“O direito à moradia significa garantir a todos um lugar onde se abrigue de modo permanente, pois, a etimologia do verbo morar, do latim “morari”, significa demorar, ficar. O conteúdo do direito à moradia não significa, tão somente, a faculdade de ocupar uma habitação. A história da habitação está ligada ao desenvolvimento social, econômico e político da humanidade. É imprescindível que essa habitação tenha dimensões adequadas, em condições de higiene e conforto, a fim de atender ao disposto na Constituição Federal, que prevê a dignidade humana como princípio fundamental, assim como o direito à intimidade e à privacidade, e que a casa é um asilo inviolável. Não sendo assim, esse direito à moradia seria um direito empobrecido, pois, considerar como habitação um local que não tenha adequação e dignidade para abrigar um ser humano, é mortificiar a norma constitucional”

(CANUTO, VLACH, 2005).

“The right to housing guarantees everyone access to permanent shelter. The verb “to dwell” in Latin “morari” means to take a while, to stay. The right to a dwelling doesn’t translate only to the act of occupying a habitation. The history of habitation is linked to social, economic and political development of humanity. In order to address requirements set forth by the Constitution, which emphasizes human dignity as the underlying principle, the right to intimacy and privacy signifies that the house is an inviolable refuge. If the right to a dwelling is not as such, then this right is depleted; to consider a habitation a place where there’s a lack of adequacy and dignity to shelter a human being translates to a constitutional violation.”
Hypothesis and Research
The Architect As Aid “Expert”

Architecture is among the most vulnerable professions to economic cycles. The booms and busts of our world economy seem to affect construction and therefore the architecture profession first and foremost out of all other professions. This requires a cyclical reflection towards practice as it undergoes uncontrollable external forces.

Since the most recent global economic meltdown, architects, such as myself, turned to their creativity for solutions out of their own recession. While a minority held on to their seats in their current jobs, or went back to school, unless they didn’t change out of their careers completely, many architects engaged in unconventional methods of practice. While some participated in design competitions or decided to finally take up small but somewhat profitable projects such as a bathroom renovation, others opted to offer their services to unconventional clients, such as community-based institutions, non-governmental organizations, or directly to under-represented communities or families in their hometown or elsewhere across the globe with the primary intention of either improving the lives of others or as an opportunistic approach for a steady flow of projects through their office.

Most Recently, architectural interventions in areas hit by natural disasters or socio-political distress have been celebrated in exhibitions such as MoMA's Small Scale Big Change, and also in publications such as Design Like You Give A Damn, among other numerous popular architectural publications. Consequently, architects became “experts” in national and international aid by many within and outside of the profession. One may argue that architects have an expertise that is necessary in the larger discussion revolving “aid,” but there are also cases, which show that architects are not well equipped to intervene in unconventional settings. Further, numerous “experts” we rely on today to provide aid have actually provided less than standard service to those suffering natural or man-made disasters, while other organizations have gone beyond that which was expected. The architect plays a role in each of the settings described above, at times directly or sometimes indirectly.

The majority of aid funding today goes to fund housing programs. Housing is still a need for many, both in rural and urban environments. While governments around the globe subsidize and fund multiple housing programs, the urban poor have yet to live in adequate housing. The private sector has for decades been proactive in filling in the gaps of where the public sector has seemed to fail. Although very often unregulated, either due to lack of code enforcement or the government's inability to over see the multitude of non-governmental agencies providing housing, privately-funded housing continues to funnel moneys from private donors, foundations, and corporations to programs that claim to eradicate inequality in under-served communities around the globe.

This proposal seeks to evaluate the quality of privately-funded permanent housing projects deployed after the most recent economic downturn, in relation to the varying degrees of the architect’s involvement and participation in such projects, and how architecture has been engaged either directly and/or indirectly in the process.

Methods and Metrics for Evaluation
The Client as Expert

Housing projects that result from aid programs have as clients individuals and families who, due to either a natural disaster or socio-political reasons, have been left with no other alternative for shelter. Because individual needs are subordinated by the international political economy, be it through governmentally or privately funded projects, the housing provided will most often create homogenous settlements. As a result, the families that inhabit them perceive a lack of control over their own home, the perceived absence of social identity and a stronger tie to their home base rather than the place where the home is located. Thus, the resulting “culture of poverty” appearance in such settlements is mistakenly identified as slovenliness on the part of its residents.

In this proposal, my evaluating criteria will be based on the recipient family’s level of domesticity, control, and identity with the home they received as aid. Firstly, I will acquire the original plans for the settlement from the non-governmental agency providing the housing. Then I will visit and reside in the communities where the homes are located and will juxtapose my findings to the original intent of the lead organization. I will conduct interviews with each client (the residents/recipients of the aid), and document – via sketches and photos – the current appropriations and adaptations within and outside their homes, and the degree of decay and/or level of maintenance involved for the upkeep of these homes. I will also attend public meetings that are pertinent to the community’s development and improvement.

1. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that job losses within the architecture profession has been the worst in relation to all other professions. (2008)
2. The term “architect” here is used to encompass all professionals working in the architecture profession, licensed or unlicensed by the national licensing board.
Secondly, in order to evaluate the architect’s role in the project, I will analyze the degree in which the architect intervened. I will first conduct an interview with the responsible architect that led the efforts in order to understand the original goals of the project in comparison with what was built. I will interview the architect involved in order to understand their role, relevant experience in such context, experience leading the architectural efforts, and process and level of engagement with the family or families receiving their services. I will juxtapose my findings to the vernacular architecture existing in neighboring communities and the vernacular of the place of origin of the clients.

There are 5 general categories through which architects engage in the construction of permanent aid housing projects:

I. International aid organization
II. National aid organization
III. Non-governmental agencies specialized in housing
IV. Architectural non-governmental agency
V. The Architect as Agent

In each of these categories, the role of the architect varies in degree of engagement; some which require direct contact with the client, while others work with the clients indirectly. Alternatively, there exists yet another mode which involves a hybrid of the two. In my itinerary, I include at least one organization from each of the above mentioned categories.

Finally, once I have gathered information from each of the sites, I will compare these findings with one another in order to understand if the success of a project is dependent on the architect’s involvement. Perhaps it is the structure of private “aid” that prevents good outcomes from the architect’s intervention. Or perhaps the architect is not well equipped to intervene in a productive manner.

Itinerary
Living with the Experts

There are numerous housing projects that architects have engaged since our last global economic meltdown. For the purposes of this research, I have further organized the list by categorizing the organizations according to their relationship to the architect involved as well as to the degree of engagement from the architect.

Indirect Engagement.
In this mode of project execution, the architect has no direct contact with the site (project location) nor the clients (end users). The non-governmental agency acts as mediator between architect and the information needed to execute project. Some of the organizations consired for itinerary included:

- Food For The Poor, Haiti (International non-governmental organization)
- World Vision, Somalia, Haiti, Africa (International non-governmental organization)
- Un Techo Para Mi Pais, Sao Paulo, Brazil (International housing non-governmental organization)

Engagement with Site but no contact with Client.
A majority of habitation projects will fall under this category. Some of the organizations considered included:

- Echale Tu Casa, Oaxaca, Mexico (national housing non-governmental organization)
- Habitat For Humanity, Haiti (international housing non-governmental organization)
- Un Techo Para Mi Pais, Chile (international housing non-governmental organization)
- Pro-Moradia, Goias, Brazil (national housing non-governmental organization)

Direct Engagement.
In this mode of project execution, the architect has access to both the site and the client. Some of the organizations considered:

- Architecture for Humanity, Biloxi, Mississippi: Biloxi Housing Project (international architectural non-governmental organization)
- Emergency Architects, Paris, France (global projects) (international architectural non-governmental organization)
- Make It Right Foundation, NOLA (non-governmental housing organization)
- Article 25, Haiti (international architectural non-governmental organization)
- Arquitectas Da Comunidade, Sao Paulo, Brazil (architectural non-governmental agency)
- Shiguenu Ban, Sri Lanka (private practitioner)
- Beyond Architecture Group, Italy (private practitioners with National projects)
- PROA Housing Micro-Loans, La Paz, Bolivia (provides loans for home improvements, borrower is required to consult with architect)

3. “Aid” here is being defined as financial aid given by governments and/or other agencies to support the economic, environmental, social and political development of developing countries. It is distinguished from humanitarian aid by focusing on alleviating poverty in the long term, rather than a short term response.
North America
JANUARY 15- March 15

SITE #1: Oaxaca, Mexico (4 weeks)

Project Lead: Echale a Tu Casa
[Funding: Private Donors, Corporations, Foundation Grants.
Architect’s Involvement: Indirect. Architect hired directly by Housing Organization. Need further research to understand how much contact the architect had with site and client.
Organization’s Mission: Echale a Tu Casa is a "social housing production company that delivers affordable homes to communities through the implementation of innovations in construction, technology and finance."

Why this organization: The process in which the architect engages with this organization’s model of building homes is unique because the architect has to design according to the organization’s locally-produced material -- compressed-earth brick. Organization focuses on trade-building and improvement and construction process as economic development tool.

Travel Logistics: Accomodations to be coordinated with Echale Tu Casa within vicinity of homes built.

SITE #2: Biloxi, Mississippi (4 weeks)

Project Lead: Architecture for Humanity
[Funding: Private Donors, Corporations, Foundation Grants.
Architect’s Involvement: Direct. Architect is deployed to site to directly engage with clients and site for duration of construction.
Organization’s Mission: Architecture for Humanity is a "volunteer non-profit organization set up to promote architecture and design to seek solutions to global social and humanitarian crisis."

Why this organization: This project in particular matched families that were displaced by Hurricane Katrina with an architect. The architect consulted directly to family in order to design a sustainable home suitable to their custom needs.

