

## 7 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Mapping street vending activities reveal the more clearly that street vending activities performs informally but in a systematic trading process in which connected to urban network.

The use of shading devices such as parasols or plastic sheets was a commonly adopted mechanism in street vending in this area. These shading devices usually overlapped with one another and, side by side together, they unionized all the small vending units into one linear system connected to the building nearby. This could be called the parasitic element. The “umbra network” is a soft urban network line stretched along urban networks temporarily and informally. The term “umbra network” also expresses the living-in-the shadow culture due to local climate and the vendors’ reciprocal social relationship, as well as their shadowy economic features. These umbra networks are an important informal and temporal urban element that should be taken into account in the Asian urban morphology.

In Thewet, “self-made” public spaces also emerged through informal urban elements; this included the flow of users, activities and objects, and included street vending as a key element. These spaces provided a unique feel to the area and could imbue a given public space with liveliness and a spatio-cultural identity. A cross-cultural analysis revealed the complexity of this system as informal elements merged into public space, territories were blurred, public space became the private space of passageways to another shop, and public spaces were occupied by street vendor stalls. These result affirmed that Asian streets are rich in the multi-layering of space and time. They also proved that these kinds of streets have a two-sided characteristic of simplicity and complexity.

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## ID 1588 | THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF MODERNIST MASS HOUSING: A TOOL FOR URBAN PLANNERS

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**ABSTRACT:** Although the modernist failure myth largely descends from Jane Jacobs’ work, many of its advocates abandoned the observational method on which the American author grounded her work. Not only generalizations about the alleged failure of modernist architecture ignored non-environmental factors and disregarded the differences which characterize modernist public housing neighborhoods, but also they were unable of getting direct knowledge of how real life works in them. If we assume that each modernist public housing neighborhood is unique and different from all the others, as it is certainly the case, then we need to get first-hand knowledge of how it works. Starting from the review of anthropological research on modernist mass-housing in different countries this section of the course will discuss the implications of such research for urban planners.

## 1 PRUITT-IGOE AND THE MODERNIST FAILURE MYTH

The striking images of the demolitions of Pruitt-Igoe – the Saint Louis neighborhood built in the 1950s and partially blown up in 1972 – are still a powerful symbol of the alleged failure of modernist architecture. Oscar Newman (1972, 1996) presented Pruitt-Igoe as a paradigmatic example of indefensible, badly-designed neighborhood, inevitably destined to become an environment of fear, vandalism and decay. Rowe and Koetter (1978) used the pictures of its imploding buildings while talking of the decline and fall of twentieth century utopian architecture, which had produced “the impoverished banalities of public housing which stand around like the undernourished symbols of a new world which refused to be born” (p. 4). Charles Jencks (1977, 9) identified the Pruitt-Igoe demolitions with the death of modern architecture. In his book, the visual impressiveness of the building’s collapse was matched by the peremptory character of the epitaph which accompanies it: Modern Architecture died in St Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 p.m. (or there abouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grâce by dynamite. Previously it had been vandalised, mutilated and defaced by black inhabitants, and although millions of dollars were pumped back, trying to keep it alive (fixing the broken elevators, repairing mashed windows, repainting), it was finally put out of its misery. Boom, boom, boom.

Without doubt, the ruins should be kept, the remains should have a preservation order slapped on them, so that we keep a live memory of this failure in planning and architecture. Like the folly or artificial ruin – constructed on the estate of an eighteenth-century English eccentric to provide him with instructive reminders of former vanities and glories – we should learn to value and protect our former disasters. As Oscar Wilde said, 'experience is the name we give to our mistakes', and there is a certain health in leaving them judiciously scattered around the landscape as continual lessons.

It took fourteen years from the publication of Jencks’ book for the dominant narrative of modernist-architecture’s failure to be seriously questioned. It was up to Katharine Bristol (1991) advancing for the first time the thesis that Pruitt-Igoe’s breakdown – and more generally the breakdown of some modernist residential neighborhoods – was not mainly attributable to its alleged design errors. There were enormous social, economic, institutional, and administrative forces at work, which all contributed to making of Pruitt-Igoe an unprecedented concentration of poor and deprived people in badly maintained buildings and tenures. Bristol (p. 163) argued that: By placing the responsibility for the failure of public housing on designers, the myth shifts attention from the institutional or structural sources of public housing problems. Simultaneously it legitimates the architecture profession by implying that deeply embedded social problems are caused, and therefore solved, by architectural design.

