# Contextual Modernism and Sustainable Urbanism as New Housing Strategies - A way for better understanding the phenomena of concentrated poverty (Discussion Paper)

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## Abstract

*The growing alienation of modernist public housing estates and their ethnically and socially excluded people, and the neglected human potential they symbolize, is a grotesque expression of the failure of a system driven by the profit motive and failed planning policy, rather than by the requirement to satisfy sustainable urbanism. The modernist concept of urban planning, which emerged in response to a very particular time and set of regional circumstances, spread throughout the Western society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The result, where the idea was simplistically accepted was a disaster. Paying particular attention to housing, this paper discusses the contrasting results of modernist planning approaches in housing and the consequences of that- It also looks at Sustainable Urbanism paradigm and the possibility that it might offer an alternative to the failed modernist satellite-suburban-monolith-alienated type of living in most major European cities. Empirical evidences are drawn from observation, introspection , analysis and deduction studies and Futurescape of selected cases in the American Housing Program HOPE VI, and from ethnographic survey of the ongoing Grand Housing Program in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, through an descriptive and explorative qualitative approach.*

## Introduction

Urbanization is the defining phenomenon and process of this century. The impact of rapid-hybrid urbanization coupled with the population growth will be felt most acutely in developing countries, where the built up area is expected to increase threefold while the urban population doubles by 2030. From this troubling perspective, both *city sustainability* and the *resilience of cities* become the main issues at hand, where housing and "adequate shelter for all" become paramount (Haas, 2012). The search for a more conventional and livable lifestyle in the city or in the countryside continues unabated for citizens and consumers globally, regardless of the realization and predictions of the peak oil and 'dark ages' ahead. The time and age of walking in Avalon has been replaced by one where walking in complexity and in the convergence of emerging crisis of the 21st century is a reality. A time for unprecedented need for controlling and reshaping modernization on human grounds basis becomes warranted. In urbanism and architecture alike, we need to reevaluate and rethink critically the Avant Garde's pursuit of novelty with iconic-flagship architecture manifested in Transurbanism and City Branding schemes (As Professor Dana Cuff, 2011 calls it *'architecture without urbanism'*), and its

blind belief that new technology and innovation should sweep away the past, on the expense of humanistic design. We have seen once before the results of that, during the age of modernism where on the expense of architecture, function and style, human aspects of urban form, environmental design and ergonomics of everyday life paid a horrific price with unprecedented consequences. The intentions were good as for example the housing that addresses the Modernist pledge to deliver improved living conditions did make a brake with the slums and health hazards environments, but at what cost? The dream that modernism could somehow ameliorate living conditions for all residents never came true. Instead, embracing Le Corbusier's and Mies van der Rohe's utopian visions, just the opposite occurred. Christopher Alexander has laid the groundwork with his theory that there are *common patterns* underlying traditional architecture and urbanism, which modernists have abandoned but which we must return to in order to build on a human scale and sustainable basis. New Urbanist planners in the US and worldwide have led the way by building human scale neighborhoods, and in the cases of large public modernist housing estates even making a 180 degrees change. In ethics, economics, and art, the new humanists are still a small minority, but the New Urbanism has already established itself as our most important, current theory and practice of urban planning and design. That notwithstanding, their idea is not all that different from the times of the *moderne*, an architecture and urbanism that can also help lead our (their) society toward a new humanism and better social order and behavior. But as just as modernist architecture helped to promote faith in technology and progress during the 20th century, a *humanistic architecture coupled with sustainable urbanism* can now (and is doing so) help promote the focus on human values that we need in the 21st century. Modernist architecture symbolized the triumph of technology and innovation over culture and context, with decisions made on technical engineering grounds. Today, with all the challenges posed to us we need an architecture and urbanism vision and solutions that symbolize the triumph of culture and context over technology, with decisions made on human grounds and smart growth principles, those that are capable of being sustainable and resilient and on the long run (Duany, Speck, and Lydon, 2009 and Haas, 2009).

## From High-Rise 2 Housing 4 Hope

Because modernism was considered *positive, rational, forward looking and objective*, architects like Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe championed its capacity to facilitate a new social order (through architectural and urban design). Their prophecy pointed toward that technological progress and a reconsidered (architectural) urban plan would result in a "better living through architecture." Although Le Corbusier applied his concepts to a series of theoretical, large scale housing projects, cities like Paris were wary of the plans and rejected his ideas. But by the end of World War II the need for new housing stock and the horrific situation presented by the old centers in terms of health, housing, nature, public space, etc. (both in Europe and the United States) persuaded a generation of ascending architects and urban planners & designers to fully embrace Le Corbusier's Utopian urban vision. Anonymous, cheap, high-density housing isolated its inhabitants from the greater city and exacerbated socio-economic problems. It prompted Charles Jencks, the architect credited for popularizing the term post-modernism, to date the symbolic end of modernism as July 15th, 1972. That's when the prize-winning Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St. Louis was demolished. Designed in 1951 by Minoru Yamasaki (who went on to design the World Trade Center towers) the project included 33 eleven story buildings, 2870 apartments, and when it was initially conceived, not one playground. On the other hand the proponents of modernism and some historians and urban theorists also see this failure, not just as architectural or urban, i.e. the greater societal changes and issues of economics and politics, social policy and even management were greater evils than the building themselves. As Robert Fishman (2004) and Lawrence Vale (2002) pointed out that the urban form which seemed to suppress public life and destroy streets and create inhuman scale and isolation from the fabric of the city is really largely irrelevant to the real crisis of public housing. These, at times, conflicting views of Modernism result in an ongoing and polarized, often highly ideological debate: on one side, praise for its salutary delivery of the masses from unhealthy slums; on the other, disdain for its engagement in oppressive practices of social engineering and the eradication of traditional urban fabric (Polo, 2003).

