

**“Urban Organization through the Ages:  
Neighborhoods, Open Spaces, and Urban Life”:  
*Project Description and First Annual Progress Report***

**Project Year: 2008-2009**



This project is part of the larger research project, “Late Lessons from Early History,” sponsored by the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University and funded by the President’s Strategic Initiatives Fund. For more information, contact Michael E. Smith, [mesmith9@asu.edu](mailto:mesmith9@asu.edu). Document date: *May 5, 2009.*

### **Scientific Background and Rationale**

From the earliest cities to the present, two universals of urban form are the organization of residential areas into neighborhoods and the presence of open spaces within cities. Neighborhoods can differ greatly in their ethnic, political, religious, and economic dynamics; open spaces include a broad range of uses, from gardens to civic plazas to empty lots. These two features are important influences on urban life and social activities in any city. For this project, we use neighborhoods and open spaces as points of entry into the complexities of urban organization in the broad spectrum of world cities from the earliest states to the present.

Because urbanism is too big a phenomenon to be understood from the perspectives of any single discipline, we have designed a project that is transdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and historical in design. We draw from the data and methods of archaeology, history, sociology, geography, and political science to analyze key urban issues. This research will lead to enhanced understanding of both modern and ancient cities, and of urbanization processes that unfolded over several millennia of human history.

Our project is organized around four major research themes, each with a series of research questions. These questions will be applied to a large sample of cities, including archaeological data on the earliest urban centers, historical documents on preindustrial cities around the world, and modern cities as studied by many disciplines and approaches.

1. **Neighborhoods.** Are urban neighborhoods universal? What are the different patterns of neighborhood governance? How are social parameters like class, wealth, ethnicity, race and religion patterned by neighborhood, and how do these affect urban life? What is the relationship between migration and neighborhood dynamics and how does it contribute to ethnic solidarity and conflict within cities?
2. **Open Spaces.** What kinds of open spaces—both civic spaces and green spaces—are found in cities? Where are open spaces located and what are their uses and social contexts? Is struggle over open space a universal process? What are the antecedents and ramifications of the modern privatization of urban open spaces? Who provides urban open space, and who benefits from it?
3. **Dynamics of Change.** How are neighborhoods founded, how are open spaces established, and how do they change and develop historically? In what ways do bottom-up processes (the actions of local residents) and top-down processes (laws and actions by civic authorities)

interact to generate change in urban life? Do varying patterns of local urban governance stimulate change or stability? What roles do neighborhoods and open spaces play in processes of urban sprawl and expansion? How do they contribute to urban sustainability?

4. **Context.** What effects do urban population, area, and density have on the spatial and social dynamics of neighborhoods and open spaces? What role does connectivity—within and beyond cities—play in structuring urban life? How are neighborhoods and open spaces affected by wider changes (social, political, economic, and environmental), and in what ways do they play creative or generative roles? How do these features vary regionally and culturally? Are there limits to growth and organizational capacity (for both neighborhoods and cities)?

## **1. Participants**

1. **Senior Personnel (Principal Investigators)** (see Appendix for biographical sketches)

- Christopher G. Boone, Co-PI, 1.5 years, SHESC Associate Professor. Geography.
- George L. Cowgill, Co-PI, 1.5 years, SHESC Emeritus Professor. Archaeology.
- Sharon L. Harlan, Co-PI, 1.5 years, SHESC Associate Professor. Sociology.
- Michael E. Smith, Co-PI, 1.5 years, SHESC Professor. Archaeology.
- Barbara L. Stark, Co-PI, 1.5 years, SHESC Professor. Archaeology.
- Abigail York, Co-PI, 1.5 years, SHESC Assistant Professor. Political science.

2. **Students**

- Juliana Novic, 4<sup>th</sup> year Ph.D., Anthropology/SHESC, Urbanism in ancient Mesoamerica (Graduate Assistantship)
- Benjamin Stanley, 3<sup>rd</sup> year M.A., Geography/SGS, Modern Urban Geography (Graduate Assistantship)
- Maricha Friedman, Senior undergraduate, Anthropology major (hourly worker, 2 semesters)
- Katrina Johnston, Senior undergraduate, Anthropology major (hourly worker, 1 semester)
- Cynthia Carvajal, Junior undergraduate, Anthropology major (volunteer, 1 semester; internship, 1 semester)

3. **Organizational Partners**

**A. Consultants:**

- **Roland Fletcher**, University of Sydney, Associate Professor ( Public lecture, Meetings with Project Members; spring 2008)
- **Besim Hakim**, Charrette Center, Architect/Independent Consultant (Public lecture, Meetings with Project Members and Affiliated Faculty; fall 2008)
- **Richard Blanton**, Purdue University, Professor (Public lecture, Meetings with Project Members; spring 2009)

**B. ASU colleagues:**

We have had some interactions with at least twelve colleagues at ASU about our project. They are in a number of academic units on campus, including History, Geography, Planning, Architecture, Public Affairs, and Global Studies. Most of these

attended a lunch-workshop in October in which we described the project and solicited feedback and discussion.

