that a church from the twenties be renovated to serve as a theater—named, of course, after its sponsor. And when she heard that a charming Victorian house elsewhere in town was about to be demolished, she simply had it picked up and moved to a lot next to CityPlace.

In spite of the Old World esthetic, CityPlace represents a new step in connecting a brand new downtown to the existing city. The designers decided not to bar traffic, for example, but to reinstate the street pattern, including the cars. There are quite a few parking garages, most of them discreetly located on side streets, but there is also on-street parking. No surprise to Europeans, but under the now prevalent suburban-type zoning in the US, on-street parking had disappeared.

Mayor Graham had understood early on that residential use was important in a new downtown, and that there would be demand for it. "The developer said: two hundred units at the most. I said: five to six hundred and some townhouses. Downtown living is popular now, but back then you simply could not imagine that anyone would want to live there. In the States we do not have many examples of mixed use." CityPlace has thereby

accomplished something that used to be quite common, but which Dutch cities are still trying to recapture: residential above retail. For the ex-mayor CityPlace is still the apple of her eye, even though she now works on the other coast, in California, on the revitalization of downtown San Diego. Her involvement even went so far that she chose the flowers and the pots and the street furniture. And every month she walked through the development with the maintenance people to see what needed to be done. "That was not micro-management, that was making a statement at the top." Is it healthy for such a key urban project to be so dependent on one person? "It comes down to leadership. That is not unusual in the history of the world. If you want to get something like this off the ground, there has to be one person with drive, passion and commitment."

In CityPlace, people live and work, shop and go out for a fun time. It is busy and vibrant – until you step off the edge, then all of a sudden it is quiet and empty. The new downtown is not – yet – truly a part of the city, but rather a project with a profit motive.





The urban periphery is dominated by big box retail. There is widespread nostalgia for the disappearing 'Mom & Pop' store and grumbling about the overwhelming presence of chain stores in their big, blind boxes—but their turnover continues to grow.

Big Boxes

Like most clichés, this one too is true: everything in America is big. The car, the portions in the restaurants, the rear ends that squeeze themselves onto the narrow subway seats, the parking lots, and of course the big box stores along the edges of the city with names like Wal-Mart, Target, Costco, Home Depot and Best Buy.

Their logos tell you nothing about the nature of the store or about what you can buy there. Nor do the buildings: they are huge, blind boxes. Big box retail: the term says enough. Just outside Phoenix I took a picture of a Wal-Mart that was so immense that it didn't even fit into the wide-angle lens of my camera. But in the very same country where big box retail was invented, the resistance to it is growing broader and harder. Many shops have stickers on the windows or the cash registers with texts like 'Buy Local' or 'Independent'. Everywhere you hear grumbling about the anonymous chains and wistful talk of the independent shopkeeper and the 'mom & pop' stores. The debate is also relevant for the Netherlands, now that the national government has delegated the decision about whether or not to allow large-scale retail on the edge of the city to the provinces.

At the forefront of the struggle of David against Goliath is the non-profit *Institute for Local Self-Reliance* (www.ilsr.org), founded in 1974. Its field is sustainable economic development, which entails, among other things, keeping local retail viable. Senior researcher at the ILSR Stacy Mitchell wrote a book called 'Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Business' (Beacon Press, ISBN 0-8070-3500-9). At a

lecture in Cambridge for the Harvard Bookstore – independent ever since it opened in 1932 – she eloquently and heatedly declares war on the big box stores.

She shoots down one myth after the other. City governments are eager to bring the big boxes in because they think they will create jobs for the uneducated, but in fact, says Mitchell, “They destroy more jobs than they create. Local banks, the farmers, and the newspaper – they all suffer from the consolidation of retail. For every dollar you spend at a big box, 85 percent leaves the community.”

The economic significance of the corporate retail is undeniably big. The turnover at Target has grown since 1990 to 50 billion dollars, she claims. The top five supermarkets are doing very well too: “In 1998 they had 25 percent of the market, now their market share is 50 percent.” There is another big new store on its way to the US, *The Economist* reported recently: the British supermarket chain Tesco, after Wal-Mart and France’s Carrefour the third largest in the world, is entering the American market. It will start by opening three branches every week of its ‘Fresh & Easy’ formula. (Incidentally, Tesco is also expanding in China and Europe).

In Mitchell’s eyes the chains can do no good. More choice for the consumer? Nonsense. “It’s the independent retailers who can offer more diversity thanks to their own interests and enthusiasms.” Cheaper? Not at all. “They create that impression thanks to exorbitantly expensive marketing campaigns. Maybe they’re cheaper in the beginning than the shop on the corner, but as soon as they have broken the back of the local competitor, the prices go up immediately.”

As if that were not enough, the chains also ruin the

landscape and the environment. According to Mitchell, Americans now drive a full 40 percent more to shop than in 1990, and in order to accommodate their cars the big boxes pave enormous parking lots. “The amount of shopping surface area in America has doubled since 1990, to over 35 square feet per person now. In Great-Britain that is 7 square feet!” Meanwhile thousands of dead and dying strip malls line the highways. “Often the owners have built a new mall a couple miles down the road, preferably twice as large. But they keep hold of the old one, to prevent competitors from taking it over, but it just lies there looking decrepit. They leave a terrible trail of retail wreckage behind.”

We lose not only the shops themselves, says Mitchell, but – even worse – we lose social capital. After all, shops are meeting places. Owners of shops and businesses who live where they work are much more involved in their surroundings, she believes, than CEO’s and shareholders who live in a faraway city or even in a different country.

Alas for the idealism of the small scale: the turnover of the big boxes keeps growing. Why do we spend our money there if they are the enemy? In the first place, says Mitchell, there are a great many places in the US where the consumer nowadays simply has no other choice. She, and the Institute for Local Self-Reliance with her, find it completely unfair that big global chains receive billions in subsidies and tax breaks, and the independent retailers do not. Many states in the US even offer the chains a loophole to avoid paying income tax.

That can be changed. “We can change the policies and the zoning so that local businesses are supported, for instance by imposing a maximum surface area, a size cap, of 35 to 50 thousand square feet –

an average Wal-Mart is 200 thousand square feet. The city can force a big box retailer to invest in downtown at the same time. You can require an Economic Effect Report. The city can provide beginning businesses with space and can support collaboration between independent retailers, for example with cooperative buying.”

In the US there are now at least forty cities with ‘Buy Local’ campaigns. The city of Austin in Texas has designated a day in November as ‘Austin Unchained’: boycott the chains that day.

In her book, Mitchell compares the predatory chains that are managed from abroad with the colonial powers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. She recalls how the British thought they could persuade the colonists in America to drink East Indian tea by keeping the price low. “In 1773 the colonists boarded the British ships in the Boston Harbor and threw ninety thousand pounds of tea overboard,” she proudly notes. “Now, citizens, retailers and elected officials all across the country are once again working together to build up local business.”

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance finds it unjustifiable that the global chains receive millions in subsidies and tax breaks, whereas independent retailers receive none.





The number of people commuting by car is still on the rise in the US, but light rail is increasingly popular. In Los Angeles, car city supreme, there is now a commuter rail connection between Pasadena and Union Station downtown.

Further and fatter

It is a well-known fact that Americans are – of necessity – devotees of the car. More and more Americans are traveling further and further to work, they are spending longer on the road and increasingly often they are traveling alone. And ninety percent of them commute by car. But Americans' commuting behavior is changing now that the baby boom generation is reaching retirement age and the number of immigrants is growing.

In a report that the Transportation Research Board (www.trb.org) produces every ten years, this time with the title *Commuting in America III*, researcher Alan Pisarski elaborates on the cliché of the American who is one with his car – he calls this genus 'Commuter Americanus' – with a series of new facts and dimensions. Some of his striking findings:

1 The number of commuters who leave home between 5 and 6 in the morning to beat the traffic jams is growing. Fifteen million Americans leave home before 6 am; they account for 25 percent of the growth of travel between work and home. That has consequences for their family life, but also for the delivery of the newspaper, for the news broadcasting times on radio and TV, for the opening times of the fast food restaurants on the way. Three quarters of the MacDonalds in the US now open at 5 in the morning.

2 The number of 'extreme commutes' is also growing, that is to say a journey between home and work of more than an hour and a half each way. Over 3.4 million people make that trip to work and back every day— more than twice as many as in 1990. Almost ten million Americans now drive more than an hour to work; that too is half again what it was in 1990.

3 The number of commuters who drive alone has grown in those ten years by an additional thirteen million. The number of carpoolers, 6.7 million, has remained more or less the same.

4 All that travel between home and work is only sixteen percent of the total traffic. All the other kinds of trips—free time, children being driven to school or to violin lessons—have increased even more than the commutes.

5 The number of cars in the US grew by thirty million between 1990 and 2000. Of those, thirteen million were acquired by households that already had two cars or more.

6 The average price of a car has dropped to less than twenty weeks' worth of the average wages, the lowest price in 25 years. The number of vehicles in the US now totals over 226 million; half a century ago that was 59 million.

7 In spite of the fact that there are more commuter lanes on the highways, the number of people using them has diminished. In 1980 twenty percent of the commuters carpooled, now that is twelve percent. And fewer people walk to work than in 1980.

The percentage of people walking to work would have been even smaller if it were not for the fact that immigration has grown much more than expected.

The immigrants are largely people of working age, and especially the first five years that they are in the US they walk, bike and carpool – and take public transit – to work. But when in America, do as Americans do: the longer they live in the States, the more they start to drive. The higher income brackets, on the other hand, exhibit a trend toward using commuter rail. No matter what your income, public transit usually takes twice as long as driving.

Pisarski points out two 'quiet revolutions': the growth

in the number of people working at home—now four million—and the growth in the number of people who keep working after the age of 65. The number of people over 65 who are still working, grew by 21 percent between 1990 and 2000, but they make up only twelve percent of the population. Pisarski doesn't know yet what the effect on commuting patterns will be, but he is curious to see.

