

URBN.

Edited by Grace Austin



GA

CONTENTS

<i>From the Department</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Summer Research Reflection</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Development and Environmental</i>	
<i>Contamination in RI and Iowa ..</i>	<i>6</i>

<i>Department Events</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Participatory Budgeting</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>14</i>

FROM THE DEPARTMENT

Letter from the Director

Hello URBN,

As we look towards closing out another semester, I hope everyone is finding meaning and purpose in your work, and some measure of joy too. Here in URBN, this year we are still enjoying the long tail of our 50th anniversary celebrations from last spring. This fall we welcomed several alums to campus to talk about graduate school in urbanism, and we have a full slate of events on tap for the spring, including two speakers—Abidin Kusno (York Univ.) and Margaret O'Mara (Univ. of Washington)—and some more alum appearances. More on that in January, but for now I want to send best wishes for a productive conclusion to the term. I hope you are all looking forward to a restful holiday with friends and family.

Thanks,

Sandy Zipp, Director

Letter from the Editor

Hi everyone,

Thank you for taking the time to look through the newsletter! We have had an active fall semester in the Urban Studies Department and with the URBN Department Undergraduate Group (DUG). Alejandro Ingkavet, Kaylen Pak, and Sadie Elliott-Hart join me on the DUG as we hope to build community across prospective, current, and past Urban Studies students at Brown. I continue to appreciate Urban Studies as a department that brings people together for a variety of different reasons, creating engaging, thoughtful learning spaces shared by students, faculty, and alumni.

Warmly,

Grace Austin '24



GA



SUMMER RESEARCH REFLECTION

Climate Resilience and the Informal Settlement: A Reframing of Narratives

Ayan Rahman

This summer, I was able to build on previous field work I conducted in Bangladesh to collect data for my senior honors thesis project. This project surrounds the themes of rural to urban migration in Bangladesh as a result of climate induced environmental degradation affecting agrarian societies in Bangladesh's countryside. Specifically, I studied the urban informal settlements that many climate migrants in Bangladesh settle in following their displacements from rural areas. I examined the social networks within these spaces, documenting migrant narratives and visual analyses of infrastructure access within these sectors of Dhaka, the capital city of the country. All of this was made possible through the generous support of the Swearer Center's Royce Fellowship and Edward Giuliano Global Fellowship.



While in Bangladesh, I worked with the International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), an NGO focused on research and capacity building in the realm of environmentalism. With the help of a number of the center's research officers, I completed multiple site visits to informal settlements such as the Kallyanpur Pora Basti ("The Burnt Slum of Kallyanpur") and the Korail Slum. During these visits, I participated in walking tours and got to observe life within these spaces from an intimate stand-point. Much

of the work I did during these field work sessions was grounded in capturing informal sector social scenes, economic activity and more by collecting video footage, interviews, and observational notes.

One of the key takeaways from my time in Dhaka was understanding the interplays among the several stakeholders that maintained social power in the function of these climate refugee settlements. Though these were homegrown communities made by and for informal settlement residents, several entities had hands in the functioning of them – NGOs, municipal figures, and illegal landholders to name a few. With all things considered, I observed a sort of social network that served as the foundation for settlement operations, with NGOs often acting as advocates in the face of municipal and landholder hostility. Moreover, the bustling informal economies that residents often put



together that stood outside the sphere of Dhaka's main economic systems served as centralized cores for communities to subsist in the face of the opposing "formal" sector of the city. This, in conjunction with the robust residential planning schemes and community infrastructures put together by climate refugees, revealed the idea that these informal settlements – though they were seen as antithetical to Dhaka's development trajectory – are actually radical spaces of urban climate resilience, all things considered.

These are complex systems that I am continuing to investigate through my thesis project this year, and you should come to my thesis presentation this

AR

spring to hear more about it! By that point, I hope to turn the experiences I had over the summer into tangible and presentable material, reflecting an argument surrounding the nature of climate refugee experiences, the informal settlements they live in, and how they constitute a form of resilience that is often overlooked within the broader urban development context.

