INTRODUCTION

With a global migrant population of over 200 million people, international mobility of labor is one of the most significant contributing factors to both globalization and urbanization worldwide.¹

It is widely recognized that globalization is a function of the liberalized flow of capital, commodities and labor across borders and that economic opportunity is increasingly concentrated in urban areas. However, migration policy discussions at the national or international level give little attention to the local nature of this phenomenon; migrants move to cities and have an impact as well as spatial demands on the local environment in which they live. This project highlights the local aspect of global migration; the places where migrants settle, form communities and networks, and establish economic and social spaces. Through several case studies, using mapping, interviews and photography, it explores the potential for planners and architects to create and maintain inclusive, sustainable physical environments for migrant communities.

Migration of labor across domestic and international boundaries has long contributed to rapidly urbanizing cities and their globalizing economies. Migrant workers have constructed the spatial and social landscapes of New York, London and Amsterdam in the past, and they continue to shape the futures Beijing and Dubai among others. Migrant workers are powerful catalysts in the development of their host cities as well as in the economies of their home countries.² Current trends indicate that migration will continue to be a major factor in the increasing rates of urbanization around the world. Migration therefore, becomes an urban issue and one that falls squarely within the realm of urban governance, planning and architecture. The relationship between urban policy and the politics of migration takes on a critical dimension for the future of the city.

The existence of an estimated 20-30 million or more irregular or “illegal” immigrants around the world illustrates the fact that globalization has been far more successful in opening borders to capital and commodity flows than it has been in addressing the complexity of labor flows across borders.³ This reality, along with differences both real and perceived, between native populations and immigrants give rise to systems that create and maintain inequity within the city with regard to economic opportunity, access to housing and services, public safety and human rights. The challenge to the planning and design professions therefore, is to recognize

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¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2004
² We use the term migration or migrants for both internal migration from rural to urban areas, as well as international immigration
systems which perpetuate stratification between native and migrant populations and to provide inclusive and sustainable urban environments where migrants live.

With an emphasis on housing, public spaces and services, the following questions are addressed:

- What relationships to their host city do migrants develop? How do they identify with the host city?
- What factors promote stratification or prevent migrants from accessing housing and services or participating fully in the life of the city?
- What services and spaces could be designed to better accommodate migrants in their host cities, albeit temporarily?
- What economies are created in the host cities that rely on migrants and their global personal networks?
BEIJING

The monumental urban revitalization of China’s cities currently underway is being performed on the shoulders of 29 million migrant construction workers. Most of them are recruited in their villages by construction companies for short-term jobs, with very little training or regard for construction standards or health and safety requirements. An estimated number of 1.5 million so-called floating people are working on construction sites in Beijing comprising 10% of the city’s total population. High costs of living and the strict hukou system, which divides China’s population into rural and urban residents leaves them with no choice but to remain floating. The hukou household registration system, introduced in 1958 to keep peasants on the land, regulates access to government services such as housing, education and health care. Chinese can access such services only in the place in which they are registered. About 950 million Chinese, 75% of the total population possesses a rural hukou. Migrant workers travel back to their villages between jobs or for the harvest and send 90% of their salary to their families who rely on this income to survive. Migrants earn lower wages than urban residents, an average 540 yuan ($80) a month in 2004, compared to 1,350 yuan for registered urban residents. Remittances from urban to rural China are estimated to exceed $80 billion a year.

Employers provide housing at minimal cost and minimal standard on the work sites. A room of 250 square feet is typically shared by 10 people. Overcrowding is a common phenomenon and lack of electricity, potable water or heat during the winter months are often reported as the general condition in company provided housing.

Li Chuan Xin from Hunan province came for the summer of 2007 to work for a cleaning company on the site of the Olympic Stadium. A company recruiter came to his village to enlist several hundred men from the region. His salary of 50-60 RMB ($6-8) per day would only be paid out to him at the end of his stay before returning home for the harvest. Until then, he only got a small allowance, which he used to pay for food and a bunk bed in the site’s housing barracks. For Li Chuan Xin, this was his first visit to the capital, but many of his colleagues were returning for the third or fourth time to work on construction sites in the city. Spring festival at the end of April, or the harvest season in the fall are always reasons to go back to the villages but like most other migrant workers, Li Chuan Xin sees no chance to move to the city permanently and relocate his family.

Most migrants do not get health insurance from their urban employers and cannot easily access public health facilities. Similarly, the lack of access to schools and housing prevents migrants from relocating their families. They therefore remain transient, often for decades of their lives.

