

December 2nd, 2005

Today in class we received a handout of an article titled *Leasing Public Land*. We also watched a documentary in class called *Sex, Drugs, and Democracy*.

Review of *Sex, Drugs, and Democracy*

The film portrays a picture of how the Dutch frame their acceptance of, and the basic logic behind, their progressive social policies regarding drug usage and sexuality. The subjects interviewed report that the Dutch society accepts that sex and drugs are a social reality that can not be eradicated thru legal codes which seek to ban them. Therefore, they chose to cope with the issues by the means of institutionalizing prostitution and drug consumption.

Institutionalization arms the government with the power and tools to regulate, control, and mitigate harmful (potentially tragic) situations that could be avoided with appropriate supervision in place.

To illustrate the logic behind the policy, the documentary examined the prostitution industry. Legalized prostitution in Amsterdam is centered in the well known red-light districts of town. Brothels feature women and men in windows advertising themselves, attempting to attract patrons. These brothels are viewed by society as being a safe place for the women and men who have made the personal career decision to fill that role in society. The prostitution houses are monitored by government, and all prostitutes are required to be tested by the health department for sexually transmitted diseases. Prophylactic usage is also required, as a preventative measure. There are strict rules to prevent child pornography, and a variety of programs to prevent youths from being attracted by the industry.

Interviewees who were prostitutes told stories and gave testimonials about their experiences and perspectives on the industry. They made it clear that they were completely open and accepting, there by their own personal choice, and felt they played a valuable role in society. Some gave the impression that they viewed their position as a form of public service, because sexuality is a basic human desire and animalistic need. The fact that individuals can go to a proper house of business to have their sexual desires fulfilled decreases the amount of repression in society and thus decreases the propensity for desperate individuals to commit acts of sexual crime against unwilling parties out of compulsion.

The documentary made viewers privy to the plethora of options that the patron of sexual commodity could select from. There are sex clubs for the physically and mentally disabled. There are couples and group clubs. There are even clubs that perform a sort of sexual theater.

In Holland, there are many different political parties. There is a green party, a socialist party, and a women's party. Subjects reported that the income gap is generally small with a good deal of economic equalization, no extremely rich and no destitute poorness, as there is in America. Education is completely free. They view their strong government involvement as a correction to laissez-fair economics, it serves to correct for the ugly side of capitalism. Hardly any person works past the age of 65, and most go a step further by taking advantage of the early retirement program. The country has about a 60% tax rate (as of the 90's). There is a hemp industry in the Netherlands. They refuse to use nuclear power sources because it is a radioactive waste producing industry.

There are also regulations that allow coffee shops to sell marijuana and other "soft drugs" to patrons. The documentary goes into a long segment, showing the insides of the regulated recreational drug industry. They profile coffee shop owners, patrons, and marijuana producers. The documentary also delves into the flip side of the "soft drug" equation, by highlighting "hard drugs". They show heroin users and how these people can find help, obtain methadone, or end up dead in a secluded seedy place with a needle hanging out of their arm. The Dutch society conceptually contrasts this divide of soft and hard drug usage. The policy logic is that if soft drugs are tolerated, it will curb and even prevent societal progression into a hard drug lifestyle.

This documentary was very enlightening. As an American, I view myself as being a very tolerant, accepting, and open-minded person. However, I find it troubling that I personally have a difficult time reconciling and comprehending the Dutch's extreme social liberalization. I am completely accepting and open to the drug policy, but conversely wrestle with the idea of the sexual industry. As a feminist, I struggle with the dichotomy of women's liberation and women's choice versus women being objectified and degrading themselves by serving as mere sexual objects. It is difficult for me to walk the tightrope of duality between these competing values. I have been told by other American women who have been to the red-light district that it makes you feel nauseated to see slimy old guys coming out of the brothels, knowing what they have just done. However, I also am trying to be accepting of the notion that the Dutch are not repulsed by this, and their perspectives hold that this form of activity is socially acceptable based on the premise that sexual desire is a basic human need. It will be interesting to see how my views and values are influenced as this class progresses.

Review of Leasing Public Land

This article explains the concept of “ground leasing” in the Netherlands, traces the history and development of this practice to present, and surveys the current status of this practice in the country.

Basically, municipalities create ground leases on land that they own “freehold”. A ground lease is a type of arrangement that allows another party to purchase the development right to a specific plot of land and construct a building on it. The developing party owns the structure, but leases the land from the municipality and is thus obligated to abide by all stipulations set forth in the lease, including payment of rent for the land usage. Municipalities must purchase land and be the rightful owner of the land prior to being able to set up a ground lease arrangement. It’s logical that one can not lease property that is not one’s own to rightfully lease.

The motive behind this practice was so that municipalities could extend their powers further than those endowed to them by the federal government. The additional powers a municipality can derive from ground lease arrangements extend into planning, development, and design concerns. A ground lease gives a municipality more control over development standards, such as prevention of shanty tenement housing from being built, or a toxin producing industrial plant from opening up next to an urban elementary school. The stipulations of acceptable land use are set forth in the lease upon the signing of the contract, and those conditions are legally binding. If a party sells the property and the accompanying ground lease, the new owner accepts the transfer of the lease agreement to their ownership, unlike deed restrictions in property ownership transactions where the deed restrictions are terminated upon transfer from the initial buyer to the new buyer.

