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## In this issue

BY TASOULLA HADJIYANNI

The 2015 EDRA46 conference theme—"brainSTORM – Dynamic interactions of environment-behavior and neuroscience"—pushed EDRA members to challenge their thinking on what interdisciplinary connections mean and how they can be achieved. Interdisciplinarity involves reaching beyond one's own discipline to include multiple forms of knowledge, varied professions, and diverse modes of knowledge production. It is grounded in difference which is equated with newness: different disciplines, tools, approaches, questions asked and ways to look at the world enable new and unique lenses for understanding and exploring complicated problems and solutions.

Operating from within the interdisciplinarity paradigm has served EDRA well as it has become known for seeking out, modeling and fostering interdisciplinary approaches to environmental research and design by focusing on the "problem" rather than the "discipline." But, new questions surface when our focus shifts from "interdisciplinary" to "interdisciplinary thinking:" what does interdisciplinary thinking mean? How does it relate to environment-behavior scholarship? What are the implications of this kind of thinking for our collective approach and action?

In *What calls for thinking*, German philosopher Martin Heidegger entices us to take a leap "into the neighborhood where thinking resides" (1977, p.353). Heidegger's conception of thinking as place-bound resonates with EDRA members whose subjects of study revolve around places—we can certainly find "thinking" if we search for "it" even if "the leap takes us abruptly to where everything is different, so different that it strikes us as strange" (1977, p.353).

The four authors in Issue #6 took a leap into thinking through the sessions they attended at EDRA46. In their essays, we witness experiences and lessons that move environment-behavior discourse beyond the binary of disciplinary/interdisciplinary and uncover the opportunities

that arise when boundaries morph, overlap and blend and when thinking matters to peoples' lives:

- Deni Ruggeri reflects on the "*Democratic Design Without Borders*" intensive, revisiting the scope, methods, impact, power relationships, and forms of engagement that inform democratic design.
- Alice Gittler in "A First-Timer's Perspective on EDRA" relates design research tools and methods, including technology-enabled ones that can transform how knowledge and understanding are generated.
- Jennifer Senick traces the journey of the "*Be-Cause*" session that engaged attendees in brainstorming ways to advance contemporary environment-behavior research. Four themes emerged: *Diversity, Information, Happiness, and Resilience*
- Yael Perez's reflection on the Natural Settings mobile session unravels the politics and power struggles behind the preservation of green open spaces in LA.

As it turns out, I am also taking a leap to write a book that synthesizes my many years of thinking and learning about how members of diverse cultural groups living in Minnesota construct meaning in their home environments. I would like to thank EDRA for the opportunity to serve as Editor of *EDRA Connections*. It's been an honor to launch the first six issues of what I hope will grow to become a valued venue for collecting and disseminating the rich and diverse thinking of EDRA's members. It has been a wonderful opportunity and privilege to work with the many authors who shared their knowledge and insights in these inaugural issues. And, it's my great pleasure to hand the reins to Dr. Nisha Fernando, the new *EDRA Connections* Editor. We invite you to send 1000-word essays to Dr. Fernando at [Nisha.Fernando@uwsp.edu](mailto:Nisha.Fernando@uwsp.edu).



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# Notes from the “Democratic Design Without Borders” intensive session at the 2015 EDRA conference in Los Angeles

BY DENI RUGGERI

2015  
DEC

02



This year's EDRA conference was jumpstarted by an intensive session on Democratic Design, which took place at Augustus F. Hawkins Nature Park in Compton. The 8.5 acre site opened in 2000 as part of the Santa Monica Mountain Conservancy efforts to create a network of habitat areas to enhance biodiversity, eco-literacy, livability and community in underserved neighborhoods of the sprawling metropolis (Figure 1), and was the result of a community-based process led by Marcia McNally and Randy Hester's 'Community Development by Design' office.

Over the course of eight intense hours, an interdisciplinary group of design, planning and community development professionals gathered to share their stories. The structure of the event revolved around four consecutive sessions under the umbrella topics of Contexted, Enabling, Embodied and Embattled participation. Each speaker was assigned 5-7 minutes to present a synthesis of their work, followed by a rich discussion around challenges and issues raised during the presentations. Participants came from Japan to Russia, and from China and Taiwan to all over the United States, among them professors, students, and designers. In addition to the presenters, the group included a small audience of community activists whose voices were also heard during the discussion.