## **2. Activities and Findings:**

### ***1. Major research, educational, and program building activities.***

We have spent the first year reviewing several bodies of scholarly literature on urban organization in modern, historical, and ancient cities. We also consulted with a variety of experts on urbanism to help refine our goals, concepts, and methods (see list of personnel above). Our data gathering was carried out by two subgroups: the modern group and the ancient group. Our conceptual exploration was carried out by the entire group, often with input from outside experts.

***Modern group data gathering.*** Graduate Assistant Ben Stanley reviewed literature on modern urban life from numerous scholarly disciplines. He made notes on individual works and produced synthetic accounts that integrated diverse publications on key themes. Undergraduate student Katrina Johnston made notes on works focusing on open spaces in modern and historical cities.

***Ancient group data gathering.*** Under the direction of Graduate Assistant Juliana Novic and PI Michael Smith, undergraduate students Maricha Friedman and Cynthia Carvajal reviewed numerous works on preindustrial cities. The emphasis was on historical cities, with less effort given to archaeological cases at this stage. Students took notes into our Access database, scanned maps and images, and Xeroxed relevant works as passages.

***Database activities.*** Novic constructed a custom database in MS-Access to organize notes on readings. The focus of this database is to keep track of the kinds of published data and information available on individual cities so that we can return to key sources when intensive data-gathering begins in year 2. We also established a database of bibliographic works using the Endnote software. Numerous scans of illustrations were cataloged in an Excel catalog, and Xeroxes of papers and passages of books were filed in filing cabinet.

***Consultants.*** Our consultants are listed above. These were chosen because of their expertise in urban studies and their thematic interests that overlap with project themes. We held both group and individual meetings with the consultants, and received intensive feedback from each on methods, goals, theory, and data.

***Group meetings.*** During fall 2008 we held monthly meetings that combined intellectual exploration with project business. During spring 2009 we switched to a system of bi-weekly noon meetings, many of which were used to discuss specific articles and topics. Some of these were advertised among ASU colleagues, a few of whom attended the sessions and participated in discussion. In addition, the two research subgroups (ancient and modern) held a number of meetings.

***Scholarly products.*** As listed and described below, our research activities so far have produced two types of scholarly product. (1) Several works were produced directly from project activities. The most notable is a joint paper presented at the Urban Affairs Association conference; this paper is currently under revision to submit to a journal. (2) Some works by project members on related topics contain significant amounts of material from the project. (3) One competitive grant was awarded, a fellowship for a semester of comparative research at Dumbarton Oaks, which has impressive library holdings in pre-Columbian, Byzantine, and landscape architecture.

## **2. Describe the major findings resulting from these activities.**

### **A. Provide an overview of the intellectual developments that occurred over the last year and the link between these results and your project goals and objectives.**

We summarize the findings in this and the following sections in a bulleted list format.

- **Exploration of concepts, research, and data in various disciplines.** This is perhaps our most basic intellectual work this year. Between student note-taking, readings of key works for discussion, and general interaction among project members, we have explored a number of relevant urban topics as they are expressed in diverse disciplines.
- **Focus on spatial clustering of class, ethnicity, and occupation.** We found that the spatial and social clustering of social variation and attributes are topics of great concern in most of the relevant disciplines, from urban history to planning. Disciplines have differing concepts and methods, but share a concern with spatial clustering, which typically occurs at the level of the urban neighborhood. This topic became the focus of our paper at the Urban Affairs Association conference.
- **The diversity of patterns and processes.** It is clear from the literature that there is no single pattern of social clustering, neighborhood dynamics, or the uses and significance of open spaces. Patterns typically differ within cultural regions and traditions; there is no typical “Islamic pattern” or “Maya pattern” or “African pattern.” Thus explanations will have to be sought in the realms of economic, political and social processes. A related message, more relevant for non-anthropologists, is that there was not a single preindustrial urban or social pattern out of which modern cities and societies developed. We found a parallel project described by Xavier de Souza Briggs, who compared the management of ethnic diversity in three cities—Augustan Rome, medieval Cordoba, and modern Los Angeles—and offered some helpful suggestions on the possible dynamics at work. (Briggs 2004, *Civilization in Color: The Multicultural City in Three Millennia, City and Community* 3:311-342). We had planned to invite Briggs to visit as a consultant, but he has accepted a position in the Obama administration as Assistant Director of the White House Office of Budget and Management.
- **A potential contradiction between planning orthodoxy and empirical urban patterns.** The literature on urban planning and much of the social science literature emphasizes the benefits of socially diverse neighborhoods and cities. Several writers have noted that this ideal seems to be at odds with the dominant pattern in premodern cities, in which people preferred to live (and did tend to live) in socially homogeneous neighborhoods. Theorists of the new urbanism are particularly interested in this issue, and we had several conversations with Emily Talen about how our project is relevant to the concerns of the new urbanism movement. A review of the relevant literature reveals that the discussion of premodern cities relies on a small amount of poor data; the degree of ethnic and other social clustering in cities remains an open issue.
- **Dynamics of neighborhood formation and change.** We have identified several factors that are important in neighborhood dynamics in various areas and time periods. For example: rural-to-urban migration plays a particularly large role in ethnic clustering in many cases; urban administrative activities typically impact urban life on a scale larger than the neighborhood; and changing social construction of race and class can lead to new residential settlement patterns.

