Greetings from the U.K.

The Hypertext City

Summer in Pittsburgh

Pilgrimage to Greece

Spatial Reform in Cuba

Success on Main Street

Live out Your Principles

Who Are We?

The USA is an organization of Pitt students with the common desire to interpret and understand the neighborhoods and cities that we live in. To that end, we welcome and embrace a wide range of diverse opinions and ideals.

E-mail
sorc+urbansa@pitt.edu

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www.pitt.edu/~sorc/urbansa

THE PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS

The end of the semester is approaching fast and now it is crunch time to finish up class projects and reading assignments. However, during this busy time you should not forget about the USA. We have neighborhood tours planned for Mt. Lebanon and the North Side. We already had the Washington D.C. Director of Development, Stephen Green as a guest speaker and planning to have Post-Gazette transportation writer Joe Grata come to speak. I could go on and tell all of the events held and that are planned, but that is why we meet every two weeks at local coffee shops to discuss these things.

Our organization has made a dramatic shift this semester to include more participation. Many active members have volunteered to take a leadership role for activities and events. It is greatly appreciated and is always extended to anyone interested. If you even don’t want to take on the duties of planning an event, just by being involved you will learn a great deal, meet new people, and network with community leaders. As students, we spend much of our time preparing for and attending class, to gain experience outside the classroom the USA is there for you. There are great opportunities for you to write, volunteer, gain work experience, organize programs, take meaningful trips, and just have fun! We need all those interested in urban issues to actively participate in the association. With your ideas, expertise, and commitment, our organization will be successful. Please stay tuned for upcoming activities and plan to get involved! If you have questions, concerns, or suggestions please send an email and always be sure to check out our website.

Thank you, Chuck Alcorn
U.S.A. President

Above: Newly constructed building of the Southside Works
Below: Historic buildings facing East Carson St.
SOUTH SIDE NEW & OLD

Continued from Page 1

and Naturalization Service. In terms of housing, there are 69 senior homes, 30 affordable town homes, 270 rental apartments, and 120 condos located on the property. Rick Belloli, executive director of the South Side Local Development Company (SSLDC), added, “When complete, the site will have three times the jobs and three times the tax base of the Waterfront development in Homestead because it is built to that level of density.”

However, a development this dense and multi-faceted may threaten the economic vitality of the stores, restaurants, and bars on East Carson Street, or it may fail to integrate with the rest of the South Side in terms of history and neighborhood character. Though only time will tell on the project’s ultimate impact, city agencies and the South Side’s community organizations have employed several strategies to prevent this from happening.

For example, the residents of the South Side community were involved with the project from the very beginning. Belloli explained that LTV Steel contacted the SSLDC about 15 years ago to inform them that the corporation was closing the plant and to ask what the community wanted done with the space. After Pittsburgh’s Urban Redevelopment Authority bought the property, they worked with the community to explore its options until it developed a plan that everyone could agree upon. The South Side Planning Forum, which includes the SSLDC, developed a South Side Works Steering Committee to monitor the development process. It keeps the community informed about new developments by inviting the public to the Forum’s meetings and by providing information for articles in the South Pittsburgh Reporter.

Now that many of the South Side Works’ retail establishments have opened, the SSLDC is working to ensure that the new development and East Carson Street’s businesses are complimentary, not competitive. Belloli explained that the Soffer Organization has signed a written agreement limiting the square footage that can be devoted to restaurants in the South Side Works, because that is the primary trade of East Carson Street. A liaison at the Soffer Organization is also trying to create a shuttle that will run from the South Side Works to Station Square.

The SSLDC is also engaged in programs designed to enhance the businesses on East Carson Street. These include a façade lighting project to emphasize the architecture of East Carson Street’s historic buildings, opportunities for a visual display consultant to advise local businesses on how they can improve their visual marketing, and a program where “secret shoppers” visit these local stores and report on their service or appearance. SSLDC hold programs, such as the Mid-Winter Soup Contest, that connect the South Side Works to the other businesses in the neighborhood so that it won’t be a “stand-alone district.”

Belloli pointed out that the stores in the South Side Works, including REI and Urban Outfitters, tend to draw more regional businesses while the shops and restaurants on East Carson Street have a more local set of customers.