## INTRO: DESIGN AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Based on the discussion that emerged over the course of the intensive, it is clear that while the specific challenges faced by community designers and planners have changed overtime, their work continues to be critical in challenging the status quo and erasing boundaries:

- between expert and native wisdom;
- between professional boundaries and traditional fields of expertise/knowledge;

- between what is possible (short term) vs. desirable (long term);
- between socio-cultural divides between races, gender, age, language, nationality, immigrant status;
- between the materiality of the landscape and its complex underlying processes;
- between political divides, regimes and definitions of democracy.

A few lessons can be synthesized from the presentations and discussions that arose during the intensive. While these reflections are personal,



*The Augustus F. Hawkins Park, site of the intensive (photo: Deni Ruggeri)*

they were reinforced and validated by many informal conversations throughout the intensive session and the EDRA conference presentations and Saturday visits.

## ANALOG, DIGITAL, SYSTEMIC, STRATEGIC

Among the most striking of the intensive's observations one could make was the richness and variety of tools democratic designers have been and continue to employ in their work. Drawing continues to be a strong tool in engaging with community

residents, but more and more new modes and interfaces are emerging in the digital world that are allowing community designers to communicate and collaborate with community members (Hester, 2015) (Figure 2). The Japanese example of an emoticon, “Yurudoru” digital mascot used by a community to reclaim its unique identity suggested to all of us the great possibilities connected with technological change (Hattori, 2015). Yet what also emerged is that democracy and digital technologies can be at odds, and that the rich participation offered by traditional, face-to-face workshops may be challenging to achieve through digital platforms alone. Community designers must continue to be critical and watchful of inequalities and inclusivity of the processes used, no matter what tools they use (Ruggeri, 2015).

## DEMOCRATIC DESIGN IS OFTEN STILL FOUGHT AGAINST

Democratic designers and planners are taking on challenges that go way beyond what traditional models of practices have empowered them to do. Their work is increasingly interdisciplinary, reflective, and aimed at changing political discourse and democratic decision making processes towards greater inclusivity, all the while having to fit into narrowly defined and often rigid political and administrative processes (Sanoff & Demir Mishchenko, 2015; Hadjiyanni, 2015).

Much work remains to be done, particularly in the context of emerging democracies, as well as in increasingly diverse western societies, to unleash the true power of bottom-up design and planning. While across the world many countries have been embracing community-based work, challenges remain in places that do not fully allow communities to participate more actively and meaningfully in decisions regarding their own futures, relegating participation to the bottom of the participatory ladder. The Korean case studies presented by Yeun-Kum Kim (2015) illustrate this point. While the

Korean Government has opened up to participation, the road to a participation that goes beyond tokenism and information gathering is long and fraught with obstacles. As Henry Sanoff, Randy Hester and the other speakers in the ‘Contested Participation’ roundtable reminded us, there continues to be a need for vigilance, resistance to power, and advocacy for citizens’ rights to livable and supportive landscapes.

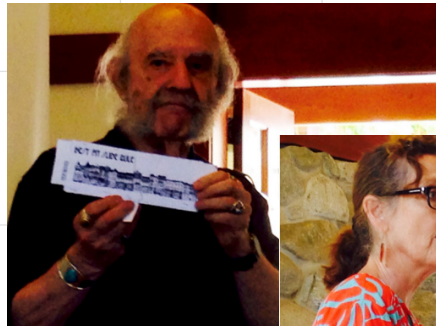
## COMMUNITY DESIGN IS NO LONGER A MERELY ACADEMIC ENTERPRISE

While the role of academics in promoting democratic design remains crucial, there is growing evidence that professional designers are engaging in community-based work, either on a pro-bono basis or by employing bottom-up, community-based dimensions to their ‘fee-based’ work (Pasalar, 2015). The case of a small Russian community (Snigireva & Smirnov, 2015) and South Korea demonstrate that it is possible to engage communities even when budgets and clients may not specifically allow for it. Designers and academics can serve as mentors and advisers—suggesting methods, giving feedback—and use their cultural capital to ‘legitimize’ community-based design and planning processes (Berney, 2015; De la Pena, Simpson, & Simmons, 2015). Most of all, they can offer an important moment of reflection and evaluation of participation, challenging the field towards greater inclusivity, more open dialogues, rigor and incisiveness.

