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Philindustry: The Public Re-Use of Philadelphia's Industrial Landscape

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Abstract
This paper poses a strategy for how Philadelphia can re-think its physical industrial history. The strategy calls for new, publicly accessible uses in old buildings that celebrate the city's almost forgotten industrial past. A case study focuses on the Lower Schuylkill River where many vacant industrial structures lie desperate for new uses. The main thrust of this paper is about how community and historically conscious development can create new cultural amenities and destinations for the city of Philadelphia through the re-use of existing industrial sites.

Keywords

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INTRODUCTION

Since the departure of its major industries, Philadelphia has struggled to reclaim its status as a world-class metropolis. Today real-estate investment is steadily increasing, money is going into public projects and cultural facilities, and the city is preparing for an Olympic Bid. Now more than ever Philadelphia can become a hub of commercial, cultural, historical and educational activity. It is the job of city government to partner with private interests and harness this potential for greatness by planning accordingly, allowing private interests to develop with caution while providing services and jobs for the public good. The creation of a comprehensive citywide plan with specific principals to guide design and development will allow the city to take the most advantage of the financial and social changes that are rapidly transforming Philadelphia’s landscape. The conversion of the city’s industrial structures to public buildings, housing uses for all residents and visitors of Philadelphia, is one specific principal that must become a priority as the city grows.

As cities develop they highlight and market certain aspects to the public that make them unique. Philadelphia has had significant experience “selling itself”. Independence Mall, a site that will be discussed throughout this paper, is the best known example of urban redevelopment with the purpose of attracting tourists to the city’s political history. The process of creating the vista and open space that is Independence Mall included substantial destruction of many traditional Philadelphia buildings. Independence Mall, a “historic attraction”, exists in a non-historic environment thanks to the mall’s destruction of a large portion of 19th century Philadelphia’s development. The landscaped mall is a
forced attempt to highlight certain historic elements of the nation’s history while discounting others. Instead of creating fantasy landscapes through the destruction of old buildings and the creation of new structures and vistas, Philadelphia should capitalize on its rich vacant industrial building stock, conveniently located along the city’s rivers, and use them to market the city with inventive public oriented re-use.

Cities can develop historically relevant landscapes that project their urban image to the world. Philadelphia’s unique industrial districts lend themselves to imaginative new uses that involve the entire city. Southwest Philadelphia and the lower Schuylkill River, an area ripe for re-development, provide infinite possibilities for the recycling and re-use of vacant structures. The Schuylkill River is a natural network, connecting these buildings to the city. A number of cities have successfully re-used their industrial riverfront building stock and provide excellent examples for Philadelphia. Drawing from the experience of other cities and regions, I will suggest a framework for Philadelphia’s revitalization in 2006.

URBAN MARKETING: CULTURE, DEMOCRACY AND HISTORY

The cities that stand out as desirable places to visit, live and work put considerable energy into marketing themselves to the public. Urban “marketing” can include advertising (“Philly’s better when you spend the night”), the promotion of definable spaces and structures (Rittenhouse Square, Guggenheim Bilbao), attracting large business or niche industries (NYC-Finance, Milan-Design, Philly-Comcast, Cambridge, MA-Biotech), developing a strong tourism industry (New Orleans, Venice
Italy) and hosting international expositions and events (Barcelona -The Olympic Games). Urban planners, designers and politicians have coined many terms for marketing the modern city and Philadelphia is no stranger to any of them.¹ Much of Philadelphia’s recent planning has taken place in satellite urban zones like The Avenue of the Arts, The Navy Yard, The Parkway, Fairmount Park, Independence Mall, Old City… Each zone has employed its own set of planners and marketing strategies to attract investors, visitors, workers and residents. Cities with centralized planning agencies like Boston, San Francisco, Chicago and Barcelona have been successful in attracting these interest groups thanks to citywide design schemes and initiatives that spread investment throughout the metropolis while keeping the public informed and involved in the process.

What Philadelphia lacks is a cohesive marketing strategy. Providing tax cuts for big business, legalizing gambling and building residential towers can be attractive to politicians and developers looking to see quick changes in the short term, but a comprehensive plan connecting Philadelphia’s assets and cultivating new ones would ensure a successful city for years in the future. “We need an honest civic conversation about what we all want our city to be. We should not be…made to fear that if we don’t allow the marketplace to do its thing, we will wither and die.”²

The literature on urban marketing often touches upon specific terms which include but are not limited to culture, history and community. These three themes provide a cohesive frame to analyze Philadelphia’s potential for marketing itself through urban planning and design. Culture refers to physical spaces and facilities that cater to

¹ Teedon, Designing a Place Called Bankside p. 459,460
creative, educational and entertainment related endeavors. History is connected to the physical framework of any development and how that framework rejects or embraces the past uses of its land. Community in this case refers to the democratic process of planning a more desirable city that its constituents and users support. The following pages outline some of the planning discourse that relates to the marketing of a city through the perspective of culture, history and community.

CULTURE

The marketing of the American city using cultural assets is a key issue for Richard Florida. Florida developed the term the “creative class” to describe young people who work in creative, knowledge-based industries and have specific criteria for the ideal city where they should live and work. Florida believes this population is extremely influential in making a city desirable. Urban leaders across the globe have sought Florida’s advice as they brainstorm ways to re-make their cities. His answer is fairly simple; provide public venues for cultural activities and recreation not far from affordable living and nightlife. It is these factors that will attract the creative class and, if done well, make any city “hip”.

