Not drowning in nostalgia: Diversity of design in post-Katrina Mississippi

Abstract

Six weeks after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Mississippi Gulf Coast, more than 100 New Urbanists and other professionals met for a one-week series of design charrettes to plan the future of the region's 11 cities. Those charrettes, called the Mississippi Renewal Forum, immediately impacted the recovery of the Coast and continue to influence the region today.

Now that 10 years have passed, this paper examines the legacy of the Forum. Were the critics right—did the New Urbanists use form-based codes and a pattern book to create a Coast rooted in nostalgia and tradition? Or did something more complex occur? Based on an extensive literature review, interviews of key Forum participants, and an analysis of built projects, this paper argues that the critics' fears of stylistic homogeneity were misplaced, as the rebuilt Gulf Coast is stylistically diverse, confounding the multiple forces in favor of traditional design.

Keywords

Hurricane Katrina, New Urbanism, Mississippi, disaster recovery, form-based codes

Hurricane Katrina and the Mississippi Gulf Coast

Hurricane Katrina struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. The storm devastated the entire Mississippi coastline from Waveland in the west to Pascagoula in the east, subjecting some communities to more than 10 meters of storm surge and Saffir/Simpson Category 3 force winds. Large areas of beachfront property were leveled, and approximately 60,000 homes were destroyed or otherwise made uninhabitable.

As of 2015, Hurricane Katrina is generally considered the worst natural disaster in United States history. Approximately 1,200 deaths are directly linked to Katrina, making it the third deadliest hurricane in recorded U.S. history (Blake and Gibney 2011, 7). Causing extensive damage in four states, Katrina's storm surge and winds resulted in $108 billion of damage. When that figure is adjusted for inflation, Katrina did more than twice the damage as the second most expensive hurricane, Hurricane Andrew, which struck Florida in 1992 (Blake and Gibney 2011, 9-11). More than one million people—possibly the largest evacuation in U.S. history—were displaced by Katrina, many of them permanently (Grier 2005).

Although much of the mass media's Katrina coverage focused on the horrific events in New Orleans, Louisiana, the Mississippi Gulf Coast bore the brunt of Katrina's fury, which included 200 KPH winds and unprecedented storm surge. The worst damage occurred in the westernmost communities, which were closest to the eye of the storm. Much of Waveland, a vacation and retirement community, was flattened by the storm surge. Bay St. Louis, a quirky bedroom community with ties to New Orleans, was the next most heavily damaged community, with all but the very highest properties inundated by flood waters. Pass Christian and Long Beach, the westernmost communities in Harrison County, received extensive damage along their beachfronts. Gulfport, the home of the economically important Port of Gulfport, was damaged

by the storm surge, which transformed shipping containers into floating battering rams. Biloxi, the unofficial capital of the Coast, was flooded as well, with the low-lying Point Cadet area completely swamped from the sandy front beach to Back Bay. Ocean Springs, the oldest and highest community on the Coast, was less damaged than most, despite devastating flooding and storm surge along shoreline neighborhoods. Gautier, a sprawling bedroom community, received extensive flooding. Pascagoula, the home of Ingalls Shipbuilding and a Chevron refinery, was relatively distant from the eye of Katrina, but the city is surrounded by marshes and is particularly low—approximately 90 percent of Pascagoula flooded during the storm. Moss Point, the Coast's only African-American majority community, received comparatively little damage, limited primarily to low-lying areas adjacent to the Escatawpa River.

The Mississippi Renewal Forum

In early September 2005, just days after Katrina struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast, state leaders started preparing for a planning session to direct the reconstruction of the devastated coastal region. Leland Speed, the executive director of the Mississippi Development Authority and a well-known businessman, convinced Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour to invite Andrés Duany and the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) to participate in the Mississippi Renewal Forum (Moran 2011).

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Figure 1: F Andrés Duany speaks as Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour watches during the Mississippi Renewal Forum. Image courtesy of the Knight Foundation.

For the New Urbanists, the Mississippi Renewal Forum represented both an opportunity and a challenge. With wide design latitude and a regional scale, the Forum offered the New Urbanists a design venue unlike any other they had previously encountered. Moreover, Mississippi offered the New Urbanists an opportunity to avoid the criticism that they only design for the upper middle class. Professor and New Urbanist critic Emily Talen observed:

> "It would be impossible not to notice that most New Urbanist developments are located in relatively well-off parts of the country, and Mississippi therefore represented a very different type of venue. (2008, 279)

The opportunity for the CNU was clear, a point about which Andrés Duany was very blunt. He said, "That was the highpoint [of New Urbanism]…. Basically it made us extraordinarily visible" (2011). With the opportunity, came risks. Duany said, "I actually thought at the time that if we fail, it will be the end of the New Urbanists. But so what? It's not like we had a choice" (2011).