The article states that Amsterdam owns approximately 80% of the land within its municipal boundaries, and The Hague owns approximately 65%. These municipalities can afford to make these powerful political moves because they have a monopoly on the market (i.e. if your market is Amsterdam, there’s only one Amsterdam). Various types of government expenditure for public benefit utilizing the funds extracted from ground leases are reported in the article, including: procurement of open space and public infrastructure, planning and supervision costs, social housing opportunities. The article reports that the city of Amsterdam raised \$113.5 million US dollars from ground leases in 1999.

The article also states that mostly large municipalities practice ground leasing. This practice has become socially accepted because private developers expect municipalities to purchase available land, service it, and then open it up for development. This, it’s reported, ensure higher quality public service

infrastructure. However, in recent years this practice is being increasingly called into question by the private sector. The Hague stopped charging a fee associated with ground leases to prove that they were only interested in the planning and development authority that ground leasing afforded the municipality.

This article was very informative. I never considered this as an option. I believe this would work in larger US cities where land is in such high demand (New York, San Francisco). However, in smaller cities like Louisville, that are engaged in a constant competitive battle amongst one another to attract mobile capital investment, this would not be a reality. Smaller cities are at the whim of decisions made by powerful capital, which coerces municipal governments to promote a friendly business climate (translation: let capital have whatever they want, and extra to curry favor).

January 20th, 2006

Green Urbanism

This week in class, we have student presentations/reviews of "Green Urbanism", parts 1 – 3. Mike gave a review of part 1, I was responsible for the part 2 section, and Pat Smith presented part 3.

Mike's section was short. Essentially, he had to review about 30 pages, the basic introduction to the book. In the introduction, the author provides the underlying principles of Green Urbanism, which is an urban planning agenda. Green Urbanism is predicated on a central theoretical basis: the dire need for environmental protection. The intention of Green Urbanism as a planning agenda is to use the city as a building block toward global change in the way humans live, consume, and integrate with nature.

Guiding principles are set forth with the intention of impeding the torrent of environmental destruction which results as a negative externality of western society's contemporary means of production and styles of living. Some of the concepts presented include: constraining cities to as small a spatial and ecological footprint as possible, developing at a high-density so that cities are compact, utilizing a circular consumption pattern so that no resource is wasted, central city revitalization, and providing multi-modal transit systems.

I presented part 2 of the book, which focused on land use and community. Chapter two was concerned with land use and urban form, and provided strategies for accomplishing goals and objectives consistent with Green Urbanism's overall goals. Strategies for urban development included urban growth boundaries, high density urban villages, major green initiatives, regional and national planning powers, as well as influencing cultural factors and trends of sustainability.

Chapter three addressed various strategies for creative housing and living environments. There was a strong emphasis on the need to provide a variety of living options, a substantial amount of green and private space, and the crucial need for mass transit systems. The author introduces the concepts of ecovillages, hofjes, and cohousing. Attention was also focused on urban space that is articulate and expressive using the language of eloquent urban design (interesting streetscapes, green space, street art, liner buildings, a basic civic emphasis on shared public space for the overall health and common benefit of the community).

Pat's presentation on chapter 3 dealt with mass transit systems. In general the book emphasizes the need for multi-modal transit systems. The author takes a

look at several cities and countries, their transit infrastructure, how they function, and how auto usage is discouraged. Pat Smith made this information specific to Amsterdam for our presentation, and took a specific look at the city, the transit options, and the methodology.

