

# U.S. Foundations, Urban Design, and International Development since 1945

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This report focuses on research I conducted at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) in March 2017 in support of my current book project, *The Urban International: Design and Development from the Marshall Plan to Microfinance*. *The Urban International* is a political, cultural, and intellectual history of the global dissemination of urban design and international development concepts since 1945, with a focus on the role of philanthropic foundations, universities, and international organizations. After World War II, cities around the world were physically transformed by economic concepts and design principles pioneered in the United States and Western Europe. Brasília, Brazil's modernist capital, and Chandigarh, India's first post-independence planned city, are well-known examples of European design concepts transferred to the global South by a transnational class of architects and planners. Most such undertakings, however, were of a more modest scale and often financed by philanthropic and international organizations. By investigating a range of programs sponsored by organizations including the UN, UNESCO, the World Bank, the Ford Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation, *The Urban International* reconstructs how ideas about the design and management of North Atlantic cities influenced, and were influenced by, development projects in the global South. The study asks how urban planners, architects, consultants, academics, public officials, and grassroots activists circulated ideas about how cities should look, who counted as urban citizens, and who should have access to public space and public resources. Those guiding questions are situated in an examination of the shift from modernization projects to neoliberal development in cities around the world between 1945 and the present. The same people and organizations directed and funded development projects in the global South and urban revitalization projects in North Atlantic cities, and this project aims to demonstrate that their work was one conduit through which neoliberal ideas moved between cities around the world.

# Background

The relationship between urban design and development in the West and modernization programs in the global South is a story that has only begun to be told.<sup>1</sup> By connecting urban and economic development projects across the globe, *The Urban International* offers a new history of postwar international political economy alongside a story about the transnational circulation of ideas about design and development. And by looking at the ways in which development projects in the global South influenced cities in the United States and Western Europe, the project sets out to challenge the idea that in transnational exchanges, particularly within the Americas, the direction of influence was always or primarily North to South. At its core, this research seeks to explain the transformation of social, cultural, and economic attitudes and expectations about cities across space and time. It uses historical inquiry to make new connections between humanistic fields such as design, architectural history, and cultural studies and social scientific scholarship traditionally concerned with urban planning and economic development.

The project is at an early stage, and my RAC research was to some extent exploratory. At present, I am focused on tracing how political and ideological shifts were constituted by the activities of urban “experts” from universities, nongovernmental organizations, and philanthropies who understood their work as forms of cultural expression. The Rockefeller Foundation, for instance, funded modernization projects in Latin America at the same time it subsidized the activities of several of the most prestigious urban design programs in the United States. Faculty members affiliated with those programs subsequently worked as consultants for architecture, planning, and economic development projects around the world, and my research at the RAC, Harvard, MIT, and UNESCO demonstrates significant overlap among the “experts” who funded and carried out urban development programs in U.S. cities and modernization and development projects in the global South. As I am still in the process of

conducting research and have not yet visited several key repositories, I have not yet determined which people and projects will be at the center of my narrative. The RAC is an especially rich resource for the project, however, and the topics outlined below will likely feature prominently in the book.

## Urbanization and Knowledge Production

My research pays particular attention to conflicts between the goals and approaches of U.S.-based “experts” and local interests, knowledge, and practices as planners, architects, economists, and sociologists circulated between university departments, foundation offices, and urban “laboratories” abroad. RAC holdings are essential for tracing the substantial role of the Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in producing and disseminating this kind of knowledge. Additionally, architecture and urban planning faculty members who were figured prominently in urban development projects (domestic and international) run out of U.S. universities frequently served as Rockefeller or Ford Foundation grant recipients, consultants, advisors, or even staff members.

This portion of my research encompasses a wide variety of discrete activities, many of which were modest in scope. A few larger undertakings sponsored by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations and the SSRC, however, suggest the degree to which all three organizations became interested in urban development at home and abroad at quite an early stage, and that program officers turned repeatedly to the same (U.S.-based) experts to build social scientific knowledge.