## MULTIPLE SCALES OF OPERATION

Community designers need to be able to take on big politics as well as design small scale landscapes. Paula Horrigan’s (2015) painting of a democratic design space (Figure 3) provoked all of us to think of community design as a malleable, pervasive, far reaching field that escapes a simplistic definition. Instead, she described

democratic design as orbiting around a set of issues we are trying to affect. From the intensive, a very nuanced picture of democratic design emerged as practices ranging from entire systems and ecologies to the small scale of the classroom and schoolyard (Dorgan, 2015; Eubanks-Owen, 2015; Tashiro, 2015; Yang, 2015; Zhu et al., 2015). The ability of democratic design to transcend boundaries constitutes both a strength and a continuing challenge. While they lack a shared definition or even an agreed upon name—community design, participatory



*Henry Sanoff during the lunchtime ‘design game’ exercise (photo Deni Ruggeri)*



*Paula Horrigan presents Democratic Design as space mapping (photo Deni Ruggeri)*

design, action research and service learning are often used interchangeably—democratic designers share principles, which must be continuously tested and adapted against the genius loci of the communities in which they operate (Dohi et. al, 2015). Their work is increasingly multicultural, economically, and politically-savvy; reliant on both scientific abstraction and sensuous experience; sensitive but not inauthentic; respectful of the other but not self-diminishing; multi-scalar and systemic (Hester, 2015).

## DEMOCRATIC DESIGN REQUIRES CREATIVE METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

From a methodological standpoint, the intensive gave all that participated the opportunity to engage in a rich dialogue. It included opportunities for both formal and informal discussions on specific dimensions of democratic design work. It also included moments of learning and reflection. Randy Hester led a lunch tour around the park, narrating the history of a process that led to the bottom-up push to create habitat (both ecological and social) within the impoverished neighborhood of Compton in Los Angeles. Meanwhile, a small group gathered around Henry Sanoff to learn more about his methodology called ‘Design Game’ (Figure 4). Through role-playing, participants imagined the type of dialogue and conflicts that would emerge in a community faced with the challenge to transform its main street from a commercial strip to an identity-building, civic space. Much was learned from face-to-face interactions and conversations that emerged during breaks and on our transit rides to and from the intensive site. All in all, the intensive resulted in a symphony of idioms, approaches, practices, and inspiring visions brought together by a shared passion for design written with a lower case ‘d’ but inspired by truly Democratic principles (with a capital ‘D’). The importance of stories...

## CONCLUSION: TOWARDS GREATER AWARENESS

The intensive was a community-building moment for three generations of democratic designers to dialogue, confront, and reflect. The discussions revealed that despite the fact that the socio-economic and political circumstances that led to the emergence of the field of community design may have changed, many of the difficulties faced by some of the fields’ pioneers such as Randy Hester and Henry Sanoff continue to challenge us, and the people we work with/for. These revolve around our role vis-à-vis established power relations and



structures, biases in favor of scientific knowledge over native wisdom, narrowly drawn professional boundaries and limited awareness of the power design has to not only solve problems, but also to touch hearts and change values and attitudes, as Mallika Bose suggested in her reflections at the end of the intensive.

Like any community-based process, the success of the Democratic Design intensive cannot be truly assessed over the short term. Yet, if we look at it through the evaluative framework laid out by Randy Hester in “Scoring collective creativity and legitimizing participatory design” (2012), we can find evidence of success, in allowing broader and unusual perspectives to emerge, showcasing inspiring examples of visionary change, promoting cross-cultural thinking, and creating a deeper and more informed awareness of our identity as a democratic design community.

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# A first-timer's perspective on EDRA

BY ALICE GITTLER



You could say my first EDRA conference began with a baptism of sorts. On Day 1, as the contents of my bag spilled into the pool of the Westin Bonaventure lobby, I tried gracefully to retrieve them—you can imagine the brainstorm of neurological and behavioral reaction this event elicited! I collected my thoughts and my soggy program and I wondered: was this how it was going to begin? I chose to take this watery start as a good sign and I was right. For me, EDRA46 was an opportunity to listen to new ideas, make connections, and think about my own design research practice. Many sessions came to mind as I reflected on the experience of attending an EDRA Conference for the first time. One was about discovering new concepts that could inform my work, and the other was focused on learning about experimentation with new technologies for behavior and environment research. Here, I share some highlights of those sessions and how they became a springboard for new ideas and exploration of design research practice.

