

ANNUAL REPORT
OF
THE CENTER FOR HUMAN ENVIRONMENTS

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In 2016-2017, the collective of researchers at the Center for Human Environments (CHE) continued to be involved in a broad range of projects, including those with an international scope (work on the issues of child protection and child well-being; a review of research on public space), those with a national focus (a survey of LGBTQ youth in the US; a study of community land trust housing as a new alternative for low-income households in the US), and those centering on our local New York City context (community response to NY Police Dept. policies; innovative college access programming for NYC public schools). These projects at CHE have been funded with grants from a wide variety of sources, including federal awards (NSF and US Department of Education), a NYC agency (multiple divisions of the NYC Department of Education), US foundations (Ford, Pinkerton, New York Community Trust, Booth Ferris / JP Morgan), and international charities (Plan International [UK], Bernard van Leer [Netherlands], Axson Foundation [Sweden]).

The past year at CHE was also notable for the number of events and publications that provided our researchers with opportunities to disseminate project findings and widen the impact of CHE research:

- Four youth participants in the College Access: Research & Action (CARA) program became the subject of a documentary, *Personal Statement*, which is being supported by Latino Public Broadcasting and will be broadcast on public television in 2018.
- In partnership with the international NGO ECPAT (*End Child Prostitution and Trafficking*), the Children's Environments Research Group (CERG) launched a publication synthesizing the findings from their international research project on how to most effectively involve the voices of children and youth in the governance of organizations that serve them in order to further the child protection goals of the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.
- On November 30, 2016, the Public Science Project (PSP) co-sponsored a Graduate Center forum moderated by NYC Public Advocate Letitia James on the "State of NYC Renewal Schools," which brought together stakeholders in the multi-year program to improve the most at-risk schools in the city's public system.
- The Morris Justice Project, which has been a key component of the Public Science Project for the past five years, organized and facilitated a forum in the South Bronx which was part of the "joint remedial process," a community review of NYPD procedures, especially the "stop and frisk" policy, in the light of recent lawsuits and judicial decisions.
- On March 30, 2017, the Public Space Research Group (PSRG) sponsored an interdisciplinary, all-day conference at the Graduate Center, which examined "the public" and the plural "publics" as analytical concepts of special importance in both scholarship and political life. This event was part of the Futures Initiative at the Graduate Center.

Supporting graduate students, both financially and in terms of their development as researchers, remains a primary purpose of CHE. In the past year, CHE projects provided fellowships and/or research employment for 24 GC students. CHE funds in 2016-2017 also furnished support for student travel to conferences, and on occasion offered students compensation for their contributions to public events produced by CHE projects, such as the Morris Justice Project forum mentioned above. CHE has always paid special attention to graduate students who are beginning to develop their capacity as researchers, and who come to our Center for assistance in applying for external funding (an endeavor also valued in the Graduate Center's new strategic plan). In recent years, we have been able to foster students' professional development in a number of ways, whether they were applying for NSF dissertation support, or working with international NGOs concerned with children's rights, or, as in the case of an Environmental Psychology doctoral student this past year, using a novel form of crowd-sourced funding to pay for dissertation research expenses.

The Center for Human Environments operates as a federal structure, bringing together a family of subgroups that address specific research areas, including children's environments, health and society, participatory action research, developmental psychology, housing, public space, and the evaluation of social change campaigns and advocacy projects. Here are highlights from the past year's work conducted by CHE research subgroups:

- **The College Access: Research & Action (CARA) program expanded its activities again this past year, with renewed funding and support from the NYC Department of Education for its peer-led college access and college retention counseling model. CARA's five-year Multiple Task Award Contract with the NYC DOE, now in its fourth year, has provided professional development services and technical assistance to more than 40 NYC public high schools. Meanwhile, in February 2017 Mayor De Blasio and NYC Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña announced additional support for the College Bridge program, one of the key initiatives developed by CARA over the past 10 years to increase college enrollment and college success among first-generation-to-college students from NYC public schools.**

CARA was also pleased to receive renewed support for its programming from Arbor Brothers, a consultancy that gives technical assistance to nonprofits, and from the New York Community Trust, which awarded the College Access leadership a three-year grant to document and analyze the rapid change in institutional thinking that allowed CARA's innovative youth-centered programming to take hold in the NYC public school system. In addition, 2017 saw the renewal of Pinkerton Foundation funding for a fourth year for CARA's ongoing work with Graduate NYC! and CUNY Collaborative Programs. At the very close of FY17, CARA also received word that its three-year funding request to the Booth Ferris Foundation / JP Morgan was approved.

