

Is New York almost alright? – Conference Highlights

Overarching Themes

It is worth reminding ourselves that we are at a point in time where more than half of the world's population lives in cities, and that number is increasing exponentially, particularly in the developing world.

Ricky Burdett

Civility means that the diversity of urban life becomes a source of mutual strength rather than a source of estrangement and civic bitterness. In the past this issue has been framed in terms of ethnicity or culture and in the current period of inequality, I think it needs to be increasingly framed in terms of economics.

Richard Sennett

Architecture has a role in the manufacturing of identity in urban contexts and the unique ability to make something visible long before it has actually happened. Architecture creates a sense of what a city is like. It is what we use to identify a city. An apparently extremely primitive totem pole, and yet this ancient throwback has never been in demand more than it is now.

Deyan Sudjic

Governance is clearly more important than ever. The management of complexity in places where rights, knowledge and education now rightly have been allowed to give a voice to neighbourhoods and individuals means that the task of governing cities is more complex than ever before. Citywide interests conflict with the most local of interests and it clearly takes the legitimacy of city leaders to bring about change. Examples such as Bogotá's cycle ways, Washington's renaissance, New York's control of its education system, or London's congestion charge would not have come to fruition without the legitimacy of ballot boxes.

Tony Travers

For researchers and policy makers, I think one of the critical strategies is to disaggregate the global economy into the multiple highly specialized circuits that compose it, from the upper many specialized financial systems to the small and semi-formal international real estate markets that immigrants set up. When you conduct this operation, two things happen. First, you can actually study this very slippery concept of the 'global'. More importantly, for those of us concerned with cities, you can locate your city on many global circuits and detect the links and strategic geographies that connect it to a whole bunch of other cities.

Saskia Sassen

Is New York almost alright? – Conference Highlights

The impact of broad demographic, market and cultural forces is also remaking the suburbs. With suburbs taking on a greater share of America's population, they are beginning to look more and more like traditional cities, in population and in form. Low density sprawl still dominates by far the physical landscape, but it is clear that the market increasingly emphasizes the urban in suburban.

Bruce Katz

I get the sense that in the economic realm, we are essentially accepting the neo-liberal global economic agenda when we think of cities as reactive mechanisms. E.g. it goes without saying that there are no more manufacturing jobs in New York, but the implication of that goes unexplored, even when it has a series of important meanings for the environment. We talk easily about the availability to walk to your job, but on the other hand wider environmental issues are ignored. A small example but not a trivial one: to send one kiwi fruit from New Zealand to London requires the emission of five times the weight of the fruit in greenhouse gases. We will need to be more inclusive in our discussions of urban economic self-sufficiency and sustainability.

Michael Sorkin

New York City does work, but it could work a lot better. For the money we invest in our health system, we don't need the infant mortality rates that we see in Harlem and other parts of the city; for the amounts that we invest in transport, we don't need to see our subway system lingering on the edge of collapse; for the money that we invest in housing, we don't have to have housing that has twenty-year lives and thirty-year mortgages. We could do a lot for the people living in low-income housing. We don't have to segregate our communities.

Ronald Shiffman

Governance and Planning

All city governments are dysfunctional but each is dysfunctional in its own way. New York City does not have the power to plan, let alone control, its own future nor its connection to the surrounding region. The British Parliament has granted the Greater London Authority the "brain" functions to carry this type of planning, yet not the "muscle" that the City of New York has in its wide provision of services.

Gerald Frug

I look at citizens just as nuclear power. Properly channelled and harnessed, nuclear power can power the city, otherwise it can destroy it. It is my goal to try to channel and inspire that citizen power to drive a new agenda for our city. In my humble estimation, when you are a mayor you go for the 80-20 or 70-30 rule. Most of the times you act in the "butler" function – you are basically just taking orders and deliver

Is New York almost alright? – Conference Highlights

the services as well as you can. But twenty or thirty percent of the time you are in business because you believe there is a “trustee” function. It is your job to keep citizens satisfied so you can work on those functions of initiating agendas for change, the important planning functions of city government.

Anthony Williams

I think that in every city, but particularly cities in the developing world, urban design can be an extremely powerful tool to construct equality and integration. Even if we do not have income equality, we can aspire to construct equality in the distribution of quality of life when we act so that the public good prevails over private interests. Just to mention a local example: if the hundreds of miles of waterfront that New York has were used for public space rather than private land, a lot of equality would be created.