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The question remains: why do Americans commute like crazy, seeing their children only in their pyjamas and probably spending the rest of the half an evening they have left, exhausted on the couch?

One important explanation for commuter behavior is the phenomenon 'drive till you qualify'. That is to say, you keep driving outwards until you reach the houses with prices and therefore with mortgages for which you qualify. "The price of a new home has nearly tripled in the past twenty years", according to an article in *Newsweek* in May 2007, "and is now approximately three hundred thousand dollars, according to the National Association of Home Builders. In popular regions like southern California, each freeway exit you pass saves you tens of thousands of dollars."

The commuting patterns are sure indicators of where the jobs are: they have left the city and moved to the suburbs, just like the employees. In the past ten years the commute from suburb to suburb grew by 64 percent, while the traditional commute from suburb to city center grew by a mere fourteen percent. Even now that the jobs are moving to the suburbs, the workers go still further out. Pisarski calls this 'leapfrogging'. No wonder that – according to the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard and MIT – the number of big cities where more than one-fifth

of the households lives twenty miles or more from the city center, has tripled since 1970.

In his conclusions Pisarski talks about “a dynamic and productive society”. I was puzzled. His report made an entirely different impression on me, namely of a boundless waste of time, productivity and energy, both human and fossil.

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Commuting in America III has reignited the debate about the question: does commuting makes you fat? Obesity is obviously a huge problem in the US (and, by the way, in the Netherlands, where half the population is overweight and where the indirect costs of obesity are estimated at two billion euros a year). The number of Americans who are seriously overweight grew by no less than one-third between 1994 and 2000; approximately one-third of the school-children are too fat. (The funny thing is that you never hear the word ‘fat’, apparently that sounds too judgmental; nowadays ‘fat’ is ‘big’).

But is commuting to blame?

For many people, their car is not only an extension of their living room but also of the kitchen. According to the American market research firm NDP Group, one out of four meals in a ‘restaurant’ is now ordered through the car window. The new Nissan Altima has three cupholders for the driver alone: for water, coffee and juice. The new Dodge Caliber offers the option of a cooled glove compartment, and the passenger seat in front can be folded down to serve as a table (or a desk).

The conviction is winning ground that there is indeed a correlation between how America approaches the built environment and the dimensions of the average rear end, or more importantly, the health of the populace at large. Newsweek refers to a study by the

university Georgia Tech, claiming that every thirty minutes at the wheel increases the risk of obesity by three percent. And in his well-known book about the downside to the individualistic lifestyle, *Bowling Alone*, Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam calculates that every ten minutes you spend commuting means ten percent less time spent on your family and community.

A man who has made this into a real personal mission is Richard Jackson. He is now a professor at the School of Public Health at UC Berkeley, and was previously the director of the National Center for Environmental Health. “Developers have more influence on the nation’s health than all the doctors together lifting a warning finger,” he has said. He points to the fact that in 1974, 66 percent of the schoolchildren still biked or walked to school; by 2000 that had dropped to thirteen percent. Jackson is convinced that there is a connection between long commuting times and the amount of time that we devote to physical exercise (and to our families, friends and communities). It is therefore literally a matter of life and death to find a different and better way of building and developing our cities, he says. That is also the idea behind ‘Active Living by Design’ (www.activelivingbydesign.org), an initiative of a private foundation affiliated with the University of North Carolina. It financed 25 pilot projects in various cities to experiment with designing residential neighborhoods in such a way that it becomes easy and safe to be physically active. The solutions are sometimes astoundingly simple: build sidewalks so that people can walk. Build bike and walking paths that do not just meander, but that lead to places people really need to go, such as the school and the supermarket.

Interestingly enough, Dutch research by the Free University and the architecture firm Architekten Cie. (www.degezondewijk.nl) shows that in daily life, people living in dense urban neighborhoods in the Netherlands tend to walk more than people living in the post-war developments. The garden city areas to the west of Amsterdam are more spacious, which makes it easier to park, therefore easier to grab the car rather than the bike or the tram. Free University professor Willem van Mechelen feels that it should be mandatory to judge plans for a neighborhood by their implications not only for the environment, but also for public health.

The problem, of course, is not just inside the neighborhood, but also outside. In most of the urbanization now going on in the US, neighborhoods are simply not built within walking or biking distance of the workplace. Nor is it self-evident that a child that *can* play outside, *wants* to play outside. Chatting on the computer, eating chips in front of the TV and gaming on the Playstation score at least as high, if not higher than physical activity on the adolescent wish index, both in the US and in the Netherlands. And for adults who have worked a long day and spent three hours getting there and back, the problem is mainly that their time and energy are spent.

Adults need incentives too, and a doctor from Colorado came up with an ingenious plan to combine the American passion for shopping with getting more exercise. Let Wal-Mart and all the other big box stores give their customers a pedometer when they come in the door. Whoever walks two thousand steps in the megastore gets a discount. The shoppers walk – past the shelves! Brilliant.

Ever more Americans spend an increasing amount of time traveling between work and home. This has a lot to do with the phenomenon "Drive till you qualify": you drive away from the city until you reach the houses you can afford. Each highway exit you pass can save you tens of thousands of dollars.





An old factory building in Poughkeepsie, New York. Mayor Nancy Cozart, who participated in the Mayors' Institute of City Design at MIT, wants to see more economic activity on Main Street. (Photograph by Tim Taber)

Mayor as urban designer

Every American knows Cooperstown, New York. Visitors stream into Cooperstown from far and near, 450,000 of them a year, to visit the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. Still, the town's major attraction has little to do with Cooperstown itself. The town is small, with just two thousand residents; it has no shopping mall and no fast food, but it does have a farmers' market and a large hospital. Having a destination spot of this magnitude within the city boundaries is both a curse and a blessing, I understand from hearing a presentation given by the mayor of Cooperstown, Carol Bateman. She is one of the eight mayors who have come together for an intense two-day session of the Mayor's Institute on City Design (MICD). All the mayors present a case in their city to a resource team, who proffer insights and solutions thanks to their expertise and their fresh eye. These gatherings have been held in various parts of the US since 1986, as a collaboration of the National Endowment for the Arts with the American Architectural Foundation and the United States Conference of Mayors. For this session of the Mayors' Institute that is being held in Cambridge, I have been invited to be a member of the resource team.

These yearly meetings are a wonderful idea, in part thanks to their simplicity. Every year, in six to eight places in the country, a number of mayors are invited to present an urban development problem to a resource team. The setting is small-scale and confidential, the mayors are not allowed to bring any staff or advisors and therefore feel free to talk openly about their city.

The meeting itself lasts two intense full days, but those have already been preceded by a lot of hard

work. A delegation of the MICD goes to a number of municipalities to study the issue first hand. If the municipality is invited to participate, extensive documentation is compiled in the form of maps and pictures. All of this is driven by the wish and the hope on the part of the mayor – in America an elected official – that new insights and suggestions can break through the impasse that cities often find themselves in. After all, the mission of the Mayors' Institute is "to prepare mayors for the role as the chief urban designers of their city."

All these sessions and visits are engineered from the head office in Washington DC. In various regions the Institute works together with a local university; in the northeast that entity has been the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for the past eight years. The eight participating mayors also come from this region, from cities and towns in New York, Massachusetts, Maine and Vermont.

What issues are the mayors seeking to resolve? Cooperstown is being run into the ground by its famous attraction; the Baseball Hall of Fame, says the mayor, does not feel at all obliged to contribute to the amenities in its town. Now the mayor has finally managed to find money for a new parking lot, so it must be perfectly located and designed.

Mayor Nancy Cozean of Poughkeepsie would actually like her city get a lot busier. Poughkeepsie, north of New York on the Hudson River, was founded in 1687 by the Dutch. Now, on the Main Street, there is not enough economic activity; too many factories, workshops and shops are standing empty. Drug wars between rival gangs who are exploring new hunting grounds in the environs of New York have not helped either; 25 percent of the crime in the city played itself out on Main Street.

Another problem is that quite a few government bodies have their offices in Poughkeepsie, and they are exempt from paying property taxes. This is something that many mayors come up against, because property taxes are a main source of income for local government. Mayor Cozean is very glad that the prices of houses in New York have gone through the roof: people have been forced out of the city, up the Hudson. The population dropped from 48,000 in the fifties to 26,000 in the mid-nineties, but that number has now risen slightly.

Gloucester, the oldest fishing harbor in the US (and the location of *The Perfect Storm*, for those who know the book or the movie), now has 254 fishing boats and is seeing its population grow for the first time in a century and a half, recounts mayor John Bell. That is not thanks to the fishing business, however: its contribution to the local economy has declined from 85 percent a century ago to nine percent now. Bell expects that percentage to shrink even further in years to come, to five percent.

The harbor and Main Street are now once again lively, he says, but function separately from one another. The mayor is convinced that it would be good for the city if the waterfront and Main Street formed more of a whole. The fishermen, however, are afraid they will lose the space they need for their cooling facilities and for truck parking as soon as yuppies invade the harbor area and start to complain. What was once viewed as picturesque and authentic will soon be seen as a hindrance, they fear.

So what do you say as a resource team? Indeed, there is too little economic demand on Main Streets all across the country. And yes, industry is dying out and leaving empty hulks in its wake everywhere. There is no denying it. And still, alternatives fly across

the table, large and small, ripe and green.

1 Extend cross streets to make connections.

2 Relax zoning in order to make mixed use possible.

3 Increase density of the built area (blasphemy!).

4 Take away parking places (scandal!).

5 Introduce a performance code that requires businesses to work on maintaining their face to the public, such as lighting and building repairs – with a clause stating what the fine will be if they are remiss.

6 And remove that chain link fence around the park right away; it reeks of danger and neglect.

“No matter what your measures cost, they are cheap,” the resource team impresses on the mayors.
“After all, your city is your greatest asset.”

