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## COVID-19: A Comparative Field Report

**Ray Hutchison**, *University of Wisconsin*  
**Gabriele Manella**, *Università di Bologna*  
–*Alma Mater Studiorum*

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic raises important questions for many areas of sociological study, not the least of which is community and urban sociology. With the outbreak thought to have begun in the city of Wuhan, China, with a population of 11 million, where a majority of persons live in crowded conditions in high-rise buildings, the idea that the spread of the coronavirus was related to the size and density of modern Chinese cities made intuitive sense. Similarly, the unfolding tragedy in the New York City area, with a death toll surpassing that of China and the EU combined, the density of population and crowded conditions of high rise and tenement housing in the outer boroughs also made intuitive sense. But as more information about the origin and spread of COVID-19 has come to light, it is clear that many factors

(cultural, demographic, political, and others) account for differences in the trajectory of the pandemic in the US and in the EU.

In this brief comment, we offer a comparative analysis of COVID-19 in Italy (the epicenter of the virus in the EU) and in the US, with a specific focus on one question: what might account for the spread of the virus to small towns and rural communities in the US, and the relative lower incidence of the virus in the small towns and rural communities in southern Italy? While we recognize that a wide range of sociological, cultural, and political factors may ultimately be found to explain the differential spread and transmission of the virus, our focus will be on the location and practices of nursing homes in the US and in Italy.

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## Message from the Chair

Japonica Brown-Saracino

Under ordinary circumstances, many of us would be preparing for travel to San Francisco. We would be looking forward to gathering together, in person, at our sessions, business meeting, roundtables, and for a reception at the Tenderloin Museum. I am certain that I am not alone in regretting the missed opportunity to engage with one another at our sessions, as well as to talk more

informally in a variety of conference settings – from the book exhibit, to the crowded hallways where we would ordinarily gather between panels.

Yet, we find ourselves in different circumstances; circumstances that section members grapple with in an essay in this issue of our newsletter.

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## COVID-19: A Comparative Field Report, cont'd.

According to official data, Italy was the first European country affected by the coronavirus. The first cases were reported on January 30: two Chinese tourists who were hospitalized in isolation at the Spallanzani hospital in Rome. The first domestic infections, however, were detected on February 21 and 22, and the first person who died with the virus was on February 27. The first outbreaks of the infections were located in the north of the country: the province of Lodi (southern Lombardy) and Vicenza (central Veneto). The spread of the virus was rapid and dramatic after that, with the highest levels reported in March and April.

Once COVID-19 spread to Italy, it was clear that there were important demographic trends associated with the disease; indeed, one of the early explanations for the appearance, spread, and toll of the virus in Italy was the large number of elderly persons (the highest proportion in the EU). The elderly represent a particularly vulnerable population, both in terms of general health conditions and the accumulation of other risk factors (including diabetes, high blood pressure, and lung infections; the elderly are more susceptible to flu more generally). As the virus spread to the US and to New York City in particular, a host of demographic variables were noted in explaining the rapid spread and mortality: minority populations, the poor, and the elderly were more likely to experience serious complications. And a significant number of fatalities were coming from nursing homes and group homes as the virus fed on the most vulnerable populations. By the middle of April, the media was flooded with stories of deaths in nursing homes and, unexpectedly, the increase of infections and deaths in small towns and rural areas in the US.

Experts talk about “three Italys” to

describe the spread of the virus. If the situation in the north is dramatic, the center has critical areas but has lower numbers, and the situation in the south is much better. The southern regions have seen a much lower rate of contagion and number of victims. In some regions the impact was very minimal, both as an absolute value and in relation to the number of inhabitants. Just a few cases were recorded in Basilicata, Molise and Sardinia, and also in Calabria if compared with number of residents. When the outbreak of the virus in northern Italy became known in February, there was concern that it would spread to Milan (the largest city in northern Italy) and to other cities, including Bologna in the north, Rome in the center, and eventually to Naples and other cities in the south. For the most part, this has not happened in the southern half of the country, and while the reasons for this are not fully known at present, it is likely that rapid government response and restrictions on public activities (similar to the “stay at home” guidelines in the United States) played a major part, as well as widespread compliance with the restrictions. The number of confirmed cases, hospitalizations, and deaths generally trends downward as you move from cities in the north—and into the south. Why would there be a declining number of cases of the virus in small towns and rural communities, while at the same time we find an increase in these areas in the United States?

