Arcosanti: An Innovative City Rises in the Desert

Janice G. Schuster
**Arcosanti: An Innovative City Rises in the Desert**

Arcosanti is a sustainable, experimental city envisioned by Italian-American architect Paolo Soleri who was trained by Frank Lloyd Wright. This city, located north of Phoenix, AZ, is a fascinating example of a livable community that exists in harmony with its environment while providing an opportunity for its residents to live and work with each other in a sustainable way.

Soleri realized that modern suburbs require both too much land to accommodate individual houses and costly transportation from the suburbs to the cities where people work, shop, etc., making the suburbs unsustainable for the long-term. Suburbs also isolate people by having them live far away from their places of employment and also from each other.

This architect envisioned a different type of living model, “arcology”: “architecture and ecology as one integral process” that would require far less land for dwellings, would be in sync with the environment, and would enable residents to live and work closely together. The Arcosanti community opened in the early 1970s as a prototype of Soleri’s vision of a sustainable city and an alternative to urban sprawl.

Living quarters in Arcosanti are interspersed throughout the community. All residents perform work in the community instead of paying rent. Work includes production of the famous Cosanti ceramic and bronze wind bells, gardening, working in the café, etc. Currently, there are only about 100 residents living in Arcosanti, much fewer than Soleri’s vision of 5,000. Residents must successfully complete a 5-week workshop program before being given the opportunity to live at Arcosanti.

To learn more about Paolo Soleri, arcology, and Arcosanti visit the following websites:

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo_Soleri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo_Soleri)
- [https://arcosanti.org/Arcology](https://arcosanti.org/Arcology)
- [https://arcosanti.org/](https://arcosanti.org/)
- [https://arcosanti.org/workshops](https://arcosanti.org/workshops)

Pictures: [https://flic.kr/s/aHskCEQJhu](https://flic.kr/s/aHskCEQJhu)


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This piece was written by Janice G. Schuster, Associate Professor and Commons Librarian for Research, Education, and Collections, at Providence College’s Phillips Memorial Library. Janice and her husband took a fascinating guided tour of Arcosanti in June, 2016.

**Book Spotlight: Poverty as My Teacher**

Poverty is a global, social problem not easily solved. However, in *Poverty as My Teacher: Learning to Create Sustainable Family Communities* (2014) Robert E. Miller, M. S. takes on the challenge of
creating a comprehensive plan to build Sustainable Family Communities (SFCs). His interest in creating Sustainable Family Communities (SFCs) began in Mexico in combination with his desire to find families for children orphaned by poverty and violence.

This book describes the birth of the initiative Leading the Way Out of Global Poverty* with Sustainable Family Communities* (SFC) which are designed with the economic and social/cultural factors necessary to be repeatable, scalable and sustainable.

This initiative can truly eradicate poverty beginning with one community; and with each new community contributing to the development of another community. With each new community contributing to yet another community the initiative continues to “scale.” Each new community is built with the infrastructure that addresses all the typical deficiencies found in poverty-stricken communities – ex. lack of clean water, sanitation, jobs, education, …Historically, efforts to address poverty have taken on only one, possibly two such deficiencies. Many of these efforts are very often effective in alleviating one or two conditions of poverty - but poverty continues to define the overall living conditions of the community with ongoing deficiencies in education, jobs, housing, food sufficiency, and more.

The first piece of infrastructure built for each new community is an agriculturally based commercial business. This community owned business serves as the economic foundation for each community of residents. The commercial business serves as an economic engine for each community and as such establishes a path out of the extreme poverty of urban slums to a higher quality of life for the workers and residents. This economic engine creates new jobs, wages, training and benefits for over 100 workers within each community, by way of commercial scale production of organic food. For each community 100% of its annual profits are reinvested within the community to enable three critical sustaining practices:

1. Delivery of training opportunities for community residents - adults and children alike.
2. Maintaining and operating the poverty-free community so as to perpetuate living conditions where residents can live with dignity pride and a healthy sense of self-worth.
3. Replicating itself by funding the start-up of another new community, every year with each new community creating an additional 100 jobs, housing, sanitation, clean water, educational opportunities, continuation of cultural practices and traditions, and so much more.

All of the above are designed to be accomplished without ongoing government subsidies and without ongoing donations from individuals, institutions or foundations.

Leveraging expertise of over 800 individuals, organizations and universities, the nonprofit Our Family Orphan Communities, Inc. (O.F.O.C.) has completed the design and framework for building, implementing and managing each Sustainable Family Community. Beyond the design and development of the Master Plan, the role of O.F.O.C. will be to provide a governance function that focuses on preserving the underlying values and objectives that make up the design of SFC. O.F.O.C. will guide and assist in the implementation, operation and expansion of SFC’s and ensure that each community remains poverty free with a sustainable economy, environment and food-supply for generations to come. All benefits of the network of Communities expanding within a country accrue to the people, economy and society of the country.

Successful SFCs can be built in any host country under the conditions Miller identifies. The end goal of SFCs is to replace poverty with prosperity in the long run. On page 15 of the Introduction to his book, Miller states that his objective in writing it is “to share a way to consciously create entire new communities without poverty that endure for generations.” The key words are the last three words—endure for generations.