Poughkeepsie benefits from the high price of housing in New York City: people are forced to move up the Hudson River to cities like these that are in urgent need of new residents. (Photograph by Spencer Ainsley/Poughkeepsie Journal)





A subdivision on an umbilical cord near Phoenix, Arizona. In the nineties the amount of built-up land increased by 47 percent; the population on the other hand only grew by 17 percent. (Photograph by Alex MacLean/Landslides)

The scary D-word

Precisely that which Americans get ecstatic about in old European cities is a nightmare at home. Very quaint, those alleys and winding narrow streets, lots of people out on the streets and everything within walking distance, and cosy too, but: nice place to visit. At home you want plenty of space around you, a big house, wide streets, plenty of parking. Density is fine for the Old World, but in the New World it is 'the D-word'.

Well, those who give the matter any thought it long ago became apparent that all that space has its price: extremely high energy consumption, and therefore greenhouse gas emission and climate change; hours spent in traffic and long commutes; an ugly landscape with coarse infrastructure and derelict strip malls; a rapid decline in the amount of open space in this country that can hardly imagine that space could ever become scarce. But density is still the scary 'D-word'. The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, a think tank located in Cambridge, initiated an ambitious five-year project to transform the fear of density into an intelligent debate. It commissioned landscape architect Julie Campoli and architect / pilot / aerial photographer Alex MacLean to show what density actually looks like in text, maps and over 1200 aerial photographs. The final result consists of a book and a cd-rom called Visualizing Density, accompanied by a website (www.lincolnst.edu/subcenters/VD/), a working paper (free download at www.lincolnst.edu/subcenters/visualizing_density/index.aspx) and workshops held in a variety of places all across the US. The idea was to show that density is not synonymous with over-crowding, and that there are countless ways to accommodate 6 or 22 or 50 or 80

housing units on an acre. Raising public awareness becomes all the more urgent when you realize that the US will be planning, designing and building some sixty million housing units in the next 25 years.

Soft-spoken though Julie Campoli is, the statistics with which she started her presentation are downright scary. "The population of the US has grown in the course of the nineties by 17 percent, but land consumption grew by 47 percent," she says. "That is in part due to the fact that our houses have gotten so much bigger. The average house has doubled in size in 50 years, from 1100 square feet with one garage in the fifties to 2300 square feet with garages for three cars now." And according to Alex MacLean all the country's lawns add up to a surface area larger than the state of Mississippi.

Density already has a big impact on energy consumption: an inhabitant of Houston spends 3000 dollars more on transportation than someone in the more compact city of Chicago. And as far as the future goes, the population of the US is expected to grow from 300 million now to 350 million in 2030. "We are going to need tens of millions of new homes. Where and how are we going to build those?"

The book contains pictures of the so-called McMansions, the obscenely huge houses that some wealthy Americans build for themselves —cancerous growths, usually in some unnameable neo-style, room after room after room, with a home movie theater, fitness center, fireplace in the back yard and mega-garages. But mind-boggling though they may be, they are still the exception, just like the square subdivision lost out in the middle of the desert. The book mostly looks at residential density on a neighborhood level: some old, full of grown street trees and comfy like an old pair of shoes; others new

and naked, their appearance still determined by the chilly regularity of the developer's skeletal structure. "Many municipal governments and developers are in favor of building in higher densities," says Campoli, "but they are often confronted with resistance by the residents. The failure of urban renewal projects of the sixties and seventies gave density a bad name. That is why many people still confuse density with crowding and monotony."

The opinions about density can be altogether contradictory. In the Area Social Survey in Phoenix in 2003 a majority of the respondents said that the houses in the city were built too close together, but at the same time they felt that the open land was being consumed too rapidly.

Alex MacLean: "We wanted to make it visible, especially for the non-professionals, that the numbers of units per acre don't really mean anything. It's the urban design and the context that determine whether a place is pleasant or dreary. Low densities that are smeared out across the land like peanut butter can be incredibly monotonous. We literally show what that means, in aerial photographs and maps."

That is why the second half of the book is a catalog in which they show examples of densities ranging from less than one unit per acre to over 200 per acre in various constellations. It becomes immediately clear that 35 units per acre can be built as desolate public housing towers (Detroit) or as pleasant urban villa's (Pasadena). And 100 units per acre can yield more depressing towers but also luxury flats along the banks of Lake Michigan in Chicago.

"Design plays a crucial role in how you experience density. It is the urban design that determines the physical character and the quality of a place." The

workshops Campoli has led so far showed a number of recurrent wishes people have for the surroundings where they live: people want to be reconnected to the street; they want greenery; they want usable public space as well as protected private space; and they want to live in something that looks like a big house, even if it is divided up into apartments or condo's.

Why do Americans have such an aversion to density? "It could be a deep-rooted cultural bias," sighs Campoli, "or it could simply be that they are unacquainted with the advantages and with the variety in styles that it enables. I hope that all those people who are confronted with decisions about the future of their neighborhood now know better what they are talking about when the D-word comes up."

A new housing development in Las Vegas, Nevada. This combination of small lots, closely packed monotonous construction and a dearth of open space feeds the widely shared fear of density: the D-word. (Photograph by Alex MacLean/Landslides)





In the US, there is a heated debate going on about eminent domain. Suzette Kelo became a national celebrity when she refused to sell her pink house in New London, Connecticut to the city. The city wanted to hand the area over empty to a developer. (Photograph/Institute for Justice)

The pink house

The only special thing about Suzette Kelo's house is the color: bright pink. In 1997 she bought a – by American standards – modest-size house in a working-class neighbourhood in New London, Connecticut, and renovated it, including a paint job. Not long afterwards, in early 2000, trouble came. The development agency of New London announced that it was buying her house and some sixty others in the neighborhood against the owners' will.

Pharmaceutical giant Pfizer had decided to move to New London, an investment of 270 million dollars. The city wanted to develop the adjacent parcel at the same time as the corporate campus. A private developer had a plan to build offices, a hotel and houses there. Together the two projects would generate jobs and tax revenue that the city urgently needed. These would benefit the entire community, was the reasoning, and so the city felt justified in exercising its power of eminent domain in order to buy the houses—at the going market rate—and demolish them.

The right of government to buy a citizen's property for a project that is supposed to benefit the community at large is anchored in the Constitution under the name *eminent domain*. Actually, 'anchored' is an overstatement: the wording is rather implicit. Tagged on at the end of a series of measures in the Fifth Amendment which are intended to protect citizens from random exercise of power on the part of government, it says, almost as an afterthought: "...nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation." The rather oblique suggestion is that it can be taken, as long as that one condition is met.

Suzette Kelo found this altogether unjustified. Why should she and her neighbors have to leave their homes to make way for a developer who was going to make a lot of money with their land? She and eight other neighbors went to court and became the most famous homeowners in the United States. The case, 'Kelo vs. New London', has become a household name, and her pink house has appeared in newspapers and on TV across the country. After all, property rights are at least as holy in the US as the right to bear arms.

The protection of those property rights is the mission of the zealous Institute for Justice, a non-profit founded in 1991 near Washington DC. The institute pursues its mission with vigor, or rather, it views it as a crusade. With money donated by private individuals the IJ's lawyers are eager to protect the interests of citizens – in court as well as in the media - from "ever-encroaching" government. On its website (www.ij.org) there is a picture of their lawyers like a group of Ghostbusters with their sleeves rolled up, spoiling for a fight. "Meet I.J.'s merry band of litigators!" it says, half in fun, half aggressive. And in its webshop you can buy the *Eminent Domain Abuse Survival Guide*, dvd included.

The institute is unambiguous in its distrust of government. "IJ challenges the ideology of the welfare state", it says in its mission statement, "and illustrates and extends the benefits of freedom to those whose full enjoyment of liberty is denied by government." No surprise, then, that it was the Institute of Justice that took up the cause of Susette Kelo, provided legal counsel and shouldered the costs, worked the press and successfully made a national issue out of what they viewed as abuse by local government of its powers of eminent domain.

The tide is indeed turning: during America's mid-term elections in November 2006, twelve states voted on legislation to subject eminent domain to more stringent conditions. Already in the late seventies a national controversy arose over use and abuse of the powers of eminent domain in Detroit. Here too, a corporation wanted to construct a large project—a Cadillac factory for General Motors—for which over four thousand residents of the old Polish neighborhood Poletown had to make way. At the time, as it is now, the city was in desperate need of income and agreed to the plan. The factory created jobs, but never in the promised numbers.

Suzette Kelo and her neighbors persisted, with the public support of, among others, writer and activist Jane Jacobs. They won the first time around, but ultimately the case went to the U.S. Supreme Court and there they lost. The Supreme Court ruling was taken with the smallest possible majority, however, of 5 to 4.

The minority standpoint drew a lot of attention. The widely respected judge Sandra Day O'Connor wrote in no uncertain terms: "The spectre of condemnation hangs over all property. Nothing is to prevent the State from replacing any Motel 6 with a Ritz-Carlton, any home with a shopping mall, or any farm with a factory."

The Kelo case was not the only instance of eminent domain to become a national issue. In the small town of Norwood, encapsulated in greater Cincinnati, a developer announced in 2002 that he was going to invest 125 million dollars in 'Rookwood Exchange'. This complex with shops, condos, offices and restaurants was to go up next to an existing shopping center, a horrendously ugly parking garage and equally ugly office building. The city agreed, but a

handful of inhabitants dug their heels in the sand and refused to go.

This was only the second case after 'Kelo vs. New London' to go to court, but the outcome was the opposite. The Ohio Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the city of Norwood had illegally seized the residents' property, and ordered it returned to them. But when you drive past the scene there is little cause for celebration. There are now two forlorn houses left that have been standing vacant for over two years, surrounded by a chain link fence. The developer owns the rest of the site, but has not built the new project because those two houses are in the way. The residents obtained a legal victory, but to say they *won*...

And Suzette Kelo, what happened to her? After years of strife the city of New London agreed to a compromise that she had proposed years before: Kelo is giving up her land, but not her home. The pink house has been picked up and moved. It is still in New London, a symbol of the confusing fine line between public and private. The struggle is far from over.