“It [the South Side Works] is raising the profile of Carson Street to those who weren’t aware of it before,” he said, adding that some businesses have actually seen increases. City agencies and the SSLDC are also working to keep up appearances in terms of East Carson Street’s historic architecture. The SSLDC Design Committee, which is made up of local volunteers with design expertise, reviews each building in the development. Moreover, the East Carson Street Local Historic District has been extended to include some of the frontage of the South Side Works. The structures in that area will maintain the architectural characteristics of East Carson Street by mimicking the size and scale of the historic buildings and by being located close to the street.

Bob Reppe, city zoning administrator at Pittsburgh’s Department of City Planning, said that the buildings fronting on East Carson Street will be made of historic materials, such as brick, while buildings closer to the river will be made of more contemporary steel and glass. He added that buildings east of the East Carson Street Local Historic District will be based on a more contemporary module – larger with wider bases.

With projects of this scale, it can be difficult to gain full support of the residents in spite of efforts to integrate the project into the surrounding neighborhood. Belloli explained that though individual residents have different perspectives on the South Side Works, “for the most part, we have had strong support. There’s always a concern that the site won’t meet the needs of every person, but the site’s not big enough to do that. The city’s not big enough to do that.”

He added that while the South Side Works development has been very gradual, “it was designed to do the best for the neighborhood and the city in the long term.”

FROM THE COORDINATOR

The Urban Studies Program continues to grow as more and more students determine that a study of the urban environment is interesting, enlightening and valuable, especially in light of the fact that over 50 percent of the world’s population lives in an urban place. The most exciting aspect of the program is the continued expansion of the Comparative Urbanism Concentration, a necessary and exciting endeavor considering the reality of economic and cultural globalization. In order to fully participate in this globalization process it is essential that students become as informed as possible. One of the best ways to accomplish this is through field research. Although the Paris trip last year, 2004, was a great success I was unable to get funding to take students to Paris this spring. However, I have been assured that I will be able to take students enrolled in the “International Urbanism Seminar” in the spring of 2006.

In order to make the European field trip even more worthwhile, I will be planning a London/Paris comparative trip to be offered next spring. Currently I envision a two-week trip, spending a week in each global city. While the two cities lend themselves to an interesting comparison because of their similar roles in the global economy, the history of each city is quite different. So, I’m headed to London this summer to plan for what will be an exciting field trip next spring.

Be sure to enroll in URBNST 1700, “International Urbanism” next year.

Dr. Carolyn Carson
As an American abroad doing my spring semester in London, I’ve come across some small but significant differences between European cities and American ones. Surprise surprise, almost all of them have to do with public transportation. One of my favorite activities while being here in London is taking the London Underground. The Brits are completely spoiled in this regard as they complain about the “tube” all day long. They totally take it for granted. Coming from the land of hardly any public transportation, taking the tube is a great joy. But it’s not only the fact that they have public transportation here, but how well it is designed and laid out that makes it great. Every important destination is honored with its very own stop on one of the many color coded lines. Any place that you may need to get to is within a maximum 10 minute walk to a tube stop. The many different lines connect at various points, so getting on the wrong train, missing your stop, or simply getting lost are all small inconveniences. You simply change your route or hop onto a different train. So simple, yet so helpful.

My next favorite thing about London’s transportation is the buses. Not only is the double decker bus thing cool and symbolizes London, but it’s really useful. The buses don’t have to be as long to fit people and are therefore easier to turn, maneuver, etc. The top floor is also a great way to see the city. Buses also run 24 hours, just slightly less frequently. By far the greatest feature of the buses is how easy they are to use. As a visitor who knows nothing about the city, even I was able to manage the buses successfully. On the front of each bus is printed multiple destinations so it is easy to recognize where the bus is going. Each bus stop has a small information pole that has the numbers of each bus and where they go to. There have been multiple occasions where I have had no idea where I was and simply found a bus stop, looked up something I recognized, took it there, and then took the correct bus home. If I ever did that in Pittsburgh I would wind up in the boonies somewhere. The little extra effort put forth in directions, hours, and maps really makes the London transport system far superior to any city I’ve seen in the U.S.; even New York City’s transport pales in comparison.