By way of quick introduction, I work with BBH Design as a design researcher, where I collaborate on healthcare, workplace, and education design research studies. I conduct behavioral observation and workflow mapping, pre- and post-occupancy evaluations, space syntax analysis, and simulation modeling. At BBH, we regularly make use of a web-based design app to capture behavioral observations and conduct time and motion studies, among other things. As such, design research tools and methods were among the subjects I came to EDRA to learn more about. My primary area of interest is healthcare design research, but over the course of the conference, like other ERDAites, I attended sessions around workplace design, educational settings, movie and film, heard more about neuroscience and architecture, explored the state of design researchers in practice, and mused about what I might do with all the notes I was dutifully scribbling.

One highlight of the conference for me was the Movement in Designed Environment Network Meeting. Before I arrived at EDRA46, I was asked to help facilitate

a knowledge network meeting for a colleague who was unable to attend. This was indicative of the welcoming atmosphere of EDRA and I have mentors and colleagues to thank for not only introducing me to EDRA, but giving me ample opportunities to get involved. The

Network Meeting was held on Day 3 of EDRA46. Around the table were other design researchers in practice who, like me, were new to EDRA. The group was particularly interested in sharing their work and in learning how to effectively tap into the EDRA research community and knowledge base. Two of the meeting participants described themselves as blended design research professionals in the position of bridging the gap between research and design/architecture practice within their firms, sometimes with uneven results. We didn't arrive at any conclusions, but I shared their thoughts later that evening at the *Be-Cause* brainstorming session on *Information* where the challenges inherent in bridging research and practice came up again and took off in a number of branching directions.

Another topic raised during the Knowledge Network conversations was that of design research tools and methods. The group's collective areas of work and expertise included visual communication design, brand marketing, creating meaningful visitor experiences, measuring the emotional experience of wayfinding, and pre- and post-occupancy studies in healthcare and commercial environments as well as higher education,



neuropsychology and architecture. One participant shared her interest in using the tools of UX (user experience) design, typically applied in the context of human-computer

interaction and web design. We did not have much time to delve into this at the meeting, but, as I was not very familiar with this line of work, I asked questions and after the conference, searched for others who might be applying these concepts in their healthcare design work. What I found was more than I expected.

My first source (the U.S. Health and Human Services Digital Communications Division) described the guiding principles of user experience (UX) to be six-fold: asking whether a design is useful, useable, desirable, findable, accessible and credible. The key principle at the center of these six principles was **valuable** ("Usability.gov," 2013), based on the User Experience Honeycomb

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developed by Peter Morville. The word “valuable” struck me immediately because in my work, one of our objectives is to be value-driven (whether measured as financial return on investment or what is of value to a patient) and we seek to empirically demonstrate that value through our design research. Our clients likewise talk of being values-driven, that is, designing with a strong sense of human values (sustainability, safety, etc.). The question I asked myself is whether UX principles could provide a useful framework for targeting *value* and evaluating our findings, for example, in healthcare post-occupancy evaluation.

While measures of patient experience are well established in healthcare, I discovered that user experience has been considered in the design of healthcare environments before. In 2007, Bate and Robert published a text titled, *Bringing User Experience to Healthcare Improvement: The Concepts, Methods and Practices of Experience-Based Design*. They asked, “Can you imagine what it would be like if we moved from a health service that does things to and for its patients to one which is patient-led?” (Bate & Robert, 2007). Bate and Robert encouraged designers to distinguish users’ likes and dislikes from their experience and see them as integral to improvement and innovation processes. The notion of experience is very familiar to those committed to patient-centered healthcare, but having the ability to measure both perceptions and behaviors provides an empirical base on which this innovation can be further developed. And while healthcare organizations are bringing patients, families, and care teams into the design process, fewer are incorporating an empirical approach into that process. It is encouraging to see some healthcare systems using design research findings to inform multi-user design charrettes, as one example. As recent research is demonstrating, the relationships between the design of healthcare environments, patient experience, and health outcomes are not so straightforward.

For me, EDRA was a chance to find new ideas, make connections, and develop new knowledge.

So what were some of the research tools to be explored at EDRA? One of the key things on my “to do” list was to learn more about both established as well as new technology-enabled methods to collect and analyze behavioral data. At the session on workplace environments, two papers caught my imagination. One, *Forecasting Performance of Collaborative Workspaces: Case Studies to Explore Social Sensing Technology*, described how wearable sensors recorded interactions and movement of faculty in a shared workspace (Yoon, Hedge, Danko, Hua, & Bigalow, 2015). A number of companies, such as Bank of America Corp, have used these sensors to identify how team interaction influences performance. They have also provided insights into the design of office environments, including conference and meeting spaces (Silverman, 2013). A Wall Street Journal article describing that research conducted a poll of article readers,

71% of whom thought the sensors were a bad idea. It raised an important issue about privacy and behavioral observation. This has been a real concern for some clients. Here, I thought, the on-site researcher might have an advantage of over sensing technologies, being viewed as more objective than an employer and more strictly bound to ethics guiding anonymity in reporting results.