Travel Logistics: Accomodations within community to be facilitated by Architecture for Humanity.
Caribbean: Haiti
March 15- May 15

SITE #3a: Leogane, Haiti (4 weeks)

**Project Lead** Habitat For Humanity

**Funding** Jimmy Carter Foundation, among other Private Donors, Corporations, Foundation Grants.

**Architect’s Involvement** Indirect. Architect hired directly by Housing Organization. Need further research to document architect’s engagement with site and client.

**Organization’s Mission** Habitat For Humanity is a “social housing production company that delivers affordable homes to communities through the implementation of innovations in construction, technology and finance.”

**Why this organization** Habitat for Humanity is one of the leading housing non-governmental organizations, and has served as a model for many other organizations.

**Travel Logistics** Accomodations within community of study to be coordinated with Habitat for Humanity.

SITE #3b: Oranges, Haiti (4 weeks)

**Project Lead** Food for the Poor

**Funding** Private Donors, Corporations, Foundation Grants.

**Architect’s Involvement** Indirect. Details regarding architect’s engagement have yet to be identified.

**Organization’s Mission** “Food For The Poor and our donors work to uplift the poor as they struggle with poverty, hunger and a lack of opportunity. We hear their desperate cries and take swift action, bringing positive and lasting change to these communities’ worker.”

**Why this organization** Food for the Poor’s mission has expanded within the last decade in order to include the construction of housing for their constituents. Although they have built thousands of homes to date, the quality of the housing being provided has yet to be assessed.

**Travel Logistics** Accomodations in community to be facilitated with the help of Food for the Poor.

In 2010 & 2011 I was sent to Haiti from Miami to survey one property for a non-governmental organization led by a Haitian diaspora member. When I came back, I brought back with me to the US two additional projects. There was so much work to be done in Haiti in terms of architecture and a lack of professionals in the field that non-profits all throughout were desperately seeking any architect’s help. My affiliation with Architecture for Humanity at the time was enough credibility.
South America
June 15- August 15

SITE #4: El Alto, Bolivia (4 weeks)

Project Lead: PROA & La Paz Mutual
[Funding: Microfinancing Institution providing housing micro-loans]
Architect’s Involvement: Direct. Architect engages directly with borrower/clients.
Organization’s Mission: PROA's mission involves “unlocking the potential of microfinance to provide shelter for the poor.”

Why this organization: PROA requires that each borrower of a micro-loan for housing improvements consult with an architect or contractor. The goal of my visit will be to understand the architect’s engagement with the borrower and the housing improvements that resulted from that interaction.

Travel Logistics: Accomodations within community to be facilitated by PROA/La Paz Mutual.

SITE #5: Bairro Complexo Oziel, Sao Paulo, Brazil (4 weeks)

Project Lead: Arquitetas da Comunidade
[Architectural non-governmental organization]
Architect’s Involvement: Direct. Architect provided architectural services directly to community members.
Organization’s Mission: Arquitetas da Comunidade is a “non-governmental organization formed by professionals within the field of civil construction who seek to promote interventions that improve habita-
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The research findings by 2008’s Branner Fellow Luke Perry provides great insight into how architects can adopt already existing methods of building – such as the incremental building approach adopted by the general Bolivian population of El Alto and La Paz. I would like to further this research in order to start understanding the already existing roles of the architect in such given context, in order to understand the architect’s contribution in communities that build incrementally and have a financial system of micro-fi-
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Why this organization: Part of their mission is to provide architectural services for a reduced-fee and/or with alternative and accessible methods of payment. I visited the site in 2010 and would compare the new findings with my previous documentation.

Travel Logistics: Accomodations within community to be facilitated by Arquitetas da Comunidade.
Europe
August 15- September 15

SITE #6: L’Aquila, Italy (3 weeks)

Project Lead: Beyond Architecture Group
[architecture firm based in Rome, Italy]
Funding: Private Donors, Corporations, Foundation Grants.
Architect’s Involvement: Direct. Architect provided architectural services directly to community receiving the service.
Organization’s Mission: Beyond Architecture Group is an architecture for-profit company based in Rome, Italy. Their mission is to build sustainable buildings, utilizing low-cost technologies which are easily replicable, even by the unskilled worker.
Why this organization: The architect in this mode of practice is very much engaged with every phase of the project and has direct contact with the site and the client. There is also a push for building techniques which are easily performed by future home-owners/occupants. Sustainability is also part of the firm’s mission.

Travel Logistics: Accomodations within community to be facilitated by architects from Beyond Architecture Group and their clients.

SITE #7: Paris, France (1 week)

Project Lead: Emergency Architects
[international architectural non-governmental organization]
Organization’s Mission: The aim of Emergency Architects is to bring help and technical aid to the victims of natural, technological and human disasters, not only in safety and security evaluations of the populations but also in post-disaster reconstruction programs focused on long-term development and risk mitigation. [Its mission] is to build sustainable buildings, utilizing low-cost technologies which are easily replicable, even by the unskilled worker.