- **In 2016-2017, the Public Science Project moved into the data analysis and dissemination phase of its national survey of LGBTQ youth, funded by the Ford Foundation and a consortium of other sponsors. The project, entitled "What's Your Issue?" Informing a national agenda by and for LGBTQ and gender**

nonconforming youth,” collected more than 6000 responses to its online survey, and is now organizing a final follow-up meeting with community members drawn from a range of LGBTQ youth-serving organizations across the US. The “What’s Your Issue?” project team is also working with media relations staff at the Graduate Center in order to ensure the widest possible audience for the project’s final report, expected in September.

Following on the successes of the “What’s Your Issue?” national survey, the Ford Foundation awarded the Public Science Project a new two-year grant, beginning in 2017, which is developing three strands of participatory action research with youth: an expansion of the social media platforms created during the dissemination phase of the “What’s Your Issue?” project; the Intergenerational Change Initiative, which is devising mobile and web-based platforms that will allow NYC youth to engage with the city agencies tasked with serving them (in partnership with the MIT Media Lab); and a project to involve youth, especially girls, in reviewing New York State’s juvenile justice system (in partnership with New York University’s Roses Initiative).

In May 2017, PSP held the sixth annual edition of its Critical Participatory Action Research Institute. Led by PSP Director Dr. Maria Torre with assistance from Prof. Madeline Fox (Brooklyn College), Prof. Michelle Fine (GC Psychology) and Prof. Brett Stoudt (John Jay), this week-long workshop drew 35 participants from community-based organizations, advocacy groups, medical centers, and college and university departments. Dr. Torre and Prof. Fine also participated in the Action Research Network of the Americas conference in Cartagena, Colombia in June 2017, where an international gathering of scholars and practitioners shared their work on action research.

In November, Prof. Stoudt and Dr. Torre, working with community members of the Morris Justice Project, facilitated a meeting of the “joint remedial process” to review NYPD policies, especially “stop and frisk” (see description above). Funding to support this forum was obtained from JAMS, an internationally recognized provider of mediation and dispute resolution services.

- In the fall of 2016 the Children’s Environments Research Group (CERG) received funding from the Bernard van Leer Foundation to establish the Selim Iltus Memorial Fund for Research on the Physical Environment and Young Children’s Development and Well-Being. Three doctoral students working in developmental psychology, social psychology, and environmental psychology are being supported with these funds. These fellowships are designed to celebrate the life of Selim Iltus and to continue the kind of work that he started at the Graduate Center before his untimely death in 2015.

Although the primary research focus of CERG has been on the physical environment of childhood, in recent years the research team has also found itself being pulled into the challenges of addressing the protection of children from physical and sexual abuse. In 2016, in partnership with the international

NGO ECPAT (*End Child Prostitution and Trafficking*), CERG completed a critical analysis of international scope on how to engage young people who are the victims of sexual exploitation in the governance of the organizations that are designed to serve them. CERG now has a project underway, in partnership with other international NGOs working with children, to understand the potentials of children's membership groups to serve as informal settings for child protection. Later phases of this project will be designed to strengthen children's groups and to evaluate the effectiveness of training programs for facilitators of such groups.

- In 2016-2017, the Housing Environments Research Group, led by Prof. Susan Saegert, began work on a three-year National Science Foundation project, "Interrupting Place-based Inequality: Building Sustainable Communities through Shared Equity Homeownership." The project is providing multi-year research employment and experience for both early-stage and advanced graduate students. Prof. Saegert's Graduate Center Co-PI is Prof. Mary Clare Lennon (Sociology), who brings statistical expertise to this survey of the changes in economic, social and cultural capital that may be associated with residence in Community Land Trust housing; Prof. Lennon will also focus on the effect of CLT residence on the children of families who live in CLT housing. The NSF project involves collaboration with two Co-PIs at Georgia State University, who have previous experience with federally funded research on housing policy and low-income communities, and are also experienced in presenting research findings to housing policymakers at the national level.
- In the past year, The Public Space Research Group (PSRG) received a grant from the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm to work on a database project creating a repository of research on public space for the 'Centre for the Future of Places' - a research institute at KTH interested in sustaining urban development by shifting the urban discourse from the hardware-objects of the cities (buildings and infrastructure), to the software-spaces of the cities (places and people).