Another presentation, *Desk Personalization: A Heightened Communicator of Self in the Open Workplace* (Marsh, Erikson, Rowell, & Leinweber, 2015), described how mobile self-report apps like iDoneThis were used to gain insights into measures of productivity and performance as reported by employees in the workplace. iDoneThis is a team performance app that allows each team member to record their accomplishments daily and uses texts and email reminders. The design team asked study participants to record their work daily. Other self-reporting technologies such as PDAs have been used in healthcare settings with mixed results. At BBH Design we have increasingly been pairing behavioral observations with acoustical and

lighting data using our cloud-based design research app and I wondered what these other technologies could add. I returned to work with a head full of ideas and I am still trying to sort out how to begin to piece them together in a way that could advance research efforts.

To me, EDRA was a chance to find new ideas, make connections, and develop new knowledge. I have always been a bit of a side door explorer – I began my academic life hoping to go into medicine – and from there struck a winding path from anthropology to gender and development to patient experience, and healthcare design research. It’s the kind of path that doesn’t seem too unusual after experiencing the diversity and cross-pollination of ideas at EDRA. And I look forward to continuing that exploration.

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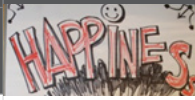


# Be-Cause: Brainstorming directions for change at EDRA46 — An experiment in generating and promoting environment behavior research

BY JENNIFER SENICK

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As we prepare for EDRA47, this is an opportunity to reflect on an experimental session of EDRA46, a facilitated and illustrated group brainstorm devoted towards the generation and promotion of research through the lens of broadly construed environment-behavior (EB) topics. This article describes a process that was intended to spark new knowledge and advance EB research in keeping with EDRA's commitment to develop and engage membership, and an EDRA Connections objective to inform members of how questions asked change as a result of the conference. Indeed, the process of "brainstorming" aligns with a strong tradition of participatory-based knowledge generation (e.g., Jason et al., 2004), across practitioners, researchers and disciplines. In this case, the EDRA membership formed the basis for community participation while also bringing professional expertise to the discussion.

## GENESIS OF BE-CAUSE

The genesis of the Be-Cause session was the EDRA membership. EDRA conference attendees have consistently provided feedback requesting more face-to-face interaction at the conference, including an opportunity for substantive networking across Knowledge Networks. Knowledge Network members have repeatedly requested greater opportunity to nurture relationships and ideas within their groups, while not also juggling lunch! In Strategic Retreats, and elsewhere, EDRA members have continued to voice sentiments about EDRA beginning and continuing as a "cause-based" organization. In keeping with these desires, as well as the brainstorm theme of EDRA46, the Be-Cause: Brainstorming Directions for Change session was developed by the EDRA Programming Committee, the Knowledge

In large and small group formats, participants exchanged views on theoretical, methodological, data and other gaps and opportunities.



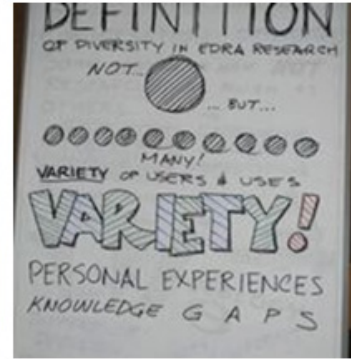
*Be-Cause session participants.*

# Be-Cause: Brainstorming directions for change at EDRA46 (CONTINUED)

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Participants identify EB research gaps concerning "Diversity," with a focus on whether some subgroups are not well represented.



conversation. Facilitators would provide general prompts to help structure discussion around applicable theories, methods, historical or current applications.

## BE-CAUSE RESULTS

Participants contributed a number of intriguing insights and suggestions on four topics – *Diversity*, *Information*, *Happiness*, and *Resilience* – regarding how to advance and disseminate associated EB research. In large and small group formats, participants exchanged views on theoretical, methodological, data and other gaps and opportunities in research and practice. What emerged generally is that there is much happening in the world wherein EDRA has a role to play and that there are many intersections and opportunities for advancing meaningful environment and behavior roles within key social phenomena.

