

# Research Summary

## The Remaking of Resilient Urban Space:

### A Case Study of West Hartford Center and the Kind of Space that is West Hartford Center



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## Letter of Introduction

To Whom It May Concern:

I write this letter and present this document as an introduction to my research. I'm a PhD Candidate at University College London, studying in the Department of Geography, *Cities and Urbanization* program. My PhD research thesis (dissertation) is titled, *The Remaking of Resilient Urban Space: A Case study of West Hartford Center and the Kind of Space that is West Hartford*. The case study, while at the scale of West Hartford Center, is designed as a broader challenge conventional urban theory and how we conceptualize and understand specific kinds of urban space and the remaking of urban space.

I have chosen West Hartford Center as the location for my case study because I believe it is an interesting urban space that is not conceptualized or explained by urban theory. Therefore, The Center provides an opportunity to challenge conventional urban theory, to explore this specific kind of space and its remaking, and to re-imagine how we approach urban theory and understand urban space. My research method is a qualitative approach focused mostly on interviews. However, I will utilize some quantitative methods to document and analyze change in tenants and use in The Center from 1980 and 2010.

I anticipate that my research will span a period of approximately twelve to eighteen months. During this time I will be reaching out government officials, property and business owners, residents and users of West Hartford, and others. If you have received this document, then I have reached out to you for assistance. To be honest, the quality, significance, and success of my research will depend greatly on the knowledge and willingness of individuals to participate in this project.

This document includes a one-page abstract (page 3) that summarizes my research. The abstract is followed by a five-page summary (page 4-8) of my research proposal in case you want greater details than the abstract provides. The final section is a partial bibliography of the source material that I use and it is intended to provide a general context to the literature I have studies to formulate my research questions.

I sincerely thank you for your time and assistance.

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## Abstract

The intent of my research is to explore the kind of space that is West Hartford Center (The Center) and the remaking of The Center as a resilient urban space. Therefore, I argue that American urban research and theory focus mostly on large cities and metropolitan regions (Park, et. al., 1925; Dear, 2002; Smith, 1996, 2002; Soja, 1996) even though most urban dwellers live in smaller cities and metropolitan regions. I also argue that much of the writing on urbanization focuses on the central city as one kind of space (Jacobs, 1961; Mumford, 1961; Riesman, 1957) and the suburbs as another kind of space (Bruegmann, 2005; Fishman, 1987; Kunstler, 1993, 1998; Jackson, 1985). Unfortunately, this differentiation between central city urban and suburban space misses the multiplicity of spaces that exist within urbanized areas. I also argue that much of the research on the remaking of space focuses on gentrification and state-sponsored regeneration (Freeman, 2006; Smith, 1996, 2002; Hannigan, 1998; Lees, 2000; Lees, et. al., 2008, 2010, Zukin, [1982] 1989, 2010) and does little to help us understand and explain the remaking of a both mundane and resilient West Hartford Center.

Based on the above arguments, I explore how the urban literature fall short of conceptualizing resilient spaces and how these spaces have been remade. For example, urban commentators and theorists (Jacobs, 1961; Mumford, 1961; Riesman, 1957) believe that suburban spaces are all similar, and more recently urban commentators and theorists (Kunstler, 1993, 1998; Duany, et. al., 2001, Zukin, 2010) assert that the process of suburbanization has created suburban spaces that are a '*Wal-Mart wasteland*' (Zukin, 2010). However, these characterizations of suburban spaces fail to explain the multiplicity of spaces that exist, including The Center, which does not fit into these characterizations.

My research will explore, through a case study method, West Hartford Center as a kind of remade space that is and has been resilient. To accomplish this I will investigate the remaking of The Center from 1980 to 2010 by exploring: What kind of space is West Hartford Center, How and why did this space emerge, Who were (and are) the change makers and what were their roles in the emergence of this space, Who are the users of this space, how do they view and experience this space, and what role does it play in their everyday lives?

By exploring these questions, I hope to: one, develop a vocabulary to better describe this kind of space; two, better understand how individuals and businesses innovated and self-organize to create an emergent and resilient space; three, how The Center fits into the individualized city and lives of the users of the space; and four, how the consumers of this space influence the production and consumption of this space. Through this process, I hope to gain a greater understanding of this space, the remaking of space, and also to demonstrate the need for further research of smaller metropolitan regions and the multiplicity of urban spaces—including the study of resilient spaces.