Environmental Contamination and Development

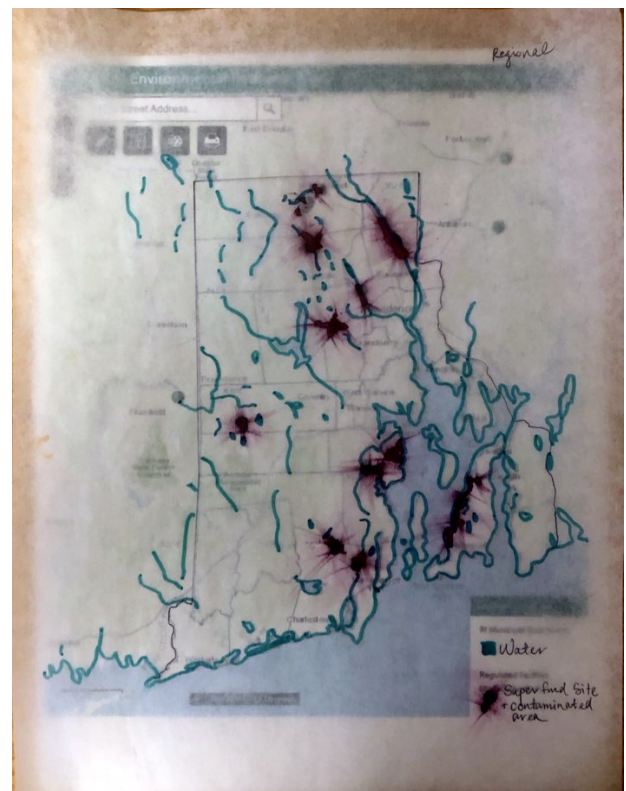
A Visual Analysis of Contaminated Sites in Rhode Island and Iowa

Eliana C. Hornbuckle

While taking Prof. Manuel Cordero Alvarado's seminar on urban ecologies in Spring 2023, I conducted a semester-long project to examine environmental contamination across different scales in urban environments. I focused on two kinds of hazardous waste sites: Superfund sites and brownfield sites. Superfund sites have high enough contamination levels that qualify them to be regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on a federal level. Brownfield sites are environmentally contaminated sites managed at the state level that have been selected for remediation and reuse.

I began by studying brownfield sites in Providence and Rhode Island's thirteen Superfund sites. Using trace paper, printed maps and markers, I visualized how sites are spatially located across the state. Through this analysis, I observed that Superfund sites are tightly correlated with bodies of water that serve as a transport mechanism for contamination. In

urban areas, brownfield sites are selected for remediation based on their potential economic, environmental and local impacts for reuse.

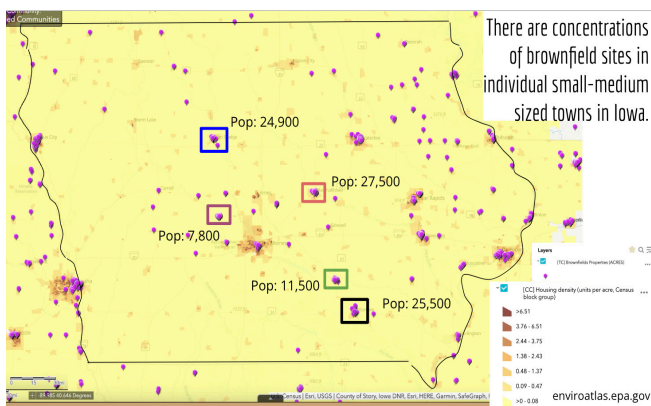


ECH

Next, I shifted my analysis to study contamination in my home state of Iowa. For this part of the project, I was interested in answering

three research questions. First, I was curious if brownfield sites in Iowa are concentrated in urban or rural areas. Iowa is a primarily rural state so I hypothesized that population density may impact brownfield site selection. Secondly, I was interested in investigating how Iowa's development and agricultural history impacted contaminated sites. Finally, I wanted to analyze how reuse of Superfund sites changed when located in Iowa.

My visual investigation led to the following observations about brownfield and Superfund sites in Iowa. I found that while environmental contamination in Iowa is both an urban and rural phenomenon, brownfield sites are concentrated in small to medium size municipalities across the state (see figure below). In these communities, there are no clear factors that determine the status of reuse of brownfield sites. Across the state, railroads have acted as man-made transport mechanisms while bodies of water naturally spread environmental contamination.



ECH

The desire to preserve land for productive agricultural use has accelerated remediation and reuse of Superfund sites in Iowa. In Rhode Island, legislation focused on the potential economic, environmental and local impacts of site reuse. This put an emphasis on the site's future potential for development. However, legislation in Iowa emphasized that the purpose of remediation of contaminated sites is to preserve productive land for agricultural uses. Consequently, site treatment is planned to prevent the development of farmland.

