

URBN.

Edited by Blake Horne



Providence, RI, India Point Park

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FROM THE DEPARTMENT

Letter from the Director



Congratulations to all as we approach the end of the Fall semester. Hope everyone is looking forward to a productive close of the year and a restful holiday season. Thanks to the DUG, and to all our concentrators and faculty for their efforts on behalf of the program this fall. We've had a busy semester—ten seniors are launched on exciting thesis projects and a record number of hopeful graduates, 31 as of last count, are turning towards thinking about their capstones. Prof. Neumann hosted Prof. Virginia Bonicatto, who talked with us about the history of Buenos Aires's built environment, and we'll look forward to an alumni event in the spring. Thanks for everything you do for the program! Here's to a peaceful holiday season and a better New Year! See you in January.

Thanks,

Sandy Zipp

Letter from the Editor

At the start of the semester, I had no plans to become the editor of the newsletter, but I am so thankful that this opportunity has fallen to me. I believe that our concentration has a special sort of community to it, especially when considering its size, and I feel that this has given me a chance to contribute something to that community. I would like to extend special thanks to Kenneth Anderson, Romilly Thomson, and Garrett Brand, who have contributed to the writing of this edition, to Professor Sandy Zipp for providing me this role and assisting with my work, and to all of my teachers and classmates who have made Urban Studies such an engaging experience.