The Forum was held on the second floor of the Isle of Capri Casino, located on the eastern tip of Biloxi in the aforementioned Point Cadet neighborhood. The general public was not allowed in this heavily damaged area, which was sealed by checkpoints staffed by the National Guard. The first floor of the casino had been scoured by the storm surge; access to the second floor was provided by an inoperable escalator.

The Mississippi Renewal Forum was an impressive operation. Organized by the CNU, the Isle of Capri ballroom was completely filled with New Urbanist and local design teams. Eleven workstations were reserved for the 11 coastal cities, while other functions, such as regional planning, architectural design and rendering, and public relations, were provided centralized spaces (Duany 2011). Each of the 11 cities was assigned a lead New Urbanist planner, a "trusted apparatchik" according to architect and educator Michael Sorkin (2006). Duany later confirmed Sorkin's sarcastic analysis, saying that the intense environment of disaster recovery required a close-knit team of people who could work together (2011). Although the Renewal Forum was led by the New Urbanists, local architects and planners played an important role, working side-by-side with CNU members on the city teams. Duany was a force of nature during the design charrettes, circulating among the various teams while orchestrating the overall efforts.

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Figure 2: The Port of Gulfport as reimagined by New Urbanist designers. Image by Knight Martorell, curtesy of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company.

Enter the New Urbanism

What is New Urbanism?

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a group of architects and planners formed the Congress for the New Urbanism as a response to the intellectual vacuum in the post-Urban Renewal era in American planning.

New Urbanism is an urban design philosophy based on traditional (i.e. pre-automobile) neighborhood design.[1] The New Urbanists are self-acknowledged empiricists (Duany 2011), unabashedly examining existing urban fabrics and often attempting to duplicate them. This openness to tradition means that many architects and others who admire traditional architectural design find a sympathetic audience among New Urbanist planners.

While an acceptance of traditionalism is an important aspect of New Urbanism, conceiving of the movement as purely reactionary is a mistake. Certainly, a forward-looking

[1] New Urbanism, like Modernism, is not a monolith. This paper addresses what Alex Krieger calls "East Coast New Urbanism," led by Andrés Duany, as opposed to the more regionally oriented "West Coast New Urbanism," associated with Peter Calthorpe (Krieger 2012).

component exists within New Urbanism. For example, form-based codes, including Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company's SmartCode, import the idea of transects—sections cuts through sample environments—from the study of ecology. Form-based codes are designed to allow increased density while improving streetscapes, and one can argue they represent the most important regulatory development in U.S. urban planning during the previous twenty years.

One of the most balanced critics of New Urbanism is Harvard University professor Alex Krieger. Although Krieger champions the great American city, with its dense downtown and streetcar suburbs, he also appreciates Thomas Jefferson's agrarian vision of land development and the American Dream of owning a single-family home on its own substantial parcel of land. While most critics of New Urbanism dismiss the movement wholesale, Krieger—not surprisingly—provides a more nuanced set of criticisms.

Opening one of his examinations of New Urbanism, Krieger noted, "In reading the 'Charter of the New Urbanism,' I find little with which anyone could disagree," citing commonly held goals including investing in downtowns, limiting sprawl, reducing segregation, and avoiding environmental degradation (1998). What bothered Krieger is the nebulous nature of New Urbanist philosophy, which appeared to claim to provide "the best of everything" (2002, 51).

Other critics argued that New Urbanism had been more effective at identifying problems than finding solutions. Robert Bruegmann found that while the New Urbanists' critique of sprawl has been effective in marshaling anti-sprawl forces, the "vast majority" of their projects (as of 2005) functioned much in the same way as standard suburban developments (2005, 152-153). This is the argument of those who say that New Urbanism should be renamed "New Suburbanism."

Some critics challenged the fundamental premise of New Urbanism, that low-density development is necessarily a problem. Kenneth Kolson noted, "[S]prawl has its attractions. If nothing else, it has been a profoundly democratic phenomenon" (2001, 122). Kolson later said that the language describing the ills of suburbia is "eerily familiar" to that used to justify the clearance of blighted urban communities (124). Similarly, Professor Emily Talen noted that "[s]prawl may be an inconvenience"—but not enough of one to justify spending money or passing laws to change it (2005, 143).

By the early 21st century, the New Urbanists had become a force in American planning—certainly in the planning of greenfield neighborhoods (Krieger 2012). Emily Talen's *New Urbanism & American Planning: The Conflict of Cultures*, published in 2005, attempted to place the movement in the wider context of American planning. Talen divided the history of American planning into four cultures: Incrementalism, represented by small-scale changes in the mode of Jane Jacobs or Christopher Alexander; Urban Plan-Making, represented by the City Beautiful and City Efficient movements; Planned Communities, represented by greenfield developments such as Seaside; and Regionalism, represented by the work of Benton MacKaye (the father of the Appalachian Trail) and others. Talen dismissed Modernist planning as anti-urban, so she gave it only passing attention.

