



McGill School of Urban Planning Newsletter

Guangzhou – Intercity train station, Photo: Shearmur

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McGill has gone remote

At the time of writing, all of McGill's teaching and administrative functions have moved on-line, with only absolutely essential tasks still happening on campus. Remote teaching and work are the order of the day until further notice.

Syllabi and course evaluations have been re-arranged, and I would especially like to thank all instructors for having been so adaptable at short notice.

I would also like to thank students, staff and faculty members for their help, adaptability and patience during the transition, despite the disruption, stress, and anxiety the Covid crisis is causing us all.

I would finally like to express my gratefulness to the University, to university services, to our Dean, Jim Nicell, and to all university staff who are undertaking a massive and complex task under difficult conditions, facing the same uncertainties as the rest of us. RS.

HONOR

During the latest Caribbean Urban Forum, which was held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, June 12-14th 2019, **David Brown** was named as one of the first two planners to become a "Honorary Fellow of the Caribbean Planning Association".

He was selected in recognition of his contribution to teaching, research, and planning practice in the Caribbean region over some 30 years. The work that Jeanne Wolfe and he did in developing a plan for Belize City in association with many different local partners, students, etc. from 1985-90 was noted, as was their assistance in establishing the first professional educational program in planning at the Trinidad campus of the University of the West Indies in the 1990s:

MSc in Urban and Regional Planning:

<https://sta.uwi.edu/eng/geomatics/MSC-urban-planning>

Congratulations!

Reading one's way through a crisis

I usually write a short "director's piece" to kick off the newsletter. I suspect that you do not wish for more advice on hand washing, social distancing, Zoom or food purchasing, which is why I'll entertain you with a few notes about the books stacked on my bedside table.

For some reason they seem to be focussed on pandemics and on wartime Russia. Indeed, global pandemics have inspired nursery rhymes (such as ring-a-ring-o'-roses – ok, this one is not on my bedside table), existentialist novels (*La peste*, by Camus) and short stories (*The Decameron*, by Boccaccio).

The device Boccaccio uses is to present stories told by a group of people secluded (in social isolation?) outside 14th century Florence as the Black Death spreads. It speaks of their boredom and their attempts to escape it. Camus – weaving a plot that of course questions the meaning of existence - describes how authorities in plague-ridden Oran reluctantly shut down the city, and of how one Parisian tries to escape home. It also describes the efforts of doctors and medical staff to treat plague victims. Ring-a-ring-o'-roses, for its part, jauntily sings of quack medicine and ineffective remedies (posies in one's pocket do not prevent the sneeze and fall – neither will forcing the economy to restart on Easter day).

The other books on my table are a series of novels set in wartime Russia. Leo Tolstoy's *War & Peace* describes people caught up in the Napoleonic wars – their lives upturned and any control over events illusory. The wise general Kutuzov retreats before Napoleon's army – a bumbling retreat, it must be said. Only the inexorable cycle of seasons eventually defeats Napoleon.

Somewhat less of a classic, Alexei Tolstoy's trilogy, *The Ordeal*, describes two sisters living through the Russian revolution and its aftermath, the protracted war between White and Red Russians – to which the Spanish Flu was a footnote. Here too, the main theme is one of people and armies buffeted by forces beyond their control – guided (as must in Soviet-era novels) by the firm belief that workers and soviets will prevail.

The most fascinating of these Russian novels are Vassili Grossman's, set during the battle of Stalingrad. The first, *For a Just Cause*, follows families through the upheavals and battles of summer 1942. Grossman toes the communist party line (more or less)¹, describing committed believers in soviet ideals who fight to defend Soviet Russia: like the Tolstoys, he depicts fate unrolling as lives are swept up in events beyond understanding.

The second volume, *Life and Fate*, is the more interesting: by the time he wrote it in the late '50s Grossman had changed profoundly. Disillusioned with Stalinism, his characters begin equating the Nazi invader with Stalinist Russia. Not only, now, are his characters buffeted by fate, cynical leaders and the mayhem of war, they give voice to Grossman's own disarray. All known copies of his manuscript were destroyed by the Soviet Union's internal police: Grossman died thinking his masterpiece was lost. Miraculously, two copies, each missing different parts, were found and reconciled in the late '70s.

Are these books of any relevance to current affairs, to lockdowns, Zoom, hand-washing and social distancing?