The Rockefeller and Ford Foundations sponsored several conferences, symposia, and workshops on urban-focused topics in the second half of the twentieth century, but two early conferences stand out as especially significant for my project, because they represent intellectually formative moments in each Foundation’s involvement with urban development. In 1956, the Ford

Foundation convened an informal “Conference on Urbanism” at the Foundation headquarters in New York, with thirty-six attendees, primarily from U.S. universities, as well as several observers from various Foundation divisions. The point of the conference was to determine whether or not U.S. cities and cities in developing countries faced a common set of development problems, and if so, determine whether those problems could be addressed through a common set of principles.<sup>2</sup> Correspondence in advance of the conference suggests that the Ford Foundation, from the outset of its involvement in the urban sphere, saw cities as economic bodies and urban problems as development problems, which could be solved with social scientific knowledge. In 1958, the University of Pennsylvania hosted a Rockefeller Foundation-sponsored “Conference on Urban Design Criticism,” a historic meeting whose participants helped define the then-new field of urban design. Luminaries such as Jane Jacobs, Louis Kahn, Kevin Lynch, Lewis Mumford, and I.M. Pei participated.<sup>3</sup> Compared to the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation took a more humanistic approach to urban concerns, focusing on the role of architects and critics and the transformative potential of design.

Sponsoring book series about or surveys of urbanization around the world—both historical and contemporary—was another way these institutions helped produce knowledge about cities. The Rockefeller Foundation supported, beginning in 1956, a planned seven-volume study on the “International History of City Development.” The series was proposed by the University of Pennsylvania to be carried out under the direction of Erwin A. Gutkind, who died before the project was completed. Gutkind’s goal was to produce a “comprehensive history” of town and city development globally, which Penn faculty noted did not exist and was sorely needed.<sup>4</sup> The comprehensive “international” study focused on cities understood to be already developed, largely in Europe and Scandinavia, with one volume on China and India and another on the Africa and the Middle East.

In 1959, the SSRC established a Committee on Urbanization under the direction of the University of Chicago's Philip M. Hauser (who worked on a similar project for UNESCO at approximately the same time) to review the existing social science scholarship on urbanization and make recommendations for new research directions. The Committee's major output was a slim volume on its findings, which was international in scope.<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, in 1971, the Ford Foundation appointed Jack Robin to conduct a multi-volume "International Urbanization Survey," which was designed as a review of "the urbanization problems of developing countries and proposing Guidelines for future Foundation action."<sup>6</sup> The survey consisted of around twenty volumes, most about single countries (Pakistan, Morocco, Chile), but with a few topically focused on planning education and technical assistance programs.<sup>7</sup>

## Ford Foundation International Projects

### *The American-Yugoslav Project*

The Ford Foundation's American-Yugoslav project was a binational regional planning program intended to transfer American urban planning expertise to Yugoslavia as part of Cold War-era "democracy building." In 1965, Yugoslav officials made it known through American colleagues that they had a shortage of urban and regional planning expertise and faced rapidly growing cities with poor infrastructure, and that they would welcome aid from an American philanthropic organization. The Ford Foundation jumped at the chance, seeing the partnership as an "opportunity 'to open doors and open minds' within Marxist Europe," which was the foundational goal of Ford's programming in Eastern Europe.<sup>8</sup> The following year, the Ford Foundation launched the American-Yugoslav Initiative in Regional Planning as an outgrowth of its East European Fellowship Program with a modest, two-year grant to Cornell University faculty to work with counterparts in Ljubljana (Slovenia). Ford Foundation funds were supplemented

with money from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and a cash-and-resource contribution from Yugoslavia's Federal Council for Coordination of Scientific Research. Ford Foundation officers expected the American-Yugoslav project to be a small, short-term program that would not exceed the timeframe of the original two-year grant; it turned into a fourteen-year project and the Ford Foundation's largest project in Eastern Europe before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Archival sources note, "before it ran its course, the Ljubljana project drew into its orbit scores of American and European urban planners from as many universities" and planning officials from "a dozen or more" U.S. and Yugoslavian cities.<sup>9</sup>