Using Talen's taxonomy, one sees that New Urbanists derive their philosophical roots from Incrementalism, create plans like Urban Plan-Makers, and have found their greatest success in Planned Communities, such as Seaside, Florida. What is missing, specifically from East Coast New Urbanism, is Regionalism. Although Talen said "[t]here is always a discussion [among New Urbanists] of regionalism in terms not unlike MacKaye" (2005, 276), as of 2005, no significant regional projects existed in the East Coast New Urbanist portfolio. This may explain

Duany's enthusiasm when approached with designing the Mississippi Gulf Coast—a project of clearly regional scale.

"The inevitable question of style"

Much of the criticism leveled at the Mississippi Renewal Forum concerned what Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck presciently named "the inevitable question of style" (2000, 208). But was the question truly inevitable? Given the *modus operandi* of the New Urbanists, the answer is probably yes.

Although Duany said that he is a stylistic "agnostic" (2011), the movement he helped found openly embraces traditionalism, which is anathema to many Modernist critics and academics. Such open apostasy is the fundamental reason New Urbanism is so often pilloried in the press. Moreover, the tools of New Urbanism—including form-based codes and pattern books—specifically address style and, in the case of form-based codes, arguably legislate style.

Professor Krieger criticized New Urbanist developments for being too uniform, too homogenized. Writing in the late 90s, he said, "America, one hopes, may at the turn of this century be ready for a less singular model of the 'good life'" (1998). This is a common argument leveled against many types of suburban development, whether through academic critiques of real places like Levittown or satirical critiques of fictional places like the Springfield of *The Simpsons.*

Duany countered Krieger's arguments by pointing out the market success of New Urbanism. He explained that New Urbanists design projects for the "difficult and problematic" customer who does not have the inclination or financial wherewithal to commission a project but who does have the resources to pick from multiple projects on the market (1998). Duany also addressed the issue of style:

> At the heart of the academy's contempt for New Urbanism is what Krieger calls its "retrograde" architectural syntax. But this variable is not under the control of New Urbanists. It is the consumer's choice—the determinant of a mass-produced product's design, exercised through selective purchase. (1998)

Architect Witold Rybczynski echoed Duany's point, saying New Urbanists do not need to endorse historical styles because home-buying consumers have already done that (Rybczynski 2006). Put succinctly, traditional homes sell, and the New Urbanists have exploited their understanding of the marketplace to their advantage.

William Morrish, a professor of architecture at the University of Virginia, complemented the way the Mississippi Renewal Forum addressed transportation issues, but he criticized what he saw as the imposition of traditional architectural styles. Morrish said, "A particular style does not promote a certain kind of sustainability or democracy…. You can't approach building a city like it's a 30-acre development" (McKee, Gulf Planning Roils Residents 2005). Despite seeing some success on regional transportation issues, Morrish believed that the New Urbanists were stuck—in Talen's terms—in the Planned Community culture.

Other critics in academe focused on the CNU's penchant for traditional design. Marlon Blackwell, an architect and professor at the University of Arkansas, said that the New Urbanists use "historicism as a way to validate a kind of moralistic take on architecture….I see it as a bit of a scourge" (McKee, To Restore or Reinvent? 2005). David Buege, a professor at Mississippi State University, wanted designs that were "more deeply satisfying than New Urbanism" (McKee, To Restore or Reinvent? 2005).

On one level, the above-listed complaints are about style. On a deeper level, the argument is one of traditionalism versus avant-gardism, or perhaps even more fundamentally, empiricism versus idealism.

The most strident critics of New Urbanism find its forms retrograde and uninspired. For example, California architect and educator Eric Owen Moss said, "[New Urbanism] is the most pessimistic and unimaginative form of architecture because it does not allow for the possibility that something new could be better than what went before" (Ward 2006). This is, of course, a specifically Modern argument—traditional design, even copying other works, has not always been seen as lacking creativity. Historian David Lowenthal wrote, "The present pejorative meaning of 'copy' is of relatively recent origin. During antiquity, copying was not distinguished from creative innovation" (1985, 301).