Miller poses the essential question: “How can people from urban slums be helped to create their own islands of prosperity in spite of what turmoil may be happening in their society?” (p. 49). He learned about what works and what does not from research and from his personal observations of failed projects of varying sizes. He discusses some of these projects and identifies the unanticipated consequences they had. As he points out, none of these projects was successful in eliminating poverty in the long run.

This book offers a detailed blueprint for creating successful Sustainable Family Communities in any host country. His model is comprehensive, specific, and practical. A very important and special benefit to all is a reduction of the number of orphans - as poverty is the
primary cause of children ending up in orphanages.

For additional insights into the Sustainable Family Communities initiative, the reader is encouraged to examine *Poverty as my Teacher: Learning to Create Sustainable Family Communities*, by Robert E. Miller. Available through Amazon in paperback and as a Kindle e-book.

This piece was submitted by Michael Lanier, Founder & Chief Executive, Business Integration Advisors, LLC, 25587 Conifer Road, Suite 510/415, Conifer, CO 80433, Phone: 303-809-0048. Lanier is a member of the Board of SFC and has been involved with the O. F. O. C. initiative for about five years.

**Treehouse Easthampton**

Treehouse Easthampton, in western Massachusetts, is an innovative, planned community founded by Judy Cockerton to help solve the problem of children in western Massachusetts aging out of foster care without being adopted. Children who age out of foster care without a family in place are at higher risk for becoming homeless, being incarcerated, living in poverty, and suicide. At the core of the Treehouse community are adoptive families, kids, and senior citizens who provide foster care, or in some other way, support the positive milestones of children from the public foster care system.

Cockerton has gone on to do much more than link former foster kids with loving individuals. For example, she has added a program to help siblings separated in foster care to reconnect (*Sibling Connections*) and another to improve these kids’ opportunities for an education (*Birdsong Farm*) and improved future life chances.

To learn more about Judy Cockerton and Treehouse Foundation, see the following:


**Piano’s Courtyard**

Architect Renzo Piano’s solution for suburban sprawl in a Milan, Italy suburb of 6,000 people is the creation of a new courtyard where people can gather for a variety of communal activities including watching movies, community gardening, and participating in multi-ethnic family-style dinners. The courtyard is a place where people of different backgrounds and ages can get together to share and to learn. For example, immigrant parents and their children can get lessons in speaking Italian from a woman who teaches at 4:00 PM everyday in the courtyard. Piano states: “When you have people coming together, problems of diversity disappear and instead diversity becomes a great opportunity of exchange.”


**Hollwich on New Aging**

The name of German-born architect, Matthias Hollwich, has become associated with the terms “new aging,” Geropolis (defined as “the new old city which consists of a dense complex of sleek, angular units designed for multi-generational living”), and BOOM (the concept of liveable communities he has planned for LGBT retirees in various cities and countries).

Through UPenn, Hollwich secured a grant which enabled him to study aging and architecture in an innovative, re-imagined way. For this architect, age 60 is the “new 40.” His innovative designs for liveable communities invite both gay and straight people over 40 to “take charge of their lives and live the latter part of their lives” in a beautiful, safe, vibrant fashion.” His work has started a movement which challenges stereotypes and current living options for retirees and shows us ways to live smarter and better in a new-age social context. Hollwich’s notion of treating aging like
starting a company is very compelling.


http://seniorplanet.org/meet-the-new-old-age-matthias-hollwichs-contrary-vision/

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Longoria on Affordable Housing

Along with the many other social causes she supports through the Longoria Foundation, Actress Eva Longoria has gotten involved in advocating for affordable housing for blue-collar workers in the Latino community. The actress recently became an investor in a Turner Impact Housing Fund whose objective is “to preserve blue-collar apartment units across the country to ease an affordability crisis that has hit minority communities especially hard.” Longoria is well aware that paying high rents make it impossible for blue-collar workers to afford the necessities of daily life like health care, nutritious food and education for themselves and their children.

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Safe Homes for Older Residents

For people thinking about retiring in the near future and wondering if they can remain in their current home, Glenn Ruffenach (2016) identifies resources that can help them make those decisions in an informed way. These resources include:

1) a study from Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University. “Housing America’s Older Adults: Meeting the Needs of an Aging Population.” (Go to jchs.harvard.edu and highlight “Research” to find this study’s results.)

This study focuses on five important features that make homes accessible and safe for older residents: single-floor living; entries with no steps; hallways and doors that are extra wide; outlets and switches that are able to be reached at any height; and lever-style door and faucet handles. The majority (almost 90%) of homes have at least one of these features already. However, less than six in 10 existing homes have more than one of these features.

2) a reference to an Aging-in Place Remodeling Checklist from the National Association of Home Builders. (Go to nahb.org and search for aging in place.); and

3) a reference to an AARP checklist of more than 100 suggestions to help older homeowners “age in place” in an environment that is both safe and comfortable. The AARP also has a free detailed “Home Fit Guide” which contains diagrams explaining how to create a ‘lifelong home” suitable for occupants of any age and physical condition. (Go to aarp.org and search for HomeFit.)