The importance of agricultural productivity has led reuse methods of Superfund sites to be more varied in Iowa than in Rhode Island. Iowa's seventeen Superfund sites are contaminated from industrial use, agricultural manufacturing, waste disposal and dry cleaning. All of these modes of contamination were also present at Rhode Island's Superfund sites with the exception of agricultural manufacturing. Superfund sites are currently being reused in seven different ways, ranging from commercial to agricultural to storage.

Through my visual investigation of Rhode Island and Iowa, I learned that successful remediation and reuse of brownfield and Superfund sites is critical to creating resilient and sustainable urban ecologies for future generations. This project also ignited my interest in spatial analysis and visualization, which I am now pursuing formally in a GIS methods course (SOC 1340).



A sunflower on a bright day
outside of the Urban Envi-
ronmental Lab on Brown's
campus.

Photo by RMK

DEPARTMENT EVENTS

Urban Studies Alumni Panel: *Should I go to Grad School in Urbanism?*

Kaylen Pak

On October 20th, urban studies concentrators gathered in Zimmer Lounge for the “Should I Go to Grad School in Urbanism?” panel moderated by Professor Samuel Zipp, with three program alumni in attendance. Hilary Ho (‘20), who got her Masters in Urban Planning at Columbia University, currently works as an analyst at HR&A Advisors, focusing on mobility, climate change, and community economic development. Sean Scott (‘16) received a Masters in Community and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania, and is a senior equity consultant and urban designer at WSP. Chris Calott (‘86) is currently Lalanne Chair in Real Estate Development, Architecture & Urbanism and an Associate Professor of Architecture at UC Berkeley, with a Masters in Architecture from Princeton University. The panel began with each of the alumni introducing themselves and their career in more depth.

Ho explained how she concentrated on homelessness and housing advocacy while at Brown, then worked for the Hudson Square Business Improvement District in New York City after graduating, focusing on running outdoor dining

and open streets programs during COVID. She advised getting job experience before going to graduate school to confirm passion in the field, and that she mainly went to graduate school to gain technical skills and inform her practice. She met her current employer, HR&A, at the Brown Career Fair, and got hired the second time that she applied.

As an urban studies concentrator, Scott was fascinated by the questions, “How is race and place codified in urban structure? How do we make places that people feel seen in?” He felt that he lacked technical knowledge, so he went to grad school directly after graduating from Brown in 2016 to develop his skill set. Beginning as an urban designer, he is currently five years into his career at WSP – a global architecture and engineering firm which offers planning/consulting services. He also helped found the Equity Center of Excellence firm at WSP, which asks how urban design can take place through an equity lens. In his time at Brown, Calott created an independent concentration to satisfy his interest in architecture and urban studies. After receiving an architecture degree at Princeton, he trav-

eled to Albuquerque, NM to be mentored by an architect that he admired. He realized that architecture was about creating buildings, not cities, and went on to Auburn University to develop a 4-year program teaching architects about urbanism. He then worked as the Director of the Master of Sustainable Real Estate Development Program in post-Katrina New Orleans, and founded the Master of Real Estate Development + Design Program at Berkeley in 2018. Calott mentioned that in the coming years of his career, he was interested in working in the public sector.

Professor Zipp kicked off the questions portion of the panel asking what sorts of urban studies graduate programs existed. Ho listed planning, environmental design/policy, social work, real estate, and urban design, advising to check which department the program is housed in, since that would direct the focus of the work. Scott honed in on programs under design schools because he was interested in that field for his career, and suggested that students focus on building a network in grad school and ask themselves what type of professional they want to be at the highest level. Calott encouraged the audience to not dismiss law school, or other business/public policy programs, in order to enter governance, which could be more influential in city decision-making. Panelists also recommended students to think about location and place – where do you want to end up, and what types of people do you want to meet?

An Architecture and Urban Studies double concentrator in the audience voiced his hesitation to enter a dual degree graduate program, as he would be in his late twenties by the time of graduation. If you are sure of wanting to do the program it will be time well spent, Scott reassured, but plan what you want to get out of it each year. Ho pointed out that you can still find fellowships, internships, and job opportunities during grad school, and that your thesis/capstone may open more opportunities after graduation.

