

HOUSING NOTES September 2017

Research Committee 43 Housing and the Built Environment

International Sociological Association

From the President

I hope this finds you well in these challenging times of extreme weather and earthquakes, reminding us all how important well built homes are but also how important it is that we take seriously climate change and where and how we develop our environment. To this end, Sarah Cooper, our newsletter editor, has written a short piece on planning for the weather (p 4).

Since our last newsletter, several of us gathered in Hong Kong for the RC43 conference **Unreal Estate? Rethinking Housing, Class and Identity** generously hosted by the City University of Hong Kong. We had great plenary sessions that introduced us to the complex landscape of housing and politics in Hong Kong, community activism and protest, and broader issues of financialization, globalization, and demographic shifts affecting our housing and communities. The paper sessions were packed with new information and insights, finding common themes and divergences, and openings for new research ideas and collaborations. The abstracts and posted papers are here: <http://programme.exordo.com/isa-rc43-2017/>

We are now looking forward to the **ISA World Congress 2018**, which will be held in Toronto, CA July 15-21. In addition to the panel sessions, we will plan some tours and opportunities to socialize! I urge you to join ISA and RC43 (or renew) especially if you are going to attend the World Congress. While I know not all are sociologists, the ISA makes it possible for the RC to participate in the World Congress. ISA membership reduces your registration fee for the conference. Furthermore, the ISA provides us some funding to support scholarships for selected ISA RC43 members (students and individuals from B-D countries) to attend. I hope to see you in Toronto.

Janet Smith, RC43 President

The lessons of Grenfell

Civilization can be judged, at least to some extent, by the minimum housing conditions which a society will tolerate for its members. Louis Wirth, 1947

The images of the burning and then burned-out Grenfell Tower in west London this past summer were shocking. The tragedy, especially now as more is known, raises too many questions about the maintenance of public housing, not only in London but in the world. It also raises serious questions about who we value as a society and reveals how those with little money are so poorly valued. The decision to take the cheaper solution – in this case cladding that was “less fire-resistant” because it would save money – is not only a matter of legal concern in terms of who is responsible but also a moral question for society: why would we allow such a decision to be made? The loss of life is an awful price to pay to learn that cost cutting can have tragic consequences, and that it is our government’s responsibility to ensure adequate maintenance of its assets. But has that lesson been learned? We all have to ask ourselves how this preventable disaster has changed how public housing is being managed and maintained in other countries and our own communities. How has Grenfell changed how local officials respond to the concerns of residents about the safety and upkeep of their housing? And equally if not more so, how has it changed how we treat those who are living in that housing or in need of it? Every day we need to ask these questions and work to assure safe, quality and affordable housing for all – not just those who can afford it.

For more information, see: Overview of what happened based on what is known to date:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-40272168> and News on opening of the public inquiry 14 September 2017: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-41262914>

ISA and RC43 events

2018 July 15-21. Toronto, Canada. XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology. **Abstracts are due Sept. 30th.**
<http://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/world-congress/toronto-2018/call-for-abstracts/>

Note that RC43 has two focused sessions and then an open session to which you can submit a paper to be placed in a session that we will organize, with a maximum of 7 sessions (4-5 papers).

Updates

ISA membership Joining ISA provides many benefits, including discounts on SAGE publications and access to SAGE journals, and reduced registration fees for the ISA World Congress. It also offers the possibility of scholarships through RC43, but you must be an ISA member to be considered! See <http://www.isa-sociology.org/en/membership/individual-membership/> for more information.

Please send ideas for updates as well as books, publications and events to feature on relevant housing and built environment policy, theory and practice to isa.rc43@gmail.com.

New books and publications

Curran, Winifred. 2018. *Gender and Gentrification*. New York: Routledge. www.routledge.com/Gender-and-Gentrification/Curran/p/book/9781138195844

“This book explores how gentrification often reinforces traditional gender roles and spatial constructions during the process of reshaping the labour, housing, commercial and policy landscapes of the city. It focuses in particular on the impact of gentrification on women and racialized men, exploring how gentrification increases the cost of living, serves to narrow housing choices, make social reproduction more expensive, and limits the scope of the democratic process. This has resulted in the displacement of many of the phenomena once considered to be the emancipatory hallmarks of gentrification, such as gayborhoods. The book explores the role of gentrification in the larger social processes through which gender is continually reconstituted. In so doing, it makes clear that the negative effects of gentrification are far more wide-ranging than popularly understood, and makes recommendations for renewed activism and policy that places gender at its core.” (from the Routledge website)

Hamraie, Aimi. 2017. *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/building-access

““All too often,” wrote disabled architect Ronald Mace, “designers don’t take the needs of disabled and elderly people into account.” *Building Access* investigates twentieth-century strategies for designing the world with disability in mind. Commonly understood in terms of curb cuts, automatic doors, Braille signs, and flexible kitchens, Universal Design purported to create a built environment for everyone, not only the average citizen. But who counts as “everyone,” Aimi Hamraie asks, and how can designers know? Blending technoscience studies and design history with critical disability, race, and feminist theories, *Building Access* interrogates the historical, cultural, and theoretical contexts for these questions, offering a groundbreaking critical history of Universal Design.