In Norwood, near Cincinnati, Ohio, the city wanted to exercise its powers of eminent domain to buy up a piece of land where a developer was going to build shops, houses, offices and restaurants. The Ohio Supreme Court voted unanimously against it, but by now almost all the houses have disappeared anyway.





An important aspect of upscale shopping, as in the lifestyle center, "The Grove" in Los Angeles, is an easy and pleasant parking experience. You can look for a spot yourself in this garage or you can pay extra for a valet to park and retrieve your car. Then you walk on a red carpet to the shops.

The curse of cruising

Strange but true: in a country that has embraced a market economy to the extent that none other has, exception is made for one thing: parking. The spot in front of the door is apparently elevated far above all mechanisms of supply and demand, of scarcity and pricing. It is as if the right to a parking place were anchored in the Constitution.

Wrongly so, says Donald Shoup, professor of urban planning at UCLA in Los Angeles. He compiled a quarter of a century's worth of research into parking practice and policy in a book with the unambiguous title *The High Cost of Free Parking*.

His position is equally clear: parking may look free, but it is not free at all. And there is more: providing parking too cheaply poisons American cities and is detrimental to the economy and the environment. Furthermore, by keeping the price of automobility and parking artificially low, citizens are virtually forced to choose the car. "I propose a number of reforms that can undo the damage done by nearly a century of wrongheaded traffic planning", he states without hesitation in a phone interview. He sees parking and parking policy as a blind spot in American urban planning.

First the facts. It is well-known that America has the largest number of vehicles in the world, both in number and per capita – 243,023,485 passenger vehicles alone, according to the US Bureau of Transit Statistics. By way of comparison: in the year 2000 France had the same percentage of car ownership as the US did in 1972; Denmark the same percentage as the US had in 1961; and China the same percentage as the US had in 1912.

"If the rest of the world had the same percentage of car ownership as the US, there would now be 4.7

billion cars in the world”, he calculates in the first chapter of his book. “All told they would need a parking lot the size of England, or Greece. Plus the extra land for gas stations, roads, send-hand car lots, junkyards, used tire storage...” Shoup assumes that this number will indeed be reached by the end of this century. “Technology will presumably find solutions for the problem of the exhaust, but the need for parking remains. After all, the average car spends 95 percent of its life standing still.”

In the US no less than 87 percent of trips are made by car. Of those, 99 percent begin and end in a free parking space. 91 percent of the commuters travel by car; 92 percent of those cars contain one person, and 94 percent park for free when they get to work.

“Those free parking places for employees are in fact a hidden subsidy of 31.5 billion dollars a year.”

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In response to the growth of private car ownership in the US, the parking meter was invented in the thirties. At the same time, cities and city planners began to demand that business solve the parking problem on their own land: off-street parking was born. “That looked like a great idea at the time”, says the professor, “but they would have done better to start charging for street parking at the same time. By concentrating only on off-street parking, most commercial buildings like shops and restaurants are obliged to provide parking lots that are bigger than the actual building. “That pushes buildings far away from each other and forces the consumer to drive from one to the next. Parking on those huge asphalt surfaces looks free, but of course it isn’t: everyone pays for it, including people who don’t even own a car.”

Now that more and more cities, consumers and developers are looking for ways to return to a smaller-

scale urban model with amenities within walking distance – ‘walkable urbanity’, as the New Urbanists call it – they have to devise all kinds of tricks to get around outdated rules and regulations. In Mashpee, a town on Cape Cod in Massachusetts, Cornish Developers tore down an empty, decrepit shopping center from the sixties and replaced it with a cozy new lifestyle center called Mashpee Commons. Existing regulations would have required the streets to be four times as wide as they are now. “Virtually everything in American zoning is determined now by the dimensions of suburbia”, says developer Doug Storrs of Cornish. The solution: privatize the streets. He points out the window and says rhetorically: “That is not a street; it is a private access lane to an inner parking lot. In other words, we can only make streets that are inviting and walkable by privatizing them.”

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Back to the professor in California. He has a name for that endless cruising to find a curbside parking place: *mobile purgatory*. “A surprisingly large amount of traffic congestion is not caused by people who are on their way to someplace”, he says, “but by people who have arrived and only need to park.” On average, one-third of the cars on the street are cruising for a spot – after all, if it is free or cheap on the street, why go to an expensive parking garage?

A cheap spot at the curb benefits the individual driver, but not society at large, says Shoup. In Westwood Village, where UCLA is located, he and his students calculated that in one year’s time, cars cruising for a parking place traveled 950,000 miles – 38 times around the earth. In doing so they wasted – in that one neighborhood alone – eleven years of time and fifty thousand gallons of gas.

“Parking garages are not expensive”, declares Shoup,

“street parking is too cheap. It costs an average of one fifth of the price of a garage. Cities need to raise the prices on the street, depending on the location and the time of day, to a level that will free up an average of fifteen percent of the spaces at any given moment. Cities have that power: parking is one of the few services about which municipal government has a say.”

Merchants are usually opposed to paid parking for fear that their customers will go where parking is free. For that very reason Shoup has held an impassioned plea all over the country for what he has dubbed the parking benefit district. “Install parking meters and give the revenue back to that exact same neighborhood. Now the money flows away invisibly into the city coffers. This way the area gets a steady stream of income for improvements such as safety, lighting, trees, street cleaning and graffiti removal.” Take Pasadena, California. The city spent two years fighting with the merchants about paid parking. Now the meters are there and in 2001 downtown Pasadena was able to put 1.2 million dollars into a fund for downtown improvement. “The customers don’t stay away, on the contrary, they like to come because they see that the area is well maintained”, says Shoup. “Besides, there is more space available for economic activity if you waste less space on parking lots.” He finds the ideal policy in enlightened cities like New York, San Francisco and Seattle. “They keep their downtowns intact not by requiring a minimum number of parking spaces, as most places in the US do, but rather a maximum.”

Empty corner lots in downtown San Diego are used as parking lots, and then at least they are worth something.





Some twenty ethnic entrepreneurs were forced to leave the Bronx Terminal Market in New York. 'No one in city government stopped to ask themselves what the consequences would be for the community', says Harvard professor Susan Fainstein. (Photograph by Chang W. Lee/The New York Times)

The Just City

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning at 8.30 the students dragged themselves into the lecture hall, armed with spongy muffins and big cardboard cups of see-through coffee. Professor Susan Fainstein was given a difficult time slot for her course 'Urban Politics and Land Use Policy'.

Fainstein studied at Harvard, got her PhD at MIT and taught at Columbia and Rutgers. She is particularly interested in the political and economic aspects of urban development, such as the influence of tourism. She wrote *The City Builders: Property Development in New York and London 1980-2000*, co-authored *The Tourist City* and contributed essays to publications such as *Cities and Visitors. Regulating People, Markets and City Space* and *Understanding Amsterdam: Essays on Economic Vitality, City Life and Urban Form*.

Fainstein spent a sabbatical in Amsterdam in 1977 and returned in 1996 as visiting professor at the Study Centre for the Metropolitan Environment of the University of Amsterdam. She regards the city as a shining example of what she calls 'the egalitarian city'. She is now working on a book about justice in relation to urban development.

What is 'the just city'?

"A city which determines its policies not just on the basis of economic return, but also looks at the social consequences. Most development measures are based on the utilitarian principle that interventions are good if more people profit from them than suffer from them. That is too simple. Justice must be one of the criteria by which we evaluate urban policy.

"The concept of the just city raises some fundamental

questions. To what extent does it require democracy? You often hear said that 'justice is the outcome of the process; if everyone has been heard then the outcome is by definition just'. But that everyone is heard, does not mean that they are also listened to. And who participates in that process? The well-to-do and well-educated are always better situated to participate, but they will also want to protect the value of their property and therefore be inclined to exclude others."

You give the urban renewal of the sixties and seventies as an example of a policy that had just intentions, but did not turn out that way.

"Many cities are now doing well that would have had serious problems without urban renewal. But that does not mean that the people who used to live in those neighborhoods are doing equally well. On the contrary, the economic growth has pushed the poor out to the periphery. They can no longer get to the jobs or the services, especially if they do not have a car. And once public housing gets demolished, it is seldom replaced."

Doesn't everyone ultimately profit from the city's economic growth?

"Not necessarily, at least not in the US. Municipal governments are too fixated on big business. As a politician you score better if you can say 'I kept Goldman Sachs in the city' than when you do a good deed for the Chinese restaurants in Flushing, even though there are a lot more of those."

You were an advisor to the Bronx Terminal Market. It was not a happy end.

"No, it was a sad ending. The Bronx Terminal Market

was a wholesale food market with 23 merchants and about four hundred employees, all of them ethnic minorities. The market was located in a rather shabby building below an overpass of the freeway next to the Harlem River.

"When New York decided to make a bid for the Olympic Games, they saw the market as a blemish, since it lies between Yankee stadium to the north and the new velodrome that was planned to the south. A fancy plan was drawn up for a shopping mall on that spot, with artist's impressions of people sitting at cute little café tables outside. Ridiculous. It's so noisy that no one would even want to sit outside, and the pigeons sitting under the overpass would shit on your head.

"New York didn't get the Olympics, but the market still has to go. The argument is that the new mall is better for the economic development of the Bronx. But it is not at all certain that this is a favorable location for a mall. Moreover, you exchange four hundred full time jobs for men for part time jobs for women who have to be able to speak English. Of course I have no objection to employment opportunities for women, but no one in city government even asked themselves what the consequences would be for the community. As their advisor I defended the market all the way to court, but to no avail."

In your book 'The City Builders' you are also critical about the renovation of Times Square in New York.

"It was absolutely necessary to do something about Times Square. But the result is only offices and tourist attractions. The city gave enormous tax incentives to big corporations like Disney to convince them to come there, without getting much back in return.