During my time here in London, I’ve also managed to do some traveling. I was able to get over to Amsterdam while here and that city is unreal, for multiple reasons that would take a whole other article to explain. However, besides Amsterdam’s many interesting points, from the urban perspective, it was also very different. Amsterdam is made up of a ring of canals, so many people live in boats or use boats as transportation. It’s a small city, so besides walking, BIKES (yes bikes) are the most widely used mode of transportation. The city has routes alongside the cars that are specifically for cyclists and the amount of times I got an impatient bell ring to signal “get out of the way” was numerous. Getting your bike stolen in Amsterdam is the equivalent of a totaling your car in the U.S.

All in all, seeing how things are done in European cities compared to the U.S., transportation concerned, has been no contest. We just don’t have any public transit yet. I’m actually rather worried about when I return to the U.S. and become horribly frustrated with the lack of journey methods to different places throughout Pittsburgh. Do we even have buses anymore? If someone could let me know about that, I’d really appreciate it, thanks. Also, in London, they spell Curb, KERB. Weird huh? Cheers!
Walking down any neighborhood or small town commercial corridor, also known as "main street," you notice many of its features. Just a few of the features include the great architectural qualities, the easy walk from the local residential area, and the amount of character and sense of place that it provides. Unfortunately, the things that stand out even more are the boarded up windows, dilapidating buildings, vacant lots and empty store fronts. It is apparent that all too many commercial districts have been abandoned in recent decades. To revive these areas there is a program available that can help undo the neglect of our nation’s main streets. Wanting to learn more about their problems and solutions, I pursued an internship with this Main Street program, and what better place to do it than in my hometown, Charleroi, Pennsylvania.

Charleroi, located 25 miles south of Pittsburgh along the Monongahela River, is like any other small town. Early in its history, Charleroi established itself as the place to shop in the Mid-Mon Valley with department stores, entertainment facilities and a general location for the community to gather. Now the town is struggling to maintain its population and preserve the feel of a place to go. Like most towns throughout the nation, Charleroi saw downtown businesses close and shoppers dwindle. The vitality of many main streets declined during the 60s and 70s as shopping malls, chain stores, and freeway construction drew customers away. The story repeated itself in towns throughout the nation as people stopped seeing the main street as a destination for shopping and saw it as just another thoroughfare for people to drive through or around.

During my internship I learned many problems that towns, such as Charleroi, must face. A few problems that I see in Charleroi that other towns are dealing with is a closed theater waiting to be reopened, an abundance of tanning/nail/hair salons throughout downtown, and competition with a Wal-Mart located ten minutes away. Also, the large size of Charleroi’s downtown makes it difficult to fill every storefront. Those vacancies, although not significant, has an affect on a person’s feeling of a thriving area.

Another problem is the amount of people who shop at and use main streets. A shopping district depends on much of its residential population and those who are working downtown to support the businesses. People living in nearby towns will only be attracted to come to an event or specialty shop that is not located in their community’s struggling main street. With a town consisting of a small population, visitors and people who work downtown make up a large part of business transactions. The day-time population has a tremendous effect on main streets, but most businesses are deciding to locate in suburban office parks instead of these communities. As for the residents of a community, many are very loyal to the main street while others are oblivious to the assets surrounding them. In Charleroi, for example, it is not surprising for someone who lives blocks away from downtown to jump in their car and drive to Lowe’s instead of walking to the local hardware store (No wonder people are getting so fat).

The Charleroi Main Street program has been trying to solve these problems with an array of initiatives. There are a variety of ways to get people back downtown to do their shopping instead of driving to chain stores. One way is to make a walking path on downtown sidewalks, which would also promote physical activity. The addition of mile markers on the sidewalks would provide an alternate means of exercise for regular gym goers. Another way is to open a small history and art center in a downtown building. Charleroi recently opened one, enticing people to learn the town’s history and promoting community pride by showcasing local art. It is also important to hold a variety of events for all age groups. For example, outdoor concerts featuring local bands are held throughout the summer months and a weekly activity is held for kids to come downtown.

Participation from businesses is crucial in revitalizing main streets. The events and activities that are held downtown are dependent upon the sponsorship provided by local businesses. Another important aspect is trying to convince retailers to stay open later, allowing those who attend events to shop in the late evening. Also, the appearance of town is based on what businesses decide to do. By participating in a façade restoration program as well as sweeping sidewalks and cleaning windows, the town’s image will be boosted. The progression is slow, but none the less it is progress and will start to make downtown a destination for people to relax and have fun.