Why this organization: In this part of the trip, I will be visiting the headquarters of Emergency Architects (also known as Architectes de L’Urgence), which is based in Paris, France.

In this visit, I plan on attending the workshops and training that Emergency Architects personell go through in order to be prepared for their assignments. This will also prepare me for my visit to their site in Pakistan.
SITE #8: Kashmir Region, Pakistan (4 weeks)

Project Lead: Emergency Architects  
[International architectural non-governmental organization]
Funding: Private Donors, Corporations, Foundation Grants.
Architect’s Involvement: Direct. Architect is deployed to site for duration of design development and construction.
Organization’s Mission: The aim of Emergency Architects is to bring help and technical aid to the victims of natural, technological and human disasters, not only in safety and security evaluations of the populations but also in post-disaster reconstruction programs focused on long-term development and risk mitigation. [Its mission] is to build sustainable buildings, utilizing low-cost technologies which are easily replicable, even by the unskilled worker.

Why this organization: Emergency Architects’ framework is similar to that of Architecture for Humanity, although the engagement and deployment of the architect is very different and was strategically chosen for comparison. It’s also an European international aid organization, which, by studying it would allow us to understand alternative modes of practice.

Travel Logistics: Accommodations in community to be facilitated by Emergency Architects and their clients.

SITE #9: Kirinda, Sri Lanka (4 weeks)

Project Lead: Shigeru Ban  
[Internationally renowned architect based in Japan]
Funding: Private Donors, Corporations, Foundation Grants.
Architect’s Involvement: Direct. Architect provided architectural services directly to community receiving the service. The level of engagement and participation within the community will only be more precisely identified once the architect and the clients are interviewed.

Why this organization: Shigeru Ban is an internationally recognized architect. This project also received the Aga Khan Award of 2013. Shigeru Ban has become an example in humanitarian efforts in architecture. If we can assess his impact and have positive results, his work, in turn, can have a big impact on our profession and how we engage with under-served families.

Travel Logistics: Accommodations in community to be assisted by Shigeru Ban.
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THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECT IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Practicing architects are often involved in projects of varying scales that impact, either positively or negatively, not only building occupants but also the surrounding urban context. Although the headlines of most architectural magazines celebrate “starchitecture,” most recently a large number of architectural periodicals star small urban interventions, very frequently led by architects, which allow the architect to engage with his/her own community. In this paper, I describe my experience in architectural projects of both scales. Moreover, I compare these projects in terms of their attempt at bringing positive change to a neighborhood, and further evaluate the role of the architect within the two contexts. Further, as I describe my experience as an architect within the two contexts, I categorize my different roles and conclude with an attempt at redefining the role of the architect acts as community agent and another as activist.

In 2006, I moved to Miami after one year of having graduated from the University of California at Berkeley’s architecture program. By 2008, I was experiencing what it was to be an architect in a fluctuating economy: I had held a couple of low paying jobs and had gotten laid off. Soon, I landed a job which I thought would give me stability: a designer position in an architecture firm that had been hired to design and assist in the permitting process for a large-scale mixed-use urban development. The firm was fairly young; it had been around for 10 years, its portfolio comprised of high-end residential projects in very affluent areas of Miami, and had no previous experience in large-scale development. The principal architect of the firm did however know the
developer who initiated the project personally and they were both residents of affluent area of Coconut Grove.

Coconut Grove, the city in which the project was located, is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the City of Miami. Its history is made up of several waves of immigrations; the first in 1825 when the lighthouse in Cape Florida went into operation. At that time, an influx of Americans from the Northeast of the United States, British and white Bahamian immigrants settled in the area. Decades later, in the 1880s, an influx of black laborers from the Bahamas arrived to build and work at the different hotels being established in the area\(^1\) as well as at citrus plantations around Coconut Grove. As tourism and agriculture prospered, so did the affluent areas of Coconut Grove. As a result, the communities built by blacks became more segregated.\(^2\)

As a result, today Coconut Grove is demographically divided into "Northeast Coconut Grove" and "Southwest Coconut Grove". Within an area of 6 square miles, one can find some of the most affluent individuals of all of Miami, with incomes well above $65,000. In 2000, the total population of both of the neighborhood's sections made up close to 20,000. Due to the high disparity of income, the medium income for the Southwest Coconut Grove is recorded to be below $12,000 per year. The reality is that the nearly half Black or African American population of the area lives well below the poverty line.\(^3\) The district borders Cocowalk, an upscale shopping center, and downtown Coconut Grove, where Realtors say small residential lots can cost at minimum $300,000. Just blocks from Coral Gables' multimillion-dollar homes are dilapidated Village West Island residences.

