

Editor's Introduction

Back to the Drawing Board: A Community Focus on Urban Renewal through Arts and Culture

**Drs. Eva Mendieta and Robin Hass Birky
Indiana University Northwest**

On November 2-4, 2006, international experts from Spain, England, and the United States joined local cultural and community leaders, artists, city planners, legislators, business groups, and theoreticians to explore the role arts and culture play in urban renewal. During this three-day dialogue at Indiana University Northwest entitled *Drawing the Lines: International Perspectives on Urban Renewal through the Arts* (www.iun.edu/~dtlines), these individuals examined various approaches and their debatable effects on the quality of life in the communities that arts and culture influence. This conference was particularly timely because Northwest Indiana has just begun a process of transformation and could benefit greatly from lessons gleaned from cities around the world that are at the other end of the transformation; these cities have already experienced urban renewal using a variety of different models, and Northwest Indiana can learn from their success as well as the challenges and roadblocks they faced. As one way to continue this conversation, the editorial board of the *South Shore Journal* chose “urban renewal through the arts and culture” as the theme for its 2007-2008 issue.

Keeping the global perspectives of *Drawing the Lines* in mind and examining the local and regional approaches to and implications of urban renewal via arts and culture, this issue of the *South Shore Journal* brings us “back to the drawing board” albeit with a local rather than an international focus.

To understand the various approaches to renewal, one must first grasp the economic degradation a place experiences as it “de-industrializes” and the need to re-invent its identity and destiny. Factory and mill closures lead to high unemployment rates, civil unrest, and poverty, and the community must deal with the effects of environmental pollution related to long-term industrial activity.¹ As one such industrialized region, Northwest Indiana’s history is closely linked to the steel industry and its expansion from Chicago along the shore of Lake Michigan. With the construction of the Inland Steel plant, Northwest Indiana became home to thousands of steel workers from across the United States and various parts of the world. As the steel industry grew in the region, it attracted other industries, which either serviced the mills themselves or processed the raw material coming from the mills. During the 1960s, the region’s economic prosperity was impaired by the dismantling of a considerable part of its industrial operations due to its inability to compete in the international steel market. Like other “steel cities” throughout the world, the “Region” must transform and re-invent itself in order to survive and thrive in these new socio-economic conditions.

¹ According to John Kromer in *Neighborhood Recovery: Reinvestment Policy for the New Hometown* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), “Blighted urban neighborhoods, particularly the older communities left behind in the wreckage of the American industrial age, are today’s biggest threats to the economic well-being of the cities and metropolitan regions where they are located” (8). Hereafter cited in the text and footnotes as Kromer.

In recent decades, urban areas, particularly industrialized regions, have approached their reorganization and transformation with disparate techniques ranging from large-scale capital projects (such as museums or sports arenas) to public art initiatives and less expensive cultural programs.² Perhaps, the most famous contemporary example remains the transformation of the Spanish city of Bilbao from a steel city in crisis into an international icon for arts and culture; as such, this city represents one paradigm for urban renaissance that has inspired much interest and study as a model across the globe.³ Similar to Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum, other cities now sport their own opera houses or athletic stadiums, providing the flagship project approach to urban renewal.

Research suggests that a focus on arts and culture can lead to significant economic renewal for a community. Time and again, the development or recovery of cultural districts has clearly shown positive economic impact; such districts attract artists, residents, and tourists who patronize local businesses thereby bringing money into the

² In "Lessons from America in the 1990s" (*Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*; eds. Peter Roberts and Hugh Sykes; London: SAGE Publications, 2000), John Shutt argues, "At neighborhood level community development in the United States is spearheading the drive to decentralization and the nation excels in this community-building capacity and its tradition of community organizing" (259). For an extended analysis of the use of sports arenas in urban renewal, see Timothy Jon Curry, Kent Schwirian, and Rachael A. Woldoff's *High Stakes: Big Time Sports and Down Redevelopment* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2004). Hereafter cited in the text and footnotes as Curry et al. In *Art, Space and the City: Public art and urban futures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), Malcolm Miles specifically discusses "Art in Urban Development," contrasting projects rooted in the locality with others located on an international "culture map" (104-131). In a similar fashion, Tim Hall points to the "broad distinction between flagship or spectacular regeneration projects, which often contain prominent works of public art by internationally famous artists, and neighborhood or community arts and regeneration projects, typically, but not exclusively, publicly funded, often away from central city locations and with a greater emphasis on community development and participatory arts" (111) in "Opening up Public Art's Spaces: Art, Regeneration, and Audience," *The City Cultures Reader*, eds. Malcolm Miles and Tim Hall, with Iain Borden, 2nd ed (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 110-117.