The Chinese government has been debating whether to loosen the hukou system since the
mid-1990s. The most recent review by the Ministry of Public Security in 2005 concluded that local governments would have to extend to migrants the right to housing, education and health care, at significant cost to local governments.4 So far, local authorities have not been able to address this challenge. Providing housing and other services is still largely left to the employer with very little government oversight. According to Human Rights Watch, the inability to present an urban hukou, still denies migrant workers basic rights within their urban environment.5

Abu Dhabi

In September of 2007, the government of Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, unveiled Plan Abu Dhabi 2030 a comprehensive development plan that will guide the city’s planning decisions for the next 20 years. One of the most notable aspects of this plan is Masdar City, the first zero-waste, zero-carbon, car-free city set to be completed by 2016. Other projects within the plan include the 640-acre cultural complex on Saadiyat (“happiness”) Island where $27 billion will be invested in the development of institutions such as a branch of the Guggenheim Museum, a New York University Campus, a branch of the Sorbonne and the Louvre. These ambitious projects are being realized with the help of approximately 3.6 million immigrants who constitute a massive 90 percent of the private sector workforce in the UAE, predominantly in the fields of construction, hospitality and domestic service. The majority of the working class immigrants are of Asian origin, from countries such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Iran and the Philippines. Institutional and cultural

4 Migration News, October 2008 Volume 14 Number 4
5 “One Year of my blood” HRW Report, 2008
barriers prevent these workers from settling in their host city as permanent residents and relocating their families. Immigrants often face harsh working conditions and substandard living conditions. Many of them live in over-crowded housing camps outside of the city.

Plan Abu Dhabi 2030 attempts to address these issues with a set of guidelines developed by the Higher Corporation for Specialized Economic Zones (Zonescorp), a government agency that require employers to provide six major facilities to the workers: transportation, decent accommodation, drinking water, food, first aid units and recreation centers in so-called worker residential cities.

Category I, or permanent worker residential cities are designed to house workers in the industrial sector. They are leased for 30 years to the employing industry with the option of renewal and are typically located in close proximity to the workplace.

A typical residential city is to be occupied by a mix of workers (60%), technicians (20%) and supervisors (20%), each being allocated a personal space of 6m$^2$, 10 m$^2$ and 20m$^2$ respectively. Structures are made out of prefab concrete and are allowed to be up to 4 stories high.

Category II, or construction worker residential cities are leased to construction companies for the duration of 10 years with the option to renew. Due to their more temporary nature, these structures are built in steel and the allocation of personal space is much smaller. Only 50% of the
total area of the city can be developed as residential. The other 50% is allocated for recreation and entertainment, public areas and parks, mosques, and administrative services. Investors pay penalties for non-compliance, which is often the case according to a representative of Zonescorp.

Of the nine temporary construction worker cities planned, three are currently in operation, primarily in areas far away from downtown Abu Dhabi, leaving workers with a 1.5-2 hour commute to their work site. To address the current shortage of temporary housing for construction workers, Category III is the so-called fast-track residential city. Built as a mobile city out of containers on the construction site, these cities are commissioned for up to four years. While the plan to accommodate 800,000 workers by 2012 is currently being revised due to the global economic downturn and the anticipated slowdown in construction activity, the first permanent workers residential city in the Industrial City of Abu Dhabi (ICAD) is already in operation housing a population of 40,000. By 2010, three more permanent cities will be completed housing 20,000 to 25,000 workers each. Building entire cities of 50,000, the local urban government in Abu Dhabi clearly recognizes the spatial demands of its immigrant population. However, the transient nature of this predominantly male population leaves questions about the vitality of these cities and their ability to be integrated communities.

PORT RICHMOND, STATEN ISLAND

On any given morning in the New York City metropolitan region, an estimated 8,500 day laborers wait on street corners to be picked up by employers to perform a single day’s work. This system is precarious at best, resulting in an unsafe and insecure environment for the workers while appearing dangerous and unsightly to community residents.

Port Richmond is a geographically well situated neighborhood for day laborers to gather. Located on Staten Island’s north shore, it is in close proximity to the Bayonne Bridge connecting Staten Island to New Jersey and is bisected by the MLK Jr. Expressway, a major artery providing access to the rest of the island. Employers coming from throughout the region can easily cross the bridge to pick-up day laborers for work in construction, landscaping and other service jobs.

In 1989, El Centro de Hospitalidad (Project Hospitality), an organization on Staten Island with a long history of service to workers, opened a worker center to provide day laborers an alternative to the street corner. It is currently one of just two such centers in all of New York City. Housed in a donated storefront in the heart of the Port Richmond, the space provides a secure environment for workers and is a point of service for the whole community. While people may

come in initially for a bit of breakfast and to escape the elements, they are quickly introduced to the myriad of services available through the center. This aging, three room storefront is used to organize workers and educate them about their rights. It is also serves as a food pantry, a legal clinic and a health clinic. Workers can have documents translated, find out how to apply for benefits and seek help with housing and public services. Staff offices serve as a base for the Center’s outreach and advocacy work.