Another twenty years later the research documentary *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth: An Urban History* (2011), directed by Chad Friedrichs, pushed further the deconstruction of the narratives which had been built around Pruitt-Igoe. These narratives go well beyond asserting the failure of public housing. In the words of urban historian Robert Fishman, “Pruitt-Igoe is not just a national or even a world symbol for the failure of American public housing. It’s also been a symbol of a perceived failure of well-intentioned government policies in general.” According to urban studies scholar Joseph Heathcott, “We don’t want the people to think of Pruitt-Igoe as a failure, if they are going then to translate that failure into all public housing or all government programs, or all social welfare, or all modernism. ... If we want to say that this one project, in this one place, for this one set of reasons declined to the point where people thought that it was necessary to tear it down, that’s one thing, but that’s not how we told the story”.

The fundamental shift in perspective firstly proposed by Bristol and later relaunched by Friedrichs is well argued and documented. It is in fact very surprising that the critique of modernism could gain such a wide acceptance although it was based almost solely on the claims raised by Jane Jacobs (1961) and by Oscar Newman (1972, 1996) about the indefensibility of modernist public housing neighborhoods. Due to the wide scope of Pruitt-Igoe narratives, their review also opens new avenues for reconsidering from more broadly informed ethnographical, historical, and critical perspectives mainstream critiques of modernist mass housing as a whole.

## 2 ‘A PLACE WE PLAYED HARD’: PRUITT-IGOE NARRATIVES OVERTURNED

Ethnographic studies of everyday life in modernist neighborhoods are very scarce. This gap is at least curious. In fact, the whole critique of modernist neighborhoods is based on the assumption that they don’t

work because they lack in everyday life. According to Newman (1972) such deficiency – and the crime which descends from it – depends on the way such neighborhoods are physically designed. Although Newman certainly demonstrates the existence of a correlation between physical design and propensity to commit crime, the relative relevance of the physical design factor in explaining the alleged failure of modernism is largely overestimated. Furthermore, the peremptory and final manner in which the whole modernist movement has been dismissed by Newman, Jencks, and many others, diverted scholars' attention from studying the inevitably complex social life that, for better or for worse, modernist neighborhoods undoubtedly host. Even in Pruitt-Igoe – that is in the paradigmatically badly conceived settlement according to crime-prevention-through-environmental- design criteria – a small number of interviews with former residents unveils an unexpectedly rich tapestry of memories and experiences. Before the intricate economic, social, and political conditions of postwar Saint Louis drove it to failure, a warm sense of family and community existed among its residents, as recounts Jacqueline Williams: There were friendships and bonds formed there. Perhaps these lasted a lifetime. I know a lot of bad things came out of Pruitt-Igoe, I know they did, but I don't think they outweigh the good, I really, really don't, because at first Pruitt-Igoe was just a wonderful place: it was wonderful! All former residents interviewed by Friedrichs provide an excellent account of their first years in the Pruitt-Igoe 'hell'. What is mostly significant about their memories is not only the emotional content, which can be easily distorted by time and by adolescence idealization, but the way space appears in their descriptions. It is in fact more difficult to reinvent or even to distort the way space was used. As an example, for Sylvester Brown Pruitt-Igoe "was a place we played hard right up and down this long breezeway, and up and down the steps, and running around. And so it was a place where kids could really really have a chance to play hard". In the memories of Valerie Sills, all that even produced a strong sense of safety: Pruitt-Igoe was a safe place for me, I mean I don't care what people said about it. They lived outside it. If you didn't live in there you thought it was a bad place, but growing up in there was ... you knew the people and you were never alone. I have to say you were never alone because somebody crossed the house, somebody down under you, somebody up over you, there's people here, there's lights here, there's life here, and so I'm not alone and I'm not afraid.

If then we move from Pruitt-Igoe – and from the intricate economic, social, and political conditions of postwar Saint Louis – the situation is even richer and more variegated.

The few studies which have been carried out on everyday life in modernist neighborhoods show very interesting results. The anthropological research undertaken by Jean-Françoise Augoyard (2007) in the 'Arlequin' neighborhood of Grenoble, France, and that conducted by Noël Jouenne (2005) in the Corbusian neighborhood of Firminy-Vert, also in France, will be reviewed here. They both highlight the limits of approaches – such as crimeprevention- through-environmental-design – which attribute to space and to build form itself a deterministic power over people and their social experience.

