

Dear Colleague,

As some of you know, Interboro is co-curating the 2009 International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (<http://www.iabr.nl/en/2008/>), a "thematically oriented bi-annual event that explores to what extent architects, with their knowledge, skills, and imaginative powers, can contribute to solving urgent problems in contemporary society." This year's Biennale will explore the "Open City," loosely defined as "an arena in which diverse social and ethnic groups can coexist, interact, and generate complex relationships and networks."

As co-curators, our job is to explore the ideal of the Open City, and consider its influence on the built environment in America by looking at the past, present and future of the American community. Our starting point is the sentiment—so prevalent in the literature on the topic—that the ideal of the Open City has had little influence in America, where homogeneous, exclusionary communities rule the day. Is this sentiment true? Could like-minded clustering "tear America apart," as Bill Bishop recently suggested? What can architects, planners, and artists do to foster heterogeneity in America's communities? Is heterogeneity as valuable a goal as advocates of the Open City say it is? These are some of the questions we will be exploring in this exhibition.

We're sending you this email because the more we work on the exhibition, the more we realize what a tremendous resource we have in our network of colleagues in the architecture and planning professions. Thanks to meetings, phone conversations, and email exchanges with many of you, our knowledge about American communities is far richer than it was when we began researching the topic earlier this year.

However, we could still use some help. With this RFP, we are asking you to help us with the following five tasks:

- *Task 1: We're looking for examples of what we call "glitches." These are planning mistakes that inadvertently produce heterogeneity.*
- *Task 2: We're looking for examples of communities that are homogeneous, but homogeneous in some interesting, potentially non-deleterious way.*
- *Task 3: We're looking to add to our list of policies and tools that planners use to foster heterogeneity in American cities and suburbs.*
- *Task 4: We're looking to add to our list of policies and tools that are used to create homogeneity in American cities and suburbs.*
- *Task 5: We're asking you to identify or propose a "Space of Encounter," a space where at least two different communities interact in some meaningful way.*

On the following pages, you will find more detailed descriptions of each of the five tasks, complete with examples.

What's in it for you? Why help us?

This is an RFP: a number of responses will be selected for further development in the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam. For example, if you respond to Task 1 with an example of an interesting “glitch,” we might ask you if you would be interested in completing a case study about it. If you respond to Task 5 with a proposal for a “Space of Encounter,” we might ask you if you would be interested in following through with the proposal. We have resources available to sponsor a variety of projects (case studies, interventions, etc.).

You do not have to respond with a complete idea: the purpose of this informal RFP is to solicit ideas. Feel free to respond informally, via email or phone, with some thoughts about one or all of the tasks. However, please respond ASAP, as we want to make sure we have enough time to work with you to develop your ideas.

Thank you for your time, and we look forward to hearing from you. We feel so fortunate to have so many colleagues who we can count on to help us with this very exciting project!

Sincerely,

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Task 1: We're looking for examples of what we call "glitches"

One of the things we're interested in is how in America, where homogeneous, exclusionary, walled suburbs are said to rule the day, instances of the Open City can still be found. Sometimes, this is the result of progressive planning practices such as inclusionary zoning, but sometimes, Open City qualities like heterogeneity are attributable to accidents.

What do we mean? Here are two examples:

- Ave Maria is a new town located near Naples, Florida. Marketed towards Catholics (and funded by the notoriously conservative founder of Domino's Pizza, Tom Monaghan) the town includes 800 residential units, a large oratory, and a university. However, despite officially opening in the summer of 2007, the Catholic-themed town still lacks a proper church: because of the local diocese's differences with the town's founder, the \$24 million, 100-foot tall Church meant to anchor the community has not been consecrated. The result? The town's religious ceremonies are performed in a neighboring parish that services decidedly lower-income Creole and Hispanic Catholic populations.
- In America, the foreclosure crisis is engendering diversity, as people who normally wouldn't be able to afford a suburban, single-family house move in to occupy foreclosed homes or rent them cheaply. This "glitch" has introduced new classes, races, and lifestyles into areas that looked as if they would remain stable, homogeneous, and exclusionary. Today, one can find many new, suburban subdivisions in which multiple families share one large house, where shift workers go in on rentals together, and where transient construction workers get put up in luxury homes.