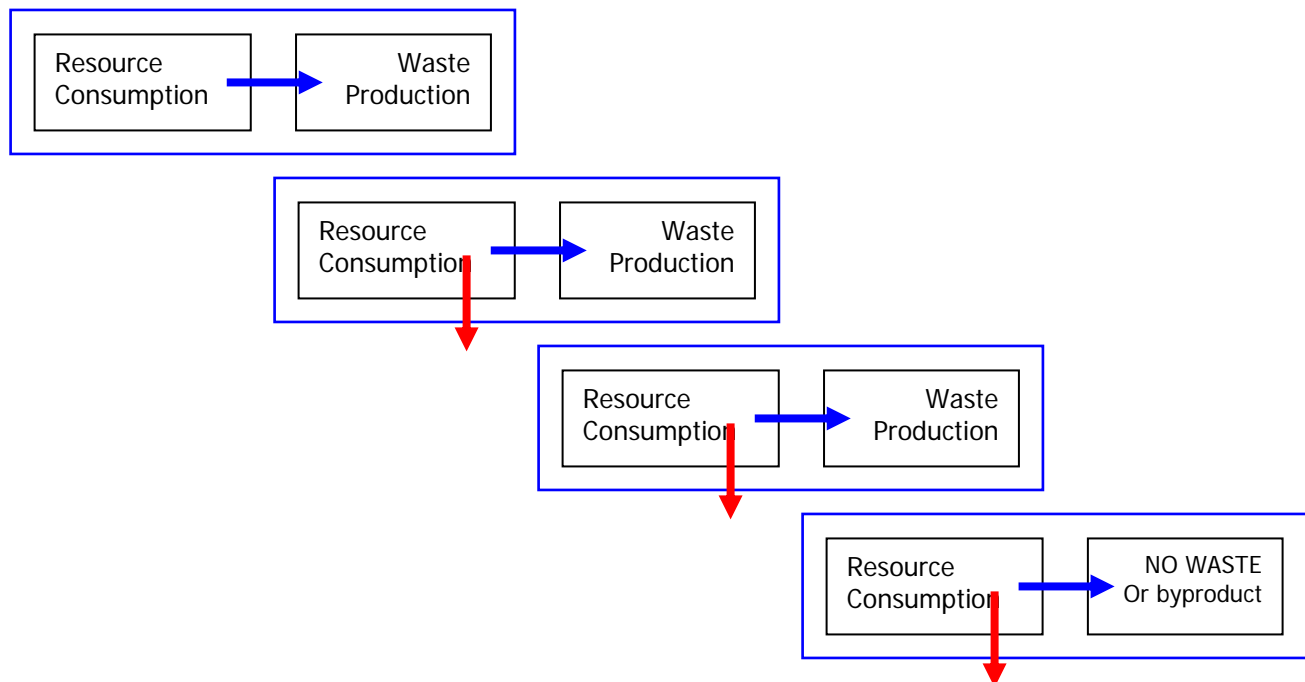
Overall, I am deeply enjoying this book. The author is right on, in terms of the theoretical basis. The case study data most likely needs to be updated, so maybe this necessitates a new, revised edition. I did raise an eyebrow at some of his blatant biases. Specifically, I am referring to his normative pro-gun control argument. The author incorporates obviously skewed, incomparable pieces of data to underhandedly prove his argument. This is insulting to the reader, because the author explains that he is comparing British firearm deaths (the country with the strictest laws in Europe) with the U.S.'s at large firearm deaths (a country that provides the right to bear arms as inherent in individual citizenship). To be objective, the author should have included the entire European Union, and should have included countries with laws more closely resembling those of the United States.

I also enjoyed his critique of New Urbanism. Last semester, New Urbanism completely dominated the pedagogical spectrum, bombarding me from three different classes. I was consumed by an enduring feeling that New Urbanism was lacking environmental concern. I found this to be extremely disappointing considering New Urbanism is the major, mainstream planning paradigm. Green Urbanism has quenched my desire for something more sensitive, urgent, and progressive, that deals with the most pressing issues facing all of mankind in a holistically integrated format. GO GO Green Urbanism!!!!

February 6th, 2006

Green Urbanism, continued.

In class, Josh, Anthony, and Nick gave their respective presentations on the assigned readings. I believe closed-systems, a concept that fell under Josh's domain, is one of the most poignant concepts presented in the entire book. Having done my own research on indigenous economic development, and through reading some of David Imbroscio's earlier political economy writings, I previously had gained exposure to this economic/environmental model of production, referred to as "import substitution" in other literatures. This seemingly common-sense model of production, reuse, and maximization of all usable resources extracted from the earth is rather new. When I came across it in previous literature, it was explained as taken the by-product of one industry (output/negative externality) and using that as the input for other industry, and so on and so forth, until there was nothing left to consume and no waste left over. I have conceived of a flow diagram to illustrate and clarify the concept in my own mind so that I might be able to effectively appeal to others the benefits of thinking creatively about production, reuse, and waste as input.



This process of balancing the urban metabolism, as referred to by Beatley, will take a lot of creative thinking to accomplish. Currently, industry in America tends to be narrowly specialized. Business people, laborers, government policy developers, and economic development groups don't seem to have made the transition, which would require a major leap in logic to depart from the current dominant economic development paradigm that cities such as Louisville use as the guiding principles toward what is perceived to be gaining a competitive edge.

Also, inherent in this idea of “import substitution” was the notion that cities should essentially treat themselves as walled-off economies, consuming only those resources that are locally available for purposes of production and replacing their dependence on imported goods. Additionally, to become economically self-sufficient and independent from the arbitrary whims of external flows of capital, cities should curb their dependence on cash flow generated from exporting goods outside its “walls”. Ideally, cities would produce and consume for their immediate locality, and not for supply and distribution to a larger, global economy for world-wide consumption. Behind this notion is the idea that locally owned businesses retain profits in the community, are accountable to the citizenry, are philanthropic, pay better wages and benefits, and have a deeper concern for the environment because their own health could be impacted if there is negligence.

Since this is an “experiential journal”, please allow me to share my constant frustration at the exclusion and debasement of the artists in today’s contemporary society. Seen merely as entertainment for the bourgeois class, artists are collected, bought, sold, traded, and treated as a commodity because of the “products” or “goods” they supply to the “market”, especially if there happens to be a great “demand” for their particular brand.

However, artists as creative thinkers who are valued for their ability to problem solve, design, engineer systems, and conceptualize models is a thing of the past. Common scientists, business people, or otherwise “specialists” are failing to decipher the many interconnected points of these cross-industrial/disciplinary bounds because of having a narrow focus. In the past, tradesmen and noble persons called upon the creatives to invent, dream up, and idealize the new, cutting edge advancements. Today, artists are marginalized into superficiality consisting of cheap wine and cheese, their true value has been pauperized into a mere subsistence of humiliating dependence upon those classes they detest.