**Key words:** Urban, Suburban, Gentrification, Regeneration, Innovation, Emergence.

## Research Summary

### The Remaking of Resilient Urban Space: A Case Study - the Kind of Space that is West Hartford Center

As of the year 2007, approximately 240 million Americans lived in urbanized areas (Census, 2007). Of the 240 million persons living in urbanized areas, only 67 million live in the 10 largest metropolitan regions. The majority, 173 million persons, of the United States' urban population live in smaller (3,500,000 persons or less) metropolitan regions. For example, only nine U.S. metropolitan areas have over 5 million persons, only 11 metropolitan areas have over 4 million persons, and only 14 metropolitan areas have over 3 million persons. The 50<sup>th</sup> largest metropolitan area has 996,512 persons. Therefore, the experience of most Americans living in urbanized areas is a 'smaller' urban or metropolitan experience.

Another aspect of America's urbanization is that the majority of urban dwellers live in suburban places, not central cities (the political state) which are often thought of as traditional, authentic, or 'real' urban places (see Kunstler, 1993, 1998; Duany et al, 2001, 2010; Zukin, 2010). Of the 67 million persons living in the 10 largest metropolitan regions, only 24 million persons (36%) live in the central city while 43 million (64%) live in urbanized areas outside the central city—suburban areas (Cox, [www.demographia.com](http://www.demographia.com)). The population of the fifty largest U.S. metropolitan areas totals 162,514,411. Of that number, only 42,716,161 persons (26%) live in a central city and 119,798,250 (74%) live outside a central city. Therefore, the American urban experience is not only a smaller metropolitan experience; it is also a suburban experience.

Viewing the American urban experience as a smaller urban and suburban experience raises questions about urban research and theories and how we understand urbanization in America. Can urban research and theory based on the form, function, and the individual site and situation of large urban places (i.e. Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York) help us to understand smaller urban places (i.e. Hartford, Providence, and Raleigh)? For example, The Chicago School (see Park and Burgess, 1925) focused on Chicago, today the third largest metropolitan region, as the model of American urbanization. Scott and Soja (1996), Soja (1996) and Dear (2002), the so-called L.A. School, focus on Los Angeles, today the second largest metropolitan region as being the modern metropolis—the new model for American urbanization. Smith (1996, 2002), Lees, 2000; Lees, et al (2008, 2010), and Zukin ([1982] 1989, 1995, 2010) utilized New York City as their urban laboratory to explain the process and effects of gentrification. While their research may be interesting in the context of New

York City and does help us understand gentrification in New York City, I argue it is wrong to assume that the experiences of New York City, Chicago, or Los Angeles help us to understand smaller urban places.

Another question is how can urban theory that juxtapose central city (read urban) places against suburban places help us to understand the multiplicity of urban spaces that exist in urbanized areas? For example, Kunstler (1993, 1998), Duany (2000), and Zukin (2010) assert that the process of suburbanization has been very similar in all areas—that suburbanization and all suburbs are the same. To use Kunstler’s words, “*most of it is depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy, and spiritually degrading.*” In addition, these individuals often claim an authenticity (see Freeman, 2006; Zukin, 2010) of central city places. Such generalizations do little to help us understand the complexity and multiplicity of urbanization, be it central city or suburban. The American urban and suburban landscape is made up of a wide variety—multiplicity—of places and spaces.

Therefore, I argue that the focus of urban theory on large urban places has overlooked the uniqueness of urbanization and urban experiences of smaller urban places. In addition, I argue that generalized urban theory based on large urban places has caused us to misunderstand the unique experiences of smaller urban places. Related to this, the differentiation of and juxtaposition of what is considered to be urban and suburban has created gaps in our understanding of urbanization.

The focus on large urban places becomes evident when examining the literature on urban research in the United States and elsewhere. For example, Ley in his 1996 book *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* documents gentrification in large Canadian cities. Hannigan opens his 1998 book *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis* in Toronto and discusses Boston, New York City, Baltimore, and Los Angeles. Muller 1997 explores “the rapidly expanding international role of suburban business complexes in large metropolitan areas, particularly Greater New York” (1997: 44). Tim Butler with Garry Robson in *London Calling: The Middle Class and the Re-making of Inner London* (2003) explore gentrification in London. Also, Zukin, (1993) in *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* focuses mostly on large urban places, and when she ventures into suburban spaces, she focuses on Westchester County, a portion of the New York City suburban region.