This polarization, however, has declined somewhat in recent years in the face of projects that have begun to chart a more fruitful middle ground where combined and contextual approaches using both post and new urbanism principle with touches of contextual modernism have appeared. That notwithstanding, the past has brought a certain context, meaning and form that seems as a foreign body to contemporary sustainable urbanism practices. Charles Jencks, used the famous Pruitt-Igoe case as an example of modernists' *hazardous intentions running contrary to real-world social development*. This concept, according to Jenks, disregarded the fact that location, population density, cost constraints, and even specific number of floors were imposed by the federal and state authorities (See: *Bristol, Kate; Montgomery, Roger (1987). Pruitt-Igoe: An Annotated Bibliography, Council of Planning Librarians*). Modernist public housing by and large advocates believed in the *primacy of design* in changing *social conditions*. They felt that "an ideal or improved residential environment will better the behavior of residents as well as the conditions of its inhabitants" (Billig, 2006) Modernist architects also convinced public officials that their designs could transform the lives of the poor. Indeed, much of the debate over Pruitt-Igoe and similar project (Cabrini Green, Robert Taylor Homes, etc.) is a proxy debate over the nature and condition of cities, both in their immediate physical conditions and in the ways we apprehend and comprehend them as inhabitants and practitioners. But at the end of the day the main questions need to be asked and re-asked again: How could a design practice that held so much promise become the symbol of all that is wrong with city building?

**Figures 1-5.** The Rise and Fall: The "end of Modernism" and the beginning of the end of the High-Rise public housing programs in the US. These programs were subsequently replaced by low-rise mixed-income HOPE VI projects based on traditional New Urbanism principles.


The truth of the matter is that public-housing tenants could not adapt to an environment of constant breakdowns caused by the inability of the typical housing authority to budget even the most minimal standards of maintenance raised from rents these tenants could afford to pay. In a very complex

situation and a number of converging negative aspects associated with the ascendance and modernist high-rise development, one of the more important issues and the main thrust of the US federal urban policy, under the guise of Urban Renewal, had been inner-city demolition (Mohl, 1993). Beginning in the 1950s, troubled inner-city areas were presumed to be best served by a program that cleared out older houses and commercial structures, and replaced them with new plazas, public buildings, and commercial districts. Under Urban Renewal, urban space was primarily an economic landscape, and cities were presumed to be best served by policies that bulldozed "blighted" houses and businesses, and replaced them with newer, more valuable or efficient structures—structures that would also return greater property tax receipts to the municipality. The social value of neighborhoods, families, and communities, and their longstanding socio-spatial connections to these places, did not enter into the economic calculus of the redevelopment agencies that developed and carried out urban renewal demolitions (Jones and Popke, 2010). Many of the residents displaced by this process ended up in large-scale public housing communities, characterized by a modernist design ethic. Drawing on the influential theories of architects like Le Corbusier and Gropius, urban designers had advocated inner-city, high-rise "projects" that were deemed to exemplify the rational and efficient use of both urban space and financial resources (Smith, 2006). U.S. urban policymakers began to express doubts in the 1970s, and by the late 1980s there was a growing consensus that the traditional approach to public housing was a failure. Public housing projects were beset with a host of seemingly intractable problems, as described by former HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo:

> *When we've made mistakes in public housing, we made them big. You have many projects that in my opinion now exist throughout the country which were flawed from inception. They were flawed by design, and they were condemned almost at the point of construction. They were too dense, they were too isolated, they were too concentrated, they were without support, they were without integration, they were without jobs, they were without opportunity. Literally those great buildings with the caged hallways in concrete bunkers. They were a mistake. In many cases the best thing we can do is literally blow them up and start over. (Cuomo, A., 1997, Oral and written testimony before the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity of the Committee on Banking and Financial Services, U.S. House of Representatives, February 25, March 6, and March 11.)*

In other words, it was necessary to transform the spatial practices of public housing tenants as much as the spatial form of the housing itself. All of this has also been wrapped up in the New Urbanism paradigm & principles, where it is simply more an issue of integrative urbanism that an architectural style, where the larger goals deal with social cohesion, satisfaction and behavior. Here the principles run the same risks that the Modernists ran when they designed and executed housing for a 'better world'. New Urbanism is an urban design movement, which promotes walkable neighborhoods that contain a range of housing and job types. It arose in the United States in the early 1980s, and has gradually continued to reform many aspects of real estate development, urban planning, and municipal land-use strategies.

New Urbanism is strongly influenced by urban design standards that were prominent until the meteoric rise of the automobile in the mid-20$^{th}$ Century encompassing principles such as traditional neighborhood design (TND) and transit-oriented development (TOD). HOPE VI makes use of New Urbanism in a design and plan way, meaning that communities must be dense, pedestrian-friendly, and multimode transit friendly-accessible. Housing rarely comes in the form of apartments, instead private houses, duplexes, and especially for these public housing projects, rowhouses are preferred, because these buildings directly interact with the street. Similarly, houses always stand close to the street, with small front yards. A certain danger looms in the fact that believing in physical solutions too much, i.e. that they can be solely or one of the key factors to alter social life & behavior. Sociologist and Human Geographer David Harvey denounce such a position as "spatial determinism" (Harvey, 1997).

The HOPE VI (Housing Opportunities for Everyone) Program, which was in many respects the brain child of New Urbanism, has over the past twenty years catalyzed the transformation of the US most distressed projects into well-designed, mixed-income neighborhoods (Susan J. Popkin, Bruce Katz, Mary K. Cunningham, Karen Brown, Jeremy Gustafson, and Margery A. Turner. 2004. A Decade of

HOPE VI: Research Findings and Policy Changes. Washington, DC: Urban Institute). HOPE VI began in 1992, with formal recognition in law in 1998. As of 2005, the program had distributed $5.8 billion through 446 federal block grants to cities for the developments .HOPE VI has included a variety of grant programs including: Revitalization, Demolition, Main Street, and Planning grant programs. As of June 1, 2010 there have been 254 HOPE VI Revitalization grants awarded to 132 housing authorities since 1993 – totaling more than $6.1 billion. The value of Hope VI is that in several cities, like Chicago for example, the program has swiftly converted the most dangerous and dilapidated parts of the metropolis into healthy, vibrant communities with rising property values, commercial activity, and resident employment (Popkin, Levy, and Buron, 2009). Hope VI programs concentrated on the following: **Diversity:** A broad range of housing types and prices will bring people of diverse ages, races and incomes into daily interaction, strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to an authentic community; **Safety and civic engagement:** The relationship of buildings and streets should enable neighbors to create a safe neighborhood by providing "eyes on the street" (Jane Jacobs legacy) and should encourage interaction between all the residents and create community identity; **Neighborhoods:** Neighborhoods should be compact, mixed-use with shops, schools, parks and other activities of daily life available within walking distance and close to public transportation; Local architectural character: The image and character of new development should respond to the best architectural traditions in the area and the historical legacy left in place; **Streets and public open space:** Neighborhoods should have an interconnected network of streets and public open spaces to provide opportunities for recreation and appropriate settings for civic activities (Cisneros, Katz, Calthorpe, Polikoff – 2009).