I believe that until artists are brought to the table, in regards to all aspects of community, cultural, political, and socioeconomic life, we will continue to experience an absence of meaning and creative solutions to problems. We are running a deficit in the arts, which translates into running a country motivated by hollow, meaningless principles and policies. Artists remind humans of their humanity. Until we regain a sense of “human-ness”, things will continue to operate in an inhumane, thus environmentally destructive manner. In the end, if humans have no “other” such as trees, birds, or fish, how, then, can they maintain the identity of being “human”, which is constructed upon the basis of dichotomous juxtaposition?

February 17th, 2006

Understanding Amsterdam.

Today, there were three in-class presentations. JC and JP did presentations on the book *Understanding Amsterdam* which is a collection of papers on the city. Tackett and Patrick Puima presented the book *Westergasfabriek Culture Park*.

JC's presentation was excellent. He attempted to address some lingering questions and fragmented perceptions that surround the country of the Netherlands and also Amsterdam. For example, JC clarified the difference between Holland and the Netherlands. This was something that I was very confused about when I first decided to take the class, and it led me to doing my own research on the question. However, JC presented more information than I had previously found, such as the fact that Holland is an "area" similar to the Dakotas or the Carolinas. I did not know that part of Holland was also in northern Belgium.

JC used humor to address the prostitution and drug trades. The class had a very humorous discussion related to the prostitution in Amsterdam. As well, he provided a history of Amsterdam's capitalist development, and highlighted the history of the Dutch East India Trading Company. Additionally, he made jokes about the Nijman essay that did a comparative analysis of Amsterdam to Miami.

JP covered the second half of the book. He highlighted the aspect of non-profit housing and discussed how the Dutch are more accepting of socialized housing. The Dutch were willing to forego lavish and luxurious residences for homes that were smaller and less personalized, alluding to the egalitarian character of the society. JP's presentation covered my favorite essay in the book, *The Egalitarian City: Images of Amsterdam*.

The class had a discussion on the squatter movement. We debated how that would be handled in the US versus how that is accepted in Europe. The conception of private property and owners rights are completely contrasting in the two countries. In the US, especially in a place like Kentucky, squatters could be shot for occupying someone's private property. If you break into a place, the property owner has a legal right to shoot you. In the Netherlands, this is not the case. Private property that goes unoccupied for a certain period of time is viewed as "up for grabs". Squatters maintain a sort of anti-capitalistic, "property is theft" outlook. If they see a vacant warehouse, they take up residence in it. It also relates back to the concept of consumption and waste. Why let a perfectly good building sit in the central core of a city vacant, when there are people living homeless on the streets? Why should someone be allowed to hold private property that is underutilized to other's disadvantage?

Patrick and Tackett presented the West Gas Factory project. Unfortunately, I had to leave early from the class. It was a very interesting presentation, and they obviously spend a substantial amount of time preparing those graphics. I felt it was unfortunate that their presentation was rushed. They discussed the development firm MAB who was responsible for the project. This firm is operating on a new development concept: Mixed-use development. They take a holistic approach to development of tough,

challenging inner-city areas that are underutilized, in decline, or are brownfield sites. Their methodology is cutting edge and holistic. They develop commercial, residential, culture, leisure, green space, and the arts in a broad stroke.

This specific approach to development is something that I have been journaling about for years (since about 2002) in my own notes and sketchbooks. I had no idea that there was anyone out there actually developing in the way that Aron and I have always dreamed about and discussed. I am not surprised that this is currently happening in Europe. It seems so intuitive to us, but that's probably because we are artists who are extreme generalists. That is to say that we attempt to learn something about everything, and then stitch it together for forward progress and positive social change.

I would love to work for a developer like this. It sounds absolutely amazing. I have soooooo many wonderful ideas and concepts for this, and at one point, had considered trying to become a developer myself just to see these things become a reality. I met with the people at City Properties once, and they really insulted us by proposing a narcissistic financial arrangement that was essentially screwing us over completely and making them a ton of money for putting in no work or energy. That made us extremely hesitant to share our ideas with them, and make us very distrustful of the company.

I have spent some time getting to know Jonathan Brannon. He is an exceptionally bright and enlightened individual. I really enjoy the conversations I have with him. However, once we were called into a meeting with Bill Wheylan and he REALLY turned me off. He dominated the discussion, interrupted others, and did not listen to what anyone had to say. We were invited to the meeting to give ideas, concepts, and feedback. It turned out instead to be him selling his concept to us, and not him taking in information or suggestions, which was the stated purpose of the meeting. I am also a type "A" personality and I can get excited about projects. However, it's poor form to bulldoze your way through everyone. In the long run, that can cause you a lot more grief that you have bargained for.