"The revitalization of Times Square and 42nd Street

has put pressure on the neighborhood to the west, Hell's Kitchen. That is where the Hudson River longshoremen used to live, it was the last working class neighborhood on Manhattan. The new jobs on Times Square were not suitable for people from the neighborhood, nor did the new businesses spring from the economic activity that was already there. It really would have been possible to make a plan for Times Square that also took these people into account."

Does Amsterdam do a better job?

"In Amsterdam there is a specific ethic, inspired by centuries of activism by social organizations. The character of Amsterdam shows how important such a moral code is. It is not enough to mobilize interests and class consciousness. The division of Dutch society into religious 'pillars' produced an ethic of reconciliation that still exists, a moral belief in a city which is fair and generous. In spite of the cuts in government spending and the pressures of globalization Amsterdam is a prosperous, diverse, egalitarian city."

How will this work in practice? Should every policy be judged according to a 'Justice Index'?

"No plans are without impact. But the consequences should be borne by those who can afford to, not – as it usually is now – by the people at the bottom, the poor, the blacks, the ethnic minorities. I don't really believe in an 'index', but there does need to be some kind of check of which a moral code is a part. I am worried about the future of the just city. The new generation of city planners is more interested in trends and -isms than in the welfare of the community."

Renewal of the Bijlmermeer in Amsterdam.
Fairstein: "The Netherlands have an ethic of reconciliation, a moral belief in a city which is just and generous." (Photograph by Theo Baart)





Video art by Jaume Plensa in Millennium Park, Chicago. This is a thoroughly democratic, public, non-commercial urban space which draws millions of people per year. In the surrounding neighborhoods, house prices are escalating and new shops and restaurants are opening.

Millennium Park

If John Bryan gets something into his head, he makes it happen. And he doesn't stop halfway. Bryan, a butcher's son from Mississippi and now a prominent member of Chicago's wealthy elite, took over his father's meat business as a young man. Then he sold it and went into the international corporate world. For 27 years he was the CEO of Sara Lee, in which capacity he engineered the take-over of the Dutch coffee, tea and tobacco manufacturer Douwe Egberts. "I've always run things," he says with his smooth Southern drawl.

An equally important part of his life is Bryan's devotion to the arts. He is a dedicated collector of paintings and applied arts, and a ubiquitous board member and philanthropist in the cultural life of Chicago. In 2001 he resigned from Sara Lee, but he is still a member of the board of General Motors and Goldman Sachs, among others, as well as chairman of the board of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he and his wife Neville finance two curators' positions. For the past 23 years they have lived on a 150 acre estate called Crabtree Farm, north of the city on Lake Michigan. There are at least ten different buildings spread here and there over the grounds. In addition to the main house which dates from 1926, there are various nineteenth-century English follies, a seventeenth-century wooden cabin that is being reconstructed under supervision of the National Preservation Trust, a covered tennis court from the twenties, the reconstruction of an Arts & Crafts house designed in 1903 but never before built, and a serene sculpture garden designed by Bryan himself. No wonder that Mayor Daley called John Bryan in 1998 with the request that he help with the

realization of Millennium Park. The city had had plans for at least fifteen years to cover train yards that were no longer in use and that formed a major obstacle between downtown and the waterfront of Lake Michigan. Daley asked Bryan to lead the fundraising effort for the private contributions to the project. Since the opening in the summer of 2004 – suffice to say that they did not make the deadline of the millennium – the park has been a spectacular success. It is an altogether democratic, public, non-commercial, urban space that draws millions of people every year with a combination of open space, extensive free cultural programming, architecture, and food and drink.

“This is the only place I know in the city where people do not try to segregate themselves from one another,” Bryan says proudly. “This park is a rare combination of free and upscale. Black, Hispanic, white, rich, poor, everyone enjoys looking at their reflection in the ‘Bean’ by Anish Kapoor and at the children playing in the fountain of Jaume Plensa’s video art. My Mexican hairdresser thinks it’s wonderful that she can take her son to hear the symphony orchestra there for free. She could never afford tickets otherwise. The park brings people together.”

The park’s success has spread through the neighborhood. Renzo Piano’s extension of the Art Institute has been moved to connect to the park. There is also a new Children’s Museum planned in the park. In the area to the south of the park new condo towers are shooting up one after the other. Rent and prices have gone up, new shops and restaurants are opening. This is the city’s new logo, Bryan believes. “Millennium Park has defined us to the world.”

The park is the result of a public-private partnership between the city government and the private sector, brought together as Millennium Park Inc. Both the city and the private sponsors have put forward some 250 million dollars for the project. “We spent a good two years negotiating a crystal-clear contract with the city,” says Bryan. “I had to be absolutely sure that this private money would not be used to fill holes in the city’s budget.” In spite of many budget overages, Anish Kapoor’s ‘Bean’ ended up costing not 9, but 23 million dollars—Millennium Park Inc. had money left over. It was deposited in a fund for maintenance, always an important and underestimated park cost. And Bryan even managed to rustle up another three million for the opening festivities.

Not the city, but rather Bryan and the corporation chose the artists; they were also the ones to approach wealthy families with a proposal for the art work – and the concomitant price tag – that they might be interested in sponsoring. To the Pritzker family, for example, he suggested that they provide the 15 million for the music pavilion; John Bryan had already conceived of the name ‘the Pritzker Pavilion’ and had thought that the architect should be Frank Gehry. He managed to excite the interest of the Wrigley family for the Wrigley Square and Peristyle, the McCormicks for the McCormick Tribune Plaza, the Luries for the Lurie Gardens, and Boeing and Bank One for an open-air sculpture gallery and a promenade (which after a merger has been renamed the Chase Promenade.)

One of the most remarkable artworks is the Crown Fountain (indeed, sponsored by the Crown family). This time Bryan asked the daughter of the family to help in choosing an artist, as she is interested in art. She came up with the then unknown young Catalan

artist Jaume Plensa. He has constructed two glass towers facing each other, on which are projected video portraits in slow motion of one thousand anonymous inhabitants of Chicago. At the end of each portrait, the person purses his or her lips and spits a stream of water into the shallow reflecting pool between the towers. "So I had to explain to everyone that Chicago was going to put itself on the map with a thousand people spitting at you?!"

Another *pièce de la résistance* in Millennium Park, in addition of course to Gehry's music pavilion with its titanium bows and curls, is the 'Bean' by artist Anish Kapoor. It was long and painful journey. To begin with, the artwork was much too heavy for the deck covering the train tracks, and separate foundations had to be constructed for it. Then the construction company went bankrupt. For the opening the skin of steel plates was constructed in a provisional manner, but then it took another year to weld and polish them properly. It was worth it: the Bean draws people to it like a magnet. They stand and look at themselves and at the distorted reflections of the famous skyscrapers of Chicago.

As a matter of fact, says Bryan, we shouldn't talk about public-private partnerships, but rather about a collaboration of non-for-profit with government. "The people who give money to civic projects like this do not do so to make a profit." Some people prefer to give anonymously. "Although anonymity can be the greatest form of *vanitas*," he laughs. "The best part is when your gift is anonymous and you can tell a select few that it was you."

Is this method of sharing public and private responsibilities a viable model for the future? "There is no other way. In America government gives very little money for culture. The Art Institute for instance

gets 2 or 3 percent of its budget from the government. And of the 400 million that Piano's extension costs, not one cent comes from the government."

But even if there were an alternative, Bryan still thinks this is the best system. "This way you get prominent citizens involved with their city. This way there are more people working together to solve a problem than when you would leave everything to government." It is exceptional, however, that this happened for a park. "The only other example I know is the Central Park Conservancy in New York, which took over the management of the park after the city had failed dismally.

"Millennium Park could not have happened without a top location, the philanthropic community, an age with great wealth creation, and a strong mayor. We were able to do our work because there were clear agreements about the separate responsibilities of the public and the private sector – and thanks to the fact that the mayor kept the bureaucrats away from us." As much as he appreciates the support given by private individuals to culture, and as much as he grants them their due recognition, sometimes it is better if there is no name attached to a gift. With visible pleasure he tells about the sponsoring of Piano's extension to the Art Institute. "We decided to try and find one sponsor who would give 50 million dollars, in return for which he could name the new wing after himself. I had heard about a young hedge fund manager. He was interested, but asked: how about 25 million, cash up front. We talked for months. The board was getting more and more nervous, because we didn't think this was a large enough amount to sell the name for, but neither do you just let 25 million go.

“What do you do in a situation like this? You ask your friends for advice. So I went to talk to someone who had already given 10 million— anonymously. He got really angry that this hedge fund manager was bargaining, and he said: here’s 50 million, on condition that it be anonymous. And this way we could call the extension The Modern Wing. I like that; it says exactly what it is. Now the Modern Wing belongs to everyone.”

Anish Kapoor's 'Bean': Millennium Park was financed with half public, half private money. 'It can't be done otherwise,' says John Bryan, who led the fundraising effort and who is himself a philanthropist. 'In America the government gives very little money for culture.'





MassMoCA – Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art – is an interesting case study for the revitalization of a town and a region through art and culture, also known as cultural community development. (Photograph by Baptist Brayel)

Can art save the city?

In North Adams the trees grow upside down. Big metal barrels containing their roots hang on metal cables high above the heads of the passers-by. Their branches grow like lashing tentacles up and out, searching for light.

Everything is turned on its head: the *kinky* trees on the entrance plaza are a cool kind of logo for Mass MoCA, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, that has breathed new life into the rural northeast of this state. Even more than the art itself, MassMoCA is in itself an interesting case study for the much discussed revitalization of city and region, in this case the northern Berkshires, through arts and culture.

For a long time North Adams has been the poor cousin of prosperous Williamstown, just ten minutes' drive away. Williamstown is home to Williams College, with its museum where many of the big names in the museum World were educated, such as Thomas Krenz of the Guggenheim and Mike Govan of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Since the fifties the Clark Institute has also been established in Williamstown, the private collection of Sterling Clark, art lover and heir to the fortune of sewing machine manufacturer Singer.