Architect as Designer

The company hired us to draw what they envisioned for “Grove Village” : the new development that comprised of 6-blocks of mixed-use residential/commercial buildings. While we designed, we

\(^1\) Livingston, Grant (2000). *The Annexation of the City of Coconut Grove*. *Tequesta* (Miami, Florida: Historical Association of Southern Florida)


assisted in the process of permitting a project of such scale, while our clients dealt with logistics such as purchasing lots from homeowners and absent landlords, negotiating land-use variances with the City of Miami Planning Advisory Board, meeting the rate of return their investors expected, etc. The owner of the development company considered himself a “local” (he lived in one of the wealthier areas of Coconut Grove) rather than a developer and had “deep pockets.”

For that, he and his investors felt insured against major financial problems that could arise from such endeavor, especially due to the fact that he was not only new to this scale of investment, but also to the type and location. As we designed the project, the local newspaper would bring to light issues that were not considered in the initial planning stages of the development; some of these issues would surfaced to us as design changes to our plans and after the developer’s meetings with the local social networks that had been established well prior of the developer’s claims and efforts to “improve the neighborhood.”

As time passed and the project evolved, I noticed the existing local social networks by the fact that there were hundreds of individuals who would speak for and against the project during the public hearings at the City Hall. Those from the community who spoke for the project, requested more community meetings and written assurance that this project wouldn’t turn out to be a “catalyst for gentrification.” The community also requested that the developers’ include affordable housing as part of the master plan. Those who resisted required that any development being proposed for the area be initiated within the community, asserting that affordable housing would not be enough to house the majority being displaced, or tell others not to sell their property. I remember having pristine rectangles representing all the blocks in my drawings for the master plan except for one, which had a notch that made my lines jog around a property whose owner refused to sell. I found out later she that she had just renovated her home and hoped to pass it on to her

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grandchildren when she passed.

Sadly, the developers considered the potential negative social impacts for the neighborhood only if these had an economic side effect in the pockets of their investors. Sadly, the local social network had less power than the new economic forces flowing through the neighborhood. Since the City could not legally require that the developer include affordable housing in the master plan (10), the developer’s only attempt to address the lack of affordable housing in his plan was to mention that he would include it in his future development plans in adjacent property that he planned to develop. He did however guarantee that 20% of the jobs created by the commercial portion of the project would be given to local residents of the West Grove, including jobs at a planned grocery store. As I designed that grocery store, I questioned the fact that those jobs were really going to be created for the locals of the West Grove and if 20% of the jobs would suffice, and if any of the adjacent commercial spaces would be affordable spaces for the currently existing “mom & pop” shops that catered to residents of the area. Moreover, even though the area had a “neighborhood conservation district” overlaid onto the existing residential and light commercial zone, the developer’s land-use attorneys were able to acquire a special use permit in order to build higher than the overlay allowed. The “neighborhood conservation district” then, at least in our office, took the shape of an aesthetic guide rather than a historic preservation tool. And when the guide lacked our modern flair, we would turn to the Sarasota Modern style, which mimiqued the look of Bahamian architecture and gave us “freedom” from the vernacular that dominated the aesthetics and function of the few homes left in the West Grove.

Another historical guide that we consulted was architect Richard Shepard, who ran the Center for Urban and Community Design at the University of Miami. A few years prior to our engagement in the West Grove, he and the Dean of the Architecture School at the university brought students to survey the West Grove in order to create a vision plan for the neighborhood in order to guarantee
the preservation of its character. From that process, the “West Grove Vision Plan” was created and later adopted by the city as part of the planning code for the area. This plan complimented the “neighborhood conservation district” overlay that became part of the local building code. The plan formulated a series of typologies existent in the West Grove in order to guide future development, however, many critics asserted that the plan didn’t do much enforcing, and that “anything else could and [was] being demolished,” said Margot Ammidown, former historic preservation officer for Miami-Dade County, who was hired as consultant on the city's proposed Neighborhood Conservation District plan for Coconut Grove. Robert Shepard had been hired as a consultant for the project and we met with him several times during the design phase. He had great recommendations, however, our modern flair was more important to us than the idea of merely copying an architectural style in order to reminisce old times. After each public hearing or community presentation, we were asked to further adapt our design to Bahamian architecture aesthetics. Since the interior spaces were not quite Bahamian in nature, the exterior was being forced into the Bahamian mold without the functionality that is inherently Bahamian.

The approval process for the project was new to us at the architecture firm, unlike other projects in our portfolio, which consisted of mostly residential work and did not require such an extensive and arduous permitting process. None of us in the firm had dealt with a project of such level of controversy, as it was being labeled gentrifying by the local newspaper and was also the word spreading around the neighborhood. The majority of us in the office had just been introduced to the term “gentrification” since the word floated around the office as news stories covering the project surfaced. Our Principal architect, who lived in the affluent area of Coconut Grove, believed gentrification was actually a positive change for the neighborhood, most of the papers covered the negative impact gentrification could cause. At the public hearings, which we were asked to attend by the developer in order to increase the small number of people favoring the project, we would hear
plenty of examples of the negative impacts of gentrification in general and those that added to West Grove’s history.