I hear that the Glassworks project that City was responsible for is continuing to struggle. The initial people who were a part of the hot glass shop factioned. Some left to start a new project on Market called flame run, others were still there hanging onto a sinking ship. Then, they convinced UofL to locate their glass program there, which was probably a relief to City. Now, UofL is opening their own hot glass center on Main Street between first and second streets. There is also another group of artists who are working with the EPA and the Clark County board of commissioners to develop a glass facility on top of their landfill in Clark County which will be powered by the methane gas generated by the landfill. Some of the people who run the glassworks thing are going with the coop over to Indiana. It will be interesting to see how City salvages this project. They have created a really bad reputation for themselves amongst the arts community. No one trusts them and no one seems to have anything but negative commentary to offer related to their business practices.

February 24th, 2006

Amsterdam Film Festival.

Today, we watched Globe Trekker on Amsterdam and a brief 7 minute video on the progressive environmental systems and design in the Netherlands.

Usually, Globe Trekker is one of my favorite shows. However, something about this particular episode did not sit right with me. I was really turned off by the host. He was, for lack of a better term, a chump. He really annoyed me. He acted like a typical Australian redneck. He was very tourist-ey. The entire show was very tourist-ey. Usually, these shows are much more information-based. This particular episode seemed to be focused on highlighting this fellow's personality and his dramatic adventures, from the scuffle in the red light district to the gay wedding where he told one of the couples that he found the ceremony to be "trashy".

The brief 7 minute video on the environmental design and programs in the Netherlands was very interesting. It highlighted one important aspect that more people need to be aware of: The Netherlands have moved beyond concept and theory and have moved into an implementation stage. This is especially important for planners and policy makers in the US to understand. Right now, the US is still dealing largely with theory. Everyone in the academic community is bound to continue this cycle of trying to convince the public that global warming is not "junk science", that it is actually occurring. In the Netherlands, the national government has started a top down campaign that society has championed as their own. They see the dire need for change, and they are innovating new lifestyles.

Last night, I was listening to *Coast to Coast* on WHAS radio with Art Bell. There was an environmentalist on the show who was talking about the problems. He noted that one thing all Americans can do to help fight global warming is to become vegetarian. He said that a University of Chicago study found that vegetarianism cuts back on more greenhouse emissions than switching from a regular car to a Prius. He was emphasizing the methane gas problem associated with animal factory farms and the feces they produce. He also connected this to the destruction of the rain forests to allow for more pastures to support the meat markets the western capitalist societies demand. Art Bell stated that convincing Americans to stop eating meat was going to be more difficult then getting them to convert to hybrid cars. However, the environmentalist stated that all Americans could simply cut back in their meat consumption, and that it would have a substantial effect. I'm a vegetarian, except I eat sea animals.

***** Amendment to the above statement regarding vegetarianism: Never order shrimp or "prawns" in Europe. Aron and I made the mistake of ordering "prawns scampi" from an Italian restaurant in Florence, Italy for 16 Euro. They brought us 6 prawns, fully shelled with eyes, legs, and tentacles. There was not enough meat to fill a bird, and it was a far stretch from being worth 16 Euro. Then, in Barcelona, we made the mistake of trying it again at a tapas bar. This time, we ordered cockroach of the sea under the guise of "shrimp" for 12 Euro. The shrimp, as well, came fully shelled. They also stank terribly.***

Let this be a lesson to you, and to future generations of readers of this journal: NEVER ORDER COCKROACH OF THE SEA IN EUROPE – WHETHER SHRIMP OR PRAWNS.... JUST SAY 'NO'.

Monday, March 13th 2006

Almere

On Monday, we took a 20 minute train ride out to the new town of Almere. This new town used to be completely under water, and dams were constructed to drain the land in order to construct a new living area for Amsterdam families that sought more space. When we arrived in Almere with Peter our tour guide, we were at the central station of the town. The town was constructed using the central station as the focal point. All development (mixed-use, housing, commercial, etc...) stemmed from the central station.

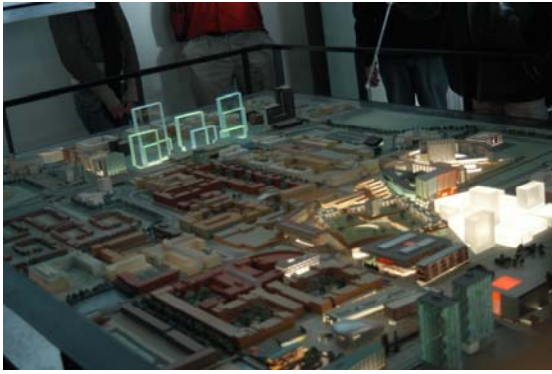


We walked to the University of Amsterdam's campus in Almere to meet with Dr. Leon Deben, an architect professor. We sat in his classroom of freshmen students and watched a video on London. The main thesis of the video was London and it's culture. The video highlighted how culture made a city what it was, and explained how Margaret



Thatcher closed off all areas for subculture to develop and exist within the city of London. This was done by rehabbing buildings, preventing youths and members of lower economic classes from being able to obtain space, stopping music and arts shows, etc...

After the film, we took a walking tour with the students and professor. They explained how they disliked Almere because it lacked culture and was nothing but a big shopping mall. The youth from Almere travel into Amsterdam for their fun. The city is attempting to shape Almere into an authentic town with life and culture, a place that people want to live and play. However, the town is contrived and lacks history. Almere is essentially a high-density suburb of



Amsterdam. Yet, the residents complain of the same problems as we do in America, but their suburban problem is much less severe. What is notable is that they are at least making an effort to allow culture spring up and are trying to develop an interesting town identity.