We compared the location of nursing homes in the United States and in Italy to see if this might be a factor in the spread (or lack of spread) of the virus in the two countries. There are significant differences in the public health systems of the two countries (Italy has, for the most part, a national health system with public funded hospital facilities, while the United States a private health care system as

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***“By the middle of April, the media was flooded with stories of deaths in nursing homes and, unexpectedly, the increase of infections and deaths in small towns and rural areas in the US.”***

## Message from the Communication Team

2020 represented a significant change from how CUSS has managed communications to its members. This process began under our past chairs Miriam Greenberg and Rachel Dwyer. We have now shifted our focus away from a traditional PDF newsletter to a combination of email, our website (comurb.org), Twitter (@ComUrbASA), and Facebook (CUSS). For instance, current chair Japonica Brown-Saracino has been sending out a monthly digest of section updates and announcements via the listserve. This digest is also posted on our Comurb.org and tweeted out by members of our team. While we are relying more on social media to get information out, we will be collecting items from the past year and posting a PDF. That way we can continue to have an archive of traditional newsletters, even as technology continues to evolve. We also continue the great work of Bill Holt, our newsletter letter editor since 2001.

As we move forward, we welcome suggestions as to how we can better serve CUSS members. This includes using the website to highlight the great work - advocacy, scholarship, and teaching - that is done by you all. We would love to post short essays or editorial-style pieces on Comurb.org. If you are interested, pitch us your ideas.

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## Message from the Chair, cont'd.

A few months ago, another section member - Benny Witkovsky (PhD student, University of Wisconsin-Madison) - contributed an essay on local politics, civic participation and COVID to ASA's *Footnotes*. I anticipate that, like Benny and the authors of the essay in this issue, many of our members will, in the months and years ahead, shed crucial light on the relationship between the pandemic and various dimensions of place - from racialized spatial inequalities, to municipal responses to COVID, and the impact of the pandemic on cultural frames for urbanism. At the same time, urban and community scholars will engage the racist police violence, state protest suppression, and resistance movements that are so visible in many of our metropolitan areas today.

As we begin these crucial conversations, I hope to see many of you (virtually) at sessions, as well as at our annual business meeting, where we will report on section news and celebrate our award winners. By registering for ASA's Virtual Engagement Event, you can enjoy section panels on Work, Community, and the City

(Sat, August 8, 2:30 to 4:10pm (PDT)); Cities and Big Data (Sun, August 9, 8:30 to 10:10am (PDT)); New Forms of Precarious Urban Labor (Sun, August 9, 10:30am to 12:10pm (PDT)); Theorizing Renters and Rental Housing in the United States (Sun, August 9, 2:30 to 4:10pm (PDT)). You are also invited to join us for the Community and Urban Sociology Section Business Meeting (Sun, August 9, 12:30 to 1:10pm (PDT)), immediately followed by the CUSS Section Roundtables (Sun, August 9, 1:10 to 2:10pm (PDT)).

Among the items on our agenda for the business meeting is the celebration of our award winners, including Barrett Lee, Professor Emeritus, Sociology and Demography, Pennsylvania State University, who will receive the Lynd Award for Lifetime Achievement. For a full list of our terrific award winners, please see: <https://comurb.org/2020/06/10/cuss-digest-june-2020/#more-731>

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## Message from the Chair, cont'd.

Despite disruptions related to the pandemic, this has been a busy and productive year for the section. To name just a few of our activities, our newly formed CUSS Communications Committee spearheaded the move to a virtual newsletter, and, with Albert Fu (Kutztown University of Pennsylvania) at the helm, maintains a robust website. In coordination with the Communications Committee, we also instituted a monthly chair's digest, which is emailed to members and posted on our website. I encourage everyone to submit content for publication on the website and in the newsletter, as well as to keep the incoming chair, Derek Hyra (American University), apprised of your news for inclusion in the monthly digest.