Toward this end, GC doctoral students Troy Simpson and Erin Lilli, under the guidance of Setha Low, are conducting public space literature reviews in the disciplines of Environmental Psychology, Geography, and Anthropology. One immediate aim of the research project is to identify and synthesize relevant research for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, the outcome document of the UN Habitat III conference (a conference in which Prof. Low and GC doctoral student Javier Otero Peña participated in the past year). A broader and more abstract aim is to identify new and timely findings relating to public space and its role within urban systems.

As a follow-up to this project, the Axson Foundation (Sweden), which underwrites some of the KTH Centre's work, is providing funding support for Prof. Low as she continues work on her current book project, *Why Place Matters*.

PSRG also sponsored a series of events at the Graduate Center in 2016-2017,

featuring both international scholars and contributors from across the CUNY system and from other US institutions: “From New York to Paris: Public Space and Social Reactions to Terrorist Attacks” (October); “Occupy All Streets: Olympic Urbanism and Contested Futures in Rio de Janeiro” (December); “Celebrating Innovative New Work in Anthropology”—launch of two new books, one by Prof. Low and one by Prof. Sally Merry of NYU (March); “Deep Word Play: Signs of Distinction and Exclusion in Gentrifying Brooklyn”—with two Anthropology faculty members from John Jay College (March); “The Public and Publics Conference” (March, see description above); and “Urban Agriculture in NYC: Social Justice, Disparities, and Gentrification”—with Visiting Research Scholar Chantal Gailloux, from Concordia University, Canada (May).

- **Developmental Studies Research Group Director Prof. Colette Daiute has submitted a new proposal to the Spencer Foundation, which funded her recent work on the community college as a critical site for civic engagement in policy debates over immigration. The proposed work examines whether the diversity or inclusivity of students’ home institutions in the US has an impact on their capacity to profit from college study abroad programs.**
- **The User Design Information Group (UDIG) is a new CHE research group connecting environmental psychology scholars with architects, planners, and communities to develop research that informs and promotes equitable design initiatives. Currently, members of the group are spearheading two projects. In the first, UDIG members Evie Klein, Eleanor Luken and Troy Simpson are leading a collaborative research project with architects from the Committee on Architecture for Education at the American Institute of Architects New York (AIANY) and have partnered with Medgar Evers College (MEC) to study elements of campus life at MEC outside of the classroom using collaborative, field-based research methods. In early 2017, UDIG members formed the project team, secured a memorandum of understanding from the MEC administration, and identified the research tools to be used during the 2017-18 project. In their second project from the past year, UDIG members Erin Lilli and Amy Beth are leading a study to identify existing models of praxis as related to social scientists engaging in and with the architectural profession and the broader field of environmental design. UDIG members presented on both of these projects at the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) conference in Madison, WI in June 2017.**
- **ActKnowledge (AK) has further expanded the audience for its Theory of Change Online (TOCO) facility, a web-based planning tool for use by advocacy movements, nonprofits, human rights organizations, and government agencies as they formulate, monitor, and evaluate the success of their programs and projects. As of 2017, TOCO counted more than 10,000 members in 60 countries in its online community of users. In the past year, Theory of Change Japan was launched as an affiliate of TOCO, with Eoin Collins, an AK staff member based at the Graduate Center, as a Co-Director. And in October, AK staff member Zabi Rahat presented on TOCO at the fourth annual Sustainable Development Transition Forum, hosted by the UN Office for**

Sustainable Development in Incheon, Republic of Korea.

Also in the AK portfolio during the past year: the Erasmus Program of the European Commission selected AK to serve as external evaluator for a two-year program in five EU countries to reach artists in sparsely populated areas, helping them to find peer groups, job opportunities, and an environment with sufficient cultural capital so that they could choose to stay in their home region, rather than migrate to a large metropolitan center.

In 2017, AK released its report on the multi-year evaluation that it conducted on behalf of the Hartford, Connecticut community schools. AK has become one of the leading evaluators for the community schools movement in the US, with clients including the Children's Aid Society, the Paterson Public Schools (New Jersey), and the United Federation of Teachers.

The CHE website provides an overview of the Center's ongoing activities, while also offering a portal to the extensively developed websites of the individual research subgroups and programs. Visit it for updates on current CHE research projects:

<http://www.gc.cuny.edu/che/>