



2013 Remaking Cities Congress

Urban Systems, Infrastructure, and the Post-Industrial City

Case Study Summary

New Orleans, Louisiana

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The City of New Orleans has demonstrated resilience through its post-Katrina recovery reflected by communities re-establishing much of its unique commerce, lifestyle, and cultural heritage, as well as by making deliberate inroads in new initiatives for economic diversification and sustainability. In achieving these outcomes, the city has built relationships with a range of partners including the Dutch around water management and national and local philanthropic institutions complementing public investment and policy implementation. This city, which boasts some of the longest multi-generational population in the nation, is also witnessing an influx of new residents from across the country, who invigorate the dynamics of renewal while seeking to respect and conserve what has attracted them to the Crescent City. In addition to the rebuilding of its traditional neighborhoods and infrastructure, New Orleans has committed its own resources, as well as those offered through the federal and state government to new capital projects and programs to enhance its citizens' participation in traditional and new economies.

Accordingly, New Orleans is attempting to use this rare window of investment in people and places not only to build a city that is sustainable in its unique setting at the Mississippi delta, but that also allows for equitable access to the benefits that will result from these efforts. For all of its success in population recovery and the city's robust economic growth rate, challenges face the city ranging from storm water management to crime in the community. In this context, New Orleans has set upon a range of planning and redevelopment initiatives whose success will be measured by how they improve transit; connect housing to jobs, schools and healthcare; manage soil and water; and promote livable communities through economic development. The city is building on past and current planning efforts by leveraging inter-agency partnerships at the federal, state, and local level with strong community guidance. At the core of many of these initiatives is the goal to reverse the impact from decades of disinvestment in New Orleans that preceded Katrina, Gustav or the BP oil spill and to bring equitable access to participate to all members of our community.

The City of New Orleans approaches a holistic development strategy that is place-based and interdisciplinary. This strategy is applied across the entire city informed by the specific circumstance reflected in each neighborhood, corridor, waterfront, or district. One area that is witnessing over \$4 billion of investment is within the physical core of the city along Claiborne Avenue and neighborhood commercial corridors that run parallel. This corridor traverses New Orleans' Central Business and Medical Districts, as well as a host of diverse, low-to-moderate income historic minority communities, including the 7th Ward, Tremé,

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Central City, and Broadmoor. The neighborhoods typify the regional array of affordable housing, economic development, and improved transit potential, including a recently completed streetcar line from the Union Passenger Terminal to Canal Street. Over half a billion dollars in recent and ongoing affordable housing investments – including a HUD Choice Neighborhood Implementation grant, \$2.2 billion in upcoming hospital and healthcare developments, \$45 million in streetcar extensions and hundreds of millions of dollars in new and renovated schools. This corridor is home to some of the longest-established neighborhoods and landmarks of the city – many places constituting truly sacred ground.

On 2010, the City of New Orleans received a combined HUD Community Challenge and DOT TIGER II planning grant funding in fulfillment of a Sustainable Communities objective for the Claiborne Corridor Plan: Leveraging Infrastructure to Build Inter-Parish Access and Equity. Specifically, the study has examined transportation and development potentials along the corridor. As part of the transportation considerations, the study has been addressing both surface-road attributes as well as the elevated portion of Interstate 10 that spans over several of the city's historic communities.

During the sessions of community outreach, three important concerns were expressed and gained momentum through the course of engagement:

1. Opportunity to participate in and benefit from economic investment;
2. Opportunity to stay in communities and fight gentrification;
3. Opportunity to continue cultural expression and pass this tradition from generation to generation.

In New Orleans, these three concerns are bound together in a manner that exemplifies some of the greatest challenges facing cities that are seeing significant investment in traditional in-town neighborhoods, but that in New Orleans take on a more critical connection. The cultural tradition of the Mardi Gras Indians and Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs is place-based. Their rich artistic and spiritual traditions are deeply ingrained in the community – as a social support system, a source of both community pride and celebration, as master craftsmen, and more. There are strong linkages to neighborhoods where the culture bearers live and associate, to streets that reflect the routes and paths of second lines and marches, and to the places of fabrication and creation of the feathered costumes and art work of this unique culture. Also, dispersed within this area are the purveyors of music that complement the art of the Mardi Gras Indians and Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs.

The rebuilding process underway in New Orleans is in need of effective ways to address the rapid commercialization of the Mardi Gras Indian culture and is in need of innovative public policy mechanisms to structure and amplify these organic cultural celebrations.

Any plan for the city's sustainability or resilience must acknowledge the value this culture brings and address a means of supporting it within the physical, social, and economic framework of a revitalized New Orleans. The strategies for addressing this issue must be multi-faceted:

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1. place-based in terms of:

- identifying and conserving sacred space;
- providing affordable housing;

2. economic in terms of:

- looking at non-traditional organizing for business like cooperatives
- Identifying means of forming clusters around supply and demand

3. social in terms of:

- respecting the traditions of this art and how it is generated
- looking at how is can be passed on from generation to generation.

While this issue may seem unique New Orleans, it reflects challenges facing many American cities including the displacement of traditional communities as an outcome of urban reinvestment and the loss of cultural anchors that distinguish our places and that in the case of New Orleans are a foundation for its cultural economy.