Theories of Practice: From Housing Regeneration to Urban Transformation

Aseem Inam Ph.D.
Director • TRULAB: Laboratory for Designing Urban Transformation
John Bousfield Distinguished Visitor • University of Toronto

Twitter: @TRU_Lab
Housing and cities
Essential challenge of housing in cities

In [New York] where almost 70 percent of residents are renters, one-third of tenants pay more than half their income in rent . . . More than 60,000 people, including 20,000 children, are homeless.

Sam Stein, Jacobin, Fall 2014.

In the last decade, London has lost 8,000 social-rented homes. Under the Tory-led coalition, the amount of affordable housing delivered across the country fell by a third – from 53,000 homes completed in 2010 to 36,000 in 2014.

Design and project based approaches

Ideas to solve London’s housing crisis - in pictures

From floating neighbourhoods to modular rooftop homes, 100 proposals shortlisted by New London Architecture (NLA) offer ideas for providing desperately needed housing in the UK capital. Here’s a selection of highlights:

- New Ideas for Housing opens at The Building Centre on 15 October 2015

The Guardian, 15 September 2015
From piecemeal projects to processes and systems . . .

Santa Bonita Affordable Housing and Mixed Use Development, Los Angeles 2010
Shifts: Theories of practice

- Beyond intentions: Consequences of design
- Beyond practice: Urbanism as creative political act
- Beyond objects: City as flux
Beyond intentions: Consequences of design

Such reasonings and all reasonings turn upon the idea that if one exerts certain kinds of volition, one will undergo in return certain compulsory perceptions. Now this sort of consideration, namely, that certain lines of conduct will entail certain kinds of inevitable experiences is what is called a practical consideration. Hence is justified the maxim, belief in which constitutes [P]ragmatism; namely: In order to ascertain the meaning of an intellectual conception one should consider what practical consequences might conceivably result by necessity from the truth of that conception; and the sum of these consequences will constitute the entire meaning of the conception.

Consequences of design
India Habitat Centre • New Delhi
From government office building to ecological campus and vibrant urban center
Beyond intentions: Consequences of design

- **We invent concepts** and objects of urbanism, and we can look towards their consequences as integral part of design process.

- Openness to outcomes so as to systematically reintegrate unexpected impacts of design strategies into practice.

- Emphasis on time is essential, in which **housing and urbanism are ongoing verbs** rather than definitive nouns.

- Case study: India Habitat Centre shows us that one critical strategy for redesigning housing is to **redesign its institutions**.
Beyond practice: Urbanism as creative political act

Moral choice becomes always a matter of compromise between competing goods rather than a choice between absolutely right and wrong . . . We stake our sense of who we are on the outcome of such choices . . . [For Pragmatists], moral struggle is continuous with the struggle for existence, and no sharp break divides the unjust from the imprudent, the evil from the inexpedient. What matters for [P]ragmatists is devising ways of diminishing human suffering and increasing human equality, increasing the ability of all human children to start life with an equal chance of happiness.

Urbanism as creative political act
Orangi Pilot Project • Karachi
Technical design as revolutionary practice in extremely challenging context
Beyond practice: Urbanism as creative political act

- Engaging with the everyday politics of the city; not just formal political institutions and dynamics
- Practicing by asking fundamental questions: Who has the power to actually shape cities, and how is that power wielded?
- Revolutionizing urbanism as creative political act by practicing temporary anarchy
- Case study: Orangi Pilot Project demonstrates that one can truly mobilize housing communities around urgent challenges and that we can learn from the radical inventiveness and resourcefulness of the global south.
What really exists is not things made but things in the making. Once made, they are dead, and an infinite number of alternative conceptual decompositions can be used in defining them. But put yourself in the making by a stroke of intuitive sympathy with the thing and, the whole range of possible decompositions coming at once into your possession, you are no longer troubled with the question of which of them is absolutely true. Reality falls in passing into conceptual analysis; it mounts in living its own undivided life—it budges and bourgeons, changes and creates.

City as flux
MIT Experimental Design Studio • Boston
Creating generative scenarios and what-if vignettes
Beyond objects: City as flux

- Fine-grained understanding of how processes of urban change actually work
- How urban change is accomplished by translating ideas into action
- Understanding that disequilibrium is normal and leveraging it to create fundamental change
- Case study: MIT Experimental Design Studio is an example of how effective housing design methodologies can emerge out of surprising sources and of how radical shifts in practice often require generational change.
From housing regeneration to urban transformation

Theories of practice

• Beyond intentions: Consequences of design: Housing as a means for urban transformation

• Beyond practice: Urbanism as creative political act: Creating common ground for strategic alliances around critical housing challenges

• Beyond objects: City as flux: New ways of engaging with the constantly changing nature of housing and urbanism
Understanding the spatial production of cities . . .

Planning for the Unplanned
Recovering from Crises in Megacities

ASEEM INAM

How do cities plan for the unplanned? Is it possible for cities to devise recovery plans for every sudden shock that they encounter? Although urban planning institutions must contend with uncertain and complex environments, they often rely upon old and familiar, rather than new and innovative, tactics to tackle the unexpected — in surprisingly effective ways.

In Planning for the Unplanned, Aseem Inam argues that the successes of urban recovery efforts in megacities are rooted in institutional bureaucracy and standardized routines. Although institutionalized routines can be rigid and limiting, they are the result of experience and, as such, simplify responses to novel situations. Using established procedures, institutions can take the shock into the realm of the familiar and utilize knowledge and resources in highly responsive ways.

Analyzing case studies of recovery efforts from earthquakes, riots, air pollution, and terrorist attacks in Mexico City, Los Angeles, and New York, Inam provides a deeper understanding of what works in urban planning and why. Furthermore, he demonstrates the ways in which institutional routines remain powerful and effective tools for planning for the unplanned.

ASEEM INAM is Assistant Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and has worked as an architect, urban designer, and planner in the United States, Canada, France, and India.

. . . by analyzing how institutions actually design housing.
Designing effective design practices . . .

by understanding how urban transformation actually occurs.
Thank you

Aseem Inam
https://independent.academia.edu/AseemInam

TRULAB: Laboratory for Designing Urban Transformation
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John Bousfield Distinguished Visitor, University of Toronto
aseem.inam@utoronto.ca