### **3 L'ARLEQUIN NEIGHBORHOOD IN GRENOBLE: EVERYDAY WALKS AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF DESIGNED SPACE**

The Arlequin neighborhood belongs to the so-called Villeneuve (New Town), a modernist settlement built between the mid-1960s and the mid- 1980s straddling the municipalities of Grenoble and Échirolles, in Rhône- Alpes, a south-eastern region of France. The Villeneuve was developed according to a schéma directeur, which envisaged six neighborhoods of 2000 apartments each, located around a large central area for community services and facilities. The Villeneuve project had a strong resonance in France and entailed the coordination among a number of central and local authorities. The whole program was based on the following design principles: mixture of land uses; simultaneous realization of public services foreseen by the plan and of other residential uses; centrality of public transport; creation of a certain number of working districts close to the Villeneuve.

Apart from the unitary design of the major service and infrastructure elements envisaged by the schéma directeur, each quarter of the Villeneuve is largely different from all the others, having been built in different times and according to various design criteria. The Arlequin neighborhood, built between 1971 and 1977, is one of the three neighborhoods belonging to the municipality of Grenoble, together with the Olympic Village (1965-1971) and with the Les Baladins quarter. It is a sinuous north-south-oriented 1.4-kilometers-long structure, with 120-degree-inclined branches stemming from it at regular intervals. The building-

height varies from six to twelve stories. The whole structure is raised on pilotis, its ground level hosting an unusually long uninterrupted pedestrian gallery. The name of the neighborhood is due to the polychromous facades of the building. Beyond being a representative example of modernist architecture, the Villeneuve project was the subject of an important research conducted by Jean-François Augoyard (2007), which clearly demonstrates the complexity and subjectivity of the relationship between designed space and human behavior.

Augoyard's research is based on a simple but seminal insight: by walking in one's neighborhood people express their own personality. Therefore, the way a neighborhood –as well as any other living environment– is 'walked', changes from person to person. But since there are countless ways of tracing paths in one and a same space, people's walks can be studied and analyzed in the same way as a language. However, one's personality is manifested according to a 'linguistics of walking' which can't be simply decoded by observing and recording the paths traced through space. Each single walk corresponds in fact to a complex experience which is, in many ways, unique and not replicable, consisting at least of a sensory dimension, of a socio-relational dimension, and of an imaginary dimension: only verbal language can reveal its complexity.

In the light of the above, the analysis method is based on the reconstruction through narration of these 'walking experiences' done in the Arlequin neighborhood by a sample of its inhabitants in different moments of the day and of the week. In fact, in the words of Augoyard (2007, 19), «oral expression ... has appeared to us to mimic quite closely the act of strolling. Like the latter, it is fluid, prone to digressions, capable of forgetting what is apparently essential and of lingering over details. Is it not another expression of an identical way of being?»

In the act of walking there are always a proactive component and a passive component, as there are in the act of reading: «The analogy with graphic expression is unendingly striking. Just as a book is read in company with a motionless (re)writing and is written at the same time that it is read for oneself and for others, walking resembles a reading-writing». If daily walks are a form of expression, a walking rhetoric exists which is «the translation of both the organization of the styles proper to each inhabitant and the correlations among these styles within a shared space» (p. 26).

The first observation that can be made before studying the inhabitants' walking rhetoric is that designed space does not exist as a whole in lived experience: «ignorant of spatial totalities, the inhabitant can exclude without refusing. This is the exclusion of an unrecounted, un-lived territory, which is equivalent to a pure absence» (p. 28). It is important to stress that as pure absence the excluded territory is neutral to the inhabitant's experience and therefore does not pose a problem to the inhabitant.

Inside the space which he actually uses, the inhabitant materializes his walking practice through a multitude of rhetoric figures. Different personalities and various styles of inhabiting express themselves starting from the elementary 'figures of avoidance': paratopism, that is the form of ambulatory practice that proceeds via substitution of one path for another (p. 29); and peritopism, that is the variation of a path through a multitude of variations. The same architectural/ urban spaces take on completely different meanings not only when walked by different subjects, but also when traveled in different moments by one and the same person. This is for example the case of the mezzanine – a passageway internal to the building that doubles the unusually long ground floor gallery – which is simply avoided by some inhabitants, while being looked for by others for its quietness, for a temporary pause for thought, or even for an ambulatory night experience in a space which is imagined as a fascinating labyrinth.