Florida’s focus on the ‘creative class’ ignores many cities’ influential working class and permanent residents, such as Philadelphia’s, and puts less emphasis on attracting tourists. In her article Struggling with the Creative Class, Jamie Peck argues that urban designers, planners and politicians must not cater to a transient creative class. Designing cities for a specific population doesn’t take into account the diversity of the population.

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3 Florida, The Rise of the Creative Class
metropolis and the need for public design to reach a broad scope of constituents. 4

I see Peck and Florida’s debate about the importance of the creative class being resolved by viewing the creative population simply as a stimulant for urban change. The effects of public oriented urban design and creating a “hip” city for young people can trickle down to the entire population as well as the city’s projection of itself to an international audience. Designing cities to attract this specific creative population can raise the quality of life in the public sphere for all urban residents including tourists and people of diverse economic and social backgrounds.

Another concern of Peck’s is the fear that urban competition for the creative class will standardize public services and amenities in all cities. 5 Instead of reading Florida’s thesis as a call to standardize American cities with cookie cutter recreational and cultural facilities, each city has authentic architecture and geographies that allow for unique spaces and opportunities in the public realm. Such traditional architecture is what makes every city unique and attractive to different individuals and communities. Philadelphia must tailor its own design for making the city a desirable place to live, work, play and visit. In Philadelphia’s case, the traditional architecture and recent history of the land use has a strong industrial character. This characteristic has left the city with a diversity of building types that are exciting and attractive spaces for residential, commercial and office uses for the creative class (as can already be seen in loft and office redevelopments in Old City, Northern Liberties, the Navy Yard…) as well as potential spaces for hosting large, open, public oriented uses for the region’s entire population. The city has yet to capitalize upon such public oriented re-use.

4 Peck, Struggling with the Creative Class p. 756
5 Peck, Struggling with the Creative Class p. 761
Barcelona is an internationally renowned leader in urban design and planning. The Spanish city provides excellent examples of culturally based redevelopment while showing mistakes that Philadelphia can avoid. Mari Paz Balibrea has argued that the transformation of the city as a cultural center has taken place in conflict with its traditional history and physical layout. Although many Barcelonans celebrate their city as a hub of artistic community and well-designed public spaces, they are celebrating a new city that has destroyed traditional historic (often industrial) parts of the metropolis and forced many lower-class residents to leave. Furthermore, Barcelona as a center for culture is defined by its aesthetic, with world famous artist and architect designed public spaces, sculptures and buildings throughout the city. Residents and visitors are in love with the city because it’s clean and beautiful; where old dirty factories once stood now there are parks, beaches and hotels. Where a poor immigrant community had once settled now there is a five star hotel and a large contemporary art museum designed by Richard Meier. It is this aesthetic environment, Balibrea argues, that the city has so successfully created as a commodity to be sold to residents and tourists. In this sense Barcelona is a kind of Disney World where its design has uplifted people’s spirits while deceiving and manipulating them into believing that this beautiful design alone has raised the entire city’s quality of life.\textsuperscript{6} Many cities have made the mistake of expecting design to solve social, economic and political problems. While the physical environment has an extremely powerful effect on any urban population, issues of process, history and context in any design can be pivotal to its success. In Barcelona’s case, the city is transforming with little regard for democratic process or maintaining the traditional social, physical

\textsuperscript{6} Balibrea, \textit{Urbanism, culture and the post-industrial city: challenging the \textquotedblleft Barcelona Model\textquotedblright}
and economic fabrics of the city’s historic districts.

Powerful aesthetics often have brand names associated with them. They market both a city and the private business interests associated with them. Brands like Tate, Guggenheim, Nike, Disney, and Sony are often instrumental in marketing a city through the creation of iconic spaces and structures. In the introduction to the “Symposium on Branding, the Entertainment Economy and Urban Place Building,” John Hannigan discusses how the theme of urban redevelopment through investment in cultural institutions has become a trend worldwide as art museums across the globe hire world-class “starchitects” to redesign and add to their existing buildings. This speaks to Peck’s concern about the standardization of cultural facilities and disregard for a city’s unique character. Although the effects of such cultural investment are hard to measure thus far, many critics are wary of development without reference to the city’s identity or history. The “Bilbao effect” is hard to emulate without taking into consideration a city’s distinct physical, social, political and historical contexts.  

Philadelphia has the option to court large businesses and organizations like Guggenheim or Nike to bring progressive design to the city. Some may say this has already taken place after the city fought to retain Comcast by deeming their downtown property a tax-free “Keystone Improvement Zone”. The construction of the 57 story Comcast Center designed by New York “starchitect” Robert Stern is well underway. While brand names may be helpful in marketing Philadelphia to potential workers or visitors, these names are often synonymous with private interests which fail to take into consideration the needs of the public.

7 Hannigan, Introduction p. 1-3
Culture is an extremely important guide for urban marketing but it can also be dangerous. Cities like Barcelona have found new investment in tourism and housing through the development of their cultural institutions. But in many cases these institutions threaten the existing social and physical frameworks of the communities in which they exist. Barcelona’s Raval district is quickly gentrifying around its Museum of Contemporary Art. The agenda of a large cultural institution and its patrons does not always coincide with the needs or interests of its locale. When developing cultural institutions, Philadelphia must embrace its historic and current physical and social landscapes. The city must work hard to avoid creating spaces and structures that defy the city’s post-industrial character. The best way to do this is designing through democratic processes.