Sincerely,
Blake Horne



Boston, MA, Boston Common

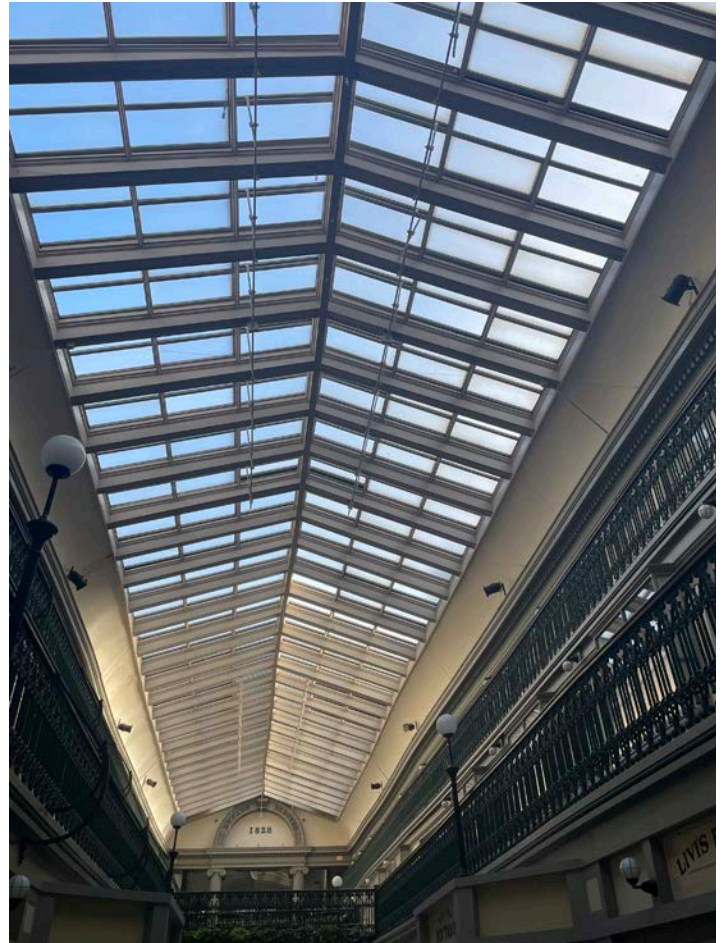
DEPARTMENT EVENTS

PVD Architecture Walking Tour

Professor Dietrich Neumann

Blake Horne

On a sunny Saturday afternoon in November, I joined along with about 20 students to follow Professor Dietrich Neumann on a walking tour of the architecture in Downtown Providence. Hosted by the ARCH and URBAN DUGs, the tour started on campus at the List Art Center (which I learned is the only campus building facing downtown) and continued into the City before ending in Burnside Park. The tour included other Providence landmarks such as the Athenaeum, the Superior Court House, and the Arcade. Throughout the tour, Prof. Neumann was able to regale us with many stories behind the architecture and development of the city's environment. While to many of us students at Brown, Providence can feel like a pit stop before we go on to bigger things, it's important to be cognizant of the rich history and culture that is present in the city. Every building tells its own story, and provides us with a home for our studies.



Between Private and Public Spheres: Architecture, Urbanism and the Shaping of Buenos Aires' Character

Virginia Bonicatto, PhD, Universidad Nacional de La Plata

Kenneth Anderson



Organized by Prof. Dietrich Neumann and the Urban Studies Department, Virginia Bonicatto, PhD, Universidad Nacional de La Plata in Argentina, gave a brief yet elucidating lecture on the development of Buenos Aires in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Hailed as the Paris of South America, Argentina commissioned grandiose architectural and urban planning projects to establish a national identity based on key ideas of independence, democracy, and European heritage. By enacting Haussmannesque policies of urban renovation, which included the construction of the first modern avenue in South America (la Avenida de Mayo), the government aimed to

create sightlines that emphasized federal buildings and national monuments. However, as corporations and manufacturers in the cities amassed vast amounts of wealth, they constructed the city's first skyscrapers, altering the urban fabric that the government had originally designed. The arrival of these tall buildings, influenced by the design of those that were erected in Chicago and New York, symbolized the might of both domestic and foreign capitalistic ventures. Argentina's capital was caught between private and public spheres, as Prof. Bonicatto noted the government's fear that corporations would eclipse its authority and vested interests.

While the development of Argentina's skyscrapers did not wane due to government regulation or intervention, it demonstrated the social implications of architecture in shaping ideas with respect to identity and belonging. Both the government and corporations had plans to mold the urban environment into one that supported the structures that gave them power, even if it meant competing with one another in this burgeoning city in the Southern Hemisphere.



STUDENT PRESENTATION AT SNEAPA

Blake Horne

This fall, I had the privilege of presenting my and my colleagues' work on the project Diversifying Housing in Rural Rhode Island at the Southern New England American Planner's Association Conference (SNEAPA) in Newport, RI. The project was completed in the spring, as part of a collaboration with the RI Department of Housing, for the course Housing Justice taught by Professor Marijoan Bull. Given the current housing crisis that Rhode Island and the country has experienced, we were tasked with assessing the feasibility of developing denser housing in areas that lack wet infrastructure, such as public water and sewers. The project was completed by five student researchers: Nadia Bishop '26, Hayden Gonzales '27, Niyanta Nepal '25, Daniela Jayinski '25, and myself. Nadia and I presented our work at SNEAPA, where we were accompanied by two housing developers, Charlie Thomas-Davison, Director of Real Estate Development at Women's Development Corporation, and Christian Belden, Executive Director of Church Community Housing Corporation. The bulk of the project was making sense of the state's regulations for onsite wastewater treatment systems and community wells, and then preparing a catalog of the existing multi-family developments that are being served by their own community wells in Rhode Island. These developments were then used as case studies to show the potential for denser development in rural areas. For the SNEAPA presentation, Charlie and Christian were able to give a deep dive into some projects that they have built and are planning to build in rural areas, providing examples of the opposition they have faced and creative solutions to make their projects work. It was a great opportunity for us to share our work and encourage municipal planners across the region to pursue denser developments in uncommon locations. The QR code on this page links to the final report from the spring, which is best viewed on a desktop or laptop.



ARE YOU GOING TO BE THE NEXT MACKEREL MASTER?