Maybe. The first set of books (and rhyme) – which clearly focus on pandemics – are a reminder that we (i.e. human society) have been here before. The types of measure currently being implemented (and/or to which we are subjected) - combined with boredom, loneliness, stress, needing entertainment, trying to get home, lockdowns, ... – are traumatic. Many of us have never experienced the like: but others have, and have pulled through: some comfort can be gleaned from that.

The second set of books deals with fate, with people living through events beyond their control, facing uncertainty and ruin. The heroes of these books are of two sorts: first, those who do small things, such as share food with a stranger, smile at a sad person, reassure a friend, or provide shelter or a warm drink to someone who has lost everything: *War & Peace's* Platon Karataev, the prisoner who befriends Pierre and who cares for an abandoned dog, epitomises this. Second are leaders, like Kutuzov, or like Camus' front-line medical staff, who struggle at the intersection of uncertainty, chance and responsibility. I find it reassuring to read of people, whether leaders or normal citizens, who rise to the challenge of extraordinary circumstances whilst remaining human and humane.

You may not buy into my interpretation of these books... if you have time this Spring and Summer, and once Netflix is exhausted (or once it has exhausted you), do some reading and let me know what you think.

Better still, you no doubt have suggestions for reading one's way through a crisis, which I'd be happy to compile.

In the hope of seeing you all again very soon!

Richard Shearmur

Second year research projects

Second year students are currently working on their supervised research projects. Below is a selection of short descriptions of these projects. Many thanks for having sent them in.

Planning with fire: Wildfire Defense Strategies for Suburban Communities – Jonnah Rainie



A hellish landscape. Flames and embers sent by strong winds set entire towns ablaze, claiming lives, and causing thousands of people to flee from their homes. The war on

wildfire is one of repetition, one where humanity is consistently on the defense. Every year, communities are burning their way into the record books and rebuilding themselves from the ashes in an environment that will inevitably burn again. While large-scale decisions such as land use regulations and subdivision design significantly affect a community's vulnerability to wildfire, there are few documents which provide a comprehensive list of mitigation strategies for urban planners, designers, and developers. This research project will address proactive wildfire defense strategies for suburban and rural communities in California.

Photo credit: Bjorgialt, Creative Commons, Wikipedia

Churches as essential providers of real estate to non-profit and community organizations – Madeline Johnson



While demolitions and conversions grab headlines, the dense packing of non-profits and community organizations into church basements and rectories receives little attention in the media, heritage scholarship, or policy discussions of the future of Montreal's Catholic churches. My SRP seeks to shine both a documentary and an analytical light on these understudied spaces.

By means of site visits, interviews, and engagement with sociological literature, I'm exploring the possibility that through their collaborative re-appropriation of auxiliary church spaces, community actors and local parish staff are crafting an innovative proposal for the future of the city's religious built heritage.

Photo: "Not your grandmother's church basement.": offices of Upperkut, a marketing agency located in the basement of Saint-Jean-Baptiste church in the Plateau. (credit: M.Johnson)

¹ Some passages were interpreted as critiques of Stalinism: the communist literary establishment lambasted the novel.

From Park to Town-Hall: A Backgrounder on Public Life Studies (PLS) for Canadian Public Servants – Julien Voyer



As an intern at the Montréal Urban Ecology Center (MUEC) in 2019, I was thrilled to take part in the launch of the French version of *How to study public life* (Gehl & Svarre 2019). Whilst

writing blog posts on the subject, I realized that there currently has been no review of the impact of Public life studies (PLS) in Canada. For my supervised research project, I am filling this gap, shedding light on the challenges linked to this relatively new professional practice. To do so, I rely principally on interviews with professionals from different organizations who have implemented this type of study, notably from the City of Vancouver, City of Toronto and 8-80 Cities.

Photo: Berczy Park (Toronto) with the final design by Claude Cormier + Associés of a \$8 million park revitalisation project partly triggered by a PLS by 8-80 Cities. (Credit: Claude Cormier + Associés)

Trans on Transit – Natalie Pace

Trans on Transit investigates the accessibility of public transit spaces and services for transgender people in Montreal. Informed by intersectional and queer theory, the project explores the relationship between public transit, non-normative gender expression, and other critical axes



of identity, such as race, class, and ability. Using an online questionnaire and transit ride-alongs, preliminary findings reveal regular harassment from other transit passengers, class-based profiling by STM inspectors, and the particular vulnerability of trans-feminine people. This project contributes to the ongoing “transit and gender” conversation happening in policy circles and ultimately advocates for the explicit inclusion of trans perspectives in planning research and practice.