COMMUNITY

Politics and process are important issues that have come up in the discourse on urban planning to remake a city’s image because they often shape the public’s perception of civic space. In Melbourne Australia’s case, Leonie Sandercock and Kim Dovey found that when their post-industrial riverfront was re-designed, there was little consideration or outreach for local community input. Similar centralized planning has taken place in many cities worldwide as urban governments produce new designs to market themselves quickly without taking the important steps of first asking what the public envisions.

Democratic planning is extremely difficult because it’s almost impossible to capture an entire community’s perspective and translate it into a comprehensive design

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8 Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* p. 107
9 Sandercock, *Pleasure, politics, and the “public interest”: Melbourne’s riverscape revitalization* p. 151
scheme that will satisfy everyone. There are however ways to gather public input that have proven successful. The community meeting is a common practice for planners and designers where local residents and stakeholders are given the chance to voice their concerns. This effort depends heavily on high attendance and all opinions being voiced. When developing plans for ground zero in New York the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation hosted a well-attended public charette. The charette splits everyone into small groups and gives them a specific set of design goals or principals to discuss and make a plan for. Usually each group is led or composed of design professionals who can provide ideas and answer questions. This way of public planning can be a successful mode of transforming design principals and goals to physical plans created by and for the community.

The concerns and needs of local communities are extremely important for the success of any development. Philadelphia has an opportunity to be a model in democratic planning and design by reaching out to local stakeholders and residents in re-thinking its industrial structures. The democratic planning process, usually through community meetings and charettes, allows for all socioeconomic groups to participate in re-designing their city. It is these current residents of the city who have the most impact in retaining a historically relevant landscape because they often have the strongest connection to that history. Democratic citywide planning also allows for widespread initiatives that aren’t directed solely at one class or one urban issue but rather encompass a comprehensive Philadelphia design. Thus through the democratic process, the city can best unite historic and cultural agendas towards a new physical landscape.
HISTORY

Disneyization refers to the proliferation of Disney theme-park-like phenomena in all aspects of society. When applied to urban development is it known as Disneyfication and refers to clean, often tourist-friendly environments that have been stripped of their layered physical history to provide for a cohesively themed urban district. A Disneyfied urban realm consists of “a social order which is controlled by an all-powerful organization”, and the disguise of all production and service related activities to make room for pure consumption. Sharon Zukin writes about Disneyfication as the sanitization of a space and the imposition of physical controls on how they experience that space. Such examples of Disneyfication in Philadelphia have generally been based around historic themes and include Ed Bacon’s recreation of Society Hill, Old City, Penn’s Campus and Independence Mall. In these areas the city has attempted to make a modern place authentically historic through selective destruction and preservation, ultimately resulting in a system of false historic places. Philadelphia has selectively chosen eras of the city’s history to “preserve” or re-create while neglecting others. Philadelphia’s tourism industry relies heavily on colonial and political themes that are physically manifested in 18th century architecture. Independence Mall was created by tearing down a significant portion of the city’s 19th century building stock. Society Hill developed through a process of eminent domain where communities were dismantled and forced to leave in order to re-create the neighborhood’s image as a historic place. These places have been sanitized in different ways, some through enforced homogenization of economic classes (Society Hill, University of Pennsylvania) and others through the

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10 Bryman, The Disneyization of Society p. 27
11 Zukin, The Cultures of Cities p. 65
destruction of structures that haven’t been maintained or don’t fit a desired image (Old City, Independence Mall). Philadelphia’s industrial building stock has an extremely significant history that the city has neglected and left to rot instead of celebrating through the re-use and upkeep of these industrial spaces and structures. It is only the private developers that have capitalized on Philadelphia’s vacant industries, building residential and office spaces in former industrial buildings.

Today Philadelphia is in danger of losing its often-vibrant street life and historic rowhome lifestyle thanks to the proliferation of modern residential towers. Inga Saffron, a prominent Philadelphia architecture critic worries that the traditional pedestrian and rowhome scaled streets are becoming a landscape of private towers accessible only by roadways and garages, stripping the city of its pedestrian activity.

SUMMARY

The marketing and planning of Philadelphia and any other city must consider many important factors. In this investigation I suggest three important elements to consider in the revitalization and marketing of Philadelphia - the provision of cultural and recreational amenities, incorporation of a democratic design process and enforcing historically relevant or even historically-conscious development. While these are only a few of the issues at stake in re-imagining any city, they will be discussed further as primary drivers in a plan for the re-use of Philadelphia’s industrial landscape. A sense of pride and a unique sense of place will protect and popularize Philadelphia when a successful balance between public historic re-use, community influence in the planning process and the provision of cultural and recreational amenities is achieved.