I am pleased to report that, in May, our section joined many ASA sections in donating the funds we would have devoted to our 2020 annual reception to the ASA Minority Fellowship Program. The Community and Urban Sociology Section Council voted unanimously to transfer \$1800 to support the program, and at our August Council Meeting we will consider ways to maintain support for this and similar initiatives regarding diversity and inclusion in our discipline going forward.

The section owes a great debt to our very active Publications Committee, chaired by Krista Paulsen, which has overseen the search for a new editor of *City & Community*. Dr. Deirdre Oakley will soon conclude her very successful editorship of the journal. During her term, the journal has, among other accomplishments, achieved its highest impact factor to date; published many compelling and timely symposia and special issues; coordinated online-first publication of papers via Early View, ensuring that accepted papers are readily available; and cleared a backlog of accepted manuscripts. As just one indicator of the journal's continued import under her stewardship, it is notable that the section's 2020 Jane Addams's Award and Best Graduate Student Paper Award both recognize articles published in *City & Community*. Dr. Oakley leaves the journal in excellent shape for our next editor – whom ASA will soon appoint. I hope you will join me at our August business meeting – and whenever we next gather together in person – to thank her for her time, commitment, and vision.

Of course, there is much work ahead of us as scholars of place and community. This is a crucial moment for urban-

ists to be in conversation with one another as our current context brings to light and exacerbates longstanding inequalities and injustice. Racist state violence, police brutality, and protest suppression are pressing urban concerns that should be central to conversations within our subfield. Consideration of how we can elevate these concerns and conversations within and beyond our scholarship and meetings will be a key item on the August agenda of the CUSS Council, and I encourage members to reach out with ideas and recommendations.

In closing, it is with gratitude that I thank several outgoing section office holders, including secretary-treasurer, Mary Fischer, Publications Committee Chair Victoria Reyes, Student Representative Kyle Galindez, and Council Members Ernesto Castañeda and LaShawn-Da Pittman.

It has been a pleasure and an honor to serve as chair of the section, and I am very happy to welcome Derek Hyra as our next chair. Indeed, I have benefited from his collaboration throughout my term, as well as from the insights of past-chairs Rachel Dwyer and Miriam Greenberg. I have no doubt that Derek, together with our other new terrific office holders, will serve our section well in this unprecedented time.



## 2020 Section Awards

The 2020 Robert and Helen Lynd Award for Lifetime Achievement is awarded to:

- **Barrett Lee**, Professor Emeritus, Sociology and Demography, Pennsylvania State University

Thanks to committee members Kevin Fox Gotham (Chair), Sarah Mayorga-Gallo, Kristin Perkins, Jaleh Jalili, and John Eason.



The Park Award Committee, Bruce Haynes (co-chair), Evelyn Perry (co-chair), Esther Sullivan, Max Besbris, and Junia Howell, selected two books that will share our 2020 Park Best Book Award:

- **Scott Frickel and James R. Elliott.** *Sites Unseen: Uncovering Hidden Hazards in American Cities* (ASA Rose Monograph Series- Russell Sage 2018).
- **Maria G. Rendon.** *Stagnant Dreamers: How the Inner City Shapes the Integration of Second Generation Latinos* (Russell Sage 2019).



The Jane Addams Award for best article has been awarded to:

- **Hwang, Jackelyn.** (2019). "Gentrification without Segregation? Race, Immigration, and Renewal in a Diversifying City," *City & Community*.

Thanks to committee members Andrew Papachristos (Chair), Sara Bastomski, Meaghan Stiman, and Ana Villarreal.



The Graduate Student Paper Award Committee, composed of Anna Rhodes (Chair), Zachary Hyde, and Watoii Rabii, selected the following paper for our 2020 award:

- **Carlson, H. Jacob.** 2020. "Measuring Displacement: Assessing Proxies for Involuntary Residential Mobility," *City & Community*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cico.12482>

They also awarded honorable mention to:

- **Herring, Chris.** 2019. "Complaint-Oriented Policing: Regulating Homelessness in Public Space." *American Sociological Review* 84(5): 769-800.