In my opinion, Almere was a very nice and aesthetically pleasing place – especially in comparison to the suburban sprawl we are confronted with here in the States. The architecture is diverse and creative, as opposed to the lowest cost but highest profit model that drives private

American development. There was high density, mixed-use, and integrated social housing. This is miles beyond America in terms of being progressive.



McDonalds-sponsored graffiti wall concealing a construction site.





I have the *worst* passport photo in history. It's humiliating. I've covered it up using a photo I took in Amsterdam for my week-long central city transit pass.

Amsterdam's Central Station.

Beautiful.

Too much information!!!! Notes and details our artist-friend & house-sitter Greg Martin (Big Greg) left for us while we were away.

Backdated Entry

Sunday – 3/12/06

Aron and I flew into London. We stayed for two nights in a hostel in the Rotherhithe neighborhood. When in London, we did all the traditional tourist crap. We rode the double-decker tour bus around for a day, seeing the Tower of London, London Bridge, and Buckingham Palace. We saw Westminster Abbey. We went to the Tate Modern and the British Museum. London was very expensive. The people who live there dress like they are on a runway. No one looks dressed down at all. Everyone wears brand name clothing and new shoes. It was very high fashion, and not what I am into. I was happy to leave London, and I have no desire to go back. My nose had black stuff coming out of it each day after walking around. I'm sure it was really great for my lungs.

We took a train from Victoria Station to Dover thru the English countryside. That was incredibly beautiful. The gardens, the little villages, castles decaying with newer houses built up around them. There was a lot of litter along the railway. It was rather filthy.

Once we got to Dover, we learned that we could not take a ferry over to Amsterdam. Aron insisted that he had taken a ferry from Dover to Amsterdam when he was in Europe several years ago. The people there said that the ferry has never gone from Dover to Amsterdam. We ended up having to get a ferry to Calais, France. From Calais, we bought a train ticket to Amsterdam. We traveled thru France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands. We had 0 transfer trains three times, I think.

Once we got into Belgium and the Netherlands, the people started to look different on the trains. They became more down-to-earth looking. They appeared to be much less high fashion and pretentious than the people in London. I started seeing people with dreadlocks who looked much more alternative. It gave me hope that the Netherlands would be much more my style than London! Aron was asleep on the train and I ended up talking with three guys who were from Rotterdam. They owned a men's clothing store called "It Takes Time". They gave me their card and suggested that Rotterdam was much better than Amsterdam, and that we should definitely visit.

Oh, and my \$270 backpack broke in London, after packing for not even three full days. Nice!

Tuesday - 3/14/06

We were at a neighborhood pub near the San Luchasio. Yani and I were discussing that it seemed like the city of Amsterdam lacked a certain kind of passion that is present in American cities. Out of everything that is so wonderful about Amsterdam, what seemed to be lacking was passion.

Wednesday - 3/15/2006

Gilderbloom gave us half the day off. Aron and I went to the Rijksmuseum to see the Rembrandt 400th birthday exhibit. We saw Gilderbloom at the museum.

One of the curatorial statements and the audio tour said that a red carnation symbolizes the hope of eternal life, and is also depicted in scenes of Mary and the baby Jesus.

I love symbolism.

Thursday - 3/16/06

Aron and I, Pat Smith, Amelia (Pat's girlfriend), and Mike Tackett went to Hill Street Blues. We had some beer and smoked some northern lights. The bar was really cool, with the whole interior being covered in graffiti.

Friday – 3/17/06

Sitting on the train to Rotterdam, I attempted to recall the week's activities.

Monday – Almere

Tuesday – Lady architect's lecture and Bike tour; hash muffins (Aron, Hallie, Pat, Anthony, Amelia, Yani, Mike) from Praxus followed by Italian food

Wednesday – Leon's lecture at Amsterdam University; Rijksmuseum; Aron and I had Ethiopian food with Mike, Yani and Tackett

Thursday – Hein, the Delft architect took us to see the Eastern Docklands, Island of Java, the Ij River area, the commune he and his friends are building collectively, and the social housing museum with great lunch; Peter took us thru Vondelpark in the morning on the way to Westergasfabriek

Friday - Rotterdam

Tuesday - 3/14/06

Early in the morning we went to meet Ir. Jolai van der Vegt, who is an Architect and Urban Planner, and also a faculty member at the University of Amsterdam and also Delft. The lecture was on the history of Amsterdam's urban planning and how the city grew. I accidentally engaged her in a conversation about the economic liberalization of Amsterdam and the Netherlands in general. The subject was basically the competing values of socialism versus capital and foreign investment.

She told stories of the housing corporations and how they have become profit oriented, and how they are transitioning over to private development corporations. She also spoke in depth about the process of going from a planning intensive / controlled process to a free market process in terms of how new developments and land are divvied out to development companies. Apparently, the city government is working with a small handful of developers but the process for getting the work (bidding for contracts, basically) is not fair and transparent. This is the essence of the lingering conflict of socialist values (control and regulation). Yet, the artifact translates into an unequal and un-free market system. It appears to be substantially corrupt based on U.S. standards.