**Figures 6-9.** HOPE VI social housing projects in the US: Chestnut Court (Oakland, California: 1998) The Broadway-Overlook HOPE VI development (foreground) in Baltimore's Washington Hill neighborhood (2005): Broadway Overlook, is comprised of 132 mixed income housing rental units and 34 for-sale units with adaptive use of heritage buildings and community input; Curtis Park (Denver, Colorado: 1999)

## Transformative Globalizing effects of Modernism

The issue of the inadequacy of 'modernist' housing solutions to be incompatible with the lifestyles and aspirations of the poor has been a recurrent concern among researchers and architects/planners alike for many years. Despite such criticisms the continued practice of modernist programs in many developing countries and immerging economies reveals the prevalent gap between knowledge acquired through previous studies and the design and planning practice. Like in many other countries, Ethiopia has tried to solve the problem of housing shortage during the process of rapid urbanization through what could be described as the modernist 'provider model', i.e., strong public sector involvement in a centralized production of ready-made, minimum-standard units for anonymous residents. An ambitious government programme for 'Low-cost Condominium Housing' provision, in recent years, has resulted in the production of over a thousand walk-up apartment blocks in the city of Addis Ababa alone. Several thousands of such housing blocks have already been built nationally.

Condominium housing program of Addis Ababa (popularly known as the *Grand Housing Program*) provide a fresh case to understand the basis of this gap by exploring, in parallel, the very contexts (particularly socio-cultural and historical) in which ideas for large scale social housing programs are conceived and implemented. The excerpt here presents a larger analysis of a study that explores how ambitions for modernization are imagined and realized through architectural design and planning and how the planned environments are responded to by the users through spatial appropriations and social relations. It employs ethnographic method to closely examine the inherent conditions in the housing development process that lead residents to adapt to or reject the physical and social environment of their housing. The attempt is to draw the local context within which the rationales of the program and the post-ante functioning of the housing environment thereof could be understood and explained.

Scholarly literature on the subject of modernism – both in developed and developing countries contains a normative bias. Those studies about modernist practices in developing countries are largely dominated by colonial texts that largely present modernism as 'imported', 'Western' and as an 'international style'. Despite harsh criticisms most largely fail to provide full picture of the background within which the 'project' was implemented and the precise causes for the success or failure of modernist housing estates. They also fail to provide alternative view and vision to city development. In contrast to the dominant view that sees modernist planning paradigm as inhuman imposition from above or imports from the West, condominium housing program of Addis Ababa reviled that modernist interventions are equally co-inspired by populace penchants for the exotic that are imprecisely equated with better standard of living. This meant that residents in the beginning showed more tolerance to the challenges they face and to adapting to the new way of life they subscribe to when moving in to the new housing environment. This internal tolerance and the desire for adaptation are witnessed by the users' innovative appropriation of spaces, uses, locations and resources. But as expectations are not met, as they continue to be confronted by the rigidity of the built form and as the resistance to exercising legitimate power over their housing environment grows unbearable the inventiveness essentially becomes a survival mechanism. One result could be growing sense of competition and desire for control which is manifested by "unqualified" spatial expansions (or 'territorial invasions') accompanied by social withdrawal to avoid confrontations. The gradual erosion of sense of belonging and sense of community and thus the risk of decline of the physical and social environment as living environment are attributed to this condition. Based on ideas of 'contextual modernism', the larger study attempts to draw ideas for what could be called *Ethiopian architectural modernism*.

## Indigenous Urban Tissue of Addis & Modernization through Condominiumization

The city of Addis Ababa being the only large African city without a colonial legacy is built on an indigenous settlement structure. The indigenous urban tissue hosts a city urbanity characterized by a "mixity" - as it is called in Addis Ababa - of social strata, functions, and economies. The close proximity of everything everywhere in the city makes crucial issues of survival for the large majority of poor inhabitants redundant, e.g. transport costs, ghettoization, etc. Against such unique quality and opportunity, however, the choice of Addis Ababean planners and policy makers, like in many other African cities, in recent years has become a radical transformation of the city in the modernist planning principles. The economic and spatial divides between the rich and the poor following the economic boom that started at the dawn of the millennium embraced modernity's rationality and efficiency as a means of structuring the new city. The city government's desire for a "clean" and "orderly" city began to show up in its hardening policies that prohibited the petty traders, street vendors, small artisans, barbers, shoeshine boys and domestic servants from operating in public spaces. The campaign against the "informal" and the "old" was then intensified when an engineering idea for large-scale "low-cost" housing production was conceived at the 'progressive' Mayor's office. The engineering idea not only was seen as a way to materialize an old desire and vision for a "modern city" and "Diplomatic Capital of Africa" but it gave hope to "once and for all" solve the housing problem of the city.

**Figures 10-11.** "Cleaning Addis" - image in pages of public journal by the city government, March 2010 and (a) image in pages of public journal by the city government, March 2010; (b) local newspaper, critic column

Down with Old to Bring in New?