After attending several public hearings, I started to understand some of the dynamics of the neighborhood: there were those who resisted the development, those who approved, and those who approved with several conditions. Those who approved were supported by the developer, his staff who were expert developers, investors, the biggest land-use attorney practice in town, the architect, business owners from the neighborhood, the Commissioner representing the neighborhood, and the majority of the Commissioners representing the City of Miami. Also on the approving side, were local organizations that were requiring in the least some affordable housing if the project were approved. The opposing side had local residents, activists, and some community organizations. The numbers seemed to favor the opposition, but the weight of the few representing the favoring side was much more financially stronger. As for me, I sat in the audience, with the “Grove Village” button on my shirt, along with my colleagues, not exactly satisfied with the work that I was assisting.

Fortunately for some, one year after my involvement, the global financial crisis materialized, which brought the project to a halt. As a result, a few of my colleagues and I got laid off. While I looked for a job (and accepted my federal unemployment checks), I decided to continue the work I had started in establishing the Miami Chapter of Architecture for Humanity – the local branch for the international nonprofit organization that provided design services for communities in need. Without hesitation, I approached one of the community’s representatives whom I had seen in action at multiple the public hearings – Maggie. I approached her and explained my interests in creating a community garden in one of the empty lots in the neighborhood. Without hesitation, she accepted. It turned out that she was also in the middle of starting a community garden in the area. This endeavor would be her second project in re-claiming underutilized public space in that neighborhood.
However, this would be different because it would involve a certain level of community organizing in order to attain an ongoing community commitment for proper care of the garden in the long term. I had the practical skills and the connections to create the garden, but relied on Maggie to attain community involvement.

I admired Maggie from the little I knew of her at the public hearings. She was well spoken, and as I would come to find out, had an extensive resume: she was the CEO of a local community development corporation called Community Empowerment Corporation (CEC). She ran the local work-training program, she had also worked was a “community builder” under the Clinton Administration, and at the public hearings she presented very good arguments for the inclusion of affordable housing and requested a certain percentage of all jobs created to be for those West Grove residents that remained. My stance on the development seemed to align with hers; I agreed with her in that development in the area was doomed to be initiated by outside investors with their interests, leaving no room for addressing the needs of the community. The room left was then used to propose measures that would soften the negative impact of that development and request that some needs be met in the process. The CEC that she directed seemed to be imbedded in the community; the receptionist was a local resident and the office seemed quite busy with residents entering and exiting the office to attend workshops and the WorkForce 1 Center. She also had previous experience in reclaiming public land for the use of the public. In 2003, she converted 2 dilapidated lots that were owned by the city into a public park. As a result of that project, she gained political power and was leveraging her influence to build the community garden. The garden was a step towards a larger goal of turning the West Grove into the first “Legacy Community” in her pilot program called “Legacy Communities Initiative.” This program was crafted by Maggie in order provide expert assistance to each community in order to have them be part of a network of communities that shared resources and tools for poverty alleviation, training of potential community builders, in order to help them
understand how to develop funding and resources to address their concerns and help their community develop activities that protect and preserve their businesses and culture.\(^5\)

Since I had recently moved from the San Francisco Bay Area, I had witnessed how community gardens could serve as a vehicle towards community engagement, which I believed was lacking in the Southwest Grove. Maggie actually had experience with such projects, which gave me assurance that our community garden initiative would be a success. However, I found out later that she was criticized by locals for her past community engagement as they perceived her to be more interested in using the neighborhood as a pilot for her program rather than actually improving the neighborhood. Still, we moved forward with the new community garden. The first phase of the project encompassed meetings attended only by local Northeast Grove residents, most of whom were white and of middle-class and above. This turn out convinced me that intervention was necessary as it aimed to recruit more local residents to help produce the change that we sought to achieve. Other volunteers included members of my group of architects, and someone from the developer’s office leading the Grove Village project. A master gardener also attended, but his time was to be remunerated. Sometimes, the receptionist Sharon, a local resident, would participate in the meetings, but most of the time she was too busy with front-desk duties and with her seven children, one of which was a teenager who was always being sent home from school because of behavior issues.

The second phase, after acquiring the land (which was temporarily provided to us by the local church), included planting a few vegetables on pots. My role involved creating a master plan for the garden, which described the location of the planter beds, the storage shelter, access to water, and permitting assistance. The third phase involved the execution of the plan, which included building the planter beds (which the volunteers in my group would help), planting, distributing the beds, and

\(^5\) Community Legacy Initiatives, website: www.communitylegacyinitiatives.com
building a fence. Between the first phase and the launch day, Maggie was having difficulties getting garden participants from the neighborhood. One of the reasons was the fact that she was pushing the garden as a tool for introducing sweat equity into the neighborhood. She believed that everyone should partake in the garden, and every participant should leave with a share of produce that equaled his or her effort. I agreed with that system, but slowly understood that it was too new of a concept for residents of the area to understand and adopt in a matter of months. They already seemed uninterested in the concept of growing their own food, collectively, imagine sharing the fruits of their sweat.