**Diversity:** *Facilitated by Dr. Lubomir Popov.* This group delved deeply into a concern that some groups (ethnic, national, religious, gendered, class, political leanings, etc.) are not well researched and may not have adequate voice and control over their environment. It furthermore was acknowledged that categorization of groups tends to upset people, "one of the gaps is that we don't have a language/terminology to talk about the relationship between 'diversity' and each individual in EB research." (Anonymous Participant).

**Information:** *Facilitated by Dr. Gowri Betrabet Gulwadi.* Participants considered many dimensions of information and how the manner in which we obtain, manage, store, communicate with/disseminate information impacts and reflects on environmental behavior. They asked whether information is knowledge and vice versa? Particular focus was accorded to the topic of how EB research is addressing the dawn of "big data" along with attendant opportunities and concerns.

**Happiness:** *Facilitated by Dr. Rula Awwad-Rafferty.* In a riff on Tasoulla Hadjiyanni's introductory comments to the April 2015 EDRA Connections, the Happiness group (the largest group at nearly 100 strong!) considered how happiness relates to the designed environment as well as why some cultures appear to be so concerned

Participants discuss differences between knowledge and information.



Networks Committee, and EDRA46 co-chairs Nisha Fernando and Greg Barker.

## DIVERSITY, INFORMATION, HAPPINESS, RESILIENCE

It was not easy to 'brainstorm' topics for the brainstorm. One thought was to emulate the process engaged at the annual American Planning Association meeting at which 2-3 well developed themes are presented for subsequent White Paper and best practice guide development by appointed chapter delegates.

Along these lines, an early proposal for the brainstorm session included two topics:

- 1) How the built environment affects disadvantaged populations; and,
- 2) The role of environmental design in assuaging cultural conflicts in behavior.

Ultimately, it was decided that it would work better, and be more organizationally appropriate, to brainstorm on perennial, pervasive EB topics while avoiding a pre-determination of a detailed agenda. We hoped that this would facilitate more mixing and matching of Knowledge Networks and their members in informal yet serious



# Be-Cause: Brainstorming directions for change at EDRA46 (CONTINUED)

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*Definitional aspects of happiness in context of EB research*



on how they generate and share information, as well as on informational challenges. The group hopes to subsequently publish the session in a format that can be utilized by researchers/practitioners. Similarly, an abstract on behalf of the Happiness group was being submitted by a participant in that brainstorm session as a means to continue the conversation among interested parties.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

EDRA was founded on an agenda to investigate social aspects of the environment and to develop tools and insights to work towards ameliorating the challenges perceived at the time (Sanoff, 1968). The need for EB research and advocacy continues, as is evident in so many daily statistics and encounters and as recently pronounced by Pope Francis in an Encyclical Letter "On Care for Our Common Home." Regardless of one's religious beliefs or lack thereof, Francis is being credited as the first Pope to address urban planning and, more broadly, what we at EDRA might say is the environment-behavior linkage:

150. "Given the interrelationship between living space and human behaviour, those who design buildings, neighbourhoods, public spaces and cities, ought to draw on the various disciplines which help us to understand people's thought processes, symbolic language and ways of acting. It is not enough to seek the beauty of design. More precious still is the service we offer to another kind of beauty: people's quality of life, their adaptation to the environment, encounter and mutual assistance. Here too, we see how important it is that urban planning always take into consideration the views of those who will live in these areas."

What does it mean for EDRA to have the Pope acknowledge the importance of the environment to peoples' lives? Is it a reflection on how an inner sense of well-being is influenced by our environment? Does this relate to Happiness? Resiliency? Where/how does this work relate to and/or promote Diversity?

*Resiliency depicted as an ability to withstand (and restore) forces.*



with defining happiness and whether that is a good idea. One is reminded in some aspects of this session's notes of traditions in positive psychology and positive environments (e.g., Suedfeld, 2001; Bonaiuto, 2013), although not all session participants would concur with these angles based, again, on session notes.

**Resilience:** *Facilitated by Dr. Mallika Bose.*

Birthing centers, urban agriculture, governments and communities are just a few of the diverse examples of the objects, processes, movements and scales explored by members of the Resilience group. Additional expressions by group participants revolved around how resilience is foundational to EDRA and how there may be dangers associated with resiliency – a highly resilient

system may ultimately over adapt losing identity in the process.