The American-Yugoslav Project is a compelling case for several reasons: first, it was the Ford Foundation's major project in Eastern Europe, and involved a range of state and non-state actors. Second, the project was clearly intended to serve as a demonstration project; if the Foundation was successful in Ljubljana (which it was not), perhaps it could be exported to other communist countries. Third, it was one of the Ford Foundation's major urban international projects, and documents expose Foundation officials' assumptions that the "scientific" knowledge embodied in technical expertise in general and urban planning in particular was somehow politically and morally neutral; it also shows how quickly those officials learned otherwise. Fourth, the contest of wills between Jack Fisher, the Cornell faculty member who won the grant, and his counterpart in Ljubljana, is an instructive moment for understanding competing urban visions and different reasons for mobilizing particular kinds of expertise. And finally, on a somewhat personal note, when Fisher left Cornell for Wayne State University, where I am a faculty member, he brought the Ford Foundation grant with him and ran the project out of Detroit. This made Wayne State one of the few non-elite institutions with a significant role in a major international foundation-funded urbanization program in the second half of the twentieth-century.

### *Urban Extension Program*

The Ford Foundation's (failed) urban extension program, inspired by the experiences of American planners hired to redevelop Calcutta and who wanted to adapt their work in India for use in U.S. cities, is another likely case study for the project. Through the urban extension program, the Ford Foundation set out to change the rural-agricultural orientation of the U.S.'s land grant universities. When the Morrill Act established land grant institutions in 1862, about 85% of the country lived in rural areas; one hundred years later, nearly 85% lived in urban areas.<sup>10</sup> Under the direction of Paul Ylvisaker, the Ford Foundation made small grants to Rutgers University and the University of Wisconsin in 1959 to "reshape the historic triad of rural extension—teaching, research, and direct aid to farmers and their families--into urban counterparts"; in 1962, the Ford Foundation extended the program to include the universities of Delaware, Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, and California (Berkeley); Purdue University; and two nonacademic organizations, Ford Foundation-supported ACTION-Housing, in Pittsburgh, and the 4-H Club, which hoped to find a foothold for new service programs in cities.<sup>11</sup>

Like the American-Yugoslav Project, the urban extension program was successful neither on its own terms nor in the view of Ford Foundation officials, but it reveals much about how Foundation officials, University presidents, and social science faculty members understood and inhabited their roles as experts. Perhaps more significantly, it also serves as instance in which American experts imported for use in U.S. cities ideas formulated in the context of international development projects.<sup>12</sup> Bernard F. Loshbough, based on his experiences working for the Ford Foundation in India in the mid-1950s, originated the idea of the urban extension program. While still in India, Loshbough observed that Ford Foundation community development projects functioned in much the same way as agricultural extension programs in the rural United States, and could be adapted to urban areas of the United States. In particular, he thought urban extension agents, modeled after rural extension agents, would be of great value as advisors



to community development projects in U.S. cities. Loshbough suggested the urban extension program to Ylvisaker while he was still working in India, and an enthusiastic Ylvisaker set about creating a pilot program.<sup>13</sup> While the urban extension experiment ultimately failed, leaving the Ford Foundation with little to show for its investment, Foundation officers learned important lessons about their relationships to universities and research faculties that they carried with them into the next several decades, chief among them that the Foundation preferred to partner with elite private institutions, rather than public universities, on their urban ventures at home and abroad.

## Key Actors

My time at the RAC helped me identify key actors who are likely to feature a prominent role in my project. The international design and development experience of Greek architect and (for a time) Ford Foundation darling Constantinos Doxiadis ranged from Marshall Plan administrator to United Nations advisor to the architect of the modernist plan for Islamabad and a (never-realized) plan to enclose Detroit in a dome. He and his consulting firm, Doxiadis Associates, played major or minor roles in many of the projects that may feature as case studies in my book. Jack Robin was recruited to work for the Ford Foundation in Calcutta based on his achievements directing Pittsburgh's postwar urban renewal program, and he subsequently led the Ford foundation's International Urbanization Survey project in the 1970s. John Friedmann, a pioneering urban theorist and planner and one of the founders of UCLA's planning department, played in active role in many planning projects in Latin America, including as a consultant to the Ford Foundation on Chile and Venezuela. Chadbourne Gilpatrick, a Rockefeller Foundation program officer, was central to the Foundation's efforts in the areas of urban planning and urban design. And finally, three Ford Foundation officials, David E. Bell, Paul Ylvisaker, and Louis Winnick, served as intermediaries between the Foundation's domestic and international urban development activities, and often as points of contact for

State Department and World Bank officials who supported some of the same projects as the Foundation.