Enrique Peñalosa

Throughout the world there is a tension between cities and higher political entities. While the powerlessness of cities is often discussed, I want to point out the actual powers that cities do have to control their own destinies. Land-use and planning is probably the area where cities exercise their power the most significantly. Throughout my career, I have never ever seen a time when the City of New York was not creating, setting and trying to implement the land-use and planning agenda. Every significant project that has taken place in New York City, and every strategy, has been driven by the Mayor, not by the Governor, not by any regional authorities, but by the Mayor.

Carl Weisbrod

Rather than the beginning of an urban age, I think we are witnessing the end of one, and the dawn of a metropolitan, or even megalopolitan age. The vast urbanized areas or networked cities of today are the new unit of production and urban activity. They need to be discussed and mentioned. In terms of governance, neither New York nor London – the thirty one county tri-state region NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area and what Peter Hall calls “Roseland” England, the rest of the South East stretching from Portsmouth to Ipswich – has any kind of regional governance system nor an official regional plan.

Robert Yaro

Labour Markets and Workplace

Despite the dictum that the telecommunications revolution would eliminate the need for face-to-face contact and make cities obsolete, metropolitan areas today represent privileged locations of firms in the field of new media, internet services, financial-business, design and other forms of knowledge and cultural production. We must not forget urban manufacturing either. This “silent partner” in the urban economy supports other key sectors such as the creative, cultural and health care industries at

Is New York almost alright? – Conference Highlights

the same time that it serves as a gateway to social integration by providing important employment opportunities with low entry barriers for people with different cultural backgrounds and qualifications.

Dieter Läßle

New York has lost diversity in terms of the sectoral composition of its economy. The project-by-project orientation of its core industries also has particular implications for the spaces of the city, both public spaces and quasi-public, or what I call liminal spaces of informal negotiation and deal-making. It creates a particular kind of urban energy but also a fragmented and contested city, composed of villages and districts.

Susan Christopherson

In architecture, we may be witnessing a shift of gear from the pursuit of physical flexibility that represents change to a search for formal qualities that inspire change without imposing it – the kind of resilience found in armatures such as grids, intensities of surfaces and suggested voids. Our risk-society, as sociologist Ulrich Beck reminds us, needs to realize that technological cures are inadequate for many of its problems, caused by technology itself. Instead, social logics and complexities will need to be made more accessible to all members of society. I would like to think of the new outputs in architecture research as a step in that direction.

Hashim Sarkis

Global businesses now operate very differently from what they did a decade ago. I am deeply impressed by the impact that information technologies have had on every aspect of work. Assumptions of co-location and synchrony no longer correspond with the realities of these businesses, we need a radical change from the assumptions on which the architecture of cities in the nineteenth and twentieth century was based. We have to be inventive in the way we design, deliver and manage buildings. The workplace needs to be prepared for mobility, volatility, permeability and complementarity of the big and small, what is internal to the firm and what is not.

Frank Duffy

New York and other world cities generate on the one hand wealth, knowledge and creativity, but on the other, inequality, segregation and poverty. As much as we need policies to sustain the positives, we need to wrestle with the negative and think of how to get healthcare benefits to workers in a flexible labour force; how to insure minimum livable wages; how to protect the manufacturing jobs that provide entry-level opportunities and are now threatened by the rise in real estate values; how to create mixed-use spaces that also benefit low-income communities.

Brad Lander

Transport and Mobility

When you compare the prices of parking lots and street parking in central Manhattan, you can see that the latter is subsidized by \$17 per hour. This is a highly inefficient and inequitable land-use decision for public space in the core of such an important world economic centre. I think that New York has good chances in terms of a sustainable future. Small qualitative changes can have big quantitative effects.

Hermann Knoflacher

In transport, we do not really need new ideas or innovative planning solutions, they are all on the table. What we need is twenty-first century organizational structures, we need new models for our agencies, agencies that deal with innovative funding, with the fact that there are stake-holder groups involved, that the systems that were once seen as independent are now highly interactive.

Robert Passwell

New York's Metropolitan Transit Authority needs an inflation-sensitive source of revenues that will fund the continuation of the capital investment in this system, and that's just for maintaining the existing system in a state of good repair, let alone the expansions needed to build a stronger city and bring more people into the central business district. It is both an intellectual curiosity and a political shame that people will not connect the dots between the fiscal resources and infrastructure needs.