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12 Sorkin, Variations on a Theme Park p. xiii
PHILADELPHIA INDUSTRY

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries Philadelphia was a hub of industrial activity. Once considered “the workshop of the world” for its diversity of manufacturing operations, today many remnants of this thriving past stand un-used.  Their fate rides on the city’s ability and interest in preserving and re-imagining these infrastructures that fueled Philadelphia during its industrial heyday. In 1876, Philadelphia was the host of the Centennial Exposition, a celebration of the city and country’s industrial developments. By the 1920s almost every industrial practice known to man took place in Philadelphia. Some of the most well known industries included the Baldwin Locomotive Plant, the Stetson Hat Company Factory and the Henry Disston Saw Company. Philadelphia is unlike every other post-industrial American city because of the diversity of industries that it once housed.

A city with such a rich and unique industrial history would benefit from some sort of organized preservation and celebration. While historical city museums exist, the Atwater Kent Museum being the most well known, there is a void in the city’s general reference to its industrial heritage. Given the lack of preservation and exhibitions devoted to it, Philadelphia seems ashamed of its history as a manufacturing city. The physical history that is preserved and celebrated is mainly colonial and political. At the very least, public use of Philadelphia’s industrial buildings would inspire a civic consciousness of the city’s almost forgotten past and develop a means to celebrate the physical presence of some of the city’s greatest achievements. While private residential

14 Scranton, *Work Sights* p. 3
15 Scranton, *Work Sights*
and commercial re-use shows an appreciation and investment in these structures among those with access to the buildings, new uses that would allow a public experience and interaction would instill a broad civic respect for Philadelphia’s industrial history.

PUBLIC INDUSTRIAL RE-USE

Architecture, especially that of the civic building, can be used as a social mechanism to market a city. Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (Figure 1) has had tremendous power in redefining the public image of that city. Cities around the world are attempting to create similar physical icons. Richard Meier’s Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (Figure 2) has been a significant force in gentrifying the once impoverished immigrant district of Raval. Sydney’s Opera House (Figure 3) has become an international symbol for the entire city. To different degrees, countless other structures have had similar impacts on their surroundings both in the US and abroad. As mentioned previously, while being powerful symbols for an urban region, these buildings have a reputation of directly contrasting their surroundings and producing a disneyized/pre-packaged effect.

Philadelphia has the capacity to create iconic urban structures to market its image while avoiding the establishment of the false aesthetic, as described by Bryman Paz-Balibrea and Hannigan, with little reference to the city’s history or current neighborhoods. Such capacity derives from the wealth of unused or abandoned industrial structures that line the rivers and the fringes of the central urban core begging for imaginative new uses.
Industrial re-use is a common practice in Philadelphia. Some of the most desirable apartments and offices are in former warehouses and factories. Real-estate investors are quick to put money into old buildings in up and coming neighborhoods, convert them into lofts and sell them at a high price. This practice is also not unique to Philadelphia. The post-industrial landscape of many cities is quickly turning to the privatized residential real-estate market. In order to market Philadelphia’s industrial architecture, some of its development must shift to publicly accessible uses that allow for a civic experience of industrial space. Philadelphia, unlike many other cities, has the building stock to get inventive with its industrial re-use in the public realm. The public building in this sense is not necessarily city owned but it is meant to host the masses for any number of educational, cultural, entertainment, recreational or service-based experience. Looking to other cities, such as London, North Adams, Massachusetts and Barcelona for examples, Philadelphia can turn its vacant industry into the city’s pride.

London presents one of the most well known international examples of public oriented industrial re-use. The Tate Modern Gallery on the Thames River in London was once the Bankside Power Station (Figure 4) designed by Giles Gilbert Scott and constructed in stages from 1947 until 1963. Most of the station had been unused since 1981 before Tate purchased it in 1994. The massive structure neighbors the low-income neighborhood of Southwark where a replica Shakespearean Globe Theater was being constructed as Tate was beginning to re-think Bankside. This local community was included in the planning process for the site and was excited about bringing people to their neighborhood as its cultural facilities developed. Tate held a competition to select an architect to redesign the building. Of the initial 149 submissions from all over the
world they eventually cut the list to 13 and finally settled on the Swiss firm Herzog and De Meuron. Since an official listing of architecturally significant structures in London did not protect the building from being redesigned, Tate and their architects could selectively preserve certain parts the original structure. This also allowed Herzog and De Meuron the freedom to come up with a radical new design instead of being confined to the original building plans.\(^{16}\)

Fortunately much of the structure’s defining exterior elements were incorporated into the final design. The building was re-created to display the character of the new architects without overpowering the original design by Gilbert Scott. Today the Tate Modern is one of the most well known examples of industrial re-use for the display of art. It is also a significant addition to London’s growing list of internationally renowned architectural landmarks.\(^{17}\) The Tate Modern is not a publicly owned building, but it is a civic institution with indoor (the Turbine Hall) and outdoor publicly accessible spaces to anyone who wishes to explore them. Even without paying the museums entrance fee, all of London can appreciate the newly re-used power station as a beautiful building inside and out. (Figure 5, 5.5)

The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA) in North Adams, an industrial site with an incredibly rich history was re-developed in the mid-1990s into the world’s largest contemporary art museum, performance and educational center. (Figure 6) The complex of industrial structures displays a rich variety of architecture dating back to the 1760s. From 1862 to 1942 the site was a textile mill for the Arnold Print Works and from 1942 until 1985 it was the home of the Sprague Electric