Hamraie reveals that the twentieth-century shift from “design for the average” to “design for all” took place through liberal political, economic, and scientific structures concerned with defining the disabled user and designing in its name. Tracing the co-evolution of accessible design for disabled veterans, a radical disability maker movement, disability rights law, and strategies for diversifying the architecture profession, Hamraie shows that Universal Design was not just an approach to creating new products or spaces, but also

a sustained, understated activist movement challenging dominant understandings of disability in architecture, medicine, and society.” (from the University of Minnesota Press website)

Madden, David and Marcuse, Peter. 2016. *In Defense of Housing*. Brooklyn: Verso Press.
www.versobooks.com/books/2111-in-defense-of-housing

“In every major city in the world there is a housing crisis. How did this happen and what can we do about it? Everyone needs and deserves housing. But today our homes are being transformed into commodities, making the inequalities of the city ever more acute. Profit has become more important than social need. The poor are forced to pay more for worse housing. Communities are faced with the violence of displacement and gentrification. And the benefits of decent housing are only available for those who can afford it.

In Defense of Housing is the definitive statement on this crisis from leading urban planner Peter Marcuse and sociologist David Madden. They look at the causes and consequences of the housing problem and detail the need for progressive alternatives. The housing crisis cannot be solved by minor policy shifts, they argue. Rather, the housing crisis has deep political and economic roots—and therefore requires a radical response.” (from the Verso website)

Watt, Paul and Peer Smets, Eds. 2017. *Social Housing and Urban Renewal*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Ltd. www.amazon.co.uk/Urban-Renewal-Social-Housing-Cross-National/dp/178714125X

“This book offers a cross-national perspective on contemporary urban renewal in relation to social rental housing. Social housing estates – as developed either by governments (public housing) or not-for-profit agencies – became a prominent feature of the 20th century urban landscape in Northern European cities, but also in North America and Australia. Many estates were built as part of earlier urban renewal, ‘slum clearance’ programs especially in the post-World War 2 heyday of the Keynesian welfare state. During the last three decades, however, Western governments have launched high-profile ‘new urban renewal’ programs whose aim has been to change the image and status of social housing estates away from being zones of concentrated poverty, crime and other social problems. This latest phase of urban renewal – often called ‘regeneration’ – has involved widespread demolition of social housing estates and their replacement with mixed-tenure housing developments in which poverty deconcentration, reduced territorial stigmatization, and social mixing of poor tenants and wealthy homeowners are explicit policy goals.

Academic critical urbanists, as well as housing activists, have however queried this dominant policy narrative regarding contemporary urban renewal, preferring instead to regard it as a key part of neoliberal urban restructuring and state-led gentrification which generate new socio-spatial inequalities and insecurities through displacement and exclusion processes. This book examines this debate through original, in-depth case study research on the processes and impacts of urban renewal on social housing in European, U.S. and Australian cities. The book also looks beyond the Western urban heartlands of social housing to consider how renewal is occurring, and with what effects, in countries with historically limited social housing sectors such as Japan, Chile, Turkey and South Africa.” (from the Emerald Publishing website)

Planning for the weather

The last few months have seen a significant number of major weather events around the world. From the recent hurricanes in the Caribbean, to floods and deadly monsoons in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, to extreme drought in East Africa and mudslides in Sierra Leone and the DR Congo (to name only a few), water has been moving in unexpected ways.

As the Earth urbanizes, cities take up increasing amounts of land and resources. In some cases, covering the landscape with roads and buildings produces huge areas of impermeable concrete and tarmac, causing flooding. In other cases, housing built on rapidly deforested hillsides is swept away by unstable soils hit by rain. In yet other areas, drought and deforestation cause migration and pressures on neighboring communities. Cities grow and spread, sprawling over the landscape and stressing local and regional ecosystems.

Increasingly, planners talk about building resilience into urban fabric. This means anticipating and preparing for major weather events before they occur, so that cities and communities are ready for them. Cities that experience extremes of water—not enough in one season, too much in another—can find ways to store water for dry periods. They can create drainage and water management plans to reduce runoff and overflow, and can create regional plans to support households in times of drought. Planners can also create emergency plans so that cities are not caught off guard by extreme weather events, and individual households know how to respond to protect themselves.

More importantly, however, we must think about **prevention**—as important as resilience is, how much better to be proactive and address the root causes of the problem? The implications of climate change are staggering; we must mitigate its impacts and lessen the need for resilience by reducing our impact on the earth.

Do you have good examples of solutions or strategies to mitigate climate change through design and development? Send them to Sarah Cooper at isa.rc43@gmail.com

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