³ For an analysis of gentrification in a post-Guggenheim Bilbao, see Lorenzo Vicario and P. Manuel Martínez Monje's "Another 'Guggenheim effect'?: Central city projects and gentrification in Bilbao" (*Gentrification in a Global Context*; eds. Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge; London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 151-167.

local economy.⁴ As this cycle continues, the image enhancement of the location brings additional economic and human resources, and the resulting increase in property values adds to the tax base and, in turn, leads to prospective development. At the same time, such development can often veer toward a process of gentrification and displacement of residents in lower socio-economic brackets.⁵ Nevertheless, the capital projects and cultural programs that comprise many of the urban renewal initiatives have led to major economic growth, attracting small businesses and larger corporations alongside painters, writers, and musicians.⁶

In addition to the obvious economic effects, urban renewal through arts and culture frequently leads to the reduction of offending behavior, especially youth crime rates. Dramatic, musical, and artistic performances and education provide positive activities in which youth can engage, diverting them from the more dangerous acts associated with poverty-stricken communities and the life expectations of the underprivileged.⁷ Renewal does not have to be an imported structure; instead, it should

⁴ In *The Art of Revitalization: Improving Conditions in Distressed Inner-City Neighborhoods* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000), Sean Zielenbach addresses how the process of attracting residents in turn leads to further economic effects: middle-class individuals have purchased housing in depressed areas, refurbishing the homes and “gradually restored the housing stock and encouraged the establishment of restaurants and businesses that cater to their tastes and needs. As the neighborhoods improved and their appeal increased, property values rose. More members of the middle class moved in, which created more economic activity and increased attention to local social issues. Taken together the changes helped reduce urban blight and expanded the cities’ tax base” (27). Hereafter cited in the footnotes and text as Zielenbach. Curry et al state, “As their landlords make their rentals available for purchased by the gentrifiers or convert rentals into condominiums, thus pricing them out of the reach of their former, poorer tenants, these people become the displaced” (41). Curry et al further discuss the effect of gentrification on the disadvantaged (40-42).

⁵ For a discussion of the ethical and economic aspects of attending to the housing needs of the poor and homeless, see Kromer, 188-191.

⁶ For a model of urban development solutions proposed by actual residents in Harlem, NYC, see David J. Maurrasse’s “Making urban development work” (*Listening to Harlem: Gentrification, Community, and Business*; London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 141-67.

⁷ For the role of education, public safety programs, and social organizations, see Zielenbach, 96-101.

flow from the very traditions of the place and its people. For instance, Mark Spencer's Gary-based West Side Theatre Guild [<http://www.wstg.org/>] has not only created award-winning cinematic productions but has also included local youths in those performances. Such initiatives also develop community members' self-confidence and affirm local community identity, focusing on youths as the foundation of the area's future.

Emphasizing authentic renewal, that is renewal based on the historical and cultural identity of the place and the people who inhabit it, urban renewal through the arts and culture can have a profound impact on the social fabric of the community, enhancing image reconstruction, identity reaffirmation and formation, and social cohesion.⁸ For example, the Gary Historic Midtown-Central District Project has involved mapping key locations with significance to the history of Gary as well as archiving the "Gary Sound," the rich musical heritage of the city. In addition, the youth in Cherise Glenn's NAACP Reginald F. Lewis Youth Entrepreneurial Institute have acquired the skills and knowledge necessary to creating their own local enterprises as well as using those skills to create a historical documentary of Gary, thereby empowering these young people to feel pride in their environment and to rebuild the community for themselves. Clearly, such projects reaffirm the rich history of this area and awaken a hunger in the next

⁸ Zielenbach addresses the role of local institutions, community organizations, social capital, and local leadership in the "art of revitalization" (15-18 and 199-211). In "European Experiences" (*Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*; eds. Peter Roberts and Hugh Sykes; London: SAGE Publications, 2000), Paul Drewe points to best practices in urban regeneration that are applicable not matter the global location: 1.) "horizontal co-operation," which is the cooperation of "local authorities, government departments, local agencies, research institutes, professional bodies, and various interest groups," 2.) "vertical co-operation," which is cooperation between central, regional, and local authorities, 3.) the involvement of the private sector, and 4.) the involvement of local residents and volunteer groups (289). Drewe further lists good practices of "economic development in areas with social problems," "environmental action linked to economic goals," and "revitalization of historic centres" (291). Hereafter cited in the text and footnotes as Drewe.

generation to reclaim its value and redefine their own identity in relation to it. This positive definition of self is especially important as a counter to external perceptions that would devalue this same area and its people.