Romilly Thomson

This summer, I went to Denmark under the Guiliano Global Fellowship to study the intersection of cultural heritage, sustainable food, and rural economies. As part of this ambition, I traveled to Sjaellands Odde, a historic harbor town, to observe a yearly fishing competition hosted by this village west of Copenhagen. I was curious to learn how this town has adopted their economy in response to a waning fishing industry, and how they might maintain their cultural heritage to this practice nevertheless. Below is an essay I wrote about the experience.

At dawn, the highway is empty. This was helpful for me, as cyclist peddling down the road a bit bleary-eyed on a wonky borrowed bike. It was 6am, and I had good reason for facing the cold wind as I zipped down to town. Today was the first day of the Mackerel-Masters Competition: a two-day adventure in which fishermen from around the Zealand region of Denmark compete to see how many mackerel they can catch. One prize for volume, one for size. Linda, who organized the competition as head of the local fishing club (the Småbådsfiskeklub) explained to me over zoom when we first met, mackerel would not be their first choice for a competition, but since the tuna left and the salmon were gone, the mackerel were the only fish that people could still reliably get down here that weren't unsatisfying minnows.



A roadside cafe

Sjallends Odde is shaped like a narwal tusk, jutting out from Zealand, Denmark's largest island and home to its capital. A couple thousand people live on this small peninsula (about six miles in length), with the population tripling during the summer as urban Danes seek their escape to the sea. That's about all I could discern online before I came, hoping to learn about this historic fishing region for a research project. There's a few towns dotting this land, some more developed than others — one consists of a burger joint and a parking lot — all connected by one long yawn of a highway that I got to know intimately on my week-long visit. I explored one best, Havnebyen, a harbor town that once hosted a thriving tuna market, flourishing in the 1920s but now a mostly sleepy junction.

As I parked my bike, the harbor was already abuzz. Men in large coats sipped coffee from mugs nestled close to their chest and spoke softly to each other, eyes trained on the water. Some of their co-competitors sat inside the hall where Linda and her coworkers made some last minute announcements: We'll blow the starting horn in 20 minutes. Be back in time to weigh your fish. Remember to have fun out there, boys. Teams began oozing out the hall, as the coffee pots ran empty and the clock neared 7. They'd be out until 3, when they'd come in to weigh their prizes from the day and enjoy a beer in the sun. But it was still early, and the sky still pastel.

Linda and I, along with a few other organizers, walked to the pier to see the boats off. They lined up in the ocean, mere dots from the rocky coast where we stood with binoculars. An icon in the Danish fishing

world, a former spokesman at the salmon competition in Southern Denmark was the star guest of the weekend. Linda shot a nervous grin at me as she bestowed the horn to him.

At 7 on the dot, the spokesman blew the horn, and about 45 boats tore through the water to hopefully catch around 300-400 mackerel, just in this first day. Back at the harbor I conducted some interviews. The more I spoke to the fishermen, the more common their stories seemed and the tone they were told in — nostalgic for the hey-days of fishing here, with a sadness talking about how hard it's become.

They spoke candidly of the pollution and warming waters which drove out the species that used to be reliable. I met Manus, who used to make a living as a fisherman, but has since had to stop. "It's just grown impossible. I want to have a life, and you can't do that fishing," he told me frankly. He now drives trucks, but comes to these competitions to reunite with old friends from the ships he worked on.



Henrik, one organizer who kindly took me out on his boat to see some of the activity up close, told me about growing up in this town, grinning as he described going off with his brothers in the morning before school to catch some fish to sell to the tourists. He'd end the day with pockets stuffed full of cash, after the city-folk bought the fresh catch that came in by the boatload each day. Henrik now works in tech, but still goes out on the water every moment he gets. "This is where I'm happiest," he explained.

Manus and his fellow fisherman Svend

The tourists this summer still eat plenty of fish as they sit al fresco by the water, but the salmon on their plates come from miles away, from farms up north in the Faroe Islands. Manus explained to me that the harbor and those nearby simply cannot meet the desires of the customers here; "People only eat so much mackerel." Now, there are only two professional, full-time fishermen in Sjaellands Odde, and they were not present at the competition. After hearing about how challenging it is to have their job these days, it's hard to imagine them coming in on a weekend for some more.