In 2006, the mayor of New York initiated a commission to examine the situation of day laborers in the city. After two years of work, the commission determined that worker centers were a legitimate use of public funds and recommended that $2 million be dedicated for the creation of six centers around the city. The creation of these permanent structures helps to legitimizes the presence of day laborers in the city and illustrates how the urban fabric shifts and changes according to the changing needs of a community. Spaces such as these present opportunities for creative design interventions as factors like climate, location and their multi-purpose nature demand flexible adaptive strategies to accommodate the various needs of the center.

Municipalities elsewhere in the United States are beginning to understand the need for worker centers to accommodate the needs day laborers. In 2008, the Los Angeles City Council passed legislation that could require big-box home improvement stores in the to provide temporary shelters equipped with drinking water, toilets, trash cans and tables. Local officials and store owners are now considering the feasibility of more permanent structures as a long-term solution.

SCHENECTADY, NEW YORK

In a bid to save itself from a shrinking population and economic base, the town of Schenectady, NY actively recruited Guyanese immigrants from Richmond Hill, Queens, a Borough of New York City. Starting with bus tours, the Mayor of Schenectady went to unusual lengths to attract new residents to dilapidated neighborhoods in his town.

Schenectady has been losing population for nearly half a century. General Electric, once the city’s major employers had cut its workforce over the years from a high of 40,000 to less than 8,000. In the absence of new industry to replace lost manufacturing jobs, people began leaving the city. In 2000, only 62,000 residents remained, representing a full 33% decline in population over 50 years.

With such dramatic loss of population, the city was left with divested neighborhoods and a shrunken tax base. With few other options available, the administration continued to impose
huge tax increases in order to keep the city afloat. Even with incentives, few native residents were interested in investing in declining neighborhoods.

Guyanese immigrants on the other hand, were motivated to take on these deteriorating properties. Most were living in Richmond Hill, Queens, where rents for a one-bedroom apartment were hovering around $900. A move to Schenectady gave them the opportunity to be property owners and in many cases landlords.

Some took advantage of a program that sold abandoned houses “as is” for one dollar, but with market prices around $11,000 for two and three-family homes, many were able to qualify for mortgages with a 5% down payment. Though the houses needed significant work, much of it was done by the new owners themselves, and the rental units were easily filled by newcomers from Guyana and Queens. Though Schenectady has lost much of its manufacturing base, there continue to be entry level jobs available for low-skilled workers that the Guyanese were qualified for and willing to take. As home values and cost of living are significantly lower in Schenectady, families buy homes on minimum wage salaries—something impossible to achieve in Queens. In the seven or so years that the Guyanese have been coming to Schenectady, signs of their impact on the city are increasingly evident. The streetscape has begun to change as houses are renovated and families move in. Neighborhoods that were “ghost towns” a mere 5 years ago now see increased activity as people tend their yards and shop in the West Indian businesses that are popping up on State Street, the main commercial corridor. West Indian restaurants and groceries mix in with auto-repair shops and businesses specializing in Hindu clothes and

Guyanese businesses and houses of worship in traditional New England architecture
goods for special occasions. A new cricket field was recently built in a nearby park and West Indians come from throughout the region for games and tournaments held in Schenectady. The city held its first Guyana Day celebration in 2008 and plans to continue this tradition. While Schenectady’s larger economic woes still exist, for now one piece of its revitalization strategy seems to be working. There have been some problems reported with crime and racial tension between longtime residents and new immigrants. Despite this however, the Guyanese community continues to grow. There are approximately 7,000 Guyanese now living in Schenectady, comprising more than 10% of the city's population. Traditional migration patterns have begun to change as new immigrants skip over Queens entirely and coming straight to Schenectady where friends and family have already settled.

The recruitment of the Guyanese to Schenectady was one of the primary strategies employed by the city administration to save its deteriorating neighborhoods. Much of its success was predicated on the fact that it did not require any kind on financial investment from the city in order to get started. The experience of Schenectady suggests that active recruitment of immigrants as a potential urban revitalization policy could serve as a model for other shrinking American cities struggling with population loss and neighborhood abandonment.

CONCLUSION

These cases, which represent many others we could have chosen, uncover a variety ways in which the physical presence of migrants help to shape their host cities.

Rural to urban migrants in Beijing, as well as the Southeast Asian migrants in Abu Dhabi are treated as temporary residents though they create an enormous demand for permanent and semi-permanent structures that provide housing and related services. While the former is left completely to the employer and is considered hugely inadequate, the latter is an attempt to recognize the need for decent housing and services for the transient population, albeit entirely without the administrative and governance structure to promote integration.

The workers center on Staten Island provides an example of how very small physical interventions can have a huge impact on the livelihood of immigrants and their host communities by providing a permanent space that legitimizes the presence of day laborers in the city and allows for the appropriate provision of services.

Finally, the experience of the Guyanese in Schenectady illustrates that immigration is closely linked with urban revitalization. Immigrants contribute to the local economy as homeowners and business owners and consumers. Policies that promote migration and integration can serve as a model for other cities in decline.