## BE-CAUSE: MESSAGING CHANGE (EDRA46 AND BEYOND)

A number of tangible actions have resulted from the Be-Cause EDRA46 session, towards advancing brainstormed ideas into more concrete knowledge while also encouraging EDRA members to continue their interaction on Be-Cause themes. An abstract that elaborates on the Information themes and includes original content from researchers in practice is being proposed for EDRA47. If accepted, it will comprise a panel of about six researchers in practice and focus

This feels like an opportunity to elevate aspects of the EB dialogue, as well as to make the Pope a complementary honorary EDRA member!

Other opportunities to continue to brainstorm and translate Be-Cause session and related themes, include the following:

**Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's campaign for a Culture of Health:** Presently, RWJF leadership is looking to engage as many educational, research and business platforms as possible in this endeavor in order to facilitate greater cultural and formative interaction at the grass roots level (RWJF, 2015). I recently spoke with a member of RWJF leadership for this work about EDRA and its potential to help with many aspects of the agenda, including evaluative work. He was intrigued.

**The American Planning Association's Plan4Health Initiative:** This initiative is administered jointly with the American Public Health Association and funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.plan4health.us/>) and focuses on built environment determinants of health and models for improving associated processes and outcomes.

Finally, a timely opportunity for members of the Resilience group (and others) to further explore these notions is the upcoming conference and/or conversation surrounding **United Nations Habitat III** (<http://unhabitat.org/habitat-iii-conference/>). Urban development themes within this framework include those focused on planning and design, resilience, gender, safety, governance, and housing, among others.

It would seem that the collective work of EDRA is as relevant as ever.

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# Politics in the wild: L.A. wilderness as contested territory

BY Yael Valerie Perez

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Many of EDRA's professional activities inspire me to reflect both outward—on the environment—and inward—into human nature—which I find essential for gaining an in-depth understanding of the interface between people and their environment. The 'Natural Settings' mobile session at EDRA46, led by UC Berkeley Professor Randy Hester, yielded to me such twofold reflective experience. It was a challenging exercise in understanding how human agency, operating as political power, protects the land. While not part of the city's "wild" reputation, there is wilderness left in L.A., the conservation of which necessitated, at times, aggressive political actions. As part of the mobile session, we visited two sites of nature and historic preservation that Hester chose to showcase in Los Angeles: The first was the Marine Braude Mulholland Gateway Park, presenting a struggle between urban growth and nature preservation; the second was the former NIKE nuclear missile control site, LA96C, adding another force to the struggle—the politics of the cold-war era. In the case of the NIKE site, the armed-protection politics and the ecological agenda conjointly struggled against urban forces. Both sites, located on the east side of the Santa Monica Mountains, were managed by the same core team, whose unique, bold characteristics were crucial for supporting natural preservation.

Travelling to EDRA46 Los Angeles from Berkeley, I thought I had a short journey, but that was just according to mileage. When considering the public political messages I encountered, the journey unfolded as a convoluted excursion. The title of the mobile session, "The Big Wild Wilderness Parks: Sex, Lies, and Real Estate," intended to capture the complex power struggles of the sites we visited. The details and lessons learned from these struggles to conserve wilderness



*LA56C park signage: Khrushchev's words captured as threat to the U.S. Photo credit: Laura Lawson.*

areas in L.A. are featured in Hester's writing (e.g. Hester, 2006). Through his academic publications, Hester presents his practice in the field of public participation and democratic planning, offering useful guidelines and techniques to work with community partners with the aspiration to democratize urban design. Moreover, his publications illuminate the politics and power struggles that impact the design process and too often prevent the interest of the public to prevail. Yet visiting the sites, with Hester and his team, offered additional insight, revealing the personalities required to preserve nature and to counterbalance urbanity in the U.S.'s second largest city. We were privileged to have team members, who greatly influenced the projects, join: Joe Edmiston, the executive director of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC), Professor Marcia McNally,

Randy Hester's project partner, and Professor Laura Lawson who worked with Hester and McNally. Vigorous personal characteristics combined with high sensitivity, comprehensive thinking, and care for environmental and human conditions emerged as key factors in the pursuit of wilderness preservation.