Food production still props up the economy here, though. Passionate sustainability advocates have transformed pockets of this small peninsula into hubs of edible innovation. There's a regenerative-grain-based bakery, a pioneering biodynamic farm, a waste-free fermentation shop, and an organic Iranian-Danish fusion bistro. But these producers can only survive through their Copenhagen customers, who've either driven up for the summer or found their goods in upscale restaurants back home.

As one farmer told me, until their sustainable practices can be subsidized in some way, locals will be priced out of the food made and grown right in their town.

The bistro is hosting the post-competition feast, but they won't be catering. A celebratory meal means pork roast and potatoes, Linda tells me. Not even the fish they caught — too delicate, too finicky. The fishermen want something heartier.

Even the competitions have changed though; both in quality and quantity. Prizes used to get up to forty-thousand dollars, now about a quarter of that if you're lucky. With the opportunities to compete diminishing and the pots slimming, the competitions have grown tenser. "People have always been competing against their friends, but now there is less to go around," Manus explains. I must say though, this tension was not immediately apparent to a first-timer like myself. I mostly saw happy reunions, families sitting together on the docks, peering out at the boats and toddlers fiddling



Manus and his daughter's boat, day of competition

with miniature rods, and the smiles on their faces as people came in and got to rest their sea legs in the evening. Perhaps this jovial spirit was thanks also to the bustling harbor stalls, set up for the first time this year to encourage non-fishermen locals and visitors to come out and enjoy the festivities. I felt the nerves keenest coming from the organizers who had to prove to the town that this project would be worth it, bringing energy and dollars into the municipality.



One of the weigh stations

prizes. Marie, Henrik's daughter, who was my age and a fast friend, explained how the announcement of the winner was not so much of a grand reveal for this twist — whispers had swirled around the harbor since the final weigh-in as people peeked at scorecards and eyed the scales while the judges calculated the results.

The jubilant winners got up from their table, and got first choice to pick their prize from the trove of fishing gold: on-boat grills, flashy rods, high-tech nets. The rest of the afternoon Linda handed out the awards to the runner-ups and for my favorite category, the junior prize. Manus's young daughter won first, and beamed with pride as she collected her sleek new rod with a medal around her neck. Manus beamed too. A skilled fisherman, he certainly could have won the big prize this weekend, but spent the two days with his girl instead, guiding her and instilling a love in the sport just as so many families had done in this hall.

When I had asked him earlier that day if she would follow in her footsteps, he looked down and smiled. "Of course, but just for a hobby. I won't let her do it for a living."



IN CONVERSTATION WITH GARRETT BRAND ON ZOHRAN MAMDANI

Blake Horne

Zohran Mamdani's election as Mayor of New York City has inspired a rush of commentary and reaction all across the country. The controversy surrounding the city's youngest mayor-elect inspired Garrett Brand URBN/SOC '26 to study the attacks on Mamdani's campaign and the negative reactions to his election for his senior thesis in Sociology. I took the opportunity to ask Garrett a few questions, about his research and about his views on Mamdani as a political figure.

Blake: You are currently working on a thesis regarding Zohran Mamdani's campaign for mayor of New York City. What is it that you propose is so unique about that campaign and why did you wish to study it?