\(^{16}\) Sabbagh, *Power into Art* p. 16
\(^{17}\) Moore, *Building Tate Modern* p. 13
Company. As major electrical companies moved their operations overseas, the plant was shut down and like many post-industrial American cities, North Adams became a home to vacant industrial structures and unemployed factory workers.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1986 Williams College and the Mayor of North Adams began investigating the potential of re-using the massive Sprague Electric Company site for the exhibition of contemporary art. The following year a private/public coalition of regional business and political leaders was created to petition the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for support of the mill’s re-use considering its value as a historic site (the Mill is listed on the National Register of Historic Places). The mill could be redeveloped to boost the local economy as a cultural center and tourist destination. Unlike the Tate Modern which was designed by an architect, the industrial complex in North Adams was created by engineers and carpenters and was built up as buildings and structures were needed. This patchwork architecture that is typical of 19\textsuperscript{th} century New England industrial buildings made the site even more attractive to Mass MoCA and the architects re-envisioning it. American Annuity Group, the new owner of Sprague Electric, donated the complex to Mass MoCA in 1987, but, for a number of reasons, it wasn’t until 1995 when the state finally gave $18.6 million in matching funds to begin the renovation of the museum. In the interim, Mass MoCA chose Bruner/Cott & Associates to be the primary Architects for the site. The museum as it stands today reflects the power of public/private investment in creating a completely unique center for the arts. With its massive industrial spaces, many works that wouldn’t fit in a traditional museum can be displayed. (Figure 7) It is completely wired with fiber optic cable to create new ways of displaying and expressing

\textsuperscript{18} Trainer, \textit{Mass MoCA}
artists’ creations not only through the museum complex itself but also with other educational institutions and media corporations. There are multiple stages and performance spaces and studios for the creation of both sculptural and new media artworks. Thanks to the museum, North Adams has become a focal point for art, tourism and progressive urban design. The current museum is also an example of democratic design. The original plans for the museum consisted primarily of art exhibition spaces with jobs in the service industry for the local North Adams community. The final design however provides cultural and educational facilities to the town of North Adams while also creating jobs not only in services but also in multimedia applications, education and performance. In this way the museum has become a pillar in the community as a regional cultural institution that has embraced rather than rejected its local community. Mass MoCA presents an excellent example for Philadelphia as an inventive way to rethink an old industrial complex, re-create a city’s cultural image and engage the local community.

Barcelona provides examples of both Disneyfication as mentioned previously in the Raval district as well as community and historically conscious public industrial re-use. Like many American cities, there is significant pressure from real-estate speculators to convert old factory and warehouse structures into lofts and offices. Commercial uses like car sales and storage are also housed in old industrial structures. (Figure 8) Some of the most interesting examples of industrial re-use in Barcelona, however, are the old factories that have been redesigned as civic institutions. They’ve become schools, senior centers, libraries, cafes, exhibition spaces, recreation clubs and theaters. (Figure 9) The

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19 Trainer, Mass MoCA
20 Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* p. 102
21 Basiana, *Ciudad de Fabricas*
funding for these renewed uses often comes from the local government and its allotted budget for funding cultural services. In many cases, neighborhood groups, often composed of old factory workers, petition the city to preserve their local factory and give it a new civic use. When the support is strong enough, the city government will host a competition to redesign the buildings according to the needs of the community.\(^2\)

Sometimes a private entity or individual will buy or lease a structure from the city for a low price on the condition that they rehabilitate the building. There are many strong proponents of industrial re-use and historic preservation in Barcelona. The city provides many successful examples of the extremely difficult process of balancing between re-using a building for something other than its original use while maintaining some of the original machinery and historic structures within it. (Figure 10)

TransEuropeHalles is a network of once vacant structures that have been revitalized for public, cultural uses throughout Europe. Each structure is part of this network because it adheres to a set of programmatic guidelines that have been laid out by the TransEuropeHalles organization. The buildings are converted markets, military barracks, warehouses and workshops that were once abandoned and have since become centers for creative communities. The network includes thirty “factories” in nineteen countries that share the definition as “democratized realms of imagination”\(^,\)\(^3\). These buildings have been turned into true hubs of community each with distinctive physical and programmatic attributes that relate to the local community and strive to promote artistic expression. They house concert halls, recording studios, bocce courts, skateboard parks, gymnastics schools, gyms, record shops, classrooms, dance performance and

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\(^2\) Basiana, *Mediateca Can Fabra*

\(^3\) *The Factories: Conversions for Urban Culture*, p. 4.5
practice spaces, artists studios, multimedia workshops, cafes, lounges, bars, movie theaters, exhibition spaces just to name a few of the uses. The buildings belong to the local communities that strove to re-invent them but are connected throughout Europe as nodes of cultural and artistic exchange. Such unique structures question the potential design of communities, making unusual spaces home to creative and cultural opportunities for all local residents.\textsuperscript{24}

Most European cities have devoted departments of culture, established specifically for the funding and hosting of cultural amenities and programs. American cities often lack the finances necessary to support comprehensive public cultural programs. For this reason cultural programming in the United States is almost completely funded by private entities. This unfortunate circumstance makes it difficult to say Philadelphia can easily develop a citywide TransEuropeHalles-style network of industrial spaces. There are however lessons to be learned from European examples in terms of overcoming design challenges in adapting old industries and brainstorming new ideas about how to inventively re-use old buildings to best serve the local community. Philadelphia and the state of Pennsylvania, like North Adams Massachusetts, does have the capacity to provide incentives for public/private partnerships that will work to create similar spaces to those found in the TransEuropeHalles Network, Barcelona, the Tate Modern and Mass MoCA. Cultural, community-oriented, historically relevant design has been done well all over the world. Philadelphia must embrace these examples and the principals they instill when looking to re-think its industrial landscape.