Memory and the allure of the traditional

Much of our understanding of the world comes from interactions with the physical environment—whether the view from a favorite restaurant, the sound of insects heard from a screened porch, or the familiar smells of a place of work. When an event like Katrina destroys large swaths of that environment—including homes, schools, places of worship, and businesses—people lose their bearings. This point is difficult to convey to those who have not experienced such destruction firsthand; however, philosopher Maurice Halbwachs captured the essence of the situation by expanding the thoughts of Auguste Comte:

> Auguste Comte remarked that mental equilibrium was, first and foremost, due to the fact that the physical objects of our daily contact change little or not at all, providing us with an image of permanence and stability. They give us a feeling of order and tranquility, like a silent and immobile society unconcerned with our own restlessness and changes of

> mood. In truth, much mental illness is accompanied by a breakdown of contact between thought and things…. (1980, 128)

The disruption affects everyone: young and old, rich and poor, famous or unknown. After losing many of his possessions in the New Orleans flood, jazz musician Pete Fountain explained why he skipped Mardi Gras in 2006:

> I think maybe it was just depression about all the stuff that happened…. All the things we lost. All the disruption. And then you look around and see all the stuff messed up. It just sort of grinds you down. (Brinkley 2007, 164-5)

Fountain was not alone among Katrina victims; many fought depression and other mental health issues after the storm.

The sense of disorientation in a post-disaster environment is hard to describe. The familiar has been shattered, replaced by an alien landscape of absence and debris. In Bay St. Louis, the destruction of many neighborhoods was so complete that a volunteer organization was created to restore street signs so residents could navigate town (Koch 2010, 239).

The sense of loss along the Coast was deep. Referring to Grasslawn, a historic house in Gulfport, a Coast citizen said:

> You can construct a building and say this is how Grasslawn looked…. But you can't ever bring back the original building and the history that goes with it. That was our heritage. And it is lost. (Lipton 2006)

In the early days after Katrina, the sense of loss was absolute—the heritage was gone, and nothing was going to bring it back.

The high level of physical destruction makes the memories of the pre-disaster community very powerful. The instinct to return to normal, to put everything back as it was—to build in a

time-honored fashion—all these impulses make it difficult for many to imagine what could be. CNN correspondent and Bay St. Louis native Kathleen Koch captured several phases of this dilemma:

> I started out like many on the Gulf Coast, wanting things rebuilt exactly as they had been, down to the last brick, board, and beam. But then I realized that was not just impractical, it was impossible…. Still, I sometimes found it difficult to embrace the new, unfamiliar structures that appeared and the changing landscape they created. It meant acknowledging that the Bay St. Louis I grew up with now existed only in the memories of those who'd known and loved the town as I did. (2010, 293)

At first, Koch wanted her hometown to be restored to how it was—to become again the town of her memories. Only later, she realized that practical matters—the lack of money and the cost of construction—made her desire an unrealizable fantasy.

Ocean Springs City Planner Eric Meyer noted that not many places—even a fast-growing city like Atlanta—are ready for the kind of change that a disaster brings (2011).[2] Discussing the post-disaster environment, Meyer said:

> In an existing town, folks just psychologically [are not ready for big planning projects]. To heal themselves and so forth, they want everything to look the same—they want things to go back the way they were. And I get that. Everyone is fighting trauma…. So how do you get the impetus to go back differently? (2011)

Disaster recovery experts understand the heavy imprint of pre-disaster memories of a destroyed or heavily damaged community. In their classic study on disaster recover, Haas et al. acknowledge the power of memory: "There is already a plan for reconstruction, indelibly

[2] Meyer left Ocean Springs in 2012 to take a position with Gautier.

stamped in the perception of each resident—the plan of the pre-disaster city" (1977, 268). Often, this plan is more of an impediment than an asset:

> In general, the reconstructed city will be more familiar and less changed than inferred from the initial destruction and more safe and less vulnerable to recurrent hazard. But the achievement is inevitably less than the potential opportunity for change offered by the disaster. (263)

In the post-disaster environment, traditional design is bolstered by memories of and nostalgia for the pre-disaster city. Forward-looking designs, no matter how well executed, tend to accentuate rather than alleviated feelings of loss and disruption.

Disasters often present planning opportunities, because the bad is swept away with the good, and because recovery funds can make previously unachievable projects suddenly feasible financially. Rarely, though, is the opportunity fully seized, largely due to memory and the allure of the traditional.

Criticisms of the Renewal Forum

The critical reaction to the Mississippi Renewal Forum mirrored previously fought battles over the validity of New Urbanism, with the Mississippi Gulf Coast simply serving as the newest battlefield.

Writing in February 2006, Michael Sorkin said, "I happened to be in Biloxi during the CNU charrette that helped guide the development of the group's plans for the Gulf, and I found it both impressive and horrifying" (2006). Although impressed with the organization of the Renewal Forum, particularly in light of the difficult post-disaster conditions on the Coast, Sorkin found the final plans too formulaic and restrictive. He also believed that the Renewal Forum failed to address the potential impact of future storms.