The complexity of meanings that the architectural designed plan takes on in everyday walks is expressed by what Augoyard calls 'polysemous figures': ambivalence, occurring as the meaning of an element ranges between two opposite poles; staggered polysemy, happening as an element takes on several meanings which are similar and interconnected; bifurcation, describing one's behavior in correspondence to a choice point along a path; and metathesis of quality, occurring as «the repeated traveling through one and the same site can accidentally change in quality via nothing more than the effect of a difference in one's everyday chronological cycle» (p. 48). This body of figures shows that in everyday life designed space loses its functional and monumental monosemy: «the variety of usages ruins its beautiful clarity as a finished product» (p. 41). The figures which have been described up to this point are elementary figures, for they apply to single paths. The figures of redundancy and those of symmetry, instead, are combinatory figures which are noted at the scale of whole trips and of complexes of walks. The figures of redundancy

introduce in the act of walking the irrational element of pathos. The *metabole* is used to describe the various 'tones' (e.g. ironic, poetic, or playful) with whom a walk is carried out. The *anaphora* describes a walk featured by a centripetal dynamic around an attractive element which is mainly symbolic. The *hyperbole* denotes a *deambulation* which is overloaded with meanings that translate themselves in 'exaggerated expressions' (as when the verb 'to scale' is used to describe a walk up the mound in the park).

The figures of symmetry describe the way paths are combined and organize the orientations of one's walks. The properly called symmetry presides over all alternations in one's trip. Dissymmetry is produced mostly by accident when, after the departure toward a specific site, the return trip does not happen to occur as foreseen and another route is then taken. Asymmetry may be observed in all cases where a trip is affected as a whole by multiple and divergent variations. This body of figures shows the way designed space is disorganized and broken, often in unpredictable ways, in everyday uses.

The two last rhetoric figures of walking described by Augoyard, *synecdoche* and *asyndeton*, operate on the level of the relationships between the parts which make up the whole trip. The *synecdoche* concerns the relationship between whole and parts, when the part stands for the whole or the whole stands for the part: as in the case of a specific portion of the park, described as "the park" tout court; or in the case of a space which is identified by reference to one of its specific elements («Often, I go into the space that is dirt-covered ... toward the dragon, voilà!»). The *asyndeton*, instead, describes the links through which every element of expression (part of a route) follows another one of them in the constitution of the expressive whole. Augoyard's thesis is that ambulatory expression is grounded on an absence of connections. Walked routes would be made of basically discontinuous fragments. This is the major structural difference between the literary text and the text produced by the act of walking.

The afore-described rhetoric figures of walking are used by Augoyard to study the different ways space is appropriated by the inhabitants of the Arlequin neighborhood. These seem to reconfigure designed space in almost infinite manners, so to make us look almost irrelevant its capacity of conditioning the ways of appropriating space by its inhabitants. As an example, whilst for some of them the space which is perceived as 'domestic' shrinks up to coincide with their bedroom, for others it broadens up to include a wide portion of the gallery. The difference in the ways the neighborhood is appropriated are reflected in the language which is used to name places, which changes in different groups and sub-groups, and makes us appear the frequentation of a space as inseparable from the process of naming that characterizes that space. The notion of boundary gets fluid, being there no appropriation «that would have a definitive meaning or that would be established once and for all» (p. 16). Finally, ambulatory practices are enriched by an imaginary dimension which disproportionately broadens the possible meanings which one and the same spatial element may assume.

Conclusively, the decodification of the walking rhetoric performed by Augoyard makes appear dangerously reductive Oscar Newman's and Jane Jacobs' environmental determinism, and allows us to extend Bristol's observations from 'Pruitt-Igoe myth' to the whole 'modernist-failure myth'. Once again, environmental determinism legitimates the architecture profession by implying its capacity of solving social problems, and shifts the attention from the real causes of public housing problems. To Bristol's observations, we should add that the modernist-failure rhetoric also prevents us from appreciating the variety of social and physical situations which modernist neighborhoods have, and which necessarily require very specific policies in order to be managed. The Corbusian *unité d'habitation* of Firminy-Vert, which was studied by anthropologist Noël Jouenne (2005), provides us a good example of the kind of policies which would be necessary to make these housing complexes correctly run.