Richard Ravitch

Architecture can help us re-think the potentials and possibilities of integrating urban transportation systems and urban structures. Buildings have been traditionally designed to contain static populations and activities. Yet, as capitalism evolves towards what has been described as a regime of flexible accumulation, the amounts of people that are engaged in dynamic activities is increasingly large. One possible contribution to respond to the increasing demands on mass transport is to change the way we conceive stations. To think of the transportation terminal as an object, an ascetic monument not connected to the social and commercial tissues of the city, is a missed opportunity to explore more contemporary forms of transportation space.

Alejandro Zaera-Polo

Public Life and Urban Space

Public space embodies a sense of belonging to the wider political community through an architecture of sympathy, it conveys a sense of safety in the crowd. Security is a "thick" public good, the most basic instrument to the preservation of *liberté, égalité et fraternité*. In this age of terrorist threats and sometimes unjustified fears, institutions

Is New York almost alright? – Conference Highlights

know how to protect their cities better. But the political meaning of cities remains extraordinarily powerful: the repertoires of people trying modestly to get along in their neighbourhoods have never been more important. They join and co-produce solutions together with their differences, as the Brooklynites of Paul Auster's books and films often do.

Sophie Body-Gendrot

The crime problems and insecurity issues that New Yorkers still face are spatially concentrated in specific neighbourhoods and call for solutions that reflect the unique problems in those neighbourhoods. Also, one cannot have a conversation on crime in New York City, or any other American city for that matter or in London as I understand developments there, without talking about race. The efforts of legal institutions in the city to control crime created a racial breach which is quite severe. There is a deep distrust for the police and lack of willingness to cooperate in investigations among minority populations.

Jeff Fagan

There is simply no proven connection between former Mayor Guiliani's theatrics of security and the decline in crime in New York. That would suggest that the choice of repression versus security is indeed a false dilemma. When we look at the role of design, in this context of great indeterminacy, two positions can be taken. We can demand the designers to design for security, to create designs that respond physically to threats. But we can also go also back to the most old fashioned of ideas for design and that is to design for delight. That is the default position for design, and appropriately so.

Harvey Molotch

We see a new kind of rhetoric, the word gentrification e.g. was clearly negative ten years ago and in places like this conference it is very noticeable that it is now used with clearly positive connotations. City centre is reduced to film screening, music, shopping, and fashion... We see a systematic laundering of the urban condition in the name of these four categories. Increasingly, the design of urban space has become a hyper-nostalgic celebration of its absence, another form of its denial.

Rem Koolhaas

Housing and Neighbourhoods

New York City is indeed built-out to its edges and yet it is now undergoing unprecedented immigration and population growth. This is a tremendous challenge to those of us in charge of planning this city. We must find places to channel this growth, while preserving neighbourhood character. We have a challenge to provide, in those neighbourhoods where we can grow, enough density to ensure affordability. Enough density to leverage open public space. Enough density to provide vitality and

Is New York almost alright? – Conference Highlights

vibrancy of neighbourhoods, while respecting the built fabric of adjacent communities.

Amanda Burden

We see incentives in zoning policy and the links between additional density and the creation of affordable housing as a bedrock way of fighting the potential increased segregation that the city may face as the result of rising real estate values. There has been attention in social policy in the US on how to break concentrations of poverty. Compared to this “pull” of integration policy, not enough attention has been given to the mechanisms to insure that any new community that we are creating, e.g. through re-zoning, is inclusive from its very beginning in terms of both income and race.

Shaun Donovan

The urban age that we talk about is of course a by-product and a pre-condition for the global economy as it is also part of the new economy. The new economy, however, relies on disparities. In the US, for example, eleven of the twenty fastest growing job categories are in the service sector, each of which pays less than two times minimum wage. I would suggest that if urban areas prosper, the agglomeration economies that support that growth will create even more disparities. The challenge in the housing sector is that as long as we consider housing a merit good, we will see an increasing disconnect between those labour markets and the housing market.

Nick Retsinas

I get quite impatient with how architects discuss what the city is. They are often insular and small in their view of what urban and social issues are. One of the things that we need is to change the bourgeois point of view and then begin to see the city from the point of view of poor people, in fact the majority of the people that live in cities today. When you take that standpoint you begin to understand concepts such as ‘community’ in a different light. Upper-middle class professionals may feel that urban societies have left the need for community behind. But for poor people community is essential, they need to aggregate in order not to be powerless and to create change. The same goes for inclusionary zoning, increasing FARs from 4 to 4.7 in re-zoning schemes to create affordability so poor people can live there does not really address the needs to replace the lost jobs so that the same people can secure their livelihoods.

Max Bond, Jr.