Other critics argued that the one-size-fits-all New Urbanist approach was a bad fit for the Gulf Coast. *New York Times* reporter Jim Lewis wrote:

> The forum presented its 11 plans to the 11 communities of the Gulf Coast, and many of the smaller, wealthier towns, like Ocean Springs and Pass Christian, were enthusiastic about adopting them; New Urbanism, after all, reconstructed the kind of life they'd been living all along. But Biloxi is bigger and more diverse…. (2006, 103)

Lewis's article proved prophetic. Ocean Springs saw the construction of several Forum-inspired projects, and Pass Christian passed the SmartCode, but Biloxi rejected the Forum recommendations and conducted its own, separate planning process.

Looking at the diversity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Biloxi City Planner Jerry Creel said:

> Each of the cities has its own niche. They each have their own vision for what they want to become. It's not like one is right and one is wrong; it's just different niches. (2011)

David Perkes, an architect and director of the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio, argued that the Renewal Forum designs failed to adequately address the unique 'niches' about which Creel spoke. Perkes said, "Every single town—including towns like Moss Point, which is a small town of 10,000 people that struggles to keep even a few stores and restaurants—they were shown this downtown plan that you would think came from Cambridge, Massachusetts" (2011). Such a high level of urbanity, said Perkes, was improbable due to population loss and the historically low levels of density on the Coast.

Other critics had concerns about the implementation of the Renewal Forum plans. Urbanist Philip Langdon observed, "To some extent, the form-based codes now being adopted

are an evolution of the design codes initially devised for greenfield projects" (2006). In a similar vein, Jim Lewis wrote:

> But it's one thing to build a housing subdivision on greenfield and invite prospective homeowners to buy in if they want to…. It's quite another to take a great swath of the Mississippi coast, still reeling from the largest natural disaster in American history, and suggest that the whole thing can be subject to a new sort of code. (2006, 104)

Langdon's and Lewis's concerns are particularly relevant in light of the political climate of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Historically, the region has no history of regional planning, only modest building code requirements, and a skeptical view of governmental regulation.

Some critics question the value of urban planning in general. Emily Talen acknowledged potential difficulties with plan-making. She wrote:

> Critics contend that whoever is in control of plan design and imagery will have an unfair advantage. Plans, especially flowery, colorful images, can be seen as a form of propaganda that are in themselves a form of control. (2005, 136).

The images created during the Renewal Forum, stylistically coordinated across all 11 teams, portrayed a revitalized Coast rendered in soft water colors, at once new and familiar. David Perkes argued that the New Urbanists' renderings simply commercialized the region's historic architecture (2011).

Critic Kenneth Kolson was also skeptical of large-scale planning efforts. Examining what he derisively called "Big Plans," Kolson said:

> Nor is it the point….that people should cease to dream. The point is that those wishing to implement their dreams should proceed with caution, and on their own nickel. (2001, 12)

The Mississippi Renewal Forum certainly was not cautious—in a week's time, the charrettes produced work which continues to influence the development of the Coast. As far as working on their own nickel, the New Urbanists were reimbursed for travel and other business expenses, but they did not earn design fees for the Renewal Forum (Duany 2011).[3]

Writing in 2009, Evans-Cowley and Gough argued that the "good intentions" of the New Urbanists "primarily failed" (2009, 439). Although this author appreciates the depth of Evans-Cowley and Gough's investigation, he disagrees with their final analysis. Evans-Cowley and Gough examined only one of the three Coast counties—Harrison County. This automatically skews the analysis, because Biloxi, which is located in Harrison County, was the municipality that most clearly and publicly diverged from the Renewal Forum planning process. Biloxi's impact is heighted when it is examined as one of five municipalities in Harrison County, versus one of 11 municipalities on the Coast. Furthermore, when Biloxi is excluded, Evans-Cowley and Gough's numbers look significantly different. Analyzing the adoption of New Urbanist principles in long-range plans, Evans-Cowley and Gough found the following rates of inclusion: D'Iberville 67 percent, Gulfport 61.2 percent, Long Beach 63.9 percent, and Pass Christian 69.4 percent (448). Rather than an indication of failure, those numbers suggest a large degree of success in communities that had a "lack of planning culture and lack of knowledge about New Urbanism" (440).

Examining legislation, projects, and people, one can see the impact of the New Urbanists across the Coast. For example, D'Iberville and Pass Christian adopted Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company's SmartCode, Gulfport adopted SmartCode districts, and Gautier adopted elements of

[3] Many firms that participated in the Renewal Forum returned to perform additional planning work and were compensated for subsequent projects.

form-based codes in their new unified development ordinance. D'Iberville's City Hall, transit hub, and new casino all respond to Renewal Forum plans, and Ocean Springs is denser and more walkable than before Katrina. Ocean Springs mayor Connie Moran is a former CNU board member, and city planner Eric Meyer (who worked for both Ocean Springs and Gautier) is a CNU member. The impact of the CNU can be seen in each of the Coast communities.

