

CourseNo: ARCHA4678_001_2014_1
Meeting Location: BUELL HALL 300 S
Meeting Time: T 06:00P-08:00P

Columbia University in the City of New York

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation

Spring 2014

New Spaces of Housing:

From Central Planning to Distributed Incentives: Housing, Space, Policy and Finance

Michael Bell, Professor of Architecture

Brian Loughlin, Chief Architect, Jersey City Housing Authority, GSAPP, Adjunct Professor

The seminar will include a series of guest speakers after we have established a level of preparation:

Eric Belsky, Executive Director, The Joint Center for Housing Studies, Harvard University.

Roseanne Haggerty, Executive Director, Community, Solutions

Marc Jahr – President, NYC Housing Development Corporation

Seminar Abstract:

The Rise of an *Anti - Policy* in Housing and its effects on Design and Cost of Housing

This seminar will explore the decreased role direct federal expenditures play in lower-income and public housing development in the United States since the advent in the 1980's of low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC) and other tax based incentives for housing development. The seminar lectures will address how changes in funding mechanisms have affected not only the development and design of lower-income and public housing, but also how they these changes in means have been perceived and what impact they had on the engagement of planning and architecture practices with issues of poverty and low-income housing.

With a focus on parallel evolutions in architectural design and theory since the 1980's that has often seemed to abandon housing as a zone of experimentation the seminar will explore how planning and architectural educations could do far more to produce a counter to the status quo in all forms of housing production. The goal is re-connect Architecture and Planning capabilities within a discussion of the financial practices as well the political philosophies of these shifts—more accurately within the seeming loss of an ability to critically discuss equity issues that many of the tax incentive practices often seem to dissimulate into market development models. Affordable housing as a derivative of tax credits, multi-tiered funding sources, and an architectural guise of *“fitting in” with the quasi-vernacular* of broader status quo developer housing models (and its constituency) has increasingly made it difficult to discuss the deeper meaning of both the political underpinnings of these policy shifts but also the potential of architectural and planning practices to affect the outcome—to enter the debate.

Decentralization

U.S. housing policy increasingly moved toward less reliance on direct subsidy of low-income and poverty rental housing during the 1990's, but the actual means to achieve this shift were created in the 1980's with the emergence of Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and other incentive means offered in lieu of direct government subsidy for housing. In 1998 the *Quality Work and Housing Responsibility Act (QWHRA)* employed directly spatial language in seeking to “de-concentrate” poverty in Public Housing Authority Developments where the homogeneity of constituencies and certain risk factors was deemed too high. These financial and overtly spatial mechanisms—*moving monies and bodies*—require far more attention than they have had in the public realm, but also within the architectural and planning academic and design realms.

The shifts toward decentralization of funding sources that have characterized U.S. housing policy since the 1990's have been paralleled by quite literal formal changes in architectural and urban design. However, the tendency to see these political shifts in light of building form or urban planning design has limited the analysis, and wider conversation about the pitfalls and broader opportunities or implications at the core of these economic and ultimately social shifts. While housing design has long ceased to be a central focus of architectural theory or design in United States architectural schools, it is in fact embedded within, and emblematic of, the same economic and urban conditions against which much contemporary architectural theory and design has defined (even *steeled*) itself. That is, housing is precisely located within the same theories of *territory*, of the *metropolis*, of the over-arching influence of finance on urban life and subjectivity that have motivated the most experimental practices in design. Architectural postures of *negation* or *engagement* have recently been deeply affected by new forms of *Building Information Management (BIM)* and by capabilities to engage construction and managed forms of money and material in ways that are essentially financial models. How these new capabilities in architectural practice relate to managed practices money and finance and how architects have seemingly increased their willingness to view the potentials of financial practices more positively is but one shift that has already begun to alter and confuse the overall state of housing design and planning.

Our goal is reexamine housing within the parameters of architecture and planning practices by asking both disciplines to address how design, policy and development practices have evolved since the 1980's and in particular how they can be expected to engage lower-income constituencies. The questions will be posed against a divide that has often left both practices falsely at odds with each other and more so at odds with false adversaries: a tendency to see [architecture + abstraction] vs. [planning + economics] has in recent years been dramatically altered by a wider predomination of market logics as the denominator of urban space and of social life, but also of architectural design. Within the over-arching market aspects of housing design both fields have lost footing while seeming to also fail to see the potentials or how the shifts were instigated—on what grounds. While both fields rely on constituent equity concepts, spatial and territorial logics, broad and specific conceptions of urban subjectivity, they do little to directly engage the literal mechanisms of the market or to dissect the principles of finance and liquidity that are at the heart of the housing policy today.