#### 4 FIRMINY-VERT: EVERYDAY LIFE AT "CORBUSIER"

The *unité d'habitation* of Firminy, built between 1965 and 1967, is the last of the five *unités* – among the thirty globally designed by Le Corbusier – which have been ever realized. It is located in the modernist neighborhood of Firminy-Vert, built after 1953 thanks to the commitment and to the resolution of Eugène Claudius-Petit. This important French politician, who served as Minister of Reconstruction in French government 1948-53, gave up his national political career in order to realize his urban planning ideas as a mayor of Firminy. The neighborhood, designed according to Athens Charter principles by a group of modernist architects, hosts twelve residential buildings of different lengths and heights, a tower-building,

the Corbusian unité, two shopping centers, and several community equipments. Two of these – the Maison de la culture et de la jeunesse (House of youth and culture) and the church – were also designed by the Master.

The work by Noël Jouenne is exclusively related to the Corbusian unité d'habitation. This is a big rectangular north-south oriented building 130 meters long, 21 meters large, and 56 meters high. It is the biggest of the five realized unités, containing 414 apartments (against Marseille's 337) for a population of up to 1800 inhabitants. The building was designed following the same principles adopted in Marseille, such as the elevation on pilotis, the façade libre, and the location of common services on the roof terrace (school, swimming pool, etc.). However, it was built with a quarter of the budget used in Marseille, giving up the realization of underground parking areas and economizing on many things, from insulation to finishing works. The apartments, of different sizes and typologies, are located on seventeen floors, organized on seven internal passageways. Most of them cross the building and face both west and east. The whole construction was designed using a Modulor 2.26 meters high and 1.83 meters large.

The research, based on anthropological methods, entailed observations and interviews over a period of one and a half years. One of the first questions which it tries to answer is: "How did people come to live to Corbusier?" Obviously enough, people moving to the unité d'habitation can be divided into two major categories: that of the ones moving by necessity, and that of the ones moving by choice. The second of these categories is the most interesting to our purposes. Among the factors which appear to be determinant of that choice is the positive image which is conveyed by the name of Le Corbusier, and by the idea of the Ville Radieuse: as in the case of a man reminding his father while driving close to Firminy-Vert and saying: "Here is the Ville radieuse!"; or in the case of a woman, who talks of "an element of utopia" guiding her housing choice. This fact is consistent with Pinson's (1996) observation that «the exceptional character of the Corbusian unités prevented them from being trivialized» as it happened, instead, in cases such as le banlieu and other similar modernist developments.

What is interesting about the myth surrounding Firminy-Vert's unité d'habitation, is not only that it attracts many people, but also that it conditions the administrative behavior of public housing managers. Applications to the local public housing authority for apartments at Corbu were often supported by covering letters written by the major. "Obviously, says the Mayor of that time, if we wanted to fill up Corbusier with immigrants that would have not been a problem. But Corbusier would have become a ghetto, and so Claudius-Petit tried, as well as I did, it shouldn't be said, to maintain a certain quota, because beyond that life would have become impossible for all of us". So in a sense, the image which by Le Corbusier is conveyed acts as a corporate brand, guiding people's behavior in many different ways. It is in this way that the unité becomes a socially mixed neighborhood, hosting not only low-wage families but also many teachers, architects, youths, and other middle class members.

The distinction between the ones who chose the unité by necessity and the ones who moved there by choice is somehow reflected in two distinct patterns of behavior concerning the duration of their stay. Although to the forty percent of the inhabitants Corbu represents an ephemeral 'habitat' which lasts up to a year, to a fifth of them it is a stable living environment which is inhabited from ten up to thirty years. But although the positive image conveyed by the architect's name is certainly influential on such a choice, other important factors also come into play. In fact for many families the long permanence at Firminy-Vert is part of a wider life project aimed at gaining access to the property of a house. This is made possible by the low cost of public housing rents.

Some of them are young people, as it is testified by the case of this former resident: Personally I lived at Corbusier and when I left I moved to a small single-familyhome development. In fact on my wage I couldn't afford do build one. I bought "turnkey" and it wasn't too expensive... But honestly, if I had the means to build a house my own way I would have inspired myself a bit more from the home which I knew at the unité d'habitation. Strictly related to long-term permanence at "Corbusier" is the social practice of apartment changing. This is made possible by at least three factors: the high number (at least thirty) of apartment typologies designed by Le Corbusier; the elevated turnover rate of apartments; and the relatively high vacancy ratio. These three factors provide an interesting kind of flexibility which allows families to easily adapt their dwellings to their changing needs.