Photo: Tim Adams, creative Commons, Wikipedia

Cycling in Anchorage – Nicolette Dent

Nicolette conducted an online survey of 260 cyclists in Anchorage, Alaska who use the municipality’s paved multi-use trails. She is analyzing how trip purpose, personal characteristics, and weather affect urban trail cycling patterns. Nicolette will include comparisons with the municipality’s permanent trail counter data and make recommendations for how her hometown



can improve the trails for commuters and create more opportunities for bike transportation.

Photo: Nicolette Dent + bike.

Quartier des Spectacles and morality planning – Rhianne Folke



My project entails a case study of the Quartier des Spectacles as an urban renewal project in Montréal’s historic red-light district, and its associations with sex work in Montréal. The project interviews stakeholders of the Quartier des Spectacles including local commercial sex businesses, members of sex work advocacy non-profits, and academics. Considering the inherent moralities in urban planning, I rethink urban planning processes with sex work in mind.

Photo: The bald mountain: Former Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau cut trees on Mount Royal in 1954 to ensure people couldn’t use the mountain for any illicit activities. (Credit: Montreal Archives, from cbc.ca)

SELECTED FACULTY RESEARCH

In this section a selection of the faculty's research activities or publications are mentioned, to give an idea of what we are up to. These are short – far more can be found with a few judicious clicks!

Lisa Bornstein has initiated a variety of original teaching and research initiatives, of which *Mental health and the City* (which involves teaching and research) and *Planning and Indigenous Communities* (introducing and developing a course on the topic), are two examples. She continues her work on mega-projects and is increasingly involved in research on climate change and disaster mitigation. She was invited to speak at the COP25 conference in Madrid.

Bornstein, L. "Reinforcing Bottom up Initiatives for Climate Change Adaptation in Latin America and the Caribbean," UN Climate Change Conference COP25, Madrid, Dec. 6, 2019.

Madhav Badami, the School's Graduate Program Director, is maintaining his close connections with the Shastri Institute whilst developing his work on sustainability and transport infrastructure. He was recently invited to give a public lecture on the topic at the Swaminathan Research Foundation:

Badami, M. 2019. Urban Transport in India: Why are things the way they are, and what can we do about it?, *MS Swaminathan Research Foundation*, Chennai, December 20.

Ahmed El-Geneidy continues to sit on the board of the ARTM, whilst performing a number of editorial roles in transport-related journals. He is conducting a variety of research projects, in particular the SSHRC funded *Measuring vulnerability and accessibility by public transit in major Canadian cities*. A number of his recent publications focus on this question, for example:

Cui, B., Boisjoly, G., El-Geneidy, A., & Levinson, D. (2019). Accessibility, equity, and the journey to work. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 74, 269-277.

Anna Kramer has developed and introduced a new course on zoning and land use planning in relation to housing issues. She is wrapping up a SSHRC grant on zoning regulation, residential density and housing affordability. As co-investigator on the CMHC/SSHRC partnership development grant on the balanced supply of housing, she organized research workshops in Montreal and Toronto.

Nik Luka has been extensively engaged with the Ville de Montréal on major project dossiers, including a formal partnership on the McGill-College development. He holds a number of grants, including a SSHRC Partnership Engage Grant, *'Supporting the possibilities of urban commoning in Montréal's Champ des Possibles'*. He continues his collaboration with Swedish partners, one result of which is his recent paper:

Qviström, M., G. De Block, & N. Luka. (2019). Beyond circular thinking: Geographies of Transit-Oriented Development. *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research*, 43(4), 786-793

Richard Shearmur continues to sit on the Grand Paris Express research oversight committee. His research on the geography of innovation and on municipal innovation carries on apace, as does his research on the location of

work in an age of mobility. However, a major SSHRC funded survey on the location of work tasks has had to be postponed. A number of his recent publications deal with this topic, for instance:

Stevens, L. and R. Shearmur, 2020, The End of Location Theory? Some Implications of Micro-work, Work trajectories and Gig-Work for Conceptualizing the Urban Space Economy, *Geoforum*, (on-line)

David Wachsmuth's research on AirBnB has gained considerable media attention and has informed policy-makers (he was expert witness at Ontario's Local Planning Appeal tribunal). He is also conducting work on issues of governance (he holds a CRC chair in urban governance) and sustainability, for example:

Angelo, H. & Wachsmuth, D. "Why Does Everyone Think Cities Can Save the Planet?" In J. Hoff, Q. Gausset, S. Lex eds., *Building a Sustainable Future: The Role of Non-State Actors in the Green Transition* (London: Routledge).