My concern is not just the focus of urban research on large urban places, but also the influences that the theories developed in large places have on not only academic research, but also on mainstream society. For example, influential journalists have focused on large urban places. Jane

Jacobs' 1961 seminal work, *The Death and Life of the Great American City* focused on Greenwich Village, became the model and ideal for urban neighborhoods and urban life, and is still widely accepted and cited today (see Duany, 2000; Kunstler, 1993, 1998; Johnson, 2001). Joel Garreau's popular 1991 book *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* explained a new phenomenon of new suburban cities on the edge of large—Atlanta, San Francisco, Washington D.C., and others—metropolitan regions. The same is true with the suburban sociologists, suburban historians, and researchers on suburbanization and suburban places. Gans' *The Levittowners* (1967) takes place in the Philadelphia metropolitan region and Warner's, *Streetcar Suburbs* (1962) explores the suburbs of Boston. Duncan and Duncan in *Landscapes of Privilege: The Politics of the Aesthetic in an American Suburb* (2004) detail life in Bedford, a wealthy New York suburb in northern Westchester County. Jackson (1985) Fishman (1988) and Baxandall and Ewen (2000) document the history of American suburbanization by looking at large metropolitan suburbanization in places such as Brooklyn, Long Island, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

The focus on large cities and metropolitan regions has not only created bias toward large cities and metropolitan areas, but more significantly, the findings related to these large urban places have become the foundation of theories that have been universally applied to all urban places, large and small (see Park, et. al., 1925; Scott and Soja, 1996; Soja, 1989, 1996; and Dear; 2002). Ash Amin and Stephen Graham explain that “[t]oo often, single cities – most recently, Los Angeles – are wheeled out as paradigmatic cases, alleged conveniently to encompass all urban trends everywhere” (Amin and Graham, 1997: 411). In addition, these generalized theories have found their way into mainstream writings on how we understand urban places. They allow popular culture journalists such as Kunstler (1993, 1998) to assert that the process of suburbanization has created one kind of suburban space. David Brooks (2004) reduces American urban places to a handful of distinct types. However, these generalizations that all urban experiences can be explained by examples in specific large urban places and that places are either urban or suburban, does little to help us understand the multiplicity of urban spaces that exist in our urban landscape. I argue that such generalizations have created barriers to our conceptualizing the multiplicity of urban spaces and reimagining the city (see Amin and Thrift, 2002). Unfortunately, this creates a gap in urban research and specific kinds of spaces, such as resilient and remade spaces that have been overlooked. Therefore, I argue that we need to view urbanization as an evolutionary process where urban and suburban spaces evolve, mature, and are continually remade into new kinds of spaces.

Similar generalizations occur with the literature on gentrification (see Smith, 1996, 2002; Lees, 2000; Lees, et al, 2008, 2010; Freeman, 2006; and Zukin, [1982] 1989, 1995, 2010). For example, the definition of gentrification has become so generalized, that any remaking of space (see Phillips, 2004) or increase of wealth within a neighborhood is defined as gentrification (see Fraser, 2004). Unfortunately, such generalizations miss the small changes that occur, the evolutionary process of change, and the continual remaking of spaces that occurs in a multiplicity of urban spaces. Not all remade spaces transform from abandonment and immigrant occupied to gentrified and wealthy. Many remade places go through a slow process of change, adjustment, maturation, and evolve over time. Some of these remade places are resilient and successful. They never decline into abandonment, but instead are continually remade into something new. The debates on gentrification and state-sponsored regeneration (see Peck and Ward, 2002; Hannigan, 1998; Harvey, 2006) do not capture and often do not allow us to recognize the many resilient spaces that are continually remaking themselves.

It is this multiplicity of urban spaces, the gaps that exist in understanding urban spaces, the remaking of these spaces, and the unique experiences of these spaces that interest me and that I will explore through my research. To accomplish this, I have selected a specific space, West Hartford Center, to research as a case study. My reasons for selecting The Center are: one, it is located in the smaller metropolitan region (1.2 million persons) of Hartford, Connecticut; two, it is a mature suburban center that has evolved and changed over time; three, its recent history demonstrates a remaking of space that is not neatly explained by urban theory; four, the remaking of The Center appears to have occurred with minimal government/planning intervention—an emergent remaking of space; and last, urban theory does not provide a vocabulary to explain the kind of space that is West Hartford Center.

