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## Places

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Fraker, Harrison

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# The Importance of “Place” at the Bellagio Global Summit

Harrison Fraker

I was recently surprised to discover how central the concept of place is within the emerging international debate about how to design more sustainable cities. The occasion was a week-long meeting that served as the last session of a month-long global summit seeking “Innovations for an Urban World,” sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, at Bellagio, in Italy. The event brought together thirty-five specialists from five continents, all with an interest in new forms of planning and design practice and pedagogy to help meet the needs of the world’s rapidly expanding urban poor.

The participants included architects, planners, professors, four deans from three continents (including me), journalists, historians, United Nations

officials, and the directors of planning associations, unions of architects, and research centers. As can be imagined, the disciplines and theoretical backgrounds represented by this group were as diverse as the titles on their business cards.

The workshop’s format included morning plenary discussions that explored the experiences of participants with regard to specific questions. Afternoons were taken up by breakout sessions charged with formulating issues, new questions, recommendations, etc. The overwhelming conclusion from these discussions was that place-based problems and challenges are central to future teaching and research on urban sustainability and to improving the lives of the urban poor.

As the workshop progressed, consensus emerged that there are too many hidden dynamic processes in global cities which are unstudied, undocumented, and poorly understood. Alternatively, knowledge about these conditions may be compartmentalized into bureaucracies or professional silos. At other times, knowledge may reside only in local constituencies, who are not included in political decision-making processes. It was further agreed that place-based explorations need to be deeply interdisciplinary, building a multilayered whole-systems representation of issues and problems. While these conclusions may not come as a surprise to readers of *Places*, the discussions at Bellagio served as a powerful affirmation of this journal’s mission.

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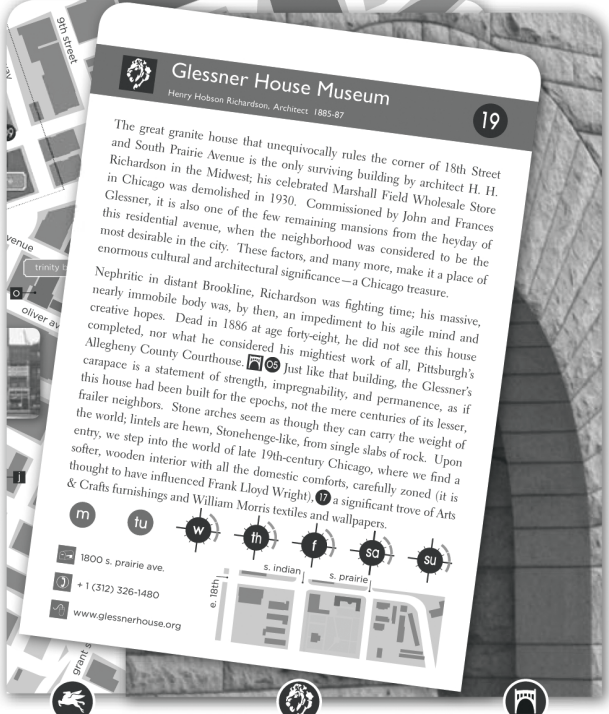
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