- **Palatial gardens and settlement dynamics.** Some sources document palatial gardens in peripheral locations in cities, and one reason is that cities have histories, with central built space and land values that contribute to decisions to move projects like palaces and associated gardens that to outer parts of settlements. In general the remodeling of urban space is a major challenge for long-lived cities; urban growth and owned or occupied spaces constrain new constructions that require considerable space.
- **Peripheral open spaces and agency effects.** In some cases marketplaces are in peripheral locations as unsponsored activities, instances of bottom-up agency in open spaces that were not otherwise built up or constrained. In general, following Low's and others' observations, streets, plazas, parks, or peripheral open spaces offer opportunities for transactions and interactions for a broad social spectrum and form a counterpoint to governmentally or institutionally sponsored and controlled buildings and spaces.

***B. Describe any lessons learned and/or unanticipated effects that have resulted from the project. Explain any significant deviations from original plan of research.***

- **Lessons learned:**
  - **Narrowing the focus.** Our initial proposal was structured around five research themes: the size and scale of urban systems; stratification and segregation in urban neighborhoods; migration and ethnic enclaves; security and surveillance; and open spaces. This proved to be an unwieldy scheme, too broad to anchor our research project. Our first consultant, Besim Hakim, also expressed some dissatisfaction with the five themes and suggested that we streamline our focus. Therefore, we rewrote our objectives to focus on our two key themes—neighborhoods and open spaces—and this provided a more workable focus for the project.
- **Unanticipated developments:**
  - **Squatters' settlements.** The study of slums and squatters settlements was not part of our original research plan. As we began to read the literature, however, we began to think that squatters' settlements—generated by informal processes rather than central planning—may yield important lessons on urban dynamics relating to neighborhoods and open spaces. Smith then took an interest in squatters' settlements as potential analogues for ancient urban housing patterns, a theme related to this project.
  - **Urban theory.** We realized recently that the variation in social theory and urban theory by discipline presents an obstacle to our efforts to define clear research questions, but also presents a new opportunity to unify aspects of our diverse disciplines. We therefore plan to address this issue soon, and such an effort may produce results whose applicability goes beyond our project.

***C. Discuss the applications, successes, and challenges of different methods and approaches that have been attempted this year in order to bridge disciplinary knowledge divides and create a transdisciplinary project.***

- **Disciplinary differences in explanation and interpretation.** Each discipline has its own bodies of theory, sources of data, its styles and procedures of explanation and interpretation (this is related to the issue variation in urban theory noted above). We recognize the need to reconcile or synthesize disciplinary approaches with explanations related to our topics, but we have yet to accomplish this.
- **Mutually intelligible terminology.** We have struggled to devise a set of terms and concepts that make sense to all project participants, and this is an ongoing effort. This problem has come up in our discussions and in devising sets of keywords for our bibliography database. For example, “social capital” is used differently in each discipline, and the concept is far less common in anthropology than in the other social sciences. Similarly, the notion of “governance” from political science turns out to be a key concept for understanding the regulation of neighborhood life, but the anthropologists had rarely used this term.
- **Comparative methods.** Our project is inherently comparative in conception, but each discipline has different views and methods of comparative analysis. Discussions with consultant Richard Blanton helped us refine our ideas about the kinds of comparative methods that might be appropriate for our project, but we still have a long way to go. One dilemma is how to manage comparisons, from use of an illustrative small set of cases (see Briggs mentioned above), to a much larger but still modest set of samples (such as the 30 societies Blanton and Fargher examined) or an even larger set of samples of cities across multiple world regions. Some investigative topics are better handled with in-depth examination of fewer cases and other require bigger data sets.
- **Integration of additional disciplines into the project.** Two disciplines that are lacking among the project PIs are of crucial importance to our theme and project: urban history and planning. There are relevant literatures in both disciplines, and scholars in these areas bring unique perspectives to issues of urban life. Although we have made contacts with individuals in these disciplines (both at ASU and elsewhere) concerning our research, we have yet to devise an adequate means to incorporate them into the project.