The Grand Housing Program (GHP) (popularly known as 'condominium' housing) was primarily introduced with a stated plan to address the overwhelming housing backlog which in 2004 was estimated at about 300,000 housing units but also to replace 50% of the total 136,330 dilapidated public rental houses (locally known as 'kebele' houses.). In the Ethiopian context, as in the United States and many provinces of Canada, the term ''condominium,'' or ''condo',' refers to an apartment that the resident owns or is entitled to as opposed to one that is rented. It is generally used to refer to the form of housing tenure under the GHP program, where each apartment unit is individually owned, while use of and access to common facilities is controlled by the association of owners that jointly represent ownership of the entire property. Kebele houses are generally single storey mud and wood constructed houses constituting approximately 70% of the housing stock in the central parts of the city. With their very low rent and their favorable location, they are the best available option for the low and lowest income households comprising the majority in the city. The ambitious plan also included ideas for densification and 'integrated' strategies to address multiple problems of the city such as high unemployment and low skill levels in the construction sector. Targeting low income and middle income households, the city government has set itself the goal of constructing between 40,000 – 50,000 low-cost houses per year over five years. (AAHDPO, 2007) With a significant delay in the construction over the years, by Feb 2009 about 60,000 housing units have been completed of which 36,000 were transferred to owners. (AAHDPO, 2010) By 2007, the national government has scaled-up the program to cover 36 cities and the figure has grown to 59 cities in 2008 (MWUD, 2008). The condominium buildings are designed in blocks of three-to-five storey buildings primarily containing one, two, and three-room housing units, with some blocks having four-room housing units on the upper floors and commercial space on the ground floors. The blocks have four basic modular typologies: A, B, C, and D (Fig. 2) that exist in several scales with little variation. For every three to five blocks, a common room building of one or two stories is also built in which activities such as cooking with fire wood, animal slaughtering, clothes washing, and social gatherings can take place. A recent proposal by the Addis Ababa Housing Development Project Office (AAHDPO) (2009) stated plans to build 8- to 31-storey condominium blocks.

**Figure 12-16.** The popular condominium blocks Type-C and block Types B and D (from left to right). (a) New condominium next to existing neighborhood; Source: Angelil & Hebel 2009 (b) cluster of condominium blocks at a suburb in Addis.

Though the success of the program in terms of quantity of housing it produced and the thousands of jobs it created proved be significant, result in terms of meeting the social and other urban objectives of the city were shown to be a failure. In just less than five years the city was filled with mono-functional clusters of freestanding condominium blocks that 'neglect the importance of public space as a social and economic base'. Herbel & Kifle in Angelil & Hebel (2009) in their review of the Grand Housing program of Addis Ababa document say that:

> *The majority of the urban poor that cannot afford to pay basic expenses for water, electricity, or garbage removal; they usually earn their income from informal and local businesses located in close proximity to their dwelling quarters. Mixed-use neighborhoods were replaced by high-end developments and publicly funded large-scale condominium clusters. Social ties and unique combinations of different income groups within a neighborhood are jeopardized by uniform planning concepts, leading to social and spatial separation - a condition likely to worsen as migration from rural to urban areas will certainly increase within the coming years. Whether informal settlements\will be recognized as an integral part of the city's fabric and transformed instead of being destroyed remains to be seen (p.112).*

This unfortunate turn and transformation of Addis Ababa is not unique to the city. Malik (2001) finds common characteristics in non-western cities such as massive social dislocation, polarizing inequality, uneven distribution of resources and congestion among other things. "The disparities and injustices in the social structure are reflected in the structures of these cities: wasteful modern enclaves and affluent suburbs juxtaposed with crumbling historic centers and the ever increasing slums and shanty towns often constituting."

Despite the brave and commendable attempt to address multiple problems of the urban poor, the Integrated Housing Development Program of Addis Ababa demonstrates the additional challenges that result when trying to solve urban problems with 'package solutions'. Unless accompanied by a thorough understanding of the complex relationship between the elements being introduced, such attempts can only be expected to yield unintended results. The lessons learned are clear: long-term objectives, as opposed to radical and instant solution approaches, must accompany even modest efforts

to tackling multiple problems. And, planners as well as politicians need to gain a more realistic and precise understanding of the life of the urban poor and respectively base their architectural projects and their policies on that. Planners and decision-makers must also understand that the urban poor have a complex web of social networks that are crucial for their livelihood; hence, their multi-faceted problems can hardly be addressed with a simplistic model. Planners must moreover understand building as a process and part with the mechanical, reductionist view that aims for an ideal, if not utopian, end product. Such an understanding calls for incremental development strategies and a more direct partnership with the community.

The condominiums of Addis Ababa, like most other modernist housing, are designed for a broad and grossly defined category of low income and middle income users without paying sufficient attention to the differences that exist within that group. The consequence of such a lack of differentiation in the conceptual design manifested, in this study, in the prevailing tendency among residents to vie for control over adjacent spaces while at the same time closing themselves off socially to avoid conflicts that may arise from conflicting interests. In light of the knowledge obtained from this case study, the often assumed economic advantage of building standard blocks for the 'average user' (as opposed to users with diverse needs) is put into question. Do 'neutral' housing environments that serve the 'average user' really achieve results or could desired results be possibly achieved more easily if the environments were designed to meet specific needs of specific type of users that are differentiated according to, for example, family size, economic backgrounds, or age group? The various models should also be studied from perspectives guided by democratic and sustainability principles.

Although the overall planning of condominium housing of Addis Ababa follow 'modernist' planning principles, the designing of the blocks demonstrate attempt to modify the foreign design concept of 'large apartment blocks' to make it local. For example, condominium blocks are low and mid- rise blocks; they are largely inner city phenomenon; they are for intended for private ownership with some legitimacy to modify internal organization of the housing units; they are made with increased density as one central goal and hence are relatively denser; there were clear cultural considerations in the designing of the blocks and the clusters. By so doing, they meet most of the physical form qualities early critics of modernist planning argued for. And yet, a closer look at life in condominium housing reveals that all this was not sufficient to create a livable housing environment neither for the poor nor for the other groups of the society. One recommendation to change this design pattern is to reconsider the often ignored design qualities in the indigenous urban tissue of Addis Ababa. Architects and planners should strive to find ways to maintain the highly mixed social, functional and economic structures of Addis Ababa which is nearly only hosted in its indigenous urban tissue at the moment.