In addition to these Gary-based initiatives, the entire region of Northwest Indiana is benefiting from various arts, culture, and economic initiatives. Having viable and effective arts and culture outlets is an important component of this renewal. The influence of such groups as the South Shore Arts and the Quality of Life Council have provided funding, planning, and opportunity for other groups and individuals to enhance the image of the region, thereby improving the quality of life. One vehicle for image reconstruction and identity formation has been re-launching the series of South Shore posters and creating a new series that captured the flavor and artistic style of the original posters while adding images of landmarks of Northwest Indiana that did not exist at the beginning of the twentieth century when the first series was created. The Northwest Indiana Forum website devoted to this initiative links art to the image formation related to place, stating “Great Art-Great Area” and “South Shore Line poster series promotion brings Northwest Indiana to life” (<http://www.southshoreart.com/index.html> and <http://www.southshoreart.com/poster/southshorearticle.htm>).

Not only do these types of cultural and artistic initiatives renew a sense of place, but they also produce interest in the local environment. In other words, cultural and artistic initiatives grow alongside those devoted to preserving the natural spaces and the architectural landscape that comprise the region. For instance, under the auspices of Congressman Pete Visclosky, the *Marquette Plan* has been designed to recuperate land

no longer needed by industry in Gary and the surrounding communities along Lake Michigan and to use the space for cultural, artistic, and recreational purposes and green space. Elements of that plan include the creation of a lakefront park with public facilities and vehicular access and the development of a river walk.

Extending the conversation beyond the research and actual local initiatives, the articles in this issue span the “Region,” providing theoretical and practical analyses of existing spaces and places from Munster to Valparaiso across the southern edge of Lake Michigan. In “The Cultural Impact of a Museum in a Small Community: the Hour Glass in Ogden Dunes,” Stephanie Smith and Steve Mark describe the manner in which this museum has brought cohesion to this lakeside community, while Connie Sowa-Wachala provides commentary on the general effects of music on a community, arguing for support of the arts in “Music: Instrument for Social Renewal.” In “Reconstructing the Vale of Paradise: A Return to the City Beautiful Movement,” Alan Bloom and James Paul Old examine current renewal efforts in Valparaiso, linking those endeavors to the theoretical framework of the City Beautiful movement and providing an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. Drs. Anja Matwijkiw and Bronik Matwijkiw explain “The Way Forward in Northwest Indiana: Ethics as a Vehicle for Urban Renewal,” addressing the recent construction of codes of ethics within the Northwest Indiana region and suggesting that an ethical government is foundational to any productive regeneration. John W. Gunn, Jr. argues the advantages and disadvantages of urban redesign through the arts, promoting community perspectives on renewal in “Art: Urban Renewal/Redesign, A Community Perspective.” Finally, Deborah Landry

discusses examples of various types of public art and connects them to opportunities within the region in “Asking ‘What about art’ and the Possibilities for Art,”

Not only does this issue include practical applications of and theoretical frameworks for models of urban renewal as appropriate to places within the region of Northwest Indiana, but it also contains artistic pieces inspired by the local urban landscape. Beverly Lewis Burton creates an evocative sense of Gary as her home city in “The Heart of My Home,” while Naomi Palagi’s “Interstate 80/94 in Progress: Half a Year after 2005” paints a vivid picture of highway construction in this urban corridor. William K Buckley’s poetic quartet evokes other aspects of this urban region with his references to “steel town,” “Bethlehem Steel,” and the “Dunes” in “Edge sideways Athena, because;” his evocation of facets of this area south of Lake Michigan in “red angels;” his work on the Gas Works in Whiting in “Real waters;” and his treatment of an “Exhibit in Steeltown” at Indiana University Northwest.

As you read the articles, essays, and poems in this issue of the *South Shore Journal*, we invite you to enter the conversation on urban renewal in Northwest Indiana. We leave you with the following questions as seeds for future reflection as we continue to imagine a brighter future for this rich region of Indiana: How do creativity and culture influence community change? What role do the arts and culture play in urban renewal? How can communities revitalize themselves through arts and culture? What models exist for community renewal through arts and culture? Who needs to be “at the table” to develop effective urban renewal policies and practices? What are the positive and negative results of certain approaches to urban renewal? Why and how do art and culture

act as catalysts to urban renewal? What local factors need to be taken into consideration when advancing urban renewal initiatives? How have approaches to urban renewal changed over time and across geographical space? Pondering the cultural, economic, and social well-being of Northwest Indiana, we become the architects, working together to design the region's future. So it's back to the drawing board for us all!