For Task 1, we would like to invite you to think of other such "glitches." Can you think of an example of how, owing to some glitch like the ones described above, some kind of heterogeneity was inadvertently produced?

Task 2: We're looking for examples of communities that are homogeneous, but also interesting and potentially non-deleterious

While we agree with scholars like Gerald Frug that when given the choice, most Americans will choose homogeneous communities over heterogeneous communities, we challenge the notion—so prevalent in the literature on the topic—that this preference has only produced hyper-militarized, fortified-up, exclusionary communities of fear. Without undermining the harm that America's anti-urban policies and sentiments have caused the poor, mostly non-white residents of America's cities, we wish to demonstrate that these same anti-urban policies and sentiments have produced communities of gay retirees, hipsters, and suburban Muslims too. People sort themselves for all sorts of reasons, and not all of them are bad.

We call these new, homogeneous, non-deleterious communities “New American Privatopias.” Examples include:

- “Peace Village” is a new 265-home subdivision outside Toronto, Canada populated exclusively by members of the Islamic Ahmadiyya sect who fled to Canada after religious persecution in Pakistan in the 1980s. Surrounding a central mosque, homes in the subdivision offer unique features such as separate living rooms for men and women and powerful kitchen fans to ventilate the aromas of the Pakistani cuisine.
- “Rainbow Vision” is a new LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi, transgender) retirement community in Sante Fe, New Mexico, soon to be reproduced in the Bay Area, Palm Springs, and Vancouver, Canada.
- Searching for the country's darkest, clearest skies, amateur astronomers settled 150 miles southeast of Tuscon, AZ and began “Arizona Sky Village,” a community of astronomers “dedicated to the preservation and appreciation of its natural surroundings.”

For Task 2, we would like to invite you to submit other examples of “New American Privatopias.” Are there communities out there you know of that advance this thesis that people sort themselves for all sorts of reasons, not all of them bad? If so, we would love to hear about them.

Task 3: We're looking to add to our list of tools that planners use to foster heterogeneity in American cities and suburbs

To counter what Bill Bishop recently called the “like-minded clustering of America,” planners have invented a number of policy tools aimed at increasing the heterogeneity of American communities. If, as legal scholar Gerald Frug insists, “the overall impact of American urban policy in the twentieth century has been to disperse and divide the people who live in America’s metropolitan areas, and, as a result, to reduce the number of places where people encounter men and women different from themselves,” surely there must be a way to use urban policy to *increase* the number of places where people encounter men and women different from themselves.

For the IABR, we are amassing an inventory of planning tools aimed at creating heterogeneity. This inventory includes familiar tools, such as inclusionary zoning, but also newer, less familiar (and less obvious) ones such as Cottage Zoning and Home-Value Insurance.

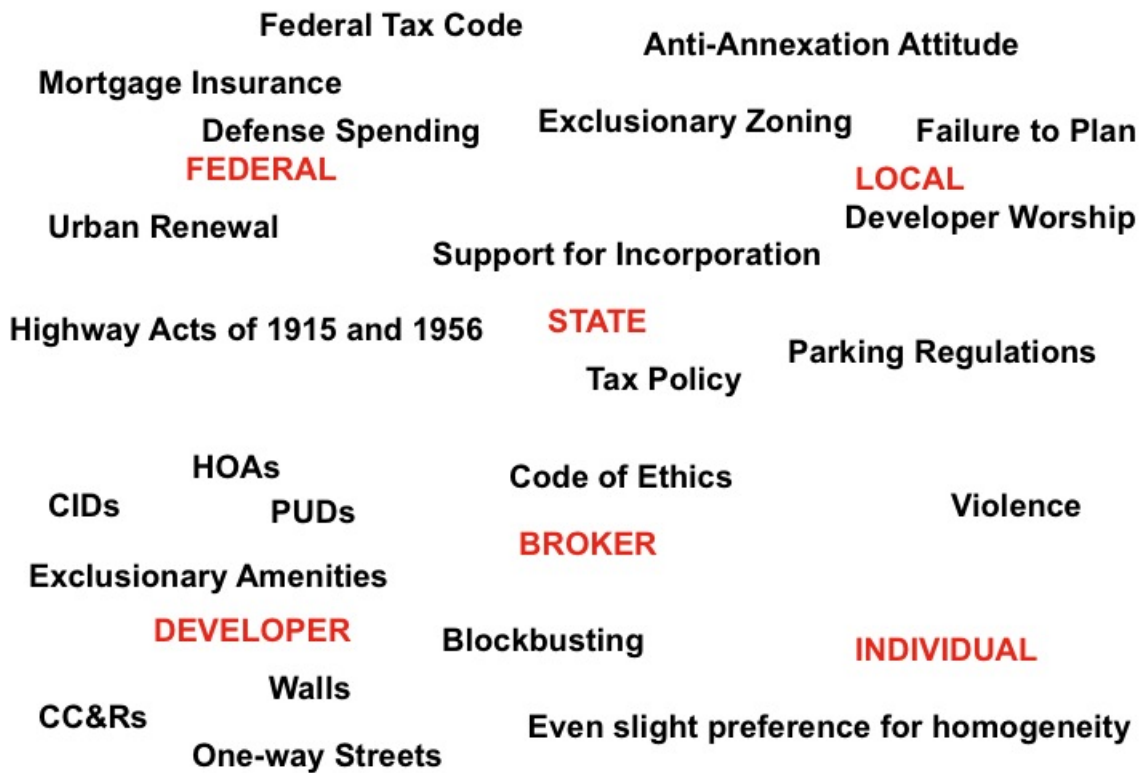
For Task 3, we're asking you if you can help us build this inventory of progressive planning tools. Can you think of other tools that planners have used to create heterogeneous communities? Can you identify creative ways in which existing tools have been used? Additionally, do you have a proposal for a new way to use an existing heterogenizing tool? Do you have a proposal for a new heterogenizing tool?