A Pattern Book *and form-based codes*

One of the most criticized products of the Mississippi Renewal Forum was *A Pattern Book for Gulf Coast Neighborhoods*, a compendium of traditional, mostly residential designs. Published online and distributed for free at home improvement stores, the *Pattern Book* was intended for a wide audience. In fact, one could argue that it was the most direct conduit of ideas from the Mississippi Renewal Forum to the average Coast citizen.

Indicating the ambitions of the authors of *A Pattern Book*, Governor Haley Barbour wrote the following in the preface:

> This valuable tool marks a new beginning in the rebuilding efforts of our residents and businesses throughout the Gulf Coast region. While many of our most loved places have disappeared, **we are compelled to rebuild the Coast in a time-honored way. To ensure that this effort is properly performed, I urge builders to use this pattern book** in their efforts. It will not only result in beautiful buildings, but also strong and well-protected homes and businesses. (Urban Design Associates 2005, italics regularized and emphasis added)

The emphasized text above begs the question: compelled by whom or by what? Because the question is not explicitly answered, one must conclude that tradition is the compelling force. This proposition is reinforced by the next sentence, in which the word *properly* implies that both

a correct and an incorrect way to build exist. Tradition provides the means of distinguishing the two.

Using illustrations from the Mississippi Gulf Coast, images from other locations in the South, prototype plans, and numerous details, *A Pattern Book for Gulf Coast Neighborhoods* ostensibly represents a return to yesteryear, but it is a carefully constructed version of the past. As Lowenthal noted:

> The unadulterated past is seldom sufficiently ancient or glorious; most heritages need ageing and augmenting. Individually and collectively we revise the inherited past to enhance self-esteem, to aggrandize property, to validate power. (Lowenthal 1985, 325)

For example, when the Coast fails to provide a sufficiently charming cottage or streetscape, one is borrowed from Natchez. That kind of decision represents a constructed past.

The paradox of attempting to build in both a time-honored manner and a future-oriented manner leads to some muddled thinking, such as this sentence from *A Pattern Book*: "The Mississippi Renewal Forum has developed concepts for rebuilding towns and cities in **new** ways but as **traditiona**l urban environments" (Urban Design Associates 2005, I, italics regularized, emphasis added). This is clarified, but not explicitly. The proposed "new ways" involve using transects from the SmartCode and responding to FEMA regulations. The "traditional urban environment" will be created by the use of transects to emulate historic neighborhoods and by building following *A Pattern Book*, which is a style manual of traditional architectural forms.

Arguably, well-designed traditional structures are rare on the rebuilt Mississippi Coast. Despite the presence of *A Pattern Book*, most owners (particularly homeowners) built generic buildings of relatively low quality (Meyer 2011). In many instances, bigger, not better, prevailed. Regardless, it was always unlikely that many owners would have access to the funds

or the carpentry skills needed to execute the traditional architecture shown in *A Pattern Book* (Perkes 2011).

Parolek et al. noted that form-based codes can have varying degrees of architectural standards—from detailed architectural standards to no architectural standards (Parolek, Parolek and Crawford 2008, 78).[4] The authors further noted that this kind of regulation should be carefully considered (Parolek, Parolek and Crawford 2008, 86). *A Pattern Book*, of course, was advisory, not compulsory, but its publication in late 2005 did set a precedent for the forthcoming form-based codes, suggesting that architectural form could and should be more strictly regulated.

Indeed, in the years after Katrina, four of the 11 Coast communities adopted some level of form-based codes—ranging from incorporating select elements of form-based codes to adopting DPZ's SmartCode city-wide. Although "form" and "style" are not synonymous, form-based codes represent a radically new approach to the regulation of the built environment on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Traditional versus modern architecture

Before the 20th century, architecture and urban design were driven by precedent—architects from the Renaissance to the Victorian era mined the past for an ever growing cache of styles. Philosophically, these architects thought about two times—the past and the present. Referring to monumental buildings, the 19th-century philosopher John Ruskin outlined two tasks:

> [T]he first, to render the architecture of the day, historical; and the second, to preserve, as the most precious of inheritances, that of past ages. (1989, 178)

For Ruskin, the future is simply the time when the present becomes the past.

[4] Any form-based code will have at least some architectural impact.

The reverence for the time-honored was rejected in the early 20th century, however. Modern architects and planners, advocating a future-oriented vision, attempted to effect an explicit break with the past. The great French architect Le Corbusier wrote, "Modern life demands, and is waiting for, a new kind of plan, both for the house and the city" (1927, 44). For Corbusier and many other Modernists, rapid technological changes required a revised design and planning philosophy that was appropriate for the spirit of the age. Specifically, Corbusier said that advances in steel and concrete construction had created an architecture where "the old codes have been overturned" (13). He called architects lazy, saying they avoid progress (101). With the ascent of the new, the past must recede. Those who work in a tradition are marginalized in favor of the avant-garde, an environment about which Lowenthal observed, "We are no longer allowed to borrow or appropriate from others; to be creative we must be wholly original" (1985, 373).