## Housing Is Just the Beginning of Broader Transformation

One of HOPE VI's principal accomplishments was to shift the emphasis of housing policy from output (units built and managed) to outcomes — housing quality, safety, resident outcomes, economic opportunity, social mixity, and the vitality of the surrounding neighborhood. Turbov and Piper (2005) have argued that the main catalyst for this shift was the creation of the mixed-financing, mixed-income model, which permitted private and other affordable units and financing of public housing. This approach helped build economically integrated communities consisting of both public housing and market-rate units (Turbov and Piper, 2005). The idea behind the new approach, or the new version and this 'super-plugin' called the Choice Neighborhoods, is to expand the HOPE VI strategy. As Zielenbach and Voith (2010) assert, it deals very much with economic sustainability by making funding available to a wider range of stakeholders, including nonprofits, private firms, local governments, and public housing authorities, the initiative encourages greater community investment in redevelopment projects and increases available resources. Just as important, the program widens the range of activities to include the acquisition of properties to create mixed-income housing in strategic locations. As HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan noted in testimony before the House Financial Services Committee, this feature gives local partners the flexibility they need to deal with the full range of

distressed properties that often blight neighborhoods of concentrated poverty (*Shaun Donovan. HUD Secretary's Testimony Before the House Financial Services Committee Hearing on Choice Neighborhoods Legislation, 17 March 2010.).* HOPE VI and Choice Neighborhoods are both premised on the idea that mixed-income, economically integrated neighborhoods improve the lives of residents and aid the surrounding community. In studying mixed-income developments, Turbov and Piper (2005) found that such projects were instrumental in both revitalizing the market and improving residents' quality of life, where the median household income of neighborhood residents grew significantly faster than elsewhere in the city or region and likewise, unemployment levels fell, workforce participation rates improved, and residential markets strengthened.
The current Obama administration through HUD (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development) is proposing a new program that aims to transform the nation's poorest neighborhoods, especially those with the high peak of concentrated poverty into sustainable communities: taking 10 urban centers with high concentrations of public housing and improving it while adding day care centers and even farmers markets, sidewalks and parks. These *Choice Neighborhoods* (building upon HOPE VI programs and continuing the principles by adding sustainable and long-term holistic visions) initiative will transform distressed neighborhoods and public and assisted projects into viable and sustainable mixed-income neighborhoods by linking housing improvements with appropriate services, schools, public assets, transportation, and access to jobs. A strong emphasis will be placed on *local community planning* for access to high-quality educational opportunities, including early childhood education. Choice Neighborhoods grants will build upon the successes of public housing transformation under HOPE VI to provide support for the preservation and rehabilitation of public and HUD-assisted housing, within the context of a broader approach to concentrated poverty. In addition to public housing authorities, the initiative will involve local governments, non-profits, and for-profit developers in undertaking comprehensive local planning with residents and the community. The $250 million proposal is a planning experiment and one of the most progressive proposals under consideration for the next budget year, building upon the Hope VI program, which over the past 17 years has torn down nearly 100,000 of the worst public housing projects in the country. Main findings are:

**Figure 17 and 18 Collage.** President Obama, here at a town-hall-style meeting in February, is proposing $250 million for the new Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, which is focused on improving not just public housing, but the neighborhoods where it exists (Courtesy of Associated Press); Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, a systems view of sustainable urbanism and housing opportunities for all.


- HOPE VI has been effective at **deconcentrating poverty** and improving some resident outcomes, particularly for those moving to the private market and to mixed-income developments.

- HOPE VI has been an important **catalyst in community cohesion** and strengthening the local organizations as well as keeping 'they eye on the street's momentum alive and in focus.
- HOPE VI has **not yet been able to solve the questions of justice, equity and fair housing** for all, as displacement and relocation of a large number of 'old modernism residents' continues.
- **Choice Neighborhoods** will expand supportive services and educational opportunities for residents, building on the strategies of successful HOPE VI sites.
- Choice Neighborhoods will promote positive **economic spillover by requiring partnerships with neighborhood institutions**. Residents from both public housing and the surrounding neighborhood will play an essential role.
- The future of Choice Neighborhoods is still unclear and if they will employ the **full palette of Sustainable Urbanism** practices as well correct the issues of HOPE VI, namely those of justice and equity.

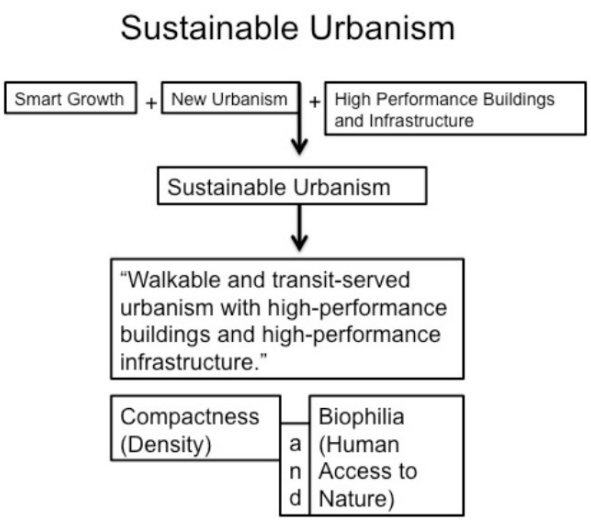
## Sustainable Urbanism & Beyond: Principles for Possible HOPE and CHOICE