# 2020 Annual Meeting



## Work, Community, and City

Sat, August 8, 2:30 to 4:10pm (PDT)

This session brings together the subjects of work and community and answers questions about how employees, freelancers, and even more precarious workers find community in the city. With the high cost of living in cities, stagnating wages, and long hours, many urban workers struggle to find like-minded and meaningful community. Papers in this session will address the following questions: How does the culture of creative class cities promote or harm a sense of community? What kinds of spaces facilitate connections, engage people in community-building, and bring people together? How do urban workers experience quality of life in cities and communities?

## Cities and Big Data

Sun, August 9, 8:30 to 10:10am (PDT)

The use of 'big data' for social sciences is on the rise. Social media and other location-based services provide an abundance of fine-grained data to a high geographical resolution. New computational methods allow researchers to analyze high volumes of user-generated location points, travels, tweets, reviews, among others. This context poses an opportunity for urban sociologists to expand traditional quantitative and qualitative methods in researching people's dynamics in the city, and the impact of new technologies on the urban experience. This panel provides a space for discussion among researchers interested in exploring the possibilities of 'big data' analysis for urban sociology.

## New Forms of Precarious Urban Labor

Sun, August 9, 10:30am to 12:10pm (PDT)

The rise of platform based gig work, such as driving an Uber or finding short stints on Taskrabbit, is often linked back to the Great Recession as workers attempted to make do with less and diversify their income

sources. But as platform-based gig work enters its second decade, the question arises, how has gig work given rise to new forms of urban precarity? More broadly, what is the impact of the new urban economy on workers, their careers, and life chances? This session invites papers that explore new forms of precarious labor by considering some of the following: What is the relationship of different types of platform-based gig work to urban place-making, e.g. the experience of “eyes on the street”, as workers are increasingly found in co-working spaces, coffee shops, and parks? In what ways do new forms of labor shape precarity for urban workers, as they encounter increased and outsourced risk in the workplace? Alternatively, has the reported flexibility of the work allowed for improved financial security through a side hustle for those with in-demand skills and high levels of social and financial capital? And finally, how do we theorize the forms of precarious labor and platform-based gig work within the study of urban inequality and racial segregation?

### **Community and Urban Sociology Section Business Meeting**

Sun, August 9, 12:30 to 1:10pm (PDT)

### **Community and Urban Sociology Section Roundtables**

Sun, August 9, 1:10 to 2:10pm (PDT)

### **Theorizing Renters and Rental Housing in the United States**

Sun, August 9, 2:30 to 4:10pm (PDT)

In U.S. cities, the percentage of residents renting units versus owning homes has reached a historic high. Given the growing share of renters and increasing rental costs across the country’s largest metropolitan areas, this session invites papers that explore various facets of rental markets in the United States, particularly as they relate to urban inequality. Potential topics of interest could examine how residents navigate unaffordable housing markets to find adequate housing; the role of landlords, property managers, real estate investors, and city officials vis-à-vis rental markets; or dynamics within subgroups of renters. Papers may also explore topics such as: cost-saving measures such as doubling up; the emergence of multi-tenant homes and short-term rental services; the global circuits of finance capital and how they relate to the rental market; and social movements mobilizing for greater tenant protections and dignified housing. Overall, this session seeks submissions that broadly theorize various aspects of rental markets. It will examine rental relationships as engines of inequality in the United States, as well as the resistance that it engenders in the process.

### **2020 ASA Special Session: Color, Race and Ethnicity: Where/How Do Space and Place Matter?**

Sun, August 9, 10:30am to 12:10pm (PDT)

The analysis of space traces back to the beginnings of American Sociology with *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). Since then, sociologists have claimed it causes a wide variety of social outcomes, but we still do not understand if space and place are cause or consequence of the social. This panel discussion treats racial matters as spatial matters that implicate a variety of social phenomena. Panelists explore space as a social product and consider how place-making shapes the experience of inequality. They discuss the relationship between agency, culture and structural constraints in the urban environment to generate new ways of thinking about urban potentialities and possibility.

## 2019 Awardee Interviews



The CUSS newsletter team reached out to the 2019 Career of Distinguished Scholarship Award Winner, Harvey Molotch, to reflect on his career and his trajectory as an urban sociologist. Dr. Molotch is Professor Emeritus at NYU and UC Santa Barbara and is a prominent figure in urban sociology and our section. We're including his responses below:

### **What initially brought you to urban sociology?**

I've always had a thing for land and buildings. Children play with blocks; I kept at it. When growing up in Baltimore I liked watching things go up, including houses and especially movie theaters. From family scuttlebutt I learned that a part of making things happen was connections – that's what gets zoning, building permits, and even permission to have a neon sign. Don't be shocked, dear reader, but there were bribes.