And North Adams? In the early eighties it boasted the highest percentages of teenage mothers and illiteracy in Massachusetts, an unemployment rate of 20 percent and one of the largest abandoned industrial complexes in the country—now one of the largest cultural centers in the country. Altogether it has 26 nineteenth-century buildings, now protected as historical landmarks, on an area of over 13 acres. The textile factory became a printer and in 1942 the

electronics company Sprague, which had produced components for the atom bomb in World War II and later consumer electronics, moved in. In the mid-sixties over 4,000 people worked for Sprague. The compound—covering a third of downtown—was virtually a town within a town. But in the mid-eighties Sprague had to give way to competition from low-wage countries, and North Adams was faced with major social issues and a ghost town within the town. “There were two possibilities at the time,” says director Joe Thompson. “It would either get a cultural function or it would become a jail.” Thirteen years late – yes, *thirteen* – MassMoCA opened its doors to the public. “Good thing I didn’t know that then,” Joe Thompson says drily. Thompson is originally from Oklahoma and you can still hear that, both in the *twang* of his accent and in his earthy manner of speaking.

A sum of 18 million dollars was required to renovate the buildings, a process that continues through today. Thompson: “We at the museum personally visited 654 businesses here in the area over a period of 4 years to ask if they were willing to invest in us based on the improvements that MassMoCA would bring to North Adams. They were, to the tune of 8 million dollars. Moreover, we had rented out a fair amount of the building as office space for the Ford Foundation, to the Center for *Creative Community Development* of Williams College and to Williams’ art restoration program.”

The ensemble of buildings contains a shop, a restaurant and a theater, but above all a long series of huge halls. In one of them the British theater collective Stan’s Cafe just opened an installation called ‘Of All the People in the World’. His pieces tell stories about what is going on in the world, not with

words but with grains of rice on large pieces of paper. An enormous rice mountain in the middle of the hall represents the number of inhabitants of the US, 300 million. Representing all the denizens of the world would require 104 tons of rice. The quantity of grains of rice depicting the number of people who entered the US at Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954 is much larger than the little pile representing the persons denied access. But the pile showing the number of American soldiers who died in Iraq is much smaller than the pile showing Iraqi civilians who died in the conflict. Other little piles make you feel more optimistic: the one small grain that is Rosa Parks, the black woman who in 1955 refused to move to the back of the bus in Alabama, had grown to a big pile by the time Martin Luther King led his march on Washington in 1963.

MassMoCA now draws 120,000 visitors a year. That would never happen if it were the only cultural attraction in the area, but together with the Williams College Museum of Art and the Clark Institute there is enough critical mass—especially when the weather is nice—to draw people from Boston and New York to the Berkshires. Art lovers know the area already as the home of the summer festivals of Tanglewood and Jacob’s Pillow. In the winter these museums organize a two-yearly conference that brings together philanthropists and museum directors from all over the country. In addition, the Clark is now working on a 125 million dollar extension by the Japanese architect Tadao Ando.

Was culture indeed the catalyst for economic revitalization in North Adams? Undeniably. There are new shops, cafés and restaurants. Just across the street from the MassMoCA a row of former drug houses has been renovated with love, taste and

money as the 'Porches' Hotel. The newspaper *The Boston Globe* called MassMoCa "...a case study for urbanists and politicians in search of a new way to bring failing cities back to life." And the Ford Foundation regards it as an example of new initiative in the young field of *cultural community development*.

As a way of stimulating the regional economy, a new local currency was recently introduced: the *Berk-shares*. (The Dutch city of Leiden commemorated the birth of Rembrandt four hundred years ago by issuing 'Rembrandt', with the value of a euro). The one, ten, twenty and fifty dollar Berkshare bills bear the portraits of local-bred heroes such as Herman Melville (author of *Moby Dick*), the painter Norman Rockwell and W.E. B. Dubois, founder of the black civil rights movement.

Will this cultural motor be strong enough in the long run, for example if director Joe Thompson were to disappear as the driving force? We don't know yet. It is sure, though, that a cultural institution can never generate the thousands of jobs that the textile or electronics factory did. But for now North Adams seems to have found a new balance in its collaboration with related institutions in the area. Thompson remembers vividly the moment that for him symbolized the turnaround. "I heard that a professor at Williams College had bought a house in North Adams. Ah!, I thought, the Maginot Line has been breached."

In the eighties North Adams had the highest percentage of teen mothers and literacy in Massachusetts, an unemployment rate of twenty percent and one of the country's largest industrial complexes. Now it has MassMoCA. (Photograph by Baptist Brayel)





Never be without your favorite breed: now also on your handbag. America's revitalizing downtowns have a high dog density. That is good for the contact between neighbors and for local retail: doggie boutiques have sprung up everywhere.

Dogmania

Dogs are good for downtown, especially the American downtowns that are doing their best to attract new inhabitants and activity. Downtown living is popular again, especially with the demographic categories I once heard described as *the newly-wed and the nearly dead*, i.e. twenty and thirty-some-things without children (as yet) and emptynesters who want to be back where the action is. Many of these new downtown denizens – according to some estimates as many as half – have a dog.

In neighborhoods where people are still getting to know each other, dogs are an indispensable social lubricant. They have to be walked, and provide the perfect vehicle for a chat. An article in the *New York Times* quoted a woman who said: "I have met everyone in the neighborhood thanks to my dog Guinness. He is my *Number 1 social life planner*." Moreover, all those dog walkers are extra eyes on the street, increasing the level of social control.

Dogs also provide a reason for group activity. In some apartment buildings with high dog density, they gather in the early morning in the lobby and travel together to the doggie day care – more about that later. Dog owners have also manifested themselves as political pressure groups for more greenery in the neighborhood – even if what they probably mean is an area where they can let the dog off the leash. American cities also have so-called dog parks, a fenced-off area where the dogs can run around and lift their leg against plastic fire hydrants.

In these new neighborhoods where the retail is still trying to establish itself, pets provide an economic impulse. The newest branch of retail and services is a broad gamut of ways to spoil your pet – such as

doggie day care and boutiques selling dresses, sweaters, raincoats, necklaces, fowl-flavored toothpaste, smell-improving sprays that go by the name of perfume. The names are as ingenious as they are silly: *Happytails Spa*, *Tailwaggers Pet Boutique*, *Wagwear*, *Canine Country*, *Pawpoochie*, *Wet Nose Gym*, *Dog-O-Rama*.

Out of love, and/or out of guilt, the modern American dog is spoiled rotten. The nation is in the grip of dogmania.

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At the Top *Dog Country Club* in New York the guests can run, play and swim in the heated pool from nine in the morning to three in the afternoon, reports the New York Times. Then it is time for a quiet *yappy* hour to recover from all the excitement. If the guest is spending the night, he can get a bath and a massage at seven, followed by a last trip to the toilet. At nine o'clock another dog day ends with a cookie and a bedtime story.

Modern technology has not passed by unnoticed: any self-respecting daycare has webcams that allow Mom and Dad to follow their pet's antics from minute to minute. Camp Bow Wow has no fewer than eleven, so that you can follow your dog while he strolls from 'Oscar's Outside Sunbath Area' to 'Sidney's Lazy Lounge'. The site quotes a certain Kristy who says: "We feel better in the knowledge that we can see how he's doing."

"Well, if you can afford it, why not?" says Alan, the owner of boutique The Barking Zoo in the hip New York neighborhood Chelsea. The sidewalks are filled with male couples with a dog, often two identical dogs. Alan and his friend Jay started the shop five years ago and it has really taken off, he says. In addition to the usual basics they also sell jackets in

gold lamé, candies with the flavor blueberry crisps (I never knew that dogs liked blueberries), squeaky toys in the shape of the Statue of Liberty and literature such as *Doga: Yoga for Dogs* and *Is Your Dog Gay?* There are now also Citydog guides to various big American cities with information on daycare, sitters, dog parks, boutiques and even alternative therapies for your four-footed accessory. A dog worth its salt doesn't even have to walk anymore, but is transported in a carrier bag. Louis Vuitton makes them in chic white leather with red piping—price upon inquiry. The fancy department store Barney's in New York has a whole display case filled with them. Of course there are also bags on wheels: see the *Pet Wheel-Away*, available in red and zebra print, in the mail order catalogue of *SkyMall* located in the seat pocket in front of you on almost every plane in America.

Everywhere you go in the US you find a doggie bakery nowadays. *The Happy Puppy Bakery & Gift Shop* in the picturesque town of Falmouth on Cape Cod sells not only bone-shaped cookies, but also treats with names like *woofie pies*, *poodle puffs* and *pupcakes*. Your dog doesn't have to eat his treat home alone, either: you can take him out to a restaurant. And doesn't he have just as much a right to a beer as you do? The Dutch pet shop owner Gerrie Berendsen from the town of Zelhem commissioned a brewery to produce a drink made of beef extract and malt under the name *Kwispelbier*, Wag Beer. It costs almost four times as much as a Heineken, but after all, you want only the best for your dog, don't you?

The pet shops and services new style are bringing in the bucks. One year of daycare costs between four and eight thousand dollars. The American *Pet*

Products Manufacturers Association estimates that last year Americans spent no less than 38 billion dollars on their pets, almost six percent more than the year before. Kennedy Smith, retail consultant with the CLUE Group in Washington DC: "In 2002 there were 7,067 companies that provided pet care as part of their offerings. Their sales total up to 1.3 billion dollars, of which 89 percent came from the pet care. This is clearly serious business."

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We have turned our pet from man's best friend into a cosseted doll, or even: a child. Why are we acting so silly? "A dog's love is unconditional and dependable," says Marjorie Garber, director of the Center for Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard, the owner of Wagner and Yofi and author of the book *Dog Love*. "It is much easier to do something good for your dog than to do something for world peace or against poverty. The uncomplicated nature of your love for your dog, and his response to it, can bring out the best in us."