She sensed resistance from the neighborhood, so she continued her promotion of her Legacy Communities Initiative elsewhere, in which the garden was a component. While she travelled throughout Florida, she sent me to meetings of different groups in the area in order to get participants for the garden. Those trips usually recharged her, as her engaging persona would captivate new audiences for her initiative. She was also very engaged at the State level, because she believed in order to bring about positive social impact, her program would need to supported and implemented at the state level. She also traveled frequently to Washington DC because, further down the road, her goal was to bring the Legacy Communities Initiative to the federal level. I remember participating in a fundraiser for a congresswoman who represented our district. I also remember eating well at the fundraiser but leaving with a bitter taste in my mouth, questioning her interest in gaining such political popularity at the state level, while in the Grove we were facing difficulties in acquiring community participation in such a small local endeavor.

Architect as Gentrifier

I also had my own agenda: to promote the Miami Chapter of Architecture for Humanity and its first project. However, since I already had a group of architects ready to help, I kept pushing the garden towards its inaugural event, even with partial community support. Maggie seemed resistant
at first, but then gave in since we had all the funding partners aligned to get the entire project off the ground. The inauguration of the garden seemed like a success, the supporting community from the West Grove attended and so did some of their fellow affluent neighbors from the East Grove. Also in attendance were my fellow architect colleagues, Grove Village’s developer, and local commissioners who had approved the Grove Village project. Garden beds were donated by local businesses and were handed off to local residents. At that point, Maggie allowed us to discard the sweat equity approach and distributed the garden beds to individuals and families who were present at the launch. Maggie had a few beds reserved for some of her peers, a few local residents from the neighborhood claimed beds for themselves, and a few Northeast residents claimed others. The garden looked like a miniature Grove Village in its social make-up. From my drive-bys, the garden seemed to have run well for two years. Today it sits empty, just like all the other lots that were purchased for the Grove Village development.

The local newspaper was also present at the inauguration and the only article written was authored by a journalist who covers only architecture and planning related events and issues in the City of Miami. Due to his inaccurate assessment of the project, he illustrated a deceiving picture of the garden project by the tile alone: “Architects help the Needy in the West Grove”. Since architects and social good are not usually covered on the same headline, he believed the project was a success since it in the least attempted to achieved that. However, he did not think about how those who were referred to as “needy” would react with that label and with our “help.” Once the paper got distributed throughout the neighborhood, my group was not welcome in the area. A few short months after, Maggie had shut down her operations. As for me, my involvement resulted in a growing number of Miami architects interested in creating more community gardens; I also won awards, and gained credibility within my profession.
For a while I didn’t understand the reason for such resistance from the community to participate in the garden. As time passed after our inauguration, I started to face their resistance and started to understand their reasoning behind it. Momentarily, I also witnessed Maggie’s withdrawal from the community until her organization closed. When I tried to contact her, she was nowhere to be found. I did however find out a few months later through a web search that she had been hired as a consultant for a low-income community in the north of South Florida. Slowly, I also started to understand that I was actually acting as a community builder without being from the community, without much knowledge of what that entailed, and without any agreements or consent. As my involvement in the garden ceased, so did Maggie’s community building assistance. The other community builder was the receptionist for the center that she ran, but as mentioned before, that was not her main title. Once Maggie left the Grove for another low-income area, her center closed and the community garden supervision got placed on the laps of another local organization. When I called to find out how the garden was going, they seemed reluctant to provide me with any information and did not welcome any help from our group or any outside help, for that matter.

_ARCHITECT THROUGHOUT HISTORY_

In looking at history, architects have not had a solely positive track record in improving communities through their interventions, not at the smallest of scales nor at larger endeavors such as those which aim at planning entire cities. Brasilia and Algiers are examples of two cities in which architects, such as Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer respectively, had crucial roles in conceptualizing, planning, designing, and building (or expanding) those cities. In Algiers, Le Corbusier conceptualized the divided city in which confrontation between races would be reduced spatially. In Brasilia, Niemeyer – along with Le Corbusier – helped planners and city officials conceptualize a city where
architecture and form would give everyone the right to the city\textsuperscript{6}, although many critics and residents will say the contrary actually took place. The result of their interventions may have been beautiful in theory, however, in practice it magnified existing problematic social conditions in which these architects had minimal exposure.

Today, smaller interventions have taken stage at the global level: from slum upgrades, to the provision of prefabricated shelter distributed to those who have been affected by disasters, social injustice, or projects such as the Grove community garden. Architects are re-claiming their role within the public sphere, without much guidance from experts. Since the architect’s intervention in a community is usually brought forth by an interest in place-based strategies for community improvement, and since place-based community development strategies alone lead to gentrification, it is essential that the architect’s intervention be coupled with people-based strategies that would then guide the architect’s interventions and integrate them as part of the larger community improvement plan.