When I got to urban social science, my Baltimore was not in it. Crime was certainly there but largely sequestered as criminology. Urban science was about concentric circles, demography, and exotic street corner life. I yearned for the developers, the fixers, and the crooks – and their linkages with the more ordinary folks trying to make their way through the thicket. A lot of my life has been to follow up on that.

### **What has been the most exciting moment of your career?**

I was giving a paper at the ASA, circa 1970, in a session called "Radical Sociology." We were plenty hyped up. It was a full-house in the "Imperial Ballroom" of the Hilton. My paper was called "Oil in Santa Barbara and Power in America" and my big line, which the journal was to edit out: "When the oil hit the water, the shit hit the fan." It went over big, including with the august Talcott Parsons, rollicking in his seat at my insolence. I doubt he could foresee the demise of his structural functionalism and the rise of the intellectual left that was blowing in the (air conditioned) wind. I got it.

I always taught Sociology One, exciting again and again. It was great to teach our greatest hits, which also included, in my version, wonderful stuff from anthropology, history, political science and even economics. I was a heavy user of slides, video, and music; I loved being there as the students saw the light.

### **What do you think are the most pressing issues for urban scholars to study today?**

Changes in land use, whether through growth or contraction, have specific impacts on wealth distribution, social lives, and the natural environment. We need to understand and publicize these effects – this is a special role for urban studies as opposed to sociology more generally.

I don't think we fully resolved the problem of the "urban object" – what is distinctive to the urban as opposed to the social and economic more generally. Too often, in my view, urban sociology means whatever goes on in cities. But since cities are the commonplace of life, this delimits very little. The urban matters, not by declaration but by clear display of how taking it up clarifies larger realms of thought and politics.

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The danger is that without meaningful framing, the urban aspect can be a sloganeering substitute for confronting larger social issues of inequality, health, and racism. High-rise public housing filled a need for sure, but it was hardly a panacea; the switch to low-rise is equally misguided as general solution. We need intellectual tactics to prevent our beloved “urban” from being misapplied.

For me, a good point of entry is to ask, in effect, “how did that get there and that way or through what process did it cease to be.” The concrete of the city, its shape and form, can be our entry point for the recursive loop between the social, the artifactual, and the natural. In short, the city, in this sense, can be method. It is a way into culture, political economy and comparative analyses.

One critical obsolescence of our prior paradigms is the collective effect of climate change. In grappling with this wicked problem, we need to think about how our urbanism as a way of life is a destroyer. We need to learn the ways particular settlement configuration exacerbate earth impact. We need to figure out how to repudiate the value-free development doctrines, world-wide, that lead to catastrophe. Going green needs some red – with approaches that are positive, practical, and that leverage potential for human solidarity. The downside of recycling is its ineffectiveness; the upside is its display of mass participation for a common cause. How can that “instinct” be bottled but made significant rather than trivial.

#### **What advice would you give to new researchers?**

Coming into sociology at a time of plentiful jobs, my own pleasurable enthusiasm was likely historically exceptional. That said, I can declare that I really did follow my fascinations and try to make myself useful. I did see some less fortunate colleagues stuck in the rut of strategizing; it made their work less interesting for themselves and probably didn’t help their careers much either. What to do? Curiosity is really all we have that has at least the potential to pay off both on and off the job. It is a reason to get up in the morning.

#### **Cities face a lot of challenges today. What advice would you give to residents and activists who are concerned about issues in their neighborhoods?**

It is discouraging to witness how much urban activism goes not to progressive agendas but to those based in fear of those agendas. Ironically, change is made horrible because there’s such a weak safety net, even for the middle-class. Some of the resulting anxiety clutters public discourse with resentment against newcomers and hostility toward those driven, like the homeless and the ill, to repugnant life strategies. We all know that miseries at the level of appearances – even public elimination at the extreme – come from the deeper realms. Urbanists have a direct line to those appearances as well as means to know their source. We have the job, as a consistent matter, to convincingly explain these extreme local troubles as traceable to policies and politics that do people in.