All true – from the human viewpoint. Because all the daycare, woofie pies, gold lamé jackets, perfumes and nail polish cannot remedy the lack of open space in downtown. No wonder that so many of the cosmetics for sale in the doggie boutique have to do with calming – and silencing – the lonely and restless dog. The dog may be good for downtown, but downtown is probably not so good for the dog.

In addition to bone-shaped cookies you can buy woofie pies, poodle puffs and pupcakes for your four-footed accessory at the doggie bakery.





At the farmers' market in Oakland, near San Francisco, you can not only buy heirloom tomatoes, old breeds that have been reintroduced, but also get a massage.

Local vs. organic

Red painted farmhouses on rolling hills, white picket fences, babbling brooks, red-orange-yellow foliage in the fall, charming country inns and cute general stores, horses and cows scattered artistically over the landscape – the northeastern state of Vermont is a climax of rural picturesqueness, as if you're driving through a calendar.

But behind all that lovely scenery lies a hard economic reality: in Vermont's dairy business, which is responsible for three-quarters of its agricultural production, the number of dairy farms has dropped by eighty percent between 1964 and 2004. Tourism now brings in nearly as much money as agriculture. In surroundings like these, where the rural feel is an economic factor of the highest order, people understand the importance of short connections. Grow local, sell local, eat local. That is good for the environment (less transport), good for the consumers' health, good for the farmers' income and therefore good for the preservation of the open countryside.

You might not think so when you see so many overweight Americans, but all over the country initiatives are unfolding to keep the food chain short and to bring the city slicker and the farmer into contact with one another. This explains the boom in the number of farmers' markets in the cities and the success of the organic supermarket Whole Foods. The Dutch supermarkets would do well to take notice of what Whole Foods sells and how. No beads and sandals, but a very attractive and extensive assortment, including a large department with prepared foods, warm and cold buffets and places to sit and eat. It is by no means cheap – the nickname

of Whole Foods is 'Whole Paycheck' – but by its very presentation the supermarket has been of inestimable importance in presenting organic food as a viable and pleasant alternative.

Whole Foods started in Austin, Texas in 1980. In the summer of 2007 it opened its first store in Europe, in London. It went straight to the top, with three floors and seating for 350 on Kensington High Street. In New York it occupies the entire bottom floor of the chic Time Warner shopping center on Columbus Circle. The company now has such a high-end image that when signs go up that a new store is going to open, the neighborhood regards it as a sure sign that gentrification has set in.

Back to Vermont, the perfect place for what is so aptly called "boutique agriculture." Many restaurants in the US take pride in including on the menu the names of the farms they buy from as proof of quality and the restaurant's discerning taste. In an attempt to bring chefs and farmers into closer contact, the Vermont Fresh Network (www.vermontfresh.net) was formed ten years ago. Chair of the board at VFN Molly Stevens says: "The idea arose during a meeting organized by the New England Culinary Institute and Vermont's Department of Agriculture between a well-known chef from New York and our local chefs and farmers. The farmers write down on a so-called fresh sheet what produce and products are available at the moment, and the chefs know what they can order." Vermont is pretty far north, however, which means that the growing season is short.

A lot of the food for which the VFN intermediates is organic, but that is not a requirement, Stevens explains. Short lines between the producer and the consumer, with healthy and tasty food, that is what it is about: the idea is that this will benefit not only

agriculture but also landscape and our health. The Fresh Network has grown by now to 330 members: 180 restaurants, ninety farmers and sixty private individuals who support the initiative with donations. Farmers pay thirty dollars for membership, restaurants fifty. A farmer has to have at least one restaurant as a partner; restaurants have to have at least three farmers as partners.

The biggest customer of the Vermont Fresh Network is Middlebury College, an elite private institution with 2400 students. Matt Biette, head of dining services: "A quarter of our budget for food goes to some sixty farms within a radius of twenty miles. That does cost about ten to fifteen percent more than it would to buy in bulk elsewhere, but we feel that this money is well spent. For the farmers it is also a question of status to be represented here, and that gives us some room to negotiate."

One incessant problem is the physical link between farm and plate, i.e. the logistics of delivery. It doesn't suit environmental and health priorities to fill the roads with vans that are carting apples, goat cheese, steaks and organic carrots back and forth. But what are the alternatives? "We are still dependent on distributors who are willing to do this small-scale transport along with the rest," sighs Molly Stevens. "We are now looking into the feasibility of an e-commerce system for the distribution."

Other farmers go meet the urbanites themselves (and save on the middlemen) by selling their goods at a farmers' market. These markets harken back to the age-old open air markets in Europe, but they are more up-market. The markets require that the products be local and/or organic, and that the farmer or his personnel be there at the stall in person. At the farmers' market in Cambridge, for instance, you can

buy fresh vegetables but also pies and gourmet cheeses from the milk of goats who are introduced to you by name and with their pictures. At the market in Oakland, near San Francisco, you can get not only weirdly baroque heirloom tomatoes, old species that have been brought back into production, but also a massage.

These farmers' markets have become popular all over the US. Since the mid-nineties more than two thousand have opened nationwide, according to the site www.farmersmarketonline.com. City governments like them: they bring fresh foods to parts of the city where the supermarkets rarely do, and moreover they create interaction and economic activity. A visit to the market is much more a social event than a trip to the supermarket. It turns out, though, that it not simple to run a farmers' market successfully. That same site states that almost a quarter of the new markets folded within or after the first year.

For the conscientious consumer this is all very wonderful, but buying direct from the farm does not solve the real macro food dilemma: what is better, local or organic? One apple was grown here close by, so that saves fuel and exhaust fumes; another apple was grown on the other side of the world, but without pesticides. As the debate about local versus organic heats up, we as consumers are left bewildered, no matter how well-intentioned we are.

Twice a week there is a farmers' market on the Harvard campus. Since the mid-nineties more than two thousand of these markets have started up all over the country. Cities are glad to have them and for farmers they provide the opportunity to come into direct contact with their – urban – customers.





Korean neighborhood in New York. The contribution immigrants make to the economy is growing, and for the cities that are shrinking it is indispensable. (Photograph by Dominick Totino)

Shrink-town

Huge as the United States are, the trends in shrinkage and growth of the cities are clear as a bell. The cities in the northeast of the country are shrinking or remaining stable at best, those in the southwest are sprinting ahead.

It is not difficult to image why. To begin with, the northeast is infamous for its sever winters; in Boston you see people with axes trying to hack out the wheels of their car from the ice. It is not just retired snowbirds who prefer to sit in the sun, the working populace too is making its way to more temperate climates. Moreover, the cities in the northeast are older and bear the burden of an outdated industrial past.

Of the ten fastest growing cities in the US, seven are in the western states of California, Texas, Arizona and Nevada, according to www.citymayors.com. Two are in North Carolina, which lies more to the east but still has a good climate. Only one sprinttown is on the east coast, one which unique in many ways anyway: the metropolis New York.

Of the ten fastest shrinking cities there is also one that forms a sad exception: New Orleans, which is emptying out after the destruction by hurricane Katrina. Of the other nine one is in the warm south, in Alabama, but the rest are in Ohio (3), the state of New York (2), Michigan (2) and Pennsylvania (1).

The fact that there is still economic activity in the northeast is for a large part thanks to the immigrants. In its attempts to formulate both a new immigration policy and to keep its economy competitive, the Dutch government would be well-advised to take a closer look. In late 2006 the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard and MIT published a report with

the title 'Comeback Cities or the New Melting Pots: Exploration into the Changing Large Cities of New England' ([/www.jchs.harvard.edu/publications/communitydevelopment/w06-7.pdf](http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/publications/communitydevelopment/w06-7.pdf)). In it they investigated the economic health of over fifty cities in New England between 1980 and 2000.

"If not for a surge in immigration, few large New England cities with population declines in the 1970s or 1980s would have bounced back," said director Eric Belsky of the Joint Center. "Meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse urban population is more important than ever. Helping immigrants enter the economic mainstream and giving them reasons to stay in cities when they do is a key to future urban economic vitality in the region."

With a bit more support and a bit less strict application of all sorts of rules, the contribution immigrants can make to the urban vitality would be even greater, is the conclusion of an in-depth report with the title *A World of Opportunity* published in early 2007 by the Center for an Urban Future (www.nycfuture.org).

"As the stakes of economic competition grow ever higher in America's cities, mayors have sought to kick-start local economies by embracing everything from artists and biotechnology companies to sports arenas", CUF writes. "For many of the nation's urban centers, however, a more rewarding – if decidedly less glamorous – answer is hiding in plain sight: tapping their growing immigrant populations."

The pool they can fish in is big: in the nineties the number of immigrants in the US grew by 57 percent – according to CUF the largest immigration wave since the thirties.

The economic activity under immigrants may often be modest in scale, but there is a lot of it. In addition,

they stay in the cities, while the established corporations are moving out to the suburbs. Immigrants are often more enterprising than the original population: in 2005 350 out of 100.000 immigrants started a business of their own as compared to 280 out of 100.000 original residents. In New York the population in 2000 consisted for 37 percent of immigrants, but almost fifty percent of the people with a business of their own was born in another country.

And then to think that these beginning entrepreneurs had to cross many more hurdles than their counterparts who were born and bred in America: the language, the unfamiliar rules and regulations, the problems with getting loans and the lack of a credit history to prove your trustworthiness.

The real shrinktowns in the US are Detroit and Cleveland. But even a big, lively city like Boston has to be careful. In 2007 the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) presented a regional plan for de Greater Boston region for the period until 2030. Of course the new plan is bursting with optimism, but the danger of shrinkage hangs over it like a menacing shadow. The region must shift its policy, the MAPC writes, because if things go on as they are now, the region will be overrun by uncontrolled sprawl, a loss of open space, a waste of water, unaffordable housing, inequality in the education system and a lack of an educated work force. The population is aging rapidly: in 2030 one third of the inhabitants of the region will be older than 55.