Success on Main Street can happen once again. I just look at what has been done on the South Side to know that it can work. The efforts underway in Charleroi and other towns will hopefully have a lasting effect on people. Allowing them to realize there are benefits of living in these traditional towns, including a short walk to the historic church, corner grocery store, revived theater and many specialty shops. With the Main Street program, the appreciation of community values represented by these places will grow and going downtown will become a part of everyday life for residents. It has been mentioned that this effort pursues times that are no more; "romanticizing the past and denying the future." I can not help but think that for hundreds of years people were concentrated in a walkable area. Today the trend is shifting, allowing us to become less of a community connected by sidewalks and more like a metropolitan region that is connected by highways. The way people are living has changed, but I do not consider it for the better.
The Hypertext City

By: Sean Capperis, USA Business Manager

As I’m writing this article, the weather outside in Pittsburgh right now is fairly disgusting. Through this misty gloom, my Central Oakland windows are showing me darkened tree limbs with drops of water at their tips, clouds rising out of Povar Hall, and Presbyterian Hospital opening its arms to fog.

The landscape outside is similar to what the internet shows as urban space. The ease of disseminating information on the internet along with the dynamic design representations of Flash and Photoshop both allow a mass of hypertext facsimiles of the urban landscape to appear in my web browser. So many of these sites, anything from “urban e-zines” to online works of urban art focus so much on the gritty details and utility of cities, something I would normally be able to see daily stepping out of our campus. Does Mumford’s idea of urban drama extend itself to the cities of cyberspace? So many sites celebrating the urban form can embrace the beauty of urban life and urban decay, but not without its real-life inspiration.

Pointing toward the exuberance of urban life is Spacing, a Toronto-based magazine on the urban landscape. The magazine publishes selected material online at www.spacing.ca, some of which now includes alley tours, photo essays of subway tiles and posters, and a study on work and play in Toronto. Although this site concentrates so much on the places of Toronto, the media smacks of universality for city dwellers, showing the life in scenes we may pass daily. The photo essay on posters is reminiscent of the poster columns outside our own union, and the article on Toronto’s buskers may certainly be fresh to the average Pittsburgher, in a city with relatively few street performers. The media—photographic and written—paint pictures of life in another North American city and the universality of making ends meet, even if it is playing a guitar at the edge of a public square.

Moving toward the idea of physical decay (and even online decay, as this site has been untouched for almost a year), Hybridia showcases pieces of the Los Angeles landscape (www.hybridia.com). Its archive, still online, shows landscapes in continuously rotating 360-degree panoramas where a user may click on certain objects to see either more detail or another level of a panorama. One of the issues, “Urban Gothic,” portrays Harbor Freeway Junction—the point where two freeways and two rail lines intersect on two different levels. Here, clicking on the appropriate piece of the landscape will show another floor of the monumentally concrete transit hub.

The urban landscape on the web even takes a fictional form. The German 99 Rooms project is a collaboration of four artists of different media putting together a vacant, dystopic, serpentine form of rooms in what seems to be an abandoned industrial building (www.99rooms.com). What results is a full-screen interactive Flash representation of decaying rooms, where mouse-overs, clicks, and drags cause elements of the landscape to change or appear. Pieces of delicately rendered graffiti art moves like the subject its representing (a bug skittering across a wall), lines appear from an invisible aerosol can, and in one of the rooms, an imprisoned graffiti figure whimpers as the pointer moves the lock on its door. This online work of art seems to symbolize the life and character of the abandoned urban landscape after a loss of usefulness.

In these three examples, we view these fragmented snippets of urban life—we are limited by a digital depth of field from seeing past freeway horizons, scrollbars from seeing more than a small expanse of Toronto subway tiles, and the familiarity of any other number of rooms. Something limits our view in each of these places (sometimes it may be distance or unfamiliarity), and yet we may focus on some single, pixelated theme. These real views of our urban landscape somehow fit into the design tools of the online realm—the photographic talents and simulated movements give us the feeling of moving through the landscape, and then urban elements move visually in a way not possible in the real world. These bursts of the digitized city may symbolize a more dynamic sort of life (a highway crossing gyrating for the traveler so its exits may be easier to find), yet without experiencing the real city, these representations would come to nothing. Urban naysayers may argue that artificiality is in both the city and the cyber-city, yet in both, there is also a shade of the true urban experience.