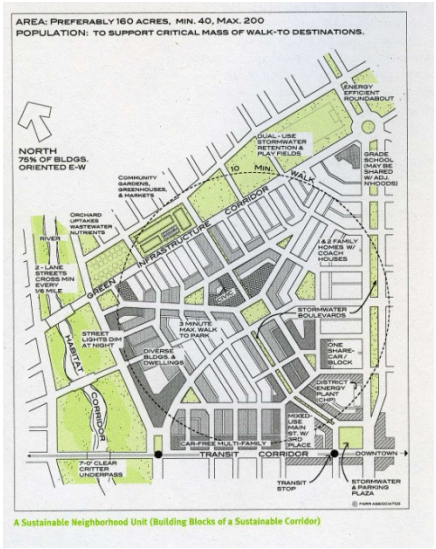
Global climate change, with its social, economic, political, cultural and ecological dimensions (and the impact on our spatial, physical and planning patterns), is one of the principal challenges facing humanity in the 21st century. The world is becoming more urbanized and as the majority of people live in cities, urbanized and suburbanized regions, which tend to increase climate change by generating carbon dioxide, and are thus, located in climactic danger zones, it is crucial that cities and regions be on the front line of climate protection and the prevention of further damage. Many attempts have already been made in this direction. However, we are still at the beginning (Farr, 2007 and Droege, 2008). All these changes are already making an impact on regions, cities and communities, which will alter the requisites for future planning, urban design and the role of professionals as we know it (Haas, 2008). There is still a great deficiency in the areas of urban design, urban and regional planning and the control of urban and regional development. As for the energetic reorganization of city regions, the creation of compact, de-centralized housing spaces, the complex economical handling of resources or the minimization of auto-dependency - all these approaches are practical requirements in future urban development, all in order to create a truly unique model of integrated cities (Calthorpe and Fulton, 2001; Beatley, Newman and Boyer, 2009). ***Sustainable Urbanism***, a phrase that is used widely and in combination with ecological and green connotations, a rather new and complete framework for interdisciplinary planning and design of contemporary cities, neighborhoods and settlements. It explores, in a more holistic manner sustainability and urban design in a rapidly urbanizing world, by focusing on the processes that shape the form and function of our built environment in its full complexity – infrastructures, land developments, built landscapes, social networks, systems of governance and economics and facilities – that all collectively make up metropolitan regions (Farr, 2007; Haas, 2008; Newman, Beatley and Boyer, 2009). Applied, sustainable urbanism focuses on identifying small-scale catalytic interventions that can be applied to urbanized locations, which in aggregate, lead to an overall shift towards sustainable neighborhoods, districts, and regions (Newman and Jennings, 2008). In its fullest meaning, Sustainable Urbanism is made up of the following: building and growing more densely and compactly; creating walkable mixed use urban environments that permit and encourage walking and bicycling; investments in public transit and transportation; creating closed-loop urban eco-metabolism and a self-sustaining agricultural system - local production of foods, goods and materials (food, building, materials); and investment in and commitment to sustainable and renewable and passive technologies integrated into the built form (e.g. solar, wind, biomass, etc.) as well as solar design that uses all the best of modern materials like steel and glass to enable daylight to fill our buildings instead of needing artificial light and heat (Congress for the New Urbanism, 1999; Farr, 2007; Newman and Beatley, 2008). Doug Farr, in his Sustainable Urbanism: Urban Design with Nature (2008), sums this up in five points:

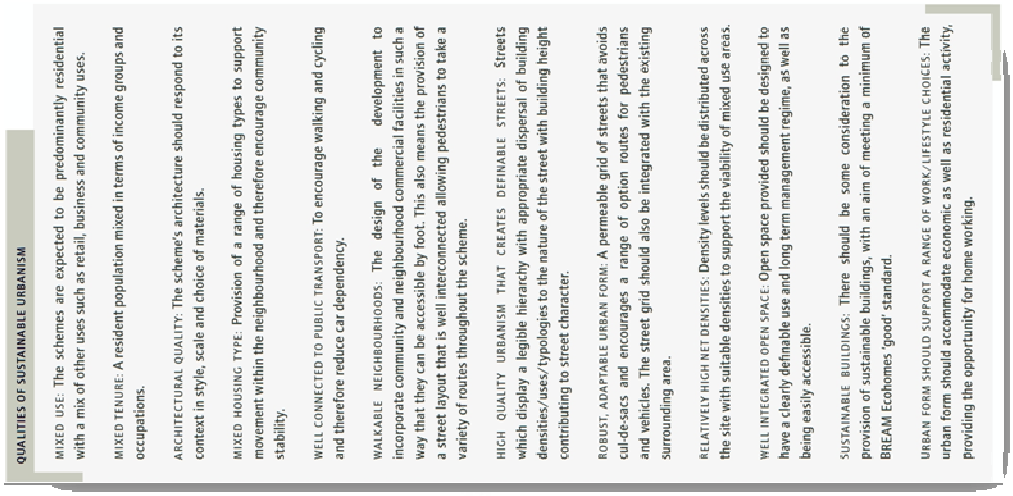
- Increasing sustainability through density and compactness.
- Integrating transportation means, patterns and land use.
- Creating sustainable neighborhoods, including housing, car-free areas, locally-owned stores, walkable neighborhoods, and universal accessibility.
- The health and environmental benefits of linking humans to nature, including walk-to open spaces, neighborhood storm water systems, waste treatment, and food production (permaculture).
- High performance buildings and district energy systems.

So in a nutshell, sustainable urbanism has three basic aspects: *environmental, social and economic*. An urban form which is environmentally sustainable enables its inhabitants to adopt a more ecologically aware, lower carbon lifestyle; in social terms, sustainable urbanism involves an appropriate mix of dwellings of different tenures, sizes and types, and a variety of spaces and buildings for recreational and community activities, as well as for service providers and commercial enterprises; and in economic terms, sustainable developments contain business activities and opportunities capable of providing jobs for many of their inhabitants across the social and economic spectra (Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment, 2007; Haas, 2008; Steuteville and Langdon, 2009).

**Figure 19-21.** The current popular definition of sustainable urbanism is also imagined as a grand unification of architecture, city planning, and environmental design for a better way of life. Diagram showing the main axis of Sustainable Urbanism, New neighborhood (green model) scheme and the qualities of sustainable urbanism (Farr, D. 2008 and The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment, 2007).



QUALITIES OF SUSTAINABLE URBANISM

MIXED USE: The schemes are expected to be predominantly residential with a mix of other uses such as retail, business and community uses.

MIXED TENURE: A resident population mixed in terms of income groups and occupations.

ARCHITECTURAL QUALITY: The scheme's architecture should respond to its context in style, scale and choice of materials.

MIXED HOUSING TYPE: Provision of a range of housing types to support movement within the neighbourhood and therefore encourage community stability.