The purpose of my research is to better understand the American urban experience as a smaller urban and suburban experience and to explore a space that has evolved, been resilient, and remade outside of the generally accepted understanding of gentrification and regeneration. To do so I will investigate the remaking of West Hartford Center, the kind of space that is The Center, and the experience that it provides by exploring the following questions:

1. What kind of space is West Hartford Center and how can we develop a vocabulary to explain it?
2. How and why did this kind of space emerge—the remaking of space?

3. Who were (and are) the change makers and what were their roles in the emergence of this kind of space?
4. Who are the users of this space, how do they view and experience this space, and what role does it play in their everyday lives?

To clearly demonstrate how I will accomplish this, the following report is organized into six sections: Literature Review, Research Methodology, Case Study, Research Plan and Schedule, Possible Thesis Organization, and Bibliography. The first section, the literature review, will provide a detailed review of literature related to our understanding of urban and suburban space, the remaking of urban space in the context of gentrification and regeneration, and how we can reimagine the remaking of urban space through theories of creativity, innovation, and emergent self-organizing behavior.

Section two, my research methodology, will discuss in detail my research questions and goals in the context of West Hartford Center and how the literature review provides a framework to understanding this space. Section three, my case study of The Center, will provide the historic and regional context of West Hartford, explaining its evolution as a suburban space and how it fits into the Hartford metropolitan region. Included in the case study will be the mapping of changes in property ownership that have occurred in The Center over the past 30 years. The fourth section, my research plan, will map out my research schedule, providing timelines and deadlines. Together, each of these sections will create a comprehensive account of my research topic and methods and demonstrate my preparation for this project.

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PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHY

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Mr. Poland is a professional planner and geographer with over seventeen years' experience in land use planning, neighborhood redevelopment, and executive level management. He has worked in public, private, non-profit, and academic sectors as a municipal planning director, planning consultant, as executive director of a non-profit neighborhood reinvestment corporation, and as an instructor in planning and urban geography. Mr. Poland has been accepted as an expert witness in the areas of land use planning and neighborhood redevelopment in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana. He is a full-time member of faculty at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU), as an Instructor in the Department of Geography.

Mr. Poland founded Connecticut Planning and Development, LLC. (CPD) in 2004 as a consulting practice. CPD clients include private developers, government agencies, and non-profit organizations. Recent projects include post-Katrina planning, land use, and redevelopment strategies in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana: HUD NSP-2 application services for Venango County, Pennsylvania: and land use administration review services for the Town of Salisbury, Connecticut.

Mr. Poland previously held the position of Director of Planning and Development for the Town of East Windsor. As Director, he reorganized the planning, zoning, wetlands, building, and economic development departments into one agency, facilitated the creation of the Town's Plan of Conservation & Development and drafted a comprehensive rewrite of the zoning regulations.

As a dedicated professional and leader, Mr. Poland is Past President of the CT Chapter of the American Planning Association (CCAPA) and past Chairman of the CCAPA Government Relations Committee. Mr. Poland is a founding member, Secretary, and Executive Director for the Connecticut Partnership for Balanced Growth. He also serves on the Board of Trustees for the CT Trust for Historic Preservation, The Bushnell Park Foundation, and is a public member and Governor appointee on the State Board of Examiners for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors.

Mr. Poland has established himself as a leader in planning and public policy. As Government Relations Chair for CCAPA he assisted the Legislature's Planning and Development Committee with bill screening and drafting legislation. Mr. Poland worked on APA's development of a smart growth policy guide and was a member of the National Delegates Assembly that adopted the APA Smart Growth Policy Guide.

Mr. Poland earned a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in both Geography and Psychology, from Central Connecticut State University and studied at the University of Bolton in Bolton, England. He earned a Master of Science degree in Geography, concentrating in Planning, from CCSU and is a certified member of the American Institute of Certified Planners. He is currently working on his PhD in urban geography at University College London, London, England.

Mr. Poland, as an adjunct lecturer, teaches an introduction to geography and urban geography at Manchester Community College and urban and regional planning at UCONN. He was awarded the Connecticut Homebuilders 2003 Outstanding Land Use Official Award and was recognized by the Hartford Business Journal as one of Hartford's Forty Under Forty business and community leaders. Mr. Poland is a licensed private pilot and lives in the city of Hartford.

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