Habitat for Humanity

What is there better to do on a Saturday than build a house? This is exactly what a group of USA members did in mid February. Even though the temperature was in the teens, the group of students set off to Washington, Pennsylvania early in the morning with the Pitt Chapter of Habitat for Humanity. Once we arrived the cold had set in with our feet and hands becoming numb. Shortly afterward that all changed when we started our work and forgot about the cold, with building walls and putting up siding.

In the process of helping that Saturday, we met new people, learned about a community, obtained skills, and helped a large group to build a house for a family who can not afford one. Even though we only did a small portion of work for this large project, we had a great time and hope that the USA will help several times each semester. If anyone is interested in Pitt’s chapter of Habitat or would like more information, take a browse at their website. www.pitt.edu/~sorc/habitat
PILGRIMAGE TO OLYMPIC GAMES IN GREECE
By Liann Tsoukas, Urban Research Seminar Professor

In August of 2004, my family and I made, what I called, a pilgrimage. Three children under seven, two grandparents, and my husband and I did not heed all of the warnings and instead, if you listened to our detractors, risked our lives in order to attend the Olympic Games in Athens. My father is from Greece, and migrated to the United States after World War II at age sixteen. My maternal grandparents also emigrated from Greece, and thus I was reared in an extremely proud ethnic tradition. When I was a child, my family returned to Greece regularly to check in on all the relatives and restore our connection. When I heard the Olympics Games would be returning to their place of origin, there was not a shred of doubt in my mind that we would be there.

I had not been to Athens for ten years. I remembered the broken down airport, the dilapidated semi gravel main roads, the dirt and dust, the nearly impassable back roads, and the six hour drive, up and down the mountains, to my father's village. The news reports were full of tales of the Greeks' incompetence and inability to pull off such a grand event. There were stories of half built stadiums and roofless arenas, of secret agents parading through the airport carrying dummy bombs in open sight and not being noticed, of terrorists penetrating Greek security with little effort. And you better believe I heard it from all sides. "What are you thinking?!?!" indignant relatives asked me. "How could you be so foolish?" nonplussed Greek family friends implored, not even trying to hide their harsh judgment. My passionate responses, focused on the significance of exposing the kids to Hellenic spirit, fell upon deaf ears. At the end, I panicked and almost caved in to the constant nagging.

When August arrived, there we all sat in an airplane traveling to Greece, preparing for the worst. When we arrived at the new Athens airport, however, my memories of the rickety old airport were quickly replaced by the sight of a state of the art facility. It was glossy and white, clean and sleek, and replete with security and official Olympics personnel. The trip into Athens was nothing short of shocking; an English speaking Greek cab driver, a wide multi-lane highway, with sophisticated tolls and signage, and within twenty minutes we were in the apartment in the center of Athens unpacking our bags. I began to feel better. We had already successfully overcome three seemingly insurmountable obstacles: the flight, the airport, and the trip into town.

We all walked down to Constitution Square, and I was reminded of how stunning the sight is. But now, with my small children taking it all in, it was even more compelling. The changing of the guards, the fountains, and the people relaxing at the outdoor cafes reminded me of how the authenticity of Greece remained, but now it was presented in an improved urban framework. The metro system is efficient and on schedule, and the stations integrate archaeological ruins into their structure. There is no eating, drinking, or smoking allowed. The trains and the stations are clean, cool, and spectacular. The main hotels, such as the Grand Bretange and the Hilton, underwent major renovations. The prices skyrocketed as well, but you did not have to pay to sneak into the marble monument of a bathroom on the main floor. And of course, as a backdrop to this new modern city, was the ever present and aesthetically gripping Parthenon.

