

To: 11.520@MIT.EDU
Subject: Synopsis of the 'Housing' problem context

Folks,

Here's a one-page description of Larry Vale's research project that sets the 'client context' for a class project that might try to help measure and map relevant aspects of (changing) neighborhood communities.

-- Joe F.

- ----- Forwarded Message

Subject: Handout on my Public Housing Research for your class

Prof. Lawrence Vale
Department of Urban Studies and Planning, MIT
253-0561, Room 10-485

Recovering Communities: From Public Housing to Private Home

The nation's housing and community development policymakers currently face major decisions over what to do about severe problems in the livability of large-scale public housing projects, many of which have fallen into a state of both social and physical disrepair. After decades of neglect that have led to an estimated \$30 billion backlog of redevelopment needs, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has recently announced a billion dollar pilot program (the Urban Revitalization Demonstration) to enable various public housing agencies around the country to develop innovative plans for the physical and socio-economic transformation of their most devastated public housing environments. My work in this area has centered on evaluation of the seminal efforts in Boston during the 1980s to improve such situations through elaborate redevelopment schemes.

In contrast to an earlier generation of work that has investigated the 'worst-case scenarios,' my own work attempts to probe the anatomy of these so-called "success" stories. Each of the three housing projects under study*-- "D Street/West Broadway" in South Boston, "Fidelis Way/Commonwealth" in Brighton and "Franklin Field" in Dorchester-- received about \$30 million in redevelopment funds during the 1980s. Most of this money was spent in an effort to reduce or eliminate the institutional appearance of the housing through the reconfiguration of buildings to include private residential entrances and backyards, reduce density, increase apartment size, eliminate crowded hallways, and enhance perceptions of resident control over outdoor landscaped areas. The goal was to use urban and architectural design to diminish the stigma of public housing by altering the appearance of the environment in ways that cause it to more closely approximate private sector norms.

My assessment of the success of these redevelopment efforts is based chiefly on 270 in-depth interviews (in four languages) with public housing residents. Using written questionnaires as their guide, the interviewers asked approximately 100 questions designed to elicit resident opinion about their apartments, the neighborhood, available services, management practices, and future aspirations. Taken together, the questions attempt to assess resident feelings about the ways their lives have changed. These interviews are supplemented by analysis of the design interventions, and by interviews with other key players in each redevelopment effort.

An important aspect of this research is to identify and analyze the effects of the surrounding neighborhoods on each public housing redevelopment effort. To do this, it will be necessary to measure how these neighborhoods differ, physically and socio-economically, from the public housing found within them. and to identify whether there were important changes in these neighborhoods that coincided with the redevelopment efforts that might help explain the relative success of these interventions.

* Approximately half of the 270 resident interviews are with residents from the three public housing projects that had undergone redevelopment; the other half are from a control group of residents from two other

Boston housing developments (Orchard Park in Roxbury and Bromley Heath in Jamaica Plain) which have not undergone extensive physical redevelopment.

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From: anneb@MIT.EDU (anne beamish)
To: jf@MIT.EDU
Subject: 11.520 Housing Group Questions
Cc: lebow@MIT.EDU, qshen@MIT.EDU

Joe, Laura, and Qing --

This is the list of questions that we came up with yesterday. I'm sending the list out so that the group can make any additions. Would you like to wait for the final list before you comment? And when would you like them by? By the way, we're meeting at 1:00 on Tuesday before the interview for a final talk.

Anne

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Hi,

Here's a summary of the questions that we discussed yesterday in class. Please add anything, we've left out, make comments, suggestions, etc. and send it back to me. I'll make a new summary and send it to you.

Thanks.

Anne (anneb)

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Interview with Larry Vale

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- - Introduction by Joe, Laura, Qing,
- - Introduce ourselves (names, program, year)
- - Moderator
- - explains that in the 1.5 hours we need to get an idea of what the project is about, what the problem is, how the project/research is organized, what he is looking for, what we can do, and in what form he needs it.
- - will introduce each part, explain the questions we are interested in. Moderator and/or students will ask for further information/clarification after Prof. Vale has answered.

There are four parts:

PROJECT

- - We've read the project description you sent, but could you briefly redescribe the project you've been working on, the results you've found on the effects of physical design changes, etc..

PROBLEM

- - We understand that you wish to look at the surrounding neighborhoods around the project sites. Could you tell us more about:
 - the type of information you wish to collect;
 - issues you're looking at;
 - how much of the surrounding area you're interested in (e.g. distance, definition);
 - what you would like to learn/show about the neighboring areas (i.e. what question are you asking);
 - what type of data do you wish to gather;
 - over what time period are you looking at the surrounding areas;
 - whether the data gathered on the surround areas are to be compared to other areas, either within the city, or in other cities;
 - how you think GIS/digital data might help;

ORGANIZATION

- - Are you working alone on this project or is there a group? If a group, please describe.