## COVID-19: A Comparative Field Report, cont'd.

well as public hospitals with vastly different funding and facilities; one well-known statistic emerging from the epidemic is that Italian hospitals had 50 percent more ventilator machines than American hospitals). There are important differences in the organization of care for the elderly and disabled as well. In the US there are more than 16,500 private as well as public nursing homes with more than 1,383,700 residents, and another 713,300 persons living in residential care communities (<http://proximityone.com/nh1.htm>). The location of private and public nursing homes is shown in the maps in Figures 1 & 2.

Care for the elderly and disabled in Italy is organized in facilities known as Residenze Sanitarie Assistite (RSA). In contrast to the US, with more than 16,500 nursing homes (1:21,000 persons) there are just 3,500 RSA across all of Italy (1:151,000 persons). The location of RSA in Italy is shown in Figure 3. While the location of nursing homes in both countries corresponds in some general fashion to overall population (concentrated in larger metropolitan areas) it is notable that there are many more nursing homes, both public and private, in smaller towns and rural communities in the United States than is found in southern Italy.

It seems clear from early reports in Italy (as many as 40 percent of deaths linked to RSAs) and in NYC (with more than an third of deaths said to be of nursing home residents and workers) that nursing homes may be a significant factor in the community spread of COVID-19. There is a regular flow of persons into and out of nursing homes and RSA: many residents will receive weekly if not daily visits from family members, and in the case of persons who live distant from relatives, this may mean travel from smaller towns to cities. In the US, this is

mostly likely to be by private vehicle, in Italy by public transportation. Nursing homes employ staff from the local community. There is ample opportunity for transmission of the virus to residents of the nursing homes by visitors and staff, who represent a very vulnerable population: nearly all are advanced in age, and many have underlying conditions that make them more likely to experience severe symptoms. Spread within confined areas, such as the nursing homes, is facilitated by movement of aides between rooms and gatherings in common areas; in Italy, staff at RSA will often move between health care facilities, including hospitals that may be treating advanced cases. Visitors and staff leave the nursing home to return to their own homes, where the virus may be spread to family members at home or persons on public transportation. While the opportunity for transmission of the virus in nursing home settings and spread to larger community is easily seen, can this account for differences between regions of a country or between countries themselves? We believe that this may be a significant factor to consider to explain the apparent discrepancy of the lack of transmission to southern small towns and rural communities in Italy, and the continued spread of the virus to these areas in the US.

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“Coronavirus in Italia, la mappa dei contagi regione per regione” (May 8, 2020)

<https://www.fanpage.it/attualita/coronavirus-italia-mappa-aggiornata/>

***“Why would there be a declining number of cases of the virus in small towns and rural communities, while at the same time we find an increase in these areas in the United States?”***

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# COVID-19: A Comparative Field Report, cont'd.

Gaby Galvin, Rural Counties Seeing Faster Growth in Covid-19 Cases, Deaths (U.S. News & World Repost, April 30, 2020). <https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2020-04-30/coronavirus-cases-deaths-growing-at-faster-rates-in-rural-areas>

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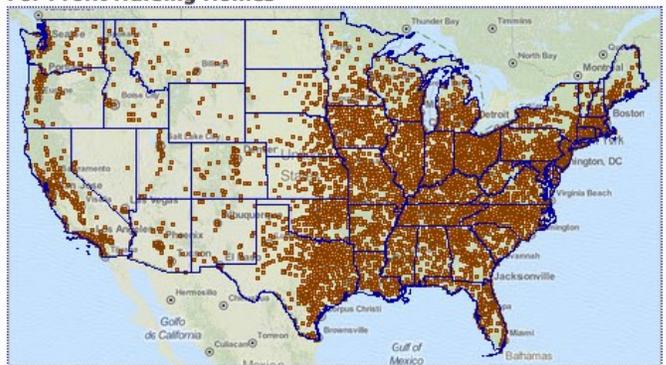
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Figure 1: Non-profit Nursing Homes in the United States



Figure 2: For-profit Nursing Homes in the United States



Source: Proximity One (May 9, 2020) <http://proximityone.com/nh1.htm>

Figure 3: Location of RSA by Region in Italy



Source: <https://www.ancorafischiailvento.org/2020/04/19/survey-rsa-fotografia-parziale-di-una-strage/>

## 2019 Awardee Interviews, cont'd



Zachary Hyde, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of British Columbia, was the winner of the 2019 Graduate Student Paper Award. Zach's innovative research agenda brings work in relational economic sociology to bear on longstanding questions in urban sociology. We reached out to ask him to discuss his research, and we're including his responses below. Thanks to Zach for participating in our interview series!