\textsuperscript{24} The Factories: Conversions for Urban Culture p. 4.5
PHILADELPHIA 2006

Sandwiched between New York and Washington D.C., Philadelphia has always had difficulty identifying itself and attracting international attention. The city’s efforts to retain big business and raise its residential population must run in tandem with investment in public institutions, services and amenities. Philadelphia’s inaccessible and underappreciated rivers are ideal sites for realizing a network of such public facilities. Once the hubs of Philadelphia’s industry, the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers have been the foci for debate about how to remake the city’s public sphere. With the Mayor’s commitment to investment in public access to the waterfront and EDAW’s Tidal Schuylkill River Master Plan for the Schuylkill River Development Corporation calling for a planned park network running along the river’s banks, Philadelphia’s old industrial buildings on the water have become targets for both investment and destruction. At this pivotal point, looking to cities like Barcelona, London and North Adams and considering how to incorporate elements of culture, history and democracy could give Philadelphia and its stakeholders the basis for a cohesive plan outlining what to do with its old industrial buildings while recasting its image.

THE LOWER SCHUYLKILL: A NEW FRONTIER

Southwest Philadelphia is home to some of the city’s most polluting industries. (Figure 11) The most infamous one is the Sunoco Refinery on Passyunk Avenue which

25 EDAW is an international landscape architecture, urban planning, urban design, environmental planning and economic, social and cultural services company.
sits on 1000 acres of land along the Schuylkill and can refine up to 330,000 barrels of crude oil a day.\textsuperscript{26} This facility has posed a number of health risks to residents in Southwest Philadelphia as well as causing considerable damage to the river and its surrounding ecosystems. In addition to the refinery, the area hosts a number of waste industries including multiple landfills, a Philadelphia Gas Works plant as well as recycling stations and plants. CSX Transportation Inc, a freight rail giant, has multiple tracks running through Southwest Philadelphia including a rail yard just North of the refinery. The trains carry hazardous waste and chemicals through many residential neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{27} The airport sits just across the Delaware River where it meets the Schuylkill emitting many noxious fumes as well as contributing significant noise pollution to the area. Finally, large fields of car recycling and scrapping centers make up much of Southwest Philadelphia’s landscape taking up acres of potentially valuable land and leaking noxious chemicals into the soil. These pollutants have left Southwest Philadelphia residents and laborers with high rates of asthma and cancer.\textsuperscript{28}

There are a number of initiatives working to clean up Southwest Philadelphia. The Schuylkill River Development Corporation (SRDC) is the most notable organization working to change the city’s relationship with the river, especially in Southwest Philadelphia. EDAW completed the Tidal Schuylkill River Master Plan in 2000 (Figure 12) and the SRDC has already begun to follow through on EDAW’s plans for a continuous network of green spaces, pathways and streets running along the Schuylkill from Fairmount Park to the Delaware River at Fort Mifflin.

\textsuperscript{26} http://www.sunocoinc.com/aboutsunoco/facphlf.htm (page accessed on 3/18/06)  
\textsuperscript{27} Lin, \textit{Railcars Full of Hazards} \textit{The Philadelphia Inquirer} 2 December 2005.  
\textsuperscript{28} Interview with Maggie Anderson Powell of Eastwick CDC 12/05
The first section connecting the Fairmount Water Works to Walnut Street has been completed and changes are already evident. With a brand new dock at Chestnut Street and lighting and landscaping along the path, the area is seeing significant use as well as new residential construction rising just next to the path at JFK and at Race streets. (Figure 13) This small section of the path has already proved successful in connecting Center City and West Philadelphia to Kelly Drive and the Art Museum area while becoming a destination for runners, bicyclists, fishers, walkers and people looking to relax along the river. The path also provides great views of West Philadelphia’s monumental architecture including the 30th Street Post Office Building, 30th Street Station and the new Cira Center.

The next section of the path is proposed to run from South Street along the East bank of the river until the Grey’s Ferry Avenue Bridge where the trail will cross the Schuylkill on an un-used railroad bridge and run up to Bartram’s Gardens at 52nd and Lindberg Avenue. In addition to the river trail, a network of streetscape improvements along Lindberg and Grey’s Ferry Avenues will create a loop back to Center City and the South of South district. The preliminary design has been completed by MGA Partners Architects. (Figure 14)

Just up the river on the Western bank a number of acres are being redesigned to attract investment and new activity around 30th Street Station and the Post Office. In conjunction with The University of Pennsylvania, Center City District, the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Corporation and Legg Mason Real Estate Services, Sasaki, an urban design, architecture and planning firm from Boston, created the Schuylkill Gateway Plan (Figure 15) which establishes 30th Street Station and its immediate surroundings as a gateway between Center City and West Philadelphia. The plan
incorporates a number of initiatives to make the area more pedestrian friendly with a large public plaza between The Post Office and the Train Station, new parks and bridges, landscaping, office spaces, retail and new residential opportunities in old buildings. The Schuylkill Gateway plan was created in conjunction with Sasaki’s plans for The University of Pennsylvania’s recent Postal Lands acquisition which will eventually re-develop 24 acres of land just south of 30th Street Station along the Schuylkill.