- - Is this investigation/analysis a one-time event? Or will it be done in other cities for similar projects? If so, who would be doing it? What background/skills do they have?
- - Who is the audience for your project and/or this additional analysis that we might do?
- - How will you use the information gained in this analysis?
- - What type of output would you like? Text, tables, maps, paper, digital, etc.?

RESOURCES

- - Could we get a copy of your project proposal?
- - Is there additional information that we could use?
- - Where do you think this data might be available?
- - Are there other people that we should talk to?
- - Are there other readings you might suggest?

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From: jf@MIT.EDU
To: anneb@MIT.EDU (anne beamish)
Cc: lebow@MIT.EDU, qshen@MIT.EDU
Subject: Re: 11.520 Housing Group Questions

Anne,

Got your interview outline. It's good and well organized. You could go with it as is. However, here are a few suggestions, basically additions, that you might consider: (1) are his notions of how to map/describe the neighborhood setting unique to each project (e.g., based on his view of project and resident responses), or more general (relevant to his view of how to describe and inner city neighborhood); (2) can he point you to any literature on neighborhood description that he considers relevant in the context of physical design/housing issues; (3) Does he have any examples of neighborhood maps/sketches that he could use to illustrate some of his ideas. Also, you will probably want to distinguish between cross-section (i.e., 'snapshot') and time series (i.e., '80 to '90 changes) characterizations, and you should not limit the discussion to static maps that the class would produce. Alternatives would be interactive settings (e.g., exploring an arcview), or a GIS-developed 'base map' that is pasted into a 'paint' package or 'hypercard' stack for use in sketching.

-- Joe F.

P.S.

If you don't mind, I may circulate your draft as an example of organizing the flow of the interview to the other groups.

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From: Pedro Ferraz De Abreu <pfa@media.mit.edu>
To: anneb@MIT.EDU, jf@mit.edu, lebow@MIT.EDU, qshen@MIT.EDU
Subject: housing interview
Cc: pfa@media.mit.edu

In regard to the proposed general interview guideline, I think it is good. My only suggestion is that, considering Larry's own statement that "my assessment of the success of these redevelopment efforts is based chiefly on 270 interviews" (...) "using written questionnaires as their guide" -- it will be useful to ask for a copy of this written questionnaire (around 100 questions), and a sample of answers. This seems to be the central "data base" we are dealing with, and given the relatively short cycle of interviews, it wouldn't hurt to start collecting specific samples. My impression is that, although people may be able to collect new data, whatever exists already will be the only real solid base for prototypes.

How are the interviews recorded ? tapes ? paper transcripts ? paper records summaries ? It may well be that one possible need for this project is some kind of browsing tool that will facilitate consultation of these records and linking with GIS product (import / export of data sets from one media or analytical tool to another). Food for thought.

-- Pedro

From: anneb@MIT.EDU (anne beamish)
To: jf@MIT.EDU
Subject: 11.520 Housing Group Interview Guide
Cc: lebow@MIT.EDU, qshen@MIT.EDU, pfa@MIT.EDU

Joe,

This was our final version of the interview questions/guide.

Anne

Interview with Larry Vale

- Introduction by Joe, Laura, Qing,
- Introduce ourselves (names, program, year)
- Moderator
 - explains that in the 1.5 hours we need to get an idea of what the project is about, what the problem is, how the project/research is organized, what he is looking for, what we can do, and in what form he needs it.
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 - what type of data do you wish to gather;
 - over what time period are you looking at the surrounding areas;
 - is the set of data the same for each neighborhood;
 - whether the data gathered on the surround areas are to be compared to other areas, either within the city, or in other cities;
 - how you think GIS/digital data might help (maps - static or interactive);
 - do you have any examples of neighborhood maps/sketches to illustrate your ideas

ORGANIZATION

- Are you working alone on this project or is there a group? If a group, please describe.
- Is this investigation/analysis a one-time event? Or will it be done in other cities for similar projects? If so, who would be doing it? What background/skills do they have?
- Who is the audience for your project and/or this additional analysis that we might do?
- How will you use the information gained in this analysis?
- What type of output would you like? Text, tables, maps, paper, digital, etc.?

RESOURCES

- Could we get a copy of your project proposal?
- Is there additional information that we could use?
- Where do you think this data might be available?
- Are there other people that we should talk to?
- Are there other readings you might suggest?
- Can you suggest any literature on neighborhood description that is relevant?
- Could we get a copy of the questionnaire and a sample or summary of the answers?