### 3. *Outreach or communication activities.*

- **Public lectures by our consultants.** Each of our consultants has given a public lecture on urban themes related to the project. These have served to publicize our project and the overall LLEH research program.
- **Informal consultants.** We have taken advantage of several visitors to ASU with relevant expertise, holding meetings and talking to them at social occasions. These include:
  - **Dan Smail** (historian, Harvard) visited SHESC and the History Department. He is an expert in urban life in medieval Marseille, particularly neighborhoods and social variation. We held a meeting with him.
  - **Michael Batty** (geographer, University College, London) visited the School of Geographical Sciences. He is a renowned quantitative urban modeler. We held a meeting with Batty.
  - **Cynthia Robin** (archaeologist, Northwestern University) visited ASU (sponsored by the Barrett Honors College) to serve as the outside reader in Maricha

Friedman's honors thesis defense. She is an archaeologist who works on social models of Maya daily life and activities, including households and neighborhoods. She gave a public lecture and met with our project group.

- **Meeting with ASU urbanists.** We hosted a lunch meeting in fall, 2008, for urbanists at ASU to talk about our project and generate interest and advice. This meeting and its participants are described above under point 1.3.B.
- **Presentations at professional conferences:**
  - Project members gave several formal presentations at professional conferences; these are listed below under publications and papers.
  - Smith participated in a Forum, "Comparative Urbanism," at the 2009 meeting of the Association of American Geography, at which he discussed the project.
- **Web site.** We obtained an intuitive URL and started adding materials to our project web site: <http://latelessons.asu.edu/urban>

### **3. Publications and Products**

#### **A. Publications and papers deriving primarily from project activities:**

Stark, Barbara L.

2009 Urban Gardens in a Tropical Lowland Capital. Paper presented at the 2009 Annual Meeting, Society for American Archaeology, Atlanta.

Friedman, Maricha

2009 *Urban Neighborhoods in Ancient Mesoamerica*. Senior Honors Thesis, Department of Arizona State University.

York, Abigail, Benjamin Stanley, Juliana Novic, and Michael E. Smith

2009 Understanding Urban Neighborhoods Through the Ages: Ethnic, Occupational, and Class Clustering. Paper presented at the Urban Affairs Association Conference, Chicago. **NOTE:** This paper is currently being revised, by all project PI and grad assistants, for submission to the *Journal of Urban Affairs*.

#### **B. Publications and papers that incorporate material from project activities:**

Smith, Michael E.

2009 Editorial: Just How Comparative is Comparative Urban Geography?: A Perspective from Archaeology. *Urban Geography* 30:113-117.

n.d. Conceptual and Comparative Framework for the Study of Urban Neighborhoods in Ancient Mesoamerica. In *Neighborhoods in Mesoamerican Cities: The Assessment of Intermediate Units of Spatial and Social Analysis*, edited by Linda Manzanilla and Charlotte Arnauld, (book in preparation).

n.d. Sprawl, Squatters, and Sustainable Cities: Can Archaeological Data Shed Light on Modern Urban Issues? *Paper under review*.

Warren, Paige S., Sharon L. Harlan, Christopher Boone, S. B. Lerman, E. Shochat, & A. P. Kinzig  
2009 Urban Ecology and Human Social Organization. In *Urban Ecology*, edited by Gascon, (in press). Cambridge University Press, New York.

## 4. Contributions

*Please summarize efforts made to build infrastructure and capacity for the mid- and long-term sustainability of this research. List funding sources that have been sought or awarded or which will be pursued in the near future.*

- **Construction of a database of published sources.** Graduate student Juliana Novic constructed a custom database in MS-Access to keep track of bibliographic information on individual cities and the kinds of data that are available in published sources. Several hundred entries have been added. We can ask questions such as: Which cities have data on public plazas? Is there information on neighborhoods in Ottoman Aleppo? Which Mesoamerican cities have good maps of housing zones? Eventually we will construct new databases for our comparative data.
- **Creation of files of scanned images.** We have scanned and cataloged nearly 300 images from publications, mostly urban plans. A selection of these are included here as Appendix B.
- **Creation of files with paper and electronic copies of articles and papers.** We have scanned and photocopied relevant articles and book passages. These are organized in a file cabinet in SS-100.
- **Dumbarton Oaks Fellowship.** Barbara L. Stark was awarded a fellowship at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC, to study “Comparative Understanding of Peripheral Urban Gardens and Garden Functions.” This work is part of our project.
- **Additional outside funding** will be sought once we settle on a clearer direction for our future research.