Garrett: I think there are a number of things that make Mamdani's campaign unique. His choice to build a campaign based on a politics of hope rather than fear stands out to me—every aspect of his messaging was about what government could and should be doing to improve people's lives, which is a refreshing break from the Democratic party's typical politics of "not now, not yet, not possible." Mamdani also expanded the New York City electorate in an exciting way by engaging groups who have been traditionally sidelined by mainstream politics, most notably young people and New York's significant South Asian community. My thesis work on Mamdani focuses less on his supporters than it



does on his detractors, however. I got the idea for the project last Spring while complaining to a friend in the Urban Studies department about how frustrated I was with the New York Times' negative coverage of Mamdani. Later in the same conversation, I mentioned that I didn't know what I was going to write my thesis on. Helpfully, my friend suggested that I consider writing about how mainstream media has covered Mamdani's mayoral campaign, and now here we are. Beyond media coverage, I am looking at the various tactics used by Mamdani's powerful opponents to delegitimize him, and in the wake of his victory, analyzing why they were ultimately unsuccessful and what that means for American political culture.

B: As you said, the campaign has garnered an immense amount of media attention, with some going on to announce Mamdani as the new face of the American Left, and his campaign as a shining star to be followed

and imitated. How do you view such claims? Is the campaign something that can be replicated in other municipalities? What about at state and federal levels?

G: Mamdani's campaign has obviously influenced politics beyond New York City in a multitude of ways. There have been a variety of copycat campaigns already popping up across the country, with a variety of candidates opting to adopt his social media aesthetics and his core messaging surrounding affordability. Of course, he was not even the only democratic socialist to win a major municipal office on election day—Katie Wilson beat an establishment candidate to become the mayor-elect of Seattle, and a variety of candidates won city council seats across the country, such as Kelsea Bond in Atlanta. There is clearly something in the leftist ethos of these campaigns that speaks to the current political moment, at least in major cities. Here in Providence, David Morales is clearly attempting to ride the “Zohmentum” as he challenges Brett Smiley for the mayor's office—and I hope he's successful! I think this wave of leftist campaigns speaks to the sense of hope that Mamdani has given to people across the country, particularly young people. I will never forget the feeling I had watching Mamdani win the primary. Prior to that night, the most positive feeling I had experienced from any election was relief that the worst possible option had not won. Mamdani's victory was different—it was the first time I was genuinely excited about a candidate's victory. Many of my friends expressed similar sentiments; there were more than a few tears shed during Mamdani's victory speech. To me, this is the most important thing to be replicated from Mamdani's campaign: the feelings of genuine excitement, joy, and hope for a better future. Obviously, Mamdani's exact policies cannot be directly exported to other cities in states without friction. But, his earnest commitment to building a better government for the people that he serves should be.

B: Many previous NYC mayors have been touted as national leaders only to then fall short of such expectations. Do you foresee that Mamdani will buck this trend and become a leader of American politics?

G: The way I see it, it is less important for Mamdani himself to become a leader in national politics than for the movement he has been propelled by to take root nationally. As discussed above, I believe this is already happening, and hope that it will continue to. However, Mamdani is undoubtedly a unique political talent and I could certainly see him having a future in Congress or another position of national leadership. He is certainly more of a political force than prior NYC mayors—I don't think he will suffer the fate of Bill de Blasio or Eric Adams.

B: What are your expectations for Mamdani's mayorship? Do you expect him to be able fulfill his campaign promises? Where do you imagine he may fall short, and where do you believe he can thrive?

G: I expect that Mamdani will be able to realize most of his core agenda! For starters, his centerpiece promise to “freeze the rent” is achievable through his power as mayor alone. He is able to appoint the members of New York's Rent Guidelines Board, who then are able to decide to not raise the rates of rent-stabilized apartments in the city. His plan to begin a municipal grocery store program should be relatively simple to implement considering its relatively low impact on New York's immense budget. Of course, Mamdani's most ambitious promises will require cooperation from the state government in Albany, most notably for his proposal to raise income taxes on the rich and to match New York's corporate tax rate to New Jersey's. Mamdani will need this tax revenue to

fund his universal childcare plan, and likely to subsidize the MTA's budget in order to make buses "fast and free." While Governor Kathy Hochul has expressed resistance to his plans, particularly in regards to taxing the rich, the political headwinds do not blow in her favor. She is up for reelection and facing a challenge from her left by Antonio Delgado, her own Lieutenant Governor. Mamdani's team has already taken steps to mobilize his enormous volunteer operation towards enacting his agenda, and it is easy to imagine him throwing his sizable political weight behind Delgado or another Hochul challenger unless she relents to his agenda. Furthermore, the leaders of both chambers of New York's state legislature have endorsed Mamdani's tax plan. Whether she likes it or not, Mamdani currently holds more political capital than Hochul in New York—I believe it is more likely than not that she will be forced to play ball.