WELL CONNECTED TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT: To encourage walking and cycling and therefore reduce car dependency.

WALKABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS: The design of the development to incorporate community and neighbourhood commercial facilities in such a way that they can be accessible by foot. This also means the provision of a street layout that is well interconnected allowing pedestrians to take a variety of routes throughout the scheme.

HIGH QUALITY URBANISM THAT CREATES DEFINABLE STREETS: Streets which display a legible hierarchy with appropriate dispersal of building densities/uses/typologies to the nature of the street with building height contributing to street character.

ROBUST, ADAPTABLE URBAN FORM: A permeable grid of streets that avoids cul-de-sacs and encourages a range of option routes for pedestrians and vehicles. The street grid should also be integrated with the existing surrounding area.

RELATIVELY HIGH NET DENSITIES: Density levels should be distributed across the site with suitable densities to support the viability of mixed use areas.

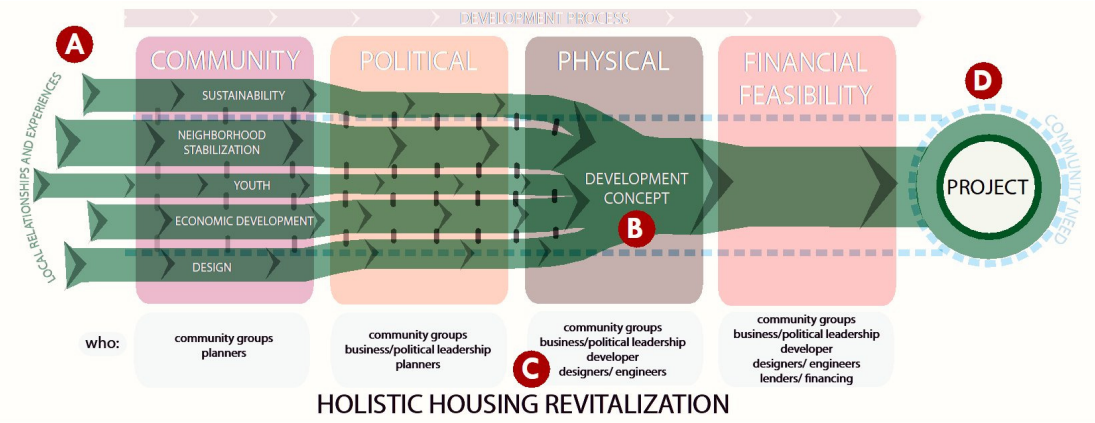
WELL INTEGRATED OPEN SPACE: Open space provided should be designed to have a clearly definable use and long term management regime, as well as being easily accessible.

SUSTAINABLE BUILDINGS: There should be some consideration to the provision of sustainable buildings, with an aim of meeting a minimum of BREAAM Ecohomes 'good' standard.

URBAN FORM SHOULD SUPPORT A RANGE OF WORK/LIFESTYLE CHOICES: The urban form should accommodate economic as well as residential activity, providing the opportunity for home working.

All of this puts the focus on the key element of the community – the neighborhood and hosing as being a main node for the carrying capacity of sustainable transformations and consolidation, one founded around the human aspects of form and traditional, timeless practices of good city building. Contemporary cities are not isolated islands but are integral part of their region and as such must be treated and analyzed on a regional scale (Calthorpe and Fulton, 2001). Urban planners and designers need a better understanding of the tools that are available to urbanism to determine the sustainability of a neighborhood, city, or region, all in an effort of building better places – more livable, more equitable, more energy efficient & ecologically sound, and more prosperous for all their citizens – regardless of their age, ethnic or social and economic background (Just cities and places for all). Our cities, villages, communities and neighborhoods stand at an important turning point - critical nexus of the most pressing issues of our time: rapid population growth and massive urbanization, energy inefficiency and scarcity, unbalanced resource consumption, growing air and water pollution, global and micro climate change, social exclusion and economic decline, unsustainable development of built environment at all scales and the relentless destruction of natural habitats (Calthorpe and Fulton, 2001; Haas 2008). As Peter Calthorpe (2011) points out that cities also remake themselves, i.e. demolish and rebuild all the time which is a very important part of urbanism. The resilience of the urban fabric is that it can be renewed and redone. However, a greater sensitivity to history, historic resources, and cultural resources has to be part of urbanism now. So, those three principles: **conservation**, both in terms of the environment and in terms of culture and history; **human scale**, which translates into creating pedestrian environments that work; **and diversity**, which means you have to create mixed use communities for a full range of people. Essentially, the argument is that developments that are designed according to the principles of sustainable urbanism: promote social integration by delivering high quality housing with a choice of tenures and sizes, mitigating the stigma traditionally associated with social housing, and creating popular and desirable communities; reduce social exclusion by creating robust and integrated communities which have access to educational and health related facilities as well as normal retail services; encourage community cohesion and stability by enabling households to remain within a given neighborhood through different life stages. This goes hand in hand with Jane Jacobs a strong critique of the urban renewal policies of the 1950s, which, she claimed, destroyed communities and created isolated, unnatural urban spaces. The important question remains today if the mixed use and income developments (like HOPE VI and beyond) or new contextual neo-modernist or conventional schemes are effective in fostering a sense of community among residents and in which way mixed use and income developments have impacts on the lives of low income residents.

**Figure 22.** Holistic revitalization – tools for urban housing development. Diagram: Jeffrey Beam, MIT 2009. In the holistic model (as opposed to conventional one) four issues A-D are: (A) Creating an inclusive community development agenda (B) Program Based versus need based development concepts (C) The developer's most effective point of entry and (D) Aligning the Project with community need. In this process, community issues are resolved roughly in a consensual agenda before the physical development is contemplated and then the concept is done together with the community to realize the agenda (for example using an all inclusive Charrette process).




Analyzing different cases of HOPE VI and Addis Ababa by using FutureScape® (mapping and visioning) planning process[1], an innovative new approach to visualizing the future as it is beginning to take shape, 10 strategies have been generated. It supports the process of visual thinking by helping us link our intuitive sense of events in the larger environment with what we already know and what the data indicate (Sanders, 2008). This visual synthesis promotes insight about the present and foresight about the future. Here are some of the possible strategies that can be suggested by using the FutureScape® in a very simplified way.