The Opening Ceremonies and Olympic Games in Athens were cause for great Hellenic pride. Despite the bad press, rocky prognosis, and general pessimism regarding the ability of the Greeks to "pull it off," they did so with great accomplishment. The Olympics connected Greek heritage to life in an ultra modern urban setting, and I am tremendously grateful that my family and I witnessed it.
There’s you, three children, a pair of parents, a pair of grandparents, and a great grandparent living in a small two-bedroom apartment. All nine of you crowd into a small living room in stiflingly humid ninety-five degree Fahrenheit heat. You’d turn on that ancient fan to cool the room, but the electricity cut out an hour ago. A cold shower might help, but these old pipes only deliver water in a thin and unsatisfying stream. This is your life as a typical Cuban, sweating away the summer in Havana’s private space. I was glad to be studying at the University of Havana on a semester abroad during Cuba’s cooler months. However, even during these months I felt confined in Havana’s private space, with its poor infrastructure, lack of light, and overcrowding. Indeed, the condition of Havana’s private space encourages its residents to use the city’s more spacious and comfortable public space for a variety of activities that cannot they cannot accomplish in private.

In Havana and other world cities, private conditions determine public uses. The dense cities of Paris and New York lack private greenspace. Thus, residents of these cities play sports, eat, relax and enjoy nature in Luxemburg Gardens or Central Park. Such parks see less use in Los Angeles, where everyone has at least a small yard. Thus, private conditions provide a means by which to understand public uses.

Havana’s residents both greatly cherish and greatly lack private space. A normal Havana residence consists of a small one-bedroom apartment with a kitchen, a common area (often used as another bedroom), a bathroom and the occasional balcony. However, the number of people concentrated into such a residence often constrains that space most. In Cuba, children rarely afford to leave their parents’ home. Thus, Havana’s apartments often contain four generations of people. Apart from cooking and laundry, residents of Havana prefer to conduct their daily activities outside of stuffy third- and fourth-floor apartments.

I regularly experienced the limitations of private space when I took private dance lessons illegally from the daughter of a man who worked in my residence. Paco cleared furniture from the 6’ x 12’ living room of their one-bedroom apartment weekly to accommodate four dance students. Paco is fortunate in that only his wife, his daughter, his son, and his daughter’s boyfriend live in their tiny home. Although Paco hosted us in the largest room in his apartment, this space proved difficult for two or three couples to dance in, and led to many collisions.

Limited private space also complicated sexual acts for many members of my study abroad group. A woman in my group found discomfort in her boyfriends’ home when his boyfriend’s grandmother slept in the next room, with his mother screened only by a curtain, and his siblings in the same space. Although Cuban’s often liberal attitudes about sex made intercourse under such conditions socially acceptable (indeed, one grandmother advised against eating less than a half-hour before hand), my colleagues did not find these conditions satisfactory. Though some chose to have sex under these “private” conditions, social and physical constraints stifled the sexual experience for citizens and foreigners alike in Havana.

Indeed, when Havana’s residents cannot relatively comfortably achieve activities ranging from to sex to simply spending time with friends, private actions are forced into the public sphere. Although Havana contains less public space than many other international cities, its public realm takes on more varied uses than most cities.

Havana’s residents find the seawall (the Malecón) that runs much of the city’s length the most versatile of its public spaces. People from all parts of the city congregate at the point of this wall closest to their home. Groups ranging in number from couples to more than twenty people sit on the Malecón on any night of the week, drinking rum and beer, and telling jokes. Traveling musicians often inspire dance, and many people bring their own instruments. People most frequently bring their social activities to the Malecón and similar public spaces because they lack space for gathering in their homes and can’t afford the expensive prices of private bars and clubs.

Sexual interactions also frequently occur in public space, contrasting heavily with public uses in other international cities. Public space not only offers couples greater comfort in their acts, but it also makes them more anonymous. Behind the veil of secluded spaces, night and anonymity, the public realm in Havana hides sexual acts far better and provides more comfort than private space does. Others studying in my group and I frequently either witnessed or engaged in public sexual acts. Kissing and more intimate “making-out” occurred regularly in any number of public places, regardless of the presence of others. Some people (usually male) masturbated in public with a slightly higher degree of covertness, with less frequency and usually covered by cloth. Though residents recognize that public masturbation occurs often, they do not consider it acceptable. By contrast, Havana’s frequently have sex in public, the social acceptance of such acts depend on their form. Cuban society shuns homosexual forms of intercourse (despite its commonality) far more than heterosexual acts. The anonymity of public space likely provides a convenient cover for men who live with family members and cannot openly enjoy homosexual lifestyles. Social norms aside, the regularity of all sexual acts in Havana’s public space implies that residents prefer such arrangements over private space.