Physical development at 30th Street is already evident with the brand new Cira Center building designed by world famous architect Cesar Pelli. (Figure 16) This 28-story building sets the stage for high-rise development West of the Schuylkill. The building has a landmark glass harp-like design that makes it stand out among Philadelphia’s taller structures. Moving South just across the South Street Bridge on the East side of the Schuylkill, the John F. Kennedy Building, originally home to industrial tenants and later the Philadelphia School District, is being converted into loft apartments.29 The entire South of South neighborhood has become a hot spot for development especially along the river where the historic Naval Home has also been converted into a luxury townhouse and condo community.

Development at the fringes of Center City on the banks of the Schuylkill is only expected to continue as industrial properties and vacant plots are converted into residential and office buildings and the Schuylkill River Trail extends towards Bartram’s Gardens. The trail as well as new docks at Bartram’s Gardens and Chestnut Street provides new ways to access Southwest Philadelphia from Center City, shortening the distance between the two. If the trail sees the same volume of use as the current Center City trail, certain private development will ensue capitalizing on the influx of people along the river. Developers are already eyeing significant portions of land in Southwest

Philadelphia as the city works to re-zone the river’s banks from industrial to mixed-use. While many of the health and environmental concerns remain, with continued investment in the area and coming zoning changes, wherever possible large polluters will begin to leave making way for more lucrative land uses. It is the responsibility of the city and civic-minded organizations to reserve some of this land and the industrial structures that inhabit it for public uses.

Even though much of the waterfront properties in Southwest Philadelphia are industrial, there is a significant population living in the area. The involvement and considerations of this community are important for all new development and planning in the area. While the river can provide excellent opportunities for residential and commercial development, these new uses must be sensitive to the lower-income community in the area. Civic institutions like cultural centers, schools, senior centers, museums and libraries have the potential to become hubs of community activity, allowing the area’s current residents to appreciate their local river, an asset that has long been neglected and mistreated. Small cultural institutions exist throughout Southwest Philadelphia, but aside from the Universities and the underused Bartram’s Gardens, there are no civic cultural environments along the Lower Schuylkill that attract people from all over the city and service the local community.

The Lower Schuylkill provides ample spaces and opportunities to realize a new physical symbol for Philadelphia. Embracing local communities and its industrial past and looking to examples in London, Barcelona and Massachusetts, the area can become a source of pride for the city.

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U.S. GYPSUM: A PLACE FOR THE CITY

An in depth review of one potential site for industrial re-use along the Schuylkill in Southwest Philadelphia will illustrate the best way to uphold the principals of history, community and culture in Philadelphia’s revitalization. The old U.S. Gypsum plant sits vacant on the waterfront property just South of Bartram’s Gardens. (Figure 17) It is accessible via South 56th Street which runs off Lindberg Avenue, a road serviced by SEPTA’s trolley system. (Figure 18) Neighboring the plant to the West is Bartram’s Village lies a Public Housing Project, home to 500 families. South of the plant sits a massive tract of vacant land. The EDAW plan calls for a residential community to be developed in the area. The Southwest Community Development Corporation’s Woodland Avenue Revitalization Project is aligned with the EDAW plan calling for a mixed-use residential, commercial and institutional development on this land. There is already significant interest in the site from numerous developers and planners. Because of its proximity to Center City, the coming river trail that will run right up to the site and enhance access, the increasing price of riverfront property in Southwest Philadelphia and the structure’s open plan, which does not lend it self to office or residential conversion, U.S. Gypsum is the perfect site for a civic institution making use of an important and symbolic building of the area’s industrial past.

The plant itself is a complex of steel and brick structures including large warehouse storage spaces, open halls, and a massive metal silo. (Figure 19) The building runs right up to the water where a small dock already exists. Significant open space surrounds the building on the South and West Sides including a covered shed area. Graffiti artists have appropriated some of the walls outside and inside the building with large colorful murals. Some of the original machinery from the plant still stands

32 http://www.southwestcdc.org/pdfs/SWIFT.pdf (page accessed on 4/24/06)
including an outdoor conveyor belt on the South side of the building. Much of the interior is empty and in need of repairs. The brick complex especially needs work as most of its windows are broken or gone and some of the exterior brickwork is crumbling. The large window portals and skylights on the brick building drench the interior with natural light.

The large metal structures are windowless but could provide ample space for exhibitions, performances or large gatherings. Even the covered metal shed area lends itself as an outdoor performance space. (Figure 20) The entire set of structures is comprised of large spaces that are ideal for public use. Unlike a traditional warehouse or multi-story industrial building with high ceilings and open floor plans, this building has large open halls and metal storage structures that would not be ideal loft apartments. U.S. Gypsum calls for a new use that would provide public access.