B: Is there anything else you would like to add that I haven't asked about?

G: I should clarify that I'm not trying to engage in any sort of political hero-worship regarding Mamdani. While I do support him and admire much about his campaign, he is ultimately a politician, and thus, his role is quite literally to be held accountable. He is sure to make missteps throughout his mayoralty—in fact, in my opinion, he already has! I disagree with his choice to retain NYPD Commissioner Jessica Tisch, and I am puzzled by his reticence to endorse fellow NYC-DSA member Councilman Chi Osse's primary challenge of Hakeem Jeffries, the pinnacle of the Democratic establishment which Mamdani has run in opposition to. However, it is refreshing to finally see a politician make decisions I disagree with and be inclined to actually give them the benefit of the doubt. To me, Mamdani has earned some degree of legitimacy and trust. I believe that that trust is deeply significant: America's political culture is broken, and most people rightfully distrust our leaders. Mamdani is showing that that doesn't have to be the case—and that our great cities can be the place where trust is rebuilt.



SURVEY: DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT OF PROVIDENCE'S CHALLENGES

Blake Horne

This semester, I was able to take URBN 1870D Downtown Development with Professor Robert Azar. As one of the Urban Studies seminars offered, the course has had my colleagues and I studying urban planning and decision making processes. The majority of our research has been conducted using Providence as a case study, which Prof. Azar has special expertise in considering his other position as Deputy Director of the Providence Planning and Development Department. With so much emphasis on Providence, I felt prompted to start considering what were the most pressing issues facing the city that our university calls home. Is it housing? Is it economic development? Is it something less tangible, something concerning the spirit of the city? I decided that it could be fascinating to pose this question to my classmates and professor. Thus, in a google form, I asked:

"In your estimate, what are the most pressing challenges that Providence is facing? Respond with at least 3 terms or phrases."

HOUSING

"lack of affordable housing," "NIMBYism," "Cost of housing"

From a pool of 20, I was only able to get 13 responses. But, every response except one mentioned this issue: housing affordability. The affordability crisis across the nation has become very publicized, but it seems to be especially challenging in Providence. There have been estimates that suggest that the cost of housing in the city, relative to the wages in the city, make it the most unaffordable city in the country. Many responses specifically ask for affordable housing, not just housing in general. In the class, there seems to be an appetite for subsidized developments and support for affordable housing developers, and that market rate construction will not be enough to bring costs down. Housing is such an undeniable issue, and it will be interesting to see what avenues the city ends up pursuing towards affordability.

ECONOMY

"lack of economic development," "retail vacancy," "financial stability"

The financial struggles of Providence are in no way a secret. Over the years, the city has seen a number of businesses close their doors and move elsewhere, and city hall has been forced to make many tough decisions in order to keep the city's finances above water. While the decline may have cooled, the city is still left with the question of how to fill the space left by departing business, and be able to kickstart the city's economic growth and raise funds for city services. Considering that about half of the responses made some sort of reference to economic struggles facing the city, this seems to be a broad concern.

SCHOOLING

“educational equity,” “failing public school system”

What will be the future of Providence Public Schools? With the school district still under state takeover, and a political climate that is becoming increasingly tilted in the favor of charter schools and “school choice”, PPSD is currently in a precarious position. However, steps are being taken to help the city’s schooling such as renovations to multiple school buildings and the pursuit of combined K-8 education. While we are yet to see the outcomes of the city’s plans, it’s intriguing to wonder how the ongoing turmoil may be able to affect Providence politics such as the upcoming mayoral election.