Despite the professional planning and landscape design context of the tour, the conversation in the bus was more evocative to me of a meeting between fellow fighters, telling stories from the battlefield: the dangers in the battle and the triumph. As they presented the projects, trading the bus' microphone back and forth to provide different voices and perspectives about their enterprise, two messages emerged: One looks outward: "protect yourself from others," and is the political message I grew up with in Israel; the other is the message I was exposed to in the last 10 years of living in Berkeley, which looks inward, into our flaws as humans, and suggests to "protect all human beings and their environment from yourself (and others)." It was surprising to encounter both of these two 'struggles to protect' on a nature preserve visit in the city of Los Angeles, as I expected the spirit there to be closer to my experience in Berkeley than my experience in Israel.

Ostensibly, the struggle to keep these areas of the Santa Monica Mountains as park required both outward and inward perspectives. It involved complex tactics and creative use of political power, public funds and private donations, overcoming several impasses and solving many intricate ordeals, some with high level of personal risks such as public criticism and lawsuits<sup>1</sup>. Each tactic which was deployed appeared to be specifically tailored to the historic, political, and stakeholder's characteristics, both on the personal, human level and on the public, political agenda; and all together, they seemed to be cleverly developed impromptu rather than being a highly planned strategy. The session highlighted that preserving the Santa Monica Mountains as public recreational place came to be possible thanks to people with solid determination who, rather than solely objecting to

<sup>1</sup> For more details about some of the support and criticism on the work of Edmiston as the executive director of the SMMC, see, for example, the Los Angeles Times articles from October 15, 1991 (Cheevers 1991) or January 17, 1994 (Russel, 1994)





*A vestige in the park: the NIKE missile's radar tower. Photo credit: Laura Lawson.*



*LA56C park signage: the enduring relevance of "keep alert." Photo credit: Laura Lawson.*

others' propositions, initiated action and plans faster than the urban developers.

In visiting the second area, the former NIKE missile site, we encountered how these same strong, daring and caring characteristics were used similarly for conservation of public recreational park, this time, with greater emphasis on the "protect yourself" message. Considering the variety of nationalities and wide age-range attending the mobile session, the political context of nuclear missiles placed in California, required explanations. To elucidate the context, Edmiston described the day he watched on TV, as a child, the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev tapping his shoe on the table while addressing foreign ambassadors in 1956, and saying, what was famously translated into English as, "we will bury you." This message was perceived, back then, as a direct threat to the United States, a threat addressed with NIKE missiles. Indeed on the plaque of the NIKE site, put in place as part of the park design, Khrushchev's words are cited, just as they were understood by Edmiston and many other US citizens, years ago. Another way to understand these words is in the socio-economic context—Communism will outlive Capitalism (Lewin and Elliott, 2005: 238; Lucas, 1987). However, this context cannot explain and justify the missiles in California. It is hard to ignore the irony in taking Khrushchev's communist words and placing them in a public park in Los Angeles which used to be an American, nuclear military site that was successfully conserved for public recreational use. Khrushchev might have sniggered at how, in the LA96C site, public capital outlived private gain in L.A.

Like in any conflict, keeping green open spaces in urban Los Angeles involves high personal risks, strong determination, and the firm belief that the aim justifies the means. Such strong conviction is difficult to uphold alongside with the effort to empathize with the other. The design of the park's signage, preserving some of the military-bases' language through bold titles such as "keep alert," reinforces well the memory of both struggles—to protect ourselves and to protect nature against ourselves. When a tenacious conviction operates in synergy with public benefit, a park thrives as a

beautiful vestige and keen reminder of the impact of power and offers a brief escape from the strain of urban forces.

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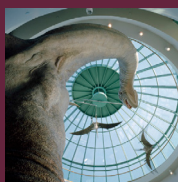
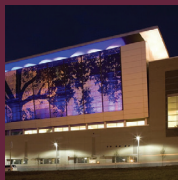
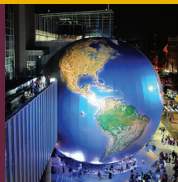
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# INNOVATION:: SHIFTING GROUND



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EDRA47Raleigh is the 47th annual conference of the Environmental Design Research Association. Hosted by the North Carolina State College of Design, EDRA47 will take place May 18-21, 2016 at the Raleigh Convention Center in Raleigh, North Carolina. This international event will draw over 400 architects, landscape architects, urban planners, designers, social ecologists, environmental psychologists, and urban anthropologists from around the world. Attendees include researchers, consultants, academics and students. Top field experts in environment and behavior work will present cutting-edge research and innovative design projects in a variety of formats centered on the theme of "Innovation: Shifting Ground."

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