At the scale of urban design, Modernist planners advocated the destruction of historic cities. For example, Le Corbusier famously proposed replacing Baron Haussmann's Paris with a series of towers in parks, all connected with a network of high-speed roadways. In the United States, Modernist architects following the inspiration of Le Corbusier provided the intellectual underpinnings for vast 1950s and 1960s Urban Renewal projects that leveled historic urban fabric and replaced it with government centers, apartment towers, elevated roadways, and other large-scale projects. The Urban Renewal period of American planning represents the large-scale and explicit removal of historical architecture in favor of newer, usually much larger, and supposedly better designs.

While the Urban Renewal projects were typically bigger than what they replaced, many of them were cold, uninviting, and—arguably—anti-urban. The demolition of the Penn Station

Terminal in the 1960s and its replacement by the mediocre Madison Square Garden was a watershed moment, inspiring the designation of numerous historic landmarks and historic preservation districts across the United States. Those who loved traditional architecture organized into an effective political force, and the demolition of large segments of center cities ceased.

In post-Katrina Mississippi, the debate between those advocating traditional architecture and those advocating modern architecture continued, but with coded language. In Governor Barbour's introduction to *A Pattern Book for Gulf Coast Neighborhoods*, Barbour argued that Coast residents should "rebuild the Coast in a time-honored way" (Urban Design Associates 2005). On the other hand, many argued for a more modern approach, typically supporting a Coast that was "bigger and better"—a phrase which was ubiquitous in post-Katrina Mississippi. For example, Kathleen Koch quoted her producer, Emily Probst, as saying the following: "Everyone says, 'We're fortunate. We'll be okay. We'll rebuild bigger and better.'" (2010, 159). Similarly, the title of the final report of the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal is *Building Back Better Than Ever*.

Research Design

Much of the debate surrounding the Mississippi Renewal Forum centered on fears that the New Urbanists would drown the Coast in nostalgia, to paraphrase the title of a Michael Sorkin article. But how can one establish if post-Katrina architectural designs are traditional or modern in nature?

The phrases "time-honored" and "bigger and better" are too loose, too easily manipulated to have much meaning. Similarly, the terms "traditional" and "modern" have flexible meanings—for different people and in different contexts. On a spectrum including good

contemporary buildings and authentic traditional buildings, Duany et al. identified "a gigantic middle ground of compromise that includes lazy historicism, half-hearted modernism, and everything in between, most of which could be called kitsch" (2000, 210). Value judgments aside, some buildings do sit on the stylistic fence, containing both traditional and modern elements. Are such buildings traditional, modern, or something in between?

To address these issues, this paper proposes TOMAS, the Traditional or Modern Analysis Scale, which ranks buildings from one (most traditional) to five (most modern) using a clear set of descriptions and exemplars from post-Katrina projects.[5] Those definitions and exemplars are the following:

[5] To be as objective as possible, the TOMAS system does not judge whether a project is aesthetically successful or not.

TOMAS 1: A traditional building with traditional materials, detailing, scale, and plan. With patina, even a newer traditional building could be mistaken for an older building. The historic home Beauvoir is an exemplar.

Figure 3: Historic Beauvoir, a TOMAS 1 building, in 2012, restored after Hurricane Katrina. Photograph by author.

TOMAS 2: A traditional building that has been modernized in materials, detailing, scale, and/or plan. Although generally traditional in appearance, a TOMAS 2 building's recent construction is immediately apparent to the discerning viewer. The Biloxi Visitors Center is an exemplar, due to its traditional look but larger, non-traditional scale.

Figure 4: The Biloxi Visitors Center, a TOMAS 2 building. Based on the destroyed Dantzler House, the Biloxi Visitors Center looks historical—until the vehicles, people, and live oak tree reveal its scale, which is much larger. Photo by author.

TOMAS 3: A modernized traditional building. Aesthetically, this building has some traditional elements (such as a gable roof, a porch, masonry construction) but the building is clearly not intended to be historical. Versus a traditional building, a TOMAS 3 building will have less detail, less ornamentation, and, typically, cleaner lines. Some materials may be traditional, but others may be modern—for example, a large expanse of glazing. Broadly, the work of the proto-Modernist architect Sir Edwin Lutyens provides good examples of TOMAS 3 designs. On the Coast, D'Iberville City Hall is an exemplar.

Figure 5: D'Iberville City Hall, a TOMAS 3 building. The building includes historic elements, such as a cornice and arched windows, and modern elements, such as an asymmetric design. Photo by Patricia W. Hughes curtesy of Eley Guild Hardy.