### **What were the main findings of your paper?**

My paper "Giving Back to Get Ahead" focuses on the popular urban policy of density bonusing, where private development companies provide affordable housing and other social services in exchange for extra density. The main finding of the paper is that density bonusing forms a paradox, whereby "giving back" social services simultaneously increases developer profits. Through contributing services developers enhance their symbolic capital via gift-giving, which can be traded in for economic advantages in future dealings with local governments.

### **What motivated you to study this particular research topic?**

I originally became interested in studying developers through my research on gentrification. I had been looking at social enterprise businesses, which mix profit-making with social service objectives, in the context of low-income neighborhoods. I began to notice that developers were making similar arguments about "socially conscious" mixed-income development, and this was tied to their increasing involvement in affordable housing provision. I wanted to know how these policies of density-for-social benefits were being implemented and understood by different actors in the field of urban development.

I carried out a study focusing on one particular developer that was becoming well-known for negotiating rezoning for social benefits throughout Canada. I studied this developer operating in two cities, Toronto and Vancouver, both with a similar approach to densification, but with different political structures. Based on this approach, these findings can speak to other cases, like New York City, where density bonusing has become central to Mayor DeBlasio's Housing New York plan since 2014. The Lincoln Institute for Land Policy recently launched a large-scale study of "land-value capture," which included density bonusing, suggesting that more and more local governments are turning to this policy framework.

### **What theoretical debates interest you the most, and how do you see your research contributing to them?**

My main interest is in the processes through which neoliberalism achieves legitimacy. In my dissertation I contribute to a number of debates related to this overarching topic, for example, by illustrating how non-market exchange, such as reciprocity, obfuscates the privatization of the welfare state. I also unpack the contradictions of progressive, yet growth-oriented, urban politics, or progressive growth machines.

More broadly, I am also interested in combining the concepts and ideas of economic sociology and urban sociology. While there has been some great work in this direction by scholars such as Frederick Wherry, Deborah Becher and Josh Pacewitz, there is still a lot of room for productive interface between the two fields. For example, in my paper I draw on Jens Beckert's recent framework of imagined futures, which highlights the way capitalism relies on fictional expectations about the future, to explain how developers justify increases in density. Finally, I've been working on developing a new framework for economic sociology based on the work of Karl Polanyi.

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**What surprises occurred as you conducted your fieldwork?**

A surprising finding during my research in Toronto was the developer's reliance on community outreach workers, many of whom were young geography and urban planning graduate students from local universities. These part-time employees were often well-versed in critical urban theory and felt conflicted about their position working for a development firm. However, they also played an important role in providing developers with legitimacy, as they were able to effectively reframe community opposition to new developments as self-interested actions by homeowners. This led me to think about the pathways through which urban knowledge, generated in the academy, makes its way into on-the-ground tensions around development.

**What are some future directions for this project?**

My latest research project extends my interest in housing and the politics of density by focusing on the resurgence of private rental housing in North American cities, and how this contributes to urban inequality. My plan is to focus on four large cities across Canada and the US, which are sites of two intersecting patterns: state-led incentives for the development of rental housing in the face of housing crises, and the rising acquisition of existing and newly-built rentals by real estate holding corporations and pension funds. This will continue my interest in the symbolic systems of housing by ex-

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## About CUSS

Members of the American Sociological Association Section on Community and Urban Sociology explore new social theory and develop empirical research on groups living, working, and communicating across geographical boundaries, including cities, suburbs, and rural areas, as well as electronic communities and other spaces.

*City & Community* is the journal of the Community and Urban Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association. Through its mission, the journal advances urban sociological theory, promotes the highest quality empirical research on communities and urban social life, and encourages sociological perspectives on urban policy.

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