Although sex serves as the most overtly controversial use of public space, it also provides the most salient example of public uses depending on the availability of private space. Up until now, urban theorists’ discussions of public space have focused on attracting people through design rather than necessity. Indeed, the Havana example seems to reveal that necessity dictates the use of public space. This idea provides planners with a new framework by which to increase and manage the use of public space in the future. Future urban theorists should examine how private constraints correlate to public uses in the future to create a necessity for desirable uses of public space somewhere between Havana’s sexualized uses and many American cities’ under-use.
In his observations of the working class districts in Industrial England, Friedrich Engels made a connection between physical deterioration and the misery of the poor. Expressing a similar theory, Frederick Law Olmsted justified his proposals for public parks by reasoning that space can act as a natural deterrent to crime and vice. The common element in their perspectives is the idea that the urban environment has an affect on residents’ quality of life. Studies have shown that people associate dirt and trash with unsafe conditions, which demonstrates the role that perception plays in the association between physical surroundings and standard of living. The extent to which the city’s appearance inspires acts of civic responsibility or encourages criminal behavior may never be fully known. However, those who live in urban areas may still take advantage of unique opportunities to make a positive impact on their physical surroundings.

One Saturday morning in the fall of 2004, I set out with a group from the Oakland Planning and Development Corporation to pick up trash in a neighborhood nearby. Despite the dreary weather, there was a cheerful feeling among the volunteers as we slowly made our way down the street. The demographic of the area included a long-term elderly population as well as students, and several residents came out to talk with us. One woman in particular stands out in my memory because of our conversation. First, she sincerely thanked us for our efforts, and then she mentioned that she herself is usually the one to pick up trash along the block after the latest party. After reflecting on her comment, I realized that its significance lies in the fact that as students, we have a responsibility to all of the residents in Oakland. The way we behave has an impact on their lives, because when we make efforts such as keeping the streets clean, it changes the way long-term community members feel about their home and their neighbors.

We all have principles that we strongly support and are not afraid to voice. Whatever our opinion on issues such as human rights and tolerance, we must back up our words with action. Our actions have the power to demonstrate our ideals and make an impact. I believe that the conditions of the streets can have an affect on the way residents feel about their homes. I also feel that it is a civic responsibility to respect our communities by caring for the area in which we live. The influence I have had by volunteering to clean up Oakland is not trivial. I realize that there will inevitably be another layer of trash along the block in a week or so. However, by taking action on my values, I have shown others that I truly believe in my own value system. The work of volunteer groups may help foster better relations between community residents with different values and lifestyles. Whether or not community relations improve, it is still worth my time to volunteer. Hopefully, you find your actions worth your time also, and as we live out our principles, we will begin to see positive changes in our communities.

Field Placements

**Spring Semester**

Chuck Alcorn  
Dept. of City Planning, City of Pittsburgh  
Alexa Born  
Tutoring Somali refugees in Pittsburgh  
Sarah Bruemmer  
Carnegie Museum  
David Fitzpatrick  
Dept. of City Planning, City of Pittsburgh  
Dan Heryer  
Mon Valley Initiative  
Rachel Leavitt  
FORGE Program  
James Mettham  
Dept. of City Planning, City of Pittsburgh  
Bonnie Nesbitt  
Bloomfield-Garfield CDC  
Henry Pyatt  
Dept. of City Planning, City of Pittsburgh  
Michael Seamans  
Free Ride  
Alison West  
Court Appointed Special Advocate Program

**INVITATION FOR SUBMISSIONS**

Do you want to make an announcement? Do you volunteer for an organization that people should know about? Want to tell us about your internship experience? Do you have something that you would like to share? Do you have an opinion? We’ll print it if it relates to urban studies. This is your organization too and our goal is to foster dialogue about such issues so to interpret and understand the neighborhoods that we live in.

E-mail: sorc+urbansa@pitt.edu

**Urban Studies Graduates**

**Spring 2005**

Kiran Adams  
David Fitzpatrick  
Rachel Leavitt  
Chuck Alcorn  
Daniel Heryer  
Jason Stevens  
Sarah Bruemmer  
Jocelyn Horner  
Nicki Weyant  
Darrin Dixon  
Nathan Jones  
Jonathon Zuk  
Joshua Punchur  
Nathan Hall  
Stephanie Fowler  
Matthew Pfeifer  
Brad Reese

**Fall 2004**

Congratulations & Good Luck!