

Final Journal

This week, Monday was presentation from students about their sites, and Wednesday was discussion about the themes and trends we had learned about during the final presentations.

I presented my site on Monday. My presentation briefly covered each of the major topics we had covered in our papers. I explained how I selected the site because I was interested in the economic and cultural influences from Fenway Park and the influences of nearby educational institutions. I covered the notable natural forces on the site – primarily via the Emerald Necklace, but also via other on-the-ground observations. I explained the history of the site by exploring previous land uses, previous tenants, and the patterns they represented, and matched the changes with photos that I had taken. Finally, I covered the traces and trends of the site with photographs I had taken, drawing the photo evidence into repeated themes I noticed while exploring the site. I concluded by looking forward for the site. I envisioned a future for the site where many of the dilapidated buildings had been redeveloped into upscale residential units for the young professionals who were increasingly making their careers in Boston. The future residents would make use of public transport, use bicycles, or walk. I drew out this future from the current trends that I had already noticed on the site – the increased use of transport, the many new mixed-use developments that were being built nearby the site, and the types of residents that were already residents of the neighborhood.

After presentations on Monday, we had an open discussion on the sites. The major theme that emerged was the influence of institutions on the sites that had been presented. For example, Tufts Medical Center was recently built in Chinatown and was expanding there. Another example was the Christian Science Center, which was shrinking and the excess space was being taken up by Northeastern University. Many students expressed anti-institution, anti-development views, believing that it was not fair that these institutions were displacing residents to expand their campuses. In particular, one person studying Chinatown hoped that the residents would organize against Tufts Medical to prevent their expansion.

I had much the opposite opinion. Fifty years ago, Boston was stuck in an economic malaise as its manufacturing base declined – its largest industry and employer. These institutions had brought tremendous wealth and a huge general economic recovery to Boston, and now Boston is a globally influential city because of them. The institution, with their billions of dollars of endowments, had made a huge investment into the city, and they attracted top talent from across the globe. Since education is such a huge driver of Boston's economy, the city should embrace and support its expansion. Since Boston has historically had very small plots, it is difficult for institutions to gather the necessary land. The anti-development mindset

will not make the housing more affordable – instead, it will push up the cost of doing business more.

I think the American city is inherently dynamic – its land uses are never fixed, its economy never at a rest, and its people always open to new ideas. That's why redevelopment by different owners is not something to be fought against. I think the urban planning discipline puts too much weight in preservation instead of change. This may be because we are studying the discipline in Boston, one of America's staunchly preservationist cities. In comparison, Chicago seems to generally be a more pro-development city at the government level, even though both have anti-development groups. Since "city processes in real life are too complex to be routine" (Jacobs 441) many development plans in both these cities are reviewed on a case-by-case basis, demanding changes on the project until it fits the government worker's vision for the city – a vision that mirrors other developments they have worked with.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed the class. I learned to see the urban landscape from multiple perspectives – natural and historical, as well as economic. It was only towards the end of the class that we had open discussions on our sites' futures. I was enjoying the debates we were having about gentrification and site development, and it revealed which perspective we put more value on. I put the most value into the economic perspective; I believe that a city must first have a healthy economy first to be able to make investments into its appearance and well-being. I have been exposed to a huge variety of perspectives through the course.