Another student asked whether or not grad school was worth its cost. For Ho, financial scholarships and aid were the main factors in her choice of program, and she recommended working a job first in order to understand which skills you're looking for in a masters program. Calott pointed out that it takes technical skills to get work, which means that a degree is a prerequisite for most jobs. Scott said that the degree will pay in returns – such as professors hiring you, in competition with other job applicants, and the network that grad school will open up. At Penn, he asked for more financial aid money and got a work study position as a TA in his class, so he advised students to never be afraid to ask for more aid.

As the alumni strongly urged students to get job experience before entering grad school, a student pointed out that many jobs require experience that undergraduates do not yet have. The panelists recommended students to focus on

networking – whether it’s talking to people after lectures, utilizing Brown connections, or tapping into networks of outside organizations such as community groups. Ho reminded that networking is a muscle that you improve over time, and recommended students to expand their keyword search, as there are a large range of jobs that can be spun into an urban studies focus.



The Urban Studies Alumni Panel was attended by more than thirty concentrators, reflecting the curiosity amongst undergraduates in learning how to navigate post-graduate life. The URBN DUG and Urban Studies Department would like to thank the three alumni for returning to Maxcy Hall to give advice to current students, and hope that we can continue to provide more opportunities throughout the year to build community and explore the curiosities of URBN concentrators.



AR

DUG Field Trip to the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation

Grace Austin

In late October, eight undergraduates and one post-doc researcher visited the nearby landfill: the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation. We learned a lot about the processes of waste management in the state as we went on a tour of the outdoor landfill and indoor recycling facilities. Thank you to Jenny and the rest of the team at RIRRC for welcoming us to the facilities and providing an informative tour!



GA

Applying Participatory Budgeting to Brown's Urban Redistribution Initiatives

Matthew Lioe

For the past three years, I have been a research assistant for Professor Jonathan E. Collins, Mary Tefft and John Hazen White, Sr. Assistant Professor of Political Science, Public Policy, and Education within the [PAVED Research Initiative](#). At PAVED, we study democratic innovation initiatives and test out different participatory models to understand the pedagogy of mass decision making within urban communities. This past November, my work with Dr. Collins had come to a cumulative end when I was asked to speak on a panel for the Watson Institute alongside Michelle Alas Molina '25 and other Providence area researchers working on local participatory budgeting in health and education.

Participatory budgeting is relatively new in the state of Rhode Island, and it has its origins in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where it was implemented as a radical and transformational tactic to foster democracy. Our work over the past three years has been in Providence-area public schools, where we implemented some of the key principles of participatory budgeting—deliberation, civic education, and voting—within the sphere of public education. Our research team's main project, Community Decides, has focused on civic education in particular, by encouraging students to learn more about their school's needs and make a collective decision on how to spend \$10,000 for their school. Part of what we found from our research is that students were not asking for substantially new transformations within their school, but rather, updates to basic necessities, such as more updated bathrooms or better kinds of food.

Additionally, we worked on a project this past year with the Office of the President and the Swearer Center called [Power to the Pupil](#) (P2P). With \$100,000 from the Fund for the Education of the Children of Providence, the eighth grade class of Nathanael Greene Middle School was brought to Brown's campus to decide how this sum of funds would be spent for the entire Providence Public School District. In our design of P2P, our research team agreed that the critical educational component of the event needed to be about redistribution to the local community, as the fund has its origins from Brown University's

recognition of benefitting from the slave trade. So, in addition to adding information about the importance of Brown's redistribution in our design, we also implemented an equity component to be led by the Swearer Center and information about Brown's high school programs as resources for students to access.

In speaking about my research with Professor Collins and the PAVED Research team at the Watson panel, I was able to reflect on many critical skills that I gained over the course of the past three years. Most importantly, the research that we have done highlights the importance of stakeholder empowerment as a component of urban citizenship. I have been incredibly grateful to work so closely with an amazing group of researchers (Camila Olander Echavarria '24, Carina Sandoval '23, Coco Maranjian '24.5, Michelle Alas Molina '25, Kavya Gopinath '22 '23 MPA, Gabriel Mernoff '22, Dr. Kiyara Leis, and Pamela Jennings) as a part of the PAVED Research team!



RMK

Thank you to Sophie Blumenstein and Ava Schully for the design template, Sandy Zipp, Lauren Yapp, and Matthew Roth for oversight and editing, writers and photographers for their contributions, and the URBN DUG members for their support.