[1] FutureScape ™ is a tool for combining insight of the present and foresight of the future, two skills needed for planning in the midst of complexity and change. This mind map presents information visually, often illustrating inter-relationships and then converts it to textual reference. It provides a way to map the larger environment in which decision-making happens. It is a valuable way to quickly collect, organize and comprehend the breadth of perspectives, insight, and knowledge into the problem at hand (Sanders, 2008)

| |
|---|
| **Strategy 1:** By changing the physical shape of public housing so that it fits with the surrounding communities instead of becoming an island of isolation. A belief that the aesthetically bland architecture and single-use nature of the housing projects was not simply anti-urban but destructive of community in ways that breed poverty and dependency. |
| **Strategy 2:** By establishing positive incentives for resident self-sufficiency (opening of small businesses and creating the self-sufficient economic prosperity districts that have an ethnic hallmark) and by setting expectations through strict occupancy rules (breaking the culture of dependency and non-involvement is crucial. In the case of mixed-income housing developments, effective management is essential. |
| **Strategy 3:** By lessening the concentration of poverty and heightening the deconcentrating instead. Concentrations of very poor residents in a neighborhood or public housing projects create, through a variety of factors, an un-improvable black hole of unemployment and poverty, crime and drug-use, low educational performance, and other community ills. |
| **Strategy 4:** New social housing developments should not be done as 'islands of hope in the sea of despair', instead a full integration into the existing fabric of the adjacent neighborhoods and the rest of the city should be achieved by mix use developments, urban infills, public transportation, schools and other amenities and overall urban pattern solidification. |
| **Strategy 5:** All new retail and commercial urban development should provide space for the public realm, for public use and to the extent feasible should facilitate the livelihood of independent and cooperatively owned businesses, where ethnic and home grown businesses can thrive and support the social capital and community cohesion. |
| **Strategy 6:** By creating and renewing the fundamental infrastructures of the community and neighborhoods: services, communications, transportations, facilities, schools and agencies. This will also be achieved by creating partnerships of ample opportunity between public and private entities, developers and investors. In addition to that transit fares should be kept very low for travel from poor neighborhoods, high for well-to-do commuters. |
| **Strategy 7:** By gentrifying or restoring and upgrading the deteriorated urban property by middle-class or affluent people, but at the same time being careful not to eliminate or displace the poor and lower-income people (by having a viable anti-strategy for displacement of the affected residents – the unemployed, the excluded and the very poor). |
| **Strategy 8:** Plans and further ideas about social housing should be developed in consultation with the target population and community neighborhood organizations if the area is already developed. The existing population, however, should not be the sole arbiter of the future of an area. Citywide considerations must also apply, but principles of equity, gender, diversity, justice and democracy must be imbedded in the process at all times. |
| **Strategy 9:** Physical design only partially accounted for public housing problems, that social factors might also be implicated. Safety and Crime prevention are still one of the dominating elements where the negative aspects such as lack of social organization, social cohesion, social service programs and lack of employment opportunities for residents, must be worked against. |
| **Strategy 10:** Understanding the development patterns, close connection of the community in the planning and building process, capacity building and utilization of local materials, crafts and skills as well as an identification of the needs, not just of a particular neighborhood or settlement, but also the whole city and even a region (holistic approach) is paramount keys to success of any project. |

## Some conclusions and final words

The fundamental question for urbanism remains – how many more people can you squeeze and pack into cities and mass housing that already seem to be choking under the pressure of their population density – no urbanism in the world will solve that – no humane urbanism in any case. As Thomas Friedman observes, 'the combination of global warming, the exponential rise of the middle class global wide and the fact that the population of the planet in the last 50 years has almost tripled, all point to a forthcoming danger zone'. All of this, according to Friedman, 'is going to drive five mega-problems that are going to shape the 21st century: energy and natural resource supply and demand, petro-dictatorships, climate change, biodiversity loss and energy poverty' (Friedman, 2008). The bearing capacity of our ecological/technological systems (that should in fact be viewed as one integrated system, not two separate) is simply put a question of the balance between production and consumption. Maybe the most important effect of the global warming threat is the money and research invested in new methods of production and transportation – as investors do not and should not invest capital based on moral but on business interests. If the "energy" and "resource" questions are solvable – by new means of technology and harvesting and so on, one of the main challenges is how to rebuild the new city on the basis of the one generated by cheap oil – without simply exchanging fossil fuels for the alternative fuels of the future. The only really viable and in the long run defensible position on how to develop our urban systems – if we take the energy, heating, housing, population, resource, poverty, etc questions as solvable – is to try to establish a system in which the general demand and wishes on built places can be met with supply. With no such "system" or contract, the continuing diversification of our society – which cannot be viewed as something negative – might generate a pattern of "urban villages" all designed for and inhabited/visited by a specific group/class/tribe. Then the meaning of "urbanity" as we know it – based on the ideas of differences coming together will be replaced with something absolutely opposite. The ability to reduce the city to an object of technical expertise was the dream of the Progressive Era reforms ranging from changes in city government to the professionalization of city planning as part of city management. Since the 1960s, there have been some compelling reasons to think that this professional project needs to be re-considered. The important point of Jane Jacobs' critique was not just that the architects and planners had been coming up with bad solutions, but that they had been asking the wrong kinds of questions altogether, applying models and analogies from the wrong sciences (Jacobs, 1961). The task of theory is, in part, to aid in the kind of critical reflection that can help us be precise about the questions we ask, and self-conscious about assumptions we might be making by asking one kind of question and not another. The task of practice, especially in the case of social and public housing we talked about is keep in mind the issues of diversity, democracy and equity, issues that are not compatible at times, but that represent the crux for policy measures. In relation to the broad issue areas of urban planning and design, those three values of equity, diversity, and democracy may pull in different ways. In each of these crucial policy arenas, context and historical moment make the choice of the most just policy indeterminate and gets us closer to something what me might become defining as the just city (Fainstein, 2010).

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