In their respective plans EDAW and the Southwest CDC specifically suggest turning the site into an Industrial History Museum, a use that could be very successful if it engaged local Southwest Philadelphia residents. EDAW sought community input on the entire Schuylkill Trails project and found strong support for an industrial museum at the 20 plus community meetings they organized with the SRDC. The idea originated out of a public charrette where artists, planners and designers brainstormed preliminary ideas about how to re-imagine the area. The designers based the museum model on the Dia Beacon, a contemporary art museum in an industrial waterfront structure in Beacon, New York. The design for a museum in US Gypsum hasn’t passed the preliminary conceptual stage. Recently support for the museum among community residents and local stakeholders has dwindled as the focus for the SRDC has narrowed on just the provision of a public trail system along the river. A private organization with the funds to purchase and clean up the site and the willingness to partner with local and state

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33 EDAW, *The Tidal Schuylkill Master Plan*
34 Phone Interview with Joseph Syrnick and Louise Turan at the SRDC
governments to help fund a public space would be the ideal candidate for gathering steam behind a new use at U.S. Gypsum. Universities like Penn or USP as well as corporations like Comcast or Liberty Property Trust have the resources necessary to get the ball rolling on riverfront re-use.

U.S. Gypsum is a prime spot for public re-use because it can market the city in many ways. With a mix of private and public funding, a design on par with the Tate Modern or Mass MoCA would be completely possible. The site’s proximity to University City also allows for potential connections with local universities as sources of funding and support for a cultural amenity. Like Mass MoCA’s collaboration with Williams College, there are many possible private universities in the area that could play a huge role in re-developing the lower Schuylkill. The site’s prime location on the water and along the future Schuylkill River Trail will provide the opportunity for easy access to and from Center City via the trail, trolley or even future water transport. Most importantly the principals of Community, Culture, and History could easily be upheld as guidelines for development.

COMMUNITY
Whatever program is decided for the site, the principal of community and democratic planning must be prioritized as development continues in the area. This overarching theme of community involvement through design charettes, public meetings and discussions, and a transparent planning process would be integral to both a historically conscious and cultural new use. As an exemplar development involving residents and workers in Southwest Philadelphia, the re-used structure would be a pillar and a pride, respected and used by the people who gave their input to ensure its design would truly service the community. Finally, a municipal or city affiliated organization like the Parks Department or the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Corporation could be involved in working with private investors to secure the site as a publicly accessible facility for the city and the local community.
CULTURE
As a cultural facility, the site would attract people to Southwest Philadelphia and bring investment to local businesses and institutions. A cultural community-oriented use, in a similar vein to the TransEuropeHalles structures, could also service the local residents with potential amenities like classroom, exhibition, meeting and performance spaces to encourage and provide for civic interaction. Like Mass MoCA the site could be a place for the city and its visitors as well as a home to local residents who would participate more actively and regularly in the cultural services that it provides as well as potentially being employed within the institution.

HISTORY
The building is a physical remnant of Philadelphia’s industrial past and simply its re-use would be a celebration of that past. Re-use would also allow a substantial structure with structural and architectural integrity yet unprotected by the National Register of Historic Places, not unlike the Tate Modern, to be completely and daringly re-designed instead of being torn down and built over or just left to decay. The Schuylkill River is both a historic and current network of industrial spaces and structures, many of which are vacant, and can be turned into a thriving asset to the city via re-use and enhanced public access. U.S. Gypsum would only be first step in re-using Philadelphia’s industrial riverfront.

CONCLUSION

In much of the 19th and 20th centuries “Philadelphia” was synonymous with industry. This past is fading fast as physical evidence deteriorates from neglect, is destroyed to make room for new uses, or is converted into unrecognizable, privatized spaces where the general public has no connection to their present or past uses. In making Philadelphia an authentic world-class city in the 21st century, the vacant building
stock must be re-interpreted in unique ways that allow the public to appreciate them. Emphasizing the city’s history through progressive design is in itself a cultural phenomenon that can attract people. Instead of destroying layers of the city, they should be highlighted and revamped to suit the needs of local citizens and visitors. It is this layer of industry that is ripe to be re-imagined. The creation of new communal spaces out of unused remnants will result in a historically conscious yet modern landscape that balances Philadelphia’s past by adapting it to the city’s current needs and uses. The success of this progressive industrial re-use will ride on how developers and designers approach historical, cultural and democratic principals so as to remain authentic to Philadelphia. After one successful redevelopment, more will follow, eventually leading to a citywide network of public cultural, educational and historic amenities open to everyone who experiences Philadelphia.
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FIGURES:

Figure 1: The Guggenheim Museum Designed by Frank Ghery in Bilbao, Spain
(http://www.artdreamguide.com/adg/adg_ESP/ba_ESP/bilba_ba/m_gugge/img/_jpg/gugge_03.jpg)

Figure 2: Museum of Contemporary Art Designed by Richard Meier in Barcelona, Spain
Figure 3: Sydney Opera House Designed by Jorn Utzon in Sydney, Australia
(http://contrapunctus.net/league/photo/pcd1726/289.php)

Figure 4: The Bankside Power Station Designed by Giles Gilbert Scott in London, England (Below Left) (http://www.tate.org.uk/archivejourneys/historyhtml/bld_mod_site.htm)

Figure 5: The New Tate Modern Designed by Herzog and De Meuron (Above Right) (http://www.artthrob.co.za/00may/images/tate02a.jpg)
Figure 5.5: The Tate Modern Turbine Hall
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Figure 6: The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art Designed by Bruner/Cott & Associates
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Figure 7: Large Interior Exhibition Space in Mass MoCA
(http://www.williamstownchamber.com/library/mass_moca/FromBalc-whole.jpg)

Figure 8: Barcelona Car Dealership in old industrial building (6/05)
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