David Farley – in Memoriam

David Farley – director of the School for 17 years and founder of the Master of Urban Planning program - was born in Ottawa in 1931 and grew up in London and Oakville, Ontario. From an early age, he displayed a passion for art and design: following high school, his first choice was to attend the Ontario College of Art, with the goal of becoming an artist. Over the years he became an accomplished artist with an original eye, as is more than evident in the works on display in the School's front office. His paintings have been displayed many times, including two one-man shows at the Shayne Gallery.

Nonetheless, he was persuaded by his father that architecture would be a more promising career. He enrolled in McGill's architecture program in the early 1950s. After graduating in 1959, he worked for two years and then went on to Harvard where he completed graduate studies in urban design. Upon graduation in 1961, David was invited to join an urban design team working with the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

From 1964 to 1966 he taught urban design full-time at New York University and then switched to part time in order to serve as Executive Director of the Urban Design Council in New York City under Mayor Lindsay – a job that gave him considerable satisfaction, as well as superb material for teaching. In 1968 he moved back to Boston to take up a full-time teaching job at Harvard.

In 1971, John Bland invited David to renew McGill's interdisciplinary program in planning, originally established under Architecture's umbrella by Harold Spence Sales in 1947 but requiring new leadership. The idea was for the new program be accredited by the Quebec and Canadian planning associations: it was reconfigured as an independent School reporting directly to the Dean of Graduate Studies, and subsequently to the Dean of Engineering.

As anyone who has started a new program knows, this task requires filling out endless forms for the Minister of

Education of Quebec, as well as outstanding persuasive skills to convince members of numerous government and university approval committees. In this effort he was aided by Maureen Anderson, an Administrative Assistant in the School of Architecture.

David served as Director of the School of Urban Planning for 17 years during which he hired new faculty, developed the curriculum, and ensured that the School operated in a transparent, collegial manner. Once the core curriculum was covered, he encouraged the faculty to pursue their own teaching and research interests, a strategy that led to continuous innovation within a very agreeable social climate.

In addition to meeting his teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities at McGill, David worked occasionally as a consultant for Daniel Arbour and Associates. He also participated in design competitions and in 1985, along with John Schreiber and Ron Williams, submitted the winning design in a competition held by the City of Montreal for Champ-de-Mars.

Throughout his urban design career, David continued to pursue his interest in art and, upon his retirement in the mid-1990s, he began to draw and paint full time while occasionally teaching at McGill as a Professor Emeritus.

Personally, I am very grateful to David Farley for his leadership over so many years. As a student in the School from 1972 to 1974, and a member of the faculty from 1977 to 2014, I was inspired by his commitment to planning education and positive energy despite whatever obstacles might come along. Even after being confined to bed over the last year of his life, he continued to be interested in the School and was keen to chat about how to move forward.

David Brown



Photo: David Farley memorial, 10th October 2019

2019-20 Gewurz lecture, postponed.

This year's annual Gewurz lecture was to take the form of a panel on social and affordable housing, with particular attention to planning and to alternative financing arrangements.

It has been postponed, but we hope to be able to set a new date in Fall 2020

ANNUAL SOUPosium, cancelled.

Each year the students of urban planning (SOUP) association organizes a lively conference during which there are formal presentations, interviews with researchers, panels, discussions and pizzas (or equivalent). This event, scheduled for Friday 13th March – the first day of McGill's social isolation measures –, was cancelled.

QUIZ

Current quiz: There are 36 000 municipalities in France. A correlation exists between voting for the Front National and retail: what is the nature of this correlation?

Previous Quiz: I (R.S.) have certain [reservations](#) concerning the association between cities and innovation: my argument is that whilst innovation and creativity of course occur in cities, they also occur outside of cities. Why would the village of Oswaldtwistle contribute to my reservations?

Answer: James Hargreaves, the inventor of the spinning jenny – a key invention that allowed textile factories to develop and the industrial revolution to take off in England – lived in this village.... A good example of innovation emerging from a rural setting.

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NEWS FEED

Please let **Richard Shearmur** or **Paula Domingues** know of short announcements, events, achievements or (odd) facts for the newsletter. Suggestions for quizzes are also welcome.