Here, too, immigration is indispensable in order to fill in the gaps left by residents leaving for greener pastures in other states. It is expected that by 2030, almost a quarter of the population will have been born outside the US. According to the shrink and sprint

lists of www.citymayors.org, Boston is near the tipping Point, with a growth of 0,3 percent. The region expects to have 11 percent more inhabitants in 2030, but that is much less than the national prognoses of 28 percent. And so it is that growth bears an uncanny resemblance to shrinkage.

In her bakery in Providence, Rhode Island, Ada Torrado sells not only pineapple upside down cake but also *empanadas* from her home country, the Dominican Republic. Torrado is one of a growing number of women immigrants who are starting businesses of their own. (Photograph by John Nordell© 2005 *The Christian Science Monitor*)





Freeway in Phoenix. The invention of air conditioning and the expansion of the freeway network gave a tremendous impulse to the city's growth. Before the Second World War Phoenix was not even on the list of the 125 biggest American cities. In 2020 it is expected to be the third largest in the country.

Sprint-town

According to local folklore, Arizona was once famous for its five C's: cotton, copper, cattle, citrus and climate. Of those, only the climate is left – but that is quite a draw in itself. In the northeastern United States, the 'shrink-towns', Detroit and Cleveland in the lead, are losing population and economic activity to the 'sprint-towns' in the southwest. One of the fastest-growing sprinttowns is Phoenix, Arizona. Driving through Phoenix is an impressive experience that imparts a visceral understanding of the term sprawl. The newest residential areas, such as Verrado in the west and DC Ranch to the north, no longer lie in the valley containing Phoenix, but are set against the mountains. Jack McSweeney, an urban planner who worked with the developer of Verrado, shows me on a map how the new town drapes itself against the White Tank Mountains. "For a long time these mountains were regarded as the natural limit to growth. Now there are plans for new developments behind the White Tanks." If you have to drive to work in Phoenix from Verrado, you count yourself lucky if you can do it in an hour.

There are virtually no tall buildings in Phoenix, excepting office buildings in the otherwise rather empty downtown. According to Debra Stark, head of planning for Phoenix proper, the city exploded outwards so soon after it was founded at the end of the nineteenth century that the downtown never had time to become a real urban center.

On the eve of the Second World War, Phoenix was not even mentioned on the list of the 125 biggest cities in the US. Now it is the sixth largest city in the country; in 2020 it is expected to be the third largest, after New York and Los Angeles. The city population

grew from 107,000 in 1950 to almost 1.5 million in 2004. The regional population expanded by no less than thirty percent to 2.9 million between 1990 and 2000 alone, according to statistics of Arizona State University. Interesting detail: both the numbers for highly-educated residents and the numbers for immigrants went up steeply, tripling in the nineties. Phoenix grew fast in population, but even more rapidly in surface area. In 1950 the metropolitan area covered seventeen square miles; now it covers 520 square miles. One of the counties that makes up larger Phoenix, Maricopa County, is bigger than several states in the US, including Delaware, New Hampshire and Vermont. According to the website www.city-data.com, Greater Phoenix is now twelfth in the country as far as surface area is concerned (and it would no doubt be even higher on the list if 6 of the 11 cities above it were not in Alaska!). Phoenix beats all other American cities in one category: the number of miles that inhabitants drive every day, all-together sixty million. Per day.

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The roots of Phoenix go back to the Hohokam Indians, who constructed a network of a good thousand miles of irrigation canals using only hand tools. The Hohokams disappeared around 1450. It was not until about 1900 that the area once again had a population of some seven thousand people, mostly miners and soldiers. As the city grew, there was once again an urgent need for major infrastructure to provide Phoenix with water. The largest dam in the world was constructed, the Roosevelt Dam, with a lake behind it measuring 35 miles long, 25 miles wide and half a mile deep.

The city's next great leap forward was not until the fifties, when air conditioning was invented. At that

point corporate business began to move to the desert: Boeing, Intel, Motorola, General Electric, Revlon, and Greyhound. In the eighties came the next great wave, alongside the expansion of the highway network and the completion of Interstate 10 that connected the entire urban area from east to west. I must say, Phoenix has the most handsome highways I have seen in America. In some places, sound barriers and retaining walls are decorated with great swooping designs of stylized cacti and lizards. Ramps and junctions are generous in their dimensions and you could eat off the shiny black asphalt (during summer the road is hot enough to fry an egg). So much attention to infrastructure is striking in a country where maintenance is rarely a top priority.

It has been said of Phoenix, and rightly so, that its most important industry is growth itself. In Sprint-town growth is most often expressed in the numbers of houses built. The housing industry for Phoenix now is what the car industry was for Detroit and the steel industry for Pittsburgh. Housing construction is responsible for one-third of the regional economy, which involves 140 billion dollars a year. According to the newspaper *The Arizona Republic*, the housing business forms the foundation of the economy because:

a there is a lot of cheap land available,
b the demand is huge, and c) several high volume construction companies, capable of producing as many as 160 affordable houses a day, work in the area. Volume and affordability + job growth + sun: those are the keys.

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There is one more key, the scarcest of all: water. For a city situated in the desert it is startling to realize that

one of its greatest draws, for example for the conference market, is the wide assortment of golf courses. There are two hundred of them. The future of Phoenix, just like that of other rapidly growing cities in the southwest such as Las Vegas and Los Angeles, hangs by the silk thread of the water supply. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Salt River Project was built, comprised of a system of dams and retention basins; next followed the Central Arizona Project, diverting water from the Colorado River through a 350-mile-long chain of pumps, aqueducts and basins. But the thirst of this sprint-town is unquenchable.

Nevertheless, water will determine the urban growth patterns of Phoenix, just as the car did a generation ago. At a conference in 2006 at the *Center for the Study of the North American West*, a branch of Stanford University, the historian Grady Grammage said: "Phoenix both has been pushed outward by postwar suburbanization while public land ownership around the city, reliance on air travel, and access to water have had the opposite effect, promoting concentration." While the mountains have not succeeded in stopping the inexorable growth of Phoenix, water – or the lack of it – may yet prevail.

Fountain with bronze horses in the suburb of Scottsdale. In Scottsdale there is a lot more happening in the way of shops, restaurants, galleries and street life than in the center of 'mother lode' Phoenix. (Photograph by Baptist Brayle)





The Graduate School of Design, one of the few modern buildings at Harvard, was designed as a waterfall of terraces. The workspaces for the students of architecture, landscape and urban planning are tight, it is always too hot at the bottom and too cold at the top, but as a place to exchange ideas the GSD is an inspiring place to work.

Landing

Took off, flew around and now I'm back with both feet on the ground. Back in the Netherlands, back to work. After having enjoyed the luxury of an empty calendar for a year, and the limitless amount of input that Harvard has to offer, it is once again time for me as a writer and a journalist to produce output. That is to say: look around, ask questions and write down what I see and what I think.

Did the Fellowship bring what you had expected? Kind souls ask. Absolutely, I say, it was a gift from heaven. But what was I expecting? Above all, I was curious. Journalists always want to know the paths that power takes. So if you're talking about planning, land use, urban development you want to know: who decided what gets built or developed where? How does that person get his or her way? What is the balance of power between the private and the public sector and the individual citizen?

The relationship between public and private runs like a leitmotiv through the essays in this book. The tension between them is greater in the US than in the Netherlands because the distrust of government is much greater there. The vituperative tone with which the Institute of Justice leads the debate about eminent domain, government's right to expropriate land for projects which are meant to benefit the entire community, is exemplary. (I must add that cities had made it hard on themselves by not making a clear enough distinction between the interests of the developer and those of the community at large). Municipalities in the US are more dependent on private funds than those in the Netherlands because they are relatively poor. Usually their only source of income is property taxes (which are considerably

higher than in the Netherlands.) In order to realize urban development projects, then, they are dependent on two sources: citizens who are willing to pay taxes in advance on benefits they hope to accrue, or market forces willing to invest as long as they earn their investment back, and more. (Every now and then the federal government pays for something, but that is hailed as a joyous exception.) The flip side is that the private world feels a responsibility for the public interest. In this book I describe the example of Millennium Park, where public and private (philanthropic) resources in equal parts created a marvelous new amenity for the urban environment of downtown Chicago. No wonder that so much depends on the person of the mayor, an elected official, unlike in the Netherlands where he or she is appointed by the Queen. Ideally the mayor is a forceful and inspiring figure who can play both the part of the pater/mater familias as well as the savvy negotiator. The Mayors' Institute of City Design, which 'teaches' mayors all over the country to be urban designers, is an excellent initiative within the American context and would definitely be worth considering in the Netherlands.

There you have it: *leadership*. The country is obsessed by it. In contrast to the Netherlands, America has no qualms about exercising authority; everyone says 'sir' to a policeman. In spite of the fact that people call one other by their first names, society is much more hierarchical, and nobody has a problem with that. In spatial issues some of this openness would be refreshing: we say we need 'people with vision', but when push comes to shove no one vision should be allowed to dominate over another. Given that in the US people expect more of the

private than of the public sector, no one finds it strange that so much public space is in fact private. The new *lifestyle centers* and *downtowns* look public, people flock to them in crowds to shop, eat and look at other people, but when it comes down to it, only those activities are tolerated there that those considered by the owner/manager to be good for business.

Of course there are many more urgent matters than those I have mentioned here. Sustainability is one (although everybody seems to mean something different by it), building green is another (while countless employees while away their days in offices in basements, far removed from daylight and shivering in the airconditioning which is always too cold.) And of course all Americans complain about their long commutes, but in the meantime the length and duration of their trips continue to grow. Fortunately there are still dissident figures who put the axe to the foundations, such as the professor from the National Housing Institute who claims that government has 'gotten into bed' with developers. Or the professor from UCLA whose entire work is a well-considered protest against 'free' parking and the huge seas of parking lots. But is anybody listening?

Colophon

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The endless metropolis of Los Angeles as seen during landing on an unusually clear day.