It is also interesting to consider one of the main problems perceived by people inhabiting the unité: that of noise disturbances. The intricate manner in which apartments are composed means that each of them has

a high number of adjacent neighbors. Most of them gain access to their apartment from different streets and never meet each other. This makes the presence of an acoustic insulation one of the major requisites for the quality of everyday life. As we have seen, initial budget limitations determined significant cuts exactly on that item of expenditure. However, it is also interesting to notice how strongly the perception of noise disturbance changes across different cultural and ethnical groups: whereas to some northern-Africans noise appears to be synonym of life, to other inhabitants it is mostly a source of annoyance. These cultural differences would have significant implications for the way these estates should be managed.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

In concluding this essay at least two orders of considerations are possible. The first regards the opportunity of substantially reviewing the narratives which condemn modernist architecture per se. Such opportunity is supported by two reasons. The first reason is that such narratives don't take into the right account the many and complex factors which determined the failure of some modernist architectures. This conclusion, strongly supported by the review of Pruitt-Igoe case, is also confirmed by the cases of Grenoble's Arlequin and of Firminy-Vert's unité, which are in fact examples of correctly working modernist neighborhoods. The second reason is that such critiques are grounded on environmentally deterministic approaches which appears to be, if not completely fallacious, at least substantially reductive in the light of the complex and unpredictable ways in which the living environment is being appropriated by different users. In both l'Arlequin and the unité the one and the same environment allows completely different lifestyles and relationships to space. Although some of Newman's arguments on the correlation between crime and physical design are certainly strong, it is time to fully reconsider their relative importance in explaining socially unsuccessful architectures. The necessity of reviewing the aforementioned narratives becomes particularly strong if we consider, as argued by Bristol (1991), that one of their effects is that of concealing the major causes which determined the failure of many mass housing projects.

This leads us directly to our second order of considerations which concern the major feature of modernist mass-housing buildings: complexity. Buildings conceived to host thousands of people, such as Firminy-Vert's unité and l'Arlequin's apartment blocks, are incredibly complex "machines à habiter" which require to be designed, built, and managed as such. Although Le Corbusier was a master in managing complexity, the way Firminy-Vert's unité was built and managed didn't take complexity into sufficient account. A cut in the budget for acoustic insulation could significantly alter the environmental comfort of inhabitants. Even an apparently insignificant change as that of the colors of passageways could have the significant effect of making difficult to many children orientation in passageways. This leads us to the final conclusion that modernist mass housing neighborhoods can work great if the resources which are invested in their construction and management are adequate. Although this conclusion may appear obvious, politicians, planners, and public housing managers are only rarely aware of that.

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## ID 1632 | RECONCILING GOALS OF SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL SUSTAINABILITY: AN EXAMINATION OF SPATIAL DIMENSION OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN TRONDHEIM, NORWAY

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**ABSTRACT:** The paper presents preliminary findings from the first phase of a research project that is aimed at investigating the policy for decentralised local centers (commercial and transport hubs) in the city of Trondheim and an expressed goal of creating inclusive spaces at sub city level, while achieving a reduction in transport related greenhouse gas emissions. We use the case of social integration of refugees in the city of Trondheim to examine the potential of the planned local centers in achieving the expressed goal of creating a sustainable and inclusive city. We situate ourselves in the debate on social integration in the spatial domain viz. social mix versus segregation (Cole and Goodchild, 2001, Fincher et al, 2014 etc.) and the value of creating spaces of encounters (Fincher et al. 2014, Gressgård and Jensen 2015) to study the patterns of interaction among refugee groups in the city and their use of space in the local neighborhoods/ centers for such interactions. We relate these preliminary findings to the plans and policies of the Trondheim Municipality - both spatial and social welfare policies, to contribute to the debates on the role of spatial planning to promote social integration in increasingly diverse medium size cities in Europe. Municipal policy on integration of refugees in Trondheim is limited to the formal and structural aspects of society, while leaving the relational, interactional and cultural aspects to unplanned arenas and self-initiative by the refugees. There have been some efforts to represent the cultural diversity of the city through food and cultural festivals, with limited outcomes. As is illustrated by our preliminary investigations, most informants experience a sense of alienation and isolation, and interactions are limited to people of similar cultural backgrounds and other refugees, mainly in central locations. One of the main findings discussed in the paper is that refugees experience a sense of isolation in the neighborhoods they are housed in by the Municipality, raising questions to the efficacy of the policies of social mixing followed in Trondheim. We also find that spaces of social encounters in the local area have only limited potential to facilitate long lasting contact between the refugees and the host population, unless more targeted efforts for social network building is undertaken. The window of opportunity of the first five years of the 'Introduction program' of the Municipality are critical owing to the close contact refugees have to State