According to Jolai...

Total population of the Netherlands: 16 million

Total number of houses: 6.5 million

Buildings used to be all wood construction. Early 16th century building laws started to require stone and brick structures. Homes were for living, working, shops, and sales.

Bike Tour

The Bike Tour was awesome!!!! You should definitely do the bike tour with your next class. This was definitely one of the best parts of the trip. You see so much more of the city on a bike, as opposed to on the trams or on foot. The tour guide was extremely knowledgeable regarding the history of Amsterdam and told us a lot about the development of the city, the housing, economics, etc...

The houses were so narrow with such narrow staircases, that they had to use large metal hooks attached to a beam on the front of the house to hoist furniture into the house thru the open windows. The housing was narrow and tall because the land was scarce and expensive.

The tour guide told us that the Russian and Yugoslavian mafias run the area of the Western Docklands across the river. He also toured us thru the red light district and told us the story of the red lights. Apparently, it used to be a mixed-income neighborhood and the merchant's wives would sit in the front windows during daylight hours to knit and sew by the natural sun light. Men would confuse these decent women with hookers, and so the tradition of the red light was born in order to distinguish which ladies were for sale and which ones were not.

The people in our tour group were as follows:

Hallie

Aron

Mike Tackett

Gilderbloom

Pat Smith

Anthony Campbell

We had a fun group! Anthony's bike broke and we had to wait for a new one to be delivered. The police messed with us, because we apparently almost rode bikes down a pedestrian-only corridor. We rode thru the tranny purple light district. Pat Smith kept trying to lead ahead of the tour guide. All the while, we froze our asses off. However, riding a bike definitely gets your body temperature up compared to walking. That's how those people stay warm!!!!

Friday - 3/17/06

Rotterdam Trip

The agenda....

- Tour of urban renewal areas
- Lunch at the mall with excellent food
- Bike tour over landmark bridge
- Presentation by John Westrick, urban planner for Rotterdam

It's 70 KM between Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

The harbors in Rotterdam moved from inside the central city to the North side, which is outside the central city.

The old harbor is not used, because they built a completely new one. The old buildings are being redeveloped into loft space.

Rotterdam – 600,000 people
Amsterdam – 740,000 people

ds+V = Dept. of Urban Planning, Housing & Traffic

They Structure the department to include infrastructure which is more progressive

Rotterdam's downtown was dead at night because it was all offices and workspace with no housing. So they have been building housing towers on top of office blocks to get more life onto the streets.

Lots of social housing. Area across the bridge has been an urban renewal area since 1975. Rotterdam still has a long way to go, and is still in decline.

Now, Parkstad is the area with rail yards cutting off the city from the waterfront. The municipality is trying to buy it to redevelop but the train company is driving up the cost.

North side = rich; South side = working class. Bridge connects.

Erasmus bridge spurred economic development and revitalization of the city.

All housing in Rotterdam until 1990 was 70% social housing.

They are facing water problems because the Rhine keeps flooding. The sea level is rising and there is also lots of rain fall. They need to raise the height of the dikes and develop more infrastructure capacity.

The Hague and Amsterdam are out of land. Only Rotterdam has land suited for development within its urban boundary.

We took a bike tour with the professor and the urban planner, and Christy (a student at Delft).

Lunch was delicious inside the mall, and expensive. It was so unbelievably healthy compared to the food at home.

It cost 50 cents to go to the restroom. YIKES!!!!

I really liked Rotterdam, with the modern architecture (it was bombed out in WWII), and the city had areas in decline. It was nice to meet with an actual city planner who told us what was going on and why.

It was also nice to be able to compare Amsterdam to Rotterdam.

Christy (the student) was really cool. We exchanged email addresses.

Thursday - 3/16/06

Peter took us to Westergasfabriek. It was very nice. I enjoyed it, although it was so terribly cold that day it was difficult to think of anything other than the fact that I was simply freezing.

My favorite part of Thursday was Hein. What an awesome man!!!! I loved that guy. I wish he were my grandfather. He told me he was an anarchist! He had an amazing personality. He had his finger on the pulse of cooperative developments and utopian ideas. He took us to see so much stuff, including all the new development on the newly constructed islands. We got to see the cranes and pneumatic hammers putting concrete pillars down into the sand.

Hein also took us to the socialist housing museum, which was very interesting. There, we got to learn about the Amsterdam School of architecture, which was inspired by organic shapes. The movement was in social housing because they wanted to make social housing look just as nice as housing for the wealthy. They felt that the poor should not have to be reminded of the fact that they were poor by being forced to live in poorly designed spaces. The museum included a housing unit that had been made to look like the original.

Hein also took us to a very nice café that was across from the museum for lunch. We had an amazing pumpkin soup, bread with herb butter, salad, and sandwiches. The food was delicious! I drank a ton of coffee while there.

Hein also took us to Java Island. We saw Onno, the inn keeper at the San Luchasio. He invited us into his home and his son was watching cartoons.