TOMAS 4: A modern building in keeping with the mid-century Modern tradition. Features typically include clean and rectilinear lines, an "honest" use of materials, and flat or low-slope roofs. Broadly, the work of Mies van der Rohe provides good examples of TOMAS 4 designs. On the Coast, the original, renovated portion of Saint Stanislaus College is an exemplar.

Figure 6: Saint Stanislaus College, in Bay St. Louis, a TOMAS 4 building. Photograph by author.

TOMAS 5: A contemporary building in keeping with current trends. Features may include butterfly or single-slope roofs, battered or otherwise angled walls, curved walls, shading devices including horizontal louvers, and contemporary materials such as zinc and other metal siding. The work of Frank Gehry provides well-known examples of TOMAS 5 design. On the Coast, the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum is an exemplar.

Figure 7: The Maritime & Seafood Industry Museum by H3 Hardy Collaboration Architecture, a TOMAS 5 building. Photograph ©2014 Francis Dzikowski/OTTO, used by permission

To establish the TOMAS ratings, the author examined the following post-Katrina projects:

- Those located within the city limits of the 11 Mississippi Renewal Forum communities
- New civic and educational buildings
- Major renovation/restoration projects (e.g. Beauvoir)
- Multi-family residential projects
- Unique commercial projects

The following projects were excluded from the study:

- Minor renovation/restoration projects
- Single-family residential projects[6]
- Projects where the style had been predetermined, including
    - 'Standard' commercial projects, including strip shopping centers and projects built from prototype plans
    - Military projects, such as those on Keesler Air Force Base
- Projects designed before Katrina but completed afterwards, including Frank Gehry's Ohr-O'Keefe museum in Biloxi

Using the above-listed criteria as a filter, the author created a spreadsheet of relevant projects. The core of the spreadsheet was a 240-slide presentation given by the Mississippi Chapter of the American Institute of Architects as part of the Katrina +10 series. Projects on that slideshow were cross-checked versus other sources, including architecture firm websites and local media

[6] As a practical matter, the number of single family residences rebuilt after Katrina was too large for this study. Furthermore, single-family residences are largely part of the private realm, whereas the projects in the TOMAS study are in the public realm.

websites. About 100 projects meeting the required criteria were found, and they were assigned a TOMAS ranking.

To find additional projects, the author crosschecked the initial list of projects against the author's photographs of the Coast, lists of FEMA-funded and other construction projects, and architecture firm websites. These methods identified another 40 or so projects, for a total of 137 projects. The additional projects were assigned a TOMAS ranking.

Findings

The mean TOMAS score for all projects is 2.66, indicating that the project set is slightly more traditional than modern. The mathematical mode (i.e. the most common TOMAS number) is 3, which was higher than the author expected. The standard deviation is 1.2, which suggests that both TOMAS 1 and TOMAS 5 projects are outliers.

TABLE 1: All projects in study					
TOMAS rank	1	2	3	4	5
No. of projects	29	31	46	20	11

When historic preservation and other major renovation projects are excluded, however, the number of authentically traditional (TOMAS 1) projects decreases to 10, the TOMAS score increases to 2.88, and the curve becomes more symmetrical, indicating that new projects were nearly evenly split between traditional designs and modern designs.

TABLE 2: Historic preservation and other major renovation projects excluded					
TOMAS rank	1	2	3	4	5
No. of projects	10	31	43	16	11

Thus, one can reasonably conclude that the Mississippi Gulf Coast has remained the stylistic gumbo it has always been.

Conclusion

Planning after disaster is a fact of modern life. Since Katrina struck the Gulf Coast of the United States in 2005, the world has witnessed the Haiti earthquake, the Christchurch earthquake, the tsunami and subsequent nuclear catastrophe in Japan, Superstorm Sandy, Typhoon Haiyan, and the Nepal earthquake.

During and immediately after the Mississippi Renewal Forum, many critics expressed concerns that New Urbanists planners would impose historicist designs on the Gulf Coast. Despite the New Urbanists' strong influence on the planning of the rebuilt Gulf Coast, the creation of an architectural pattern book, and the implementation of form-based codes, the supposed stylistic homogeneity of the New Urbanists proved to be a strawman, a convenient and easy target for critics who were focused less on the needs of the Mississippi Gulf Coast than on the long-running battle between aesthetic modernists and traditionalists.

The stylistic diversity of the Gulf Coast is even more remarkable when one considers the power of memory and the allure of the tradition. As Haas et al. note, the memory of the pre-disaster city is "indelibly stamped" in the mind of every citizen. Restoring the community to its pre-disaster condition is a powerful instinct—one which must be avoided if a new city is to emerge.

Looking forward, critics of post-disaster planning exercises would do well to avoid discussions of stylistic intent and, rather, focus their efforts on more substantive and relevant issues, such as the need for affordable housing, hazard mitigation, and resilient design.

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