Both the community garden and Grove Village attempted to implement participatory planning in their execution; however, systemic barriers stopped a majority of residents from participating. Those who do participate are patronized because they do not hold the knowledge that the experts leading the process have. If a participatory planning procedure is not coupled with strategies that address access and equal representation to these processes, than the participants will not represent the constituents of the project. Further, if displacement is allowed to take place even prior a development is built, then who will be left to participate?\textsuperscript{7}

The Grove Village development exemplifies the approach to development that Architect Andres Duany, Congress for New Urbanism founder, cheers: gentrification.\textsuperscript{8} If neighborhoods have much to gain from gentrification and its approach towards deconcentration of poverty, especially in neighborhoods that are ridden of crime, violence, gang, drug dealing, and prostitution, such as the West Grove, why do we see an increase in class polarization in urban housing markets?\textsuperscript{9} Even if affordable housing were to be added to the Grove Village Master Plan, would the project still be considered gentrifying?

\textbf{Architect as Community Agent}

An architect may question the impact he may have in a community through his involvement in the building process, be it for a small residence or a large-scale mixed-use development, when essentially his/her main role is to provide a service to a client. Normally when the architect is brought on board by a client, decisions as to the nature of the project, the master plan, financial flows, etc. have already been established. One of the most crucial phases in the building process – permitting – is typically the phase in which the architect is called upon for his expertise. During that phase, the architect works through the clients’ requirements in order to satisfy regulations set forth by the local building codes and come up with an eloquent design for a building or a series of buildings. Once drawings have been generated, they are either processed by the building department or presented to the municipality’s planning advisory and zoning boards or both. It is typically at this point that the architect is required to interact with the community through public hearings, requests for community approval through community meetings, etc. Interestingly, this portion of the process is not ideal for community input since the project is very much established, without much room for

\textsuperscript{8} Duany, Three Cheers For Gentrification, \textit{The American Enterprise}, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2001).
modifications that would not lead to financial losses. Ironically, at this stage generally the first time the community is asked for input. When that ensues, the community receives the architect and trusts that the architect will take into account their requests, albeit knowing that the architect has his/her client’s best interest as his main agenda. After all, the architect’s main role to his client is that of a designer. However, if the community cannot articulate their requirements in the language that the architect understands, then the community’s interests are likely to be misrepresented. In the end, the drawings will either be permitted without the community’s complete approval or the governing authorities will stall the project until the community needs are met, depending on how committed the legislature is to their constituents.

If the community’s interest were to be better represented via the same means used by the gentrifying counterpart, would the community be more likely to have a fair fight? Could an architect act as an agent for the community in order to give those individuals a voice in a process generally dominated by political power? Would the agent architect representing the community’s best interest be able to counteract the forces being driven by the gentrifying forces, including the opposing architect?

At a smaller scale, the community garden project stems from an asset building community development tactic, one in which residents collectively identify assets it owns and decide how to build upon that.10 The Grove community garden omitted that step. Even though many of the residents who would be willing to mobilize for these reasons were themselves displaced, there were still residents left who had an interest in improving their neighborhood.11 The majority of the remaining residents were prevented from participating due to systemic barriers within the community, which were the issues in which the intervention was seeking to address. The empty lot in

10 Imbroscio, Beyond Mobility: The Limits of Liberal Urban Policy (2012)
which the community garden was created was an asset or physical capital identified by the CDC, not the community, and the community garden project itself was also initiated by the CDC. As a result, the CDC overlooked an opportunity to connect the existing physical capital to existing social capital and networks that would help decide how to build upon that asset. Maggie was preoccupied in a campaign to promote her Legacy Communities Initiatives. Consequently, the grassroots efforts that I imagined being involved was not grassroots, nor led by the community; in fact it was actually being led by an absent CEO of a local CDC, who basically assigned an outsider and gentrifier to do the job. As it turned out, Maggie was just as imbedded in politics, media, and the interest of certain individuals as were the key players in the Grove Village development.

Architect as Activist

Our profession is constantly negotiating the physical and social impacts of our role in the different scales of urban interventions. Although I went from one gentrifying project, and unknowingly, to another, my intention was to bring positive change to the community in which I had previously helped gentrify. Although, my intention was to build upon the grassroots efforts that I had witnessed in the public hearings, I actually helped intensify the resentment local residents of the West Grove had towards community development. Our communities have physical ills that need to be addressed with physical interventions. We as architects have extensive training in solving problems spatially unlike any other profession. Hence our involvement in strategizing place-based strategies is crucial to community development, especially when agency and representation is not well balanced when a community is faced with opposing forces. We will only have the impact we aspire to have when our role in community development is coupled with other players who need our efforts to compliment their people-based strategies for community improvement. It is only through a

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holistic approach that we will be able to go beyond our role of gentrifying agents and transform into agents for social change.

As architects we must understand that all of our roles have an impact in the community. By understanding and becoming reflective as practitioners, the impact on the lives of those who will experience the effects of our built projects within their neighborhood, can be a positive one rather than an additional force perpetuating a problem.