

Translating Bacon's Legacy to current and future generations: Implications of the 20th century Society Hill Urban Renewal Project to Sustaining Urban Heritages

Shuang Wu, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Abstract

Edmund Bacon, the Philadelphia based city planner, is the only city planner ever appears on the cover of Times magazine. His most famous book, Design of Cities, even becomes the required text book for architecture or city planning student all over the world. One of his most influential projects, Society Hill in Philadelphia, has become a landmark in this city. It is the only urban renewal project at that time (mid-20th century) in USA that integrated historic buildings and contemporary designed buildings together(while cities like New York and Boston took the

strategy of massively tearing down, like what we now commonly see in developing countries), together with a planner's long term foresight to recent problems like density and traffic. Bacon insists on "the best way to preserve the city is to use it rather than keep it as a museum". In less than three decades, Society Hill evolved from a big city ward that contained skid row and slum, to now a gentrified "gold coast."

Most of the citizens living in Society Hill are not quite understandable of the importance of this area, although it continues the city identity and is beneficial to not only present dwellers but also to the future of the city. The district was nominated as an official city historic district in 1999. With the passing of time, this masterpiece has put forward more and more significant implications to us and to the future:

1. Preserving a more recent heritage, such as Bacon's Legacy, for future generations other than only regarding 18th colonial buildings as heritages;
2. Adapting to new zoning while preserving the heritage;
3. Considering the integration of historic building into modern urban landscape;
4. Raising the public awareness to preserve urban heritages and developing a public participation approach (e.g. with the current civic association);
5. Learning lessons from Bacon's urban renewal strategy and sharing with developing countries/areas.

This study aims to answer these key questions based on case-study in Philadelphia with analytical methods, and finally a few recommendations presented in considering the on-going urban renewal movement in China.