IDENTITY

“Finding and expanding on its niche,” “excitement”

Possibly the most interesting response that I got was the idea that Providence is struggling to establish its identity as a city. Some people may view Providence as in the shadow of other nearby cities, and if the city wants to attract people, and particularly young people, it needs to become something special and unique. Who is Providence for? What does Providence produce? Providence needs to define itself as more than just a declined post-industrial city.

Total	13
Housing	12
Economy	6
Schooling	5
Identity	2
Climate	2
Transportation	2
Gentrification	2
ICE activity	1

Shows the number of responses that mentioned a subject area at least once.

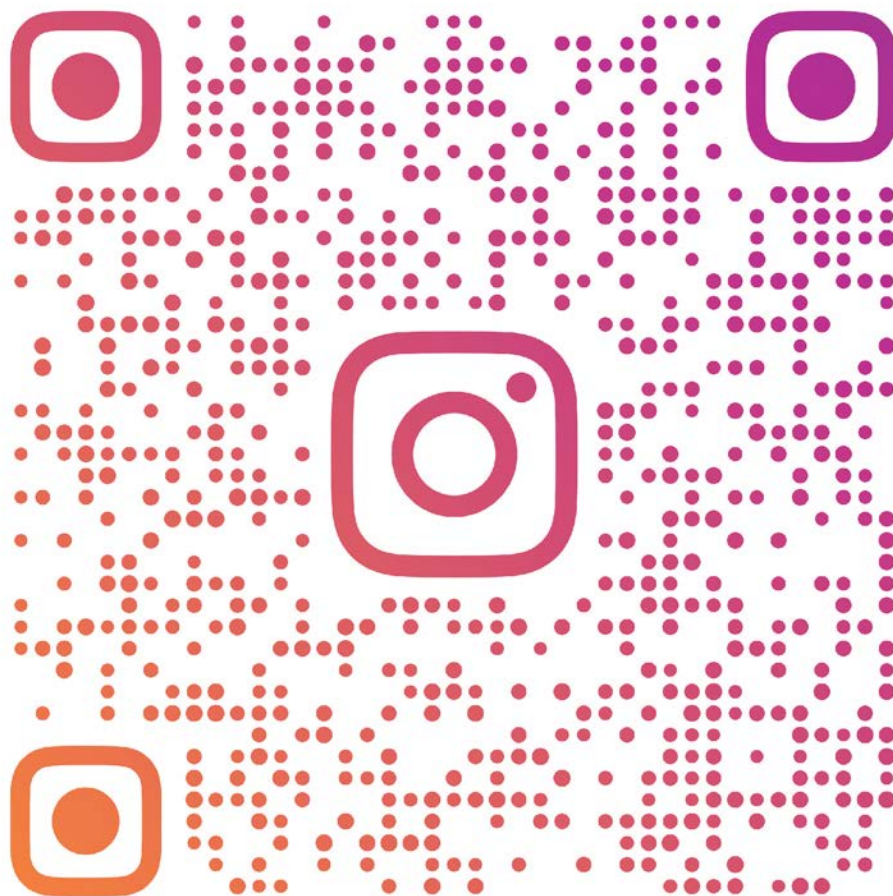
BROWN ALUM IN HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

HIAA graduate Duke DiEugenio '21.5 leads design at Culdesac, a real estate developer focused on walkable neighborhoods. Professor Neumann was in Atlanta for the annual Society of Architectural Historians conference and joined Duke for a tour of the city's Southside. Their tour included two under-construction Culdesac projects located along the BeltLine— a former railway corridor transformed into a twenty-two mile network of trails, parks, and transit. By right-sizing units and omitting parking, these townhome courtyards offer transit-supportive density and for-sale affordability.



SOCIAL MEDIA

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