General Reflection

I loved the Netherlands. It was very interesting and diverse. There were people from every single place that people could be from (except they did not seem to have any Mexicans, as I said before, which really sucked because they had no Mexican food). We heard about a global anti-war march in London and went to the march in Amsterdam. We met a Dutch guy who converted to Islam. He had totally rotten teeth. But, he was pretty cool, rotten teeth aside. He told us there were over 110 nationalities living in the Netherlands.

We talked to some people who were representing the communist party. It was a guy and girl about our age, maybe a bit younger. The girl was asking questions about America and said that it seems to her that the people worship the media like God. She said we are not critical "... because you want your hamburger with your ketchup and your mayonnaise..." She said this in a really thick accent, which was very funny. So, Aron and I kept repeating it over and over to each other for the rest of the trip. It was so funny and so true. We bought a poster from the marchers for 2 Euro and brought it home to hang in our living room. It is in Dutch and it calls Bush a terrorist, with two photos of his face on it. It's red, white and black.

Before we left Amsterdam, we went into a place called Al's Fish and Chips, because we did not get fish and chips in London and felt we had deprived ourselves. The telescreen in the restaurant was playing CNN, and they kept showing the same clips over and over. The big story was the 500,000 person protest in Paris over the government's new labor law. The protesters were turning over cars and burning things down. AWESOME!!! People were carrying signs that said "Bring down the government". There was footage of the police firing tear gas canisters into the crowd.

The protest we went to in Amsterdam was very calm, comparatively.

We also went to the Van Gogh museum and saw the Rembrandt / Caravaggio comparative exhibit. Caravaggio was so amazing.

Later that evening, Aron and I smoked the last of our weed on a platform down in a canal. We sat on the platform and watched the people walk by up on the streets. Then we just walked around the city. Aron took lots of photos. The area we walked thru was to the south west of central station. It seemed to be way less tourist-oriented, with small independent shops. It looked like a fantastic place to live. If / when we go back to Amsterdam, I'd like to explore that area and stay over there instead.

Later, we ended up seeing a HUGE bird. Seriously, this bird was as big as Aron's mom's 50 pound dog. It flew over our head and landed on a roof of a building. Aron was stoned and thought it was a sign for him. He was really tripped out by it. hahaha, he is funny when he gets high.

The red light district was a trip. It was very shady and you could feel the fact that there were people lurking around every corner waiting to rip you off and rob you. It was a total tourist trap. I'm sure that tourists go there, get super trashed, and make themselves easy targets for pick pockets. There are also shady guys every 100 feet trying to sell you cocaine, extacy, or whatever else you could want on the streets. They walk past you and just say it... "Cocaine, extacy.." .

We left Amsterdam on Monday morning and headed for Paris by train. Once in Paris, we caught a night train to Milan. We ended up getting a private sleeping car, which was an awesome experience! We transferred trains in Milan and headed to Florence, Italy.

Florence was so beautiful. Aron and I spent the night in a room that overlooked the cathedral that has Brunelleschi's dome in it. It was amazing! We also met some Italians, who were more than happy to help us smoke the rest of our hash from Amsterdam. We also brought a bottle of wine into their apartment, and drank it. We ended up hanging out for about 3 hours. The guy who invited us in was named Riccardo. He did not speak English, but luckily his roommate, her boyfriend, and his sister came in shortly after, and they all spoke English.

After we left Florence, we headed to Barcelona. Barcelona was the BEST city I have ever been to. This is where my story ends, unfortunately. The rest of my travelogue is my own. All I can say, is that I loved Barcelona more than any city I have ever been to in my life. I hope one day I can live there.

Gilderbloom – thank you so much for teaching this class. If it were not for you, I'd still have never been to Europe. I had a blast and it expanded my mind more than any classroom situation could have ever done.

I really appreciate you letting me in, and I hope that I added something to the class!

Post cards we picked up in the lobby at the University of Amsterdam. We were waiting for Professor Leo Deben to come give us a lecture.

News headlines while we were in Europe. Delta gave us the paper on our flight home out of London-Gatwick. We flew to Atlanta on Sunday 3/27. For some reason Delta gave us the Friday paper.

Train ticket from Florence (Firenze) to Milan (Milano) central station, where we transferred onto a night train to Barcelona. We did not get a sleeper car, and had to sleep in reclining seats. It was terribly uncomfortable and made for a bad night. My feet became swollen because I could not stretch out my legs as I slept. When we got to Barcelona, we immediately got a room and I had to rest in bed. I took some Ibuprofen to help with the swelling.

The best coffee nips I've ever had. I purchased them at the Milan central station before boarding the night train to Barcelona.

This Man is Albert Einstein's second cousin. We met him at the San Luchesio. He was staying there too.

One of my classmates asked if he could take his photo and the lady with him asked why. They told him because they thought he looked like Einstein. That's when she said he was Albert's second cousin.

This man said he was a bio chemist. He was in town because he was the Jewish Cantor for the Nethernalds. He was there on religious business.

Pat Smith looking like a hipster.

Gilderbloom.... Where the hell are we?

Road construction. They don't have dirt, they have sand. That's probably why there are so few trees, I'd guess. Maybe I'm wrong.

Notice how the buildings appear to be leaning toward the street... That's because they are!

Here's Gilderbloom on his cell phone trying to figure out what the hell is going on! We were at this building for a lecture from a female architect / planner.

See her card.