## 5. Future Implementation

*Overview of plans for the next project year.*

- **Goals for 2009 / 2010:**
  - To refine our research problem(s).
  - To identify one or more plans of action to address the research problem with comparative data.
  - To begin gathering information, coding data, and conducting preliminary analyses. We will give increased attention to open spaces.
  - To publicize the project more intensively and solicit more outside input into the research process.
- **Budgeted Personnel:**
  - 1 Postdoctoral scholar
  - 1 Graduate Assistant
  - 2 hourly student workers
- **Activities:**
  - Establish a coding system and build a database (postdoc and PIs)

- Continue to survey relevant literature (Graduate Assistant and undergraduates)
  - Return to sources already surveyed for coding and data entry (Graduate Assistant and undergraduates)
  - Expand the scope of our website.
  - Publish at least two papers based primarily on project activities.
  - Continue with our biweekly project meetings for both intellectual and organizational benefits.
- **Barbra Stark will be at Dumbarton Oaks** in spring 2010 for her project-related fellowship.
  - **Changes from original plans and timetable:**
    - Graduate seminar. We will move our graduate seminar back from spring 2010 to fall 2010. This will improve its value as part of our research process.

## Appendix: Biographical Sketches of Project Directors

**Christopher Boone** is an urban geographer who studies the social and environmental drivers and consequences of urbanization, particularly during the last 120 years. His research uses GIS, archival, and institutional analysis methods. In 2006, he co-authored *City and Environment*, an examination of urban environmental issues from ancient cities to the present. Boone holds a joint appointment as Associate Professor in the School of Human Evolution & Social Change and the School of Sustainability. <http://www.public.asu.edu/~cgboone/>

**George L. Cowgill** is a Mesoamericanist archaeologist who has conducted fieldwork and analysis at the central Mexican metropolis of Teotihuacan for four decades. In his work at this site he pioneered the use of quantitative techniques and databases in archaeology. In addition to numerous publications on Teotihuacan and Mesoamerica, Cowgill has also published on comparative early urbanism and various aspects of archaeological method and theory. He is Professor Emeritus in the School of Human Evolution & Social Change.

**Sharon L. Harlan** is a sociologist who studies class, gender, and ethnic inequalities in contemporary U.S. society. Her recent work is on interdisciplinary problems of social and environmental inequity brought about by rapid urbanization in the Phoenix, AZ region. She is the principal investigator of a project examining urban vulnerability to climate change as a dynamic feature of coupled natural and human systems that differentially place landscapes and people at risk from heat-related health problems in urban neighborhoods. She also directs the Phoenix Area Social Survey, which examines the impact of residential segregation on environmental inequalities. She is Associate Professor in the School of Human Evolution & Social Change. <http://shesc.asu.edu/harlan>

**Michael E. Smith** is an archaeologist who directs excavations at Aztec sites in central Mexico, focusing on issues of urbanization, imperialism, and household-level activities and conditions. He has published numerous books and scholarly articles on his fieldwork. Smith has also published on form and planning in ancient cities and is interested in the comparative analysis of preindustrial cities as well as comparisons between ancient and modern cities. He is Professor in the School of Human Evolution & Social Change. <http://www.public.asu.edu/~mesmith9/>

**Barbara L. Stark** is a Mesoamericanist archaeologist whose research focuses on ancient complex societies, including settlement patterns, tropical urbanism, and economy. She has directed field projects in south-central Veracruz, Mexico, funded by the National Science Foundation and other agencies. Recent publications have focused on a variety of topics, including Nahua ethnicity, settlement patterns and gardening, archaeological survey methods, economic changes in Mesoamerica from Olmec times, the tropical urban capital Cerro de las Mesas, and craft production in south-central Veracruz. She is Professor in the School of Human Evolution & Social Change. <http://shesc.asu.edu/stark>

**Abigail York** studies urban institutions in the social-ecological context with an emphasis on city growth and sustainability. She has a PhD in public policy with fields in political science theory and methodology, and environmental policy from Indiana University. Ongoing projects include studies of fragmentation in Western USA cities, local cross-border agreements, and coupling of water and land use institutions. She is Assistant Professor in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change and the Center for the Study of Institutional Dynamics. <http://shesc.asu.edu/york>