## Concluding Thoughts

My research remains in a formative stage, but my time at the RAC was essential in helping me trace key projects and actors. The RAC's holdings are particularly helpful because so many of the important figures in my research, some of whom initially showed up in other institutional contexts and I did not know much about, left some trace in the archives. Moreover, the Ford Foundation records hold far more information on my topic than I initially expected, and I left with a newfound interest in the Ford Foundation's work Pakistan and in Calcutta (my first book was, in part, on Pittsburgh's postwar redevelopment, and I am intrigued by the Ford Foundation's recruitment of Pittsburgh planners to work in India). I did not have time to conduct more than a cursory review of files on these topics, however, and I look forward to a return visit.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See: Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> “Abridged Transcript of Conference on Urban Planning and Development Held at the Ford Foundation, October 10-11,” Conference on Urbanism, Ford Foundation, October 10-11, 1956, 1956, Ford Foundation records, Catalogued Reports, Reports 3255-6261 (FA739B), Box 154, Abridged transcript of conference on urban planning and development held at the Ford Foundation, October 10-11 (Reports 003477), Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

<sup>3</sup> “University of Pennsylvania Community Development Files 6” n.d., Rockefeller Foundation records, projects, RG 1.2 (FA387); Series 200: United States; Subseries 200.S: United States - Social Sciences; Box 457; Folder 3904: University of Pennsylvania - Community Planning Conference, May-September 1958, Rockefeller Archive Center, accessed October 16, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> “University of Pennsylvania Community Planning Files 1” n.d., Rockefeller Foundation records, projects, RG 1.2 (FA387); Series 200: United States; Subseries 200.S: United States - Social Sciences; Box 457; Folder 3899: University of Pennsylvania - Community Planning, 1955-1956, Rockefeller Archive Center, accessed October 16, 2015; *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> See: Social Science Research Council records (FA021); Record Group 2: Accession 2; Series 1: Committee Projects; Subseries 102: Committee Projects – Urbanization and Philip M. Hauser and Leo Francis Schnore, *The Study of Urbanization* (New York: Wiley, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> John P. Robin, Colin Rosser, and Frederick C. Terzo, “The Ford Foundation International Urbanization Survey, Discussion Paper III,” 1971, Ford Foundation records, Catalogued Reports, Reports 3255-6261 (FA739B), Box 262, The Ford Foundation International Urbanization Survey (Reports 005838), Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>7</sup> “Ford Foundation Urbanization Survey, 1971-1972” n.d., Ford Foundation records, International Division, Latin America and the Caribbean, Jamaica and Mexico City Field Office Files (FA612); Series II: John S. Nagel (LAC Representative) Desk Files; Box 2; Folder: International Urbanization Survey; Urbanization Survey -- Robin, John P., 1970-71, Rockefeller Archive Center, accessed October 14, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Winnick, “Philanthropy’s Adaptation to the Urban Crisis, Vol. 5,” May 1989, 7, Ford Foundation records, Reports 11775-13948 (FA739E), Box 575, Reports 012158: Philanthropy’s adaptation to the urban crisis vol. 5, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Louis Winnick, “Philanthropy’s Adaptation to the Urban Crisis, Vol. 3,” May 1989, 2, Ford Foundation records, Reports 11775-13948 (FA739E), Box 575, Reports 012158: Philanthropy’s adaptation to the urban crisis vol. 3, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> For a brief discussion of the program, see Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development*, 144–45.

<sup>13</sup> Richard M. Catalano, “Action-Housing Urban Extension Program: Office of Policy and Planning,” April 1964, 3, Ford Foundation records, Catalogued Reports, Reports 6262-9286 (FA739C), Box 356, Action-housing Urban Extension Program: office of Policy and Planning (Reports 008422), Rockefeller Archive Center.