If so, we would love to hear about them.

Task 4: We're looking to add to our list of policies and tools that are used to creates homogeneity in American cities and suburbs

Of course, the homogeneity that is said to characterize American communities didn't just happen. Homogeneity had to be produced, and in order to produce it, every level of the government had to contribute to what we call the "Arsenal of Exclusion," a collection of policy tools that has been successfully used (if not crafted) to promote homogeneity in American communities.

Examples of these different tools are represented below:



For the IABR, we will be compiling a comprehensive list of the tools that are used to produce and maintain homogeneity, and looking at how each of these tools has been used to create a homogeneous community.

For Task 4, we're asking you if you can help us. Beyond the tools listed above, are there others you can think of? Are there case studies you would like to pursue about how one of these tools was used to create homogeneity?

If so, we would love to hear about them.

Task 5: Identify or Propose a “Space of Encounter”

For Task 5, we would like to invite you to think about how planners, architects, and artists might increase the heterogeneity of American communities by creating “Spaces of Encounter:” spaces where “diverse social and ethnic groups can coexist, interact, and generate complex relationships and networks.” Less a policy tool than a direct intervention, the “Space of Encounter” is potentially no less effective.

You might respond by nominating an existing project (built or unbuilt) that incorporates a Space of Encounter, or by proposing a new Space of Encounter between two or more communities.

Examples of existing Spaces of Encounter include:

The Favela-Bairro Project

The Favela Bairro Project is a collaborative design initiative that seeks to connect informal “favela” neighborhoods to the legalized city. Interventions include facilities such as communal kitchens, daycare facilities, and pedestrian walkways. These interventions occur at the threshold between the informal city (the favela) and the formal city to create a space of encounter between the inhabitants of these two very separate communities.

Project Rowhouse

Project Rowhouse is a recent community development project in Houston's historic but blighted Third Ward comprised of a 22 shotgun houses. Ten of the twenty-two row houses are dedicated to art, photography, and literary projects, which are installed on a rotating six-month basis. Seven of the row houses house the Young Mothers Residential Program, which provides transitional housing and services to young mothers and their children. The space between the houses becomes a space of interaction for these two groups: on the one hand, the artists and their audiences, and on the other, the single mothers and their children.

Common Room 2

Common Room 2 is a gallery in Manhattan's Co-op Village that explores the production and use of the built environment. Because it operates in the public lobby of a modernist tower-in-the-park that houses several non-profit groups (most of which cater to Co-op Village's elderly population), the gallery offers a space of encounter between two communities: the mostly elderly residents of Co-op Village, and the emerging East Village gallery scene.

Would you like to nominate a space of encounter? Would you like to draw up a proposal for one? If so, we would love to hear about it.