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Boston's NPR News Station Hosts Program on Designing Communities for Aging Americans

On 8/2/16, WBUR (90.9), Boston's NPR News Station, hosted an “On Point” program entitled, Designing Communities For An Aging America. The program was hosted by Sacha Pfeiffer. Guests included:

Paul Irving, chairman of the Center for the Future of Aging at the Milken Institute. Distinguished scholar in residence at the University of Southern California’s Davis School of Gerontology. Author of The Upside

Ruth Finkelstein, professor of health policy and management at the Columbia University Aging Center. Former director of the Age-Friendly New York City Initiative; and

Kathryn Lawler, director of the Aging and Health Resources Division and director of the Area Agency on Aging in Atlanta.

A reading list citing several popular sources on the theme is also provided on WBUR's website. Interested readers are directed to: http://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2016/08/02/senior-living-urban-design. To stream the full episode (46 mins.) click on the red play button next to the episode title. Click on the download icon to save the file to your local machine.

The Oldest Social Housing Project in the World: Fuggerei, Augsburg, Germany

Germany has always been known as a very progressive country for social welfare. Currently, Germany has over one million migrants and immigrants seeking asylum within its borders from the various war-torn countries in the Middle East. These refugees need to be housed, educated in the German language, provided with jobs and training. Many challenges lay before contemporary Germany regarding how all these objectives will be accomplished in the coming years. A large part of the challenge will be to convince ordinary German citizens to accept these newcomers into their communities and into their lives on a primary-group level. True assimilation is the only way the challenges presented by diversity can succeed. During the process, the perceived costs of change will be experienced on many levels—financial, social, cultural, and religious.

Long before the modern Bundesrepublik was created, the country already had social welfare housing. For example, in 1520, Augsburg, part of the principality of Bavaria in the Holy Roman Empire, had a unique housing arrangement, called the Fuggerei. The Fuggerei is a separate medieval community within Augsburg with gates, which are still opened and closed every day. This oldest social settlement in the world was created by Jakob Fugger the Rich. Jakob was a very wealthy merchant and owner of mines and weaving concerns with little wants of his own. He created the Fuggerei for his impoverished servants and fellow Augsburg citizens. The Fuggerei still exists today, despite being heavily damaged by the bombing of Augsburg during the Second World War. The community was rebuilt after the war.

The Fuggerei has 52 houses along with a Catholic church and several town squares. Each house has a separate entrance to small apartments with the ground level apartment serving as a museum. Currently, there are city tours through the settlement for a nominal fee. Each tenant of these apartments pays .88 euro (about $1.00 U. S. dollar) rent each month and must be of the Catholic faith and say the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary and the Nicene Creed every day.

This entry was submitted by Helmut E. Reinhardt, author of an article on Eutingen, Pforzheim, Germany which appears in this volume. His cousin by marriage, Nadine Kaelber, born in Bavaria Germany, sent him the website, I Like Germany, where the Fuggerei was described. To read more about the medieval community of Fuggerei and see pictures, go to the original source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuggerei. To learn more about the Fugger family, go to: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fugger.

Serenbe, a Series of Planned “New Urbanist” Communities in Chattahoochee, GA

Serenbe is a “new urbanist” concept, developed and co-founded by retired restauranteur, Steve Nygren, who retired early, downsized from his large urban home to live on a farm on the outskirts of Atlanta. He decided to open a Bed & Breakfast, and was motivated by a closer connection to nature. In the mid-1990s, Nygren said that this change in lifestyle was a transformative experience for him. When the opportunity to buy a 1,000 acre tract of undeveloped land from multiple owners outside of Atlanta, GA came to his attention, he jumped at the chance to build not one but several planned sustainable, “soulful” communities where residents could “age in place gracefully.” His plan was to protect the distinctive character of the surrounding area and to build communities around the village or hamlet concept.

Before he could do that, however, changes in zoning
laws were required to allow Nygren to build a clustered community of houses and commercial buildings on smaller-than-usual sized lots. The zoning changes allowed for roads to be consolidated and 70% of the surrounding land to be preserved as farms, fields, and woods.

Currently, Serenbe (a named coined by Nygren’s wife, Marie, to reflect a combination of “serenity” and “being”) has two themed hamlets, Selbourne and Grange. Each village in Serenbe has a walkable community center and the following special features: Village 1: Selbourne, a arts-focused community of 265 residents, has a downtown centered by an outdoor Serenbe Playhouse with art galleries and concerts. Village 2: Grange, a healthy food focused community, has a 25-acre organic farm, a farmer’s market, a “locavore” restaurant, and coffeehouses. The third village, Mado, which is in the process of being constructed, is planned around the theme of health and wellness. When Mado is completed, it will have 380 housing units, including townhouses, cottages, larger homes, and around 50 loft-style rental apartments which, Nygren hopes, will appeal to millenials. Unlike Selbourne and Grange, Mado is being planned as a multi-generational community which will have a range of amenities designed for residents of all ages. For example, Mado’s planned amenities include a Montessori School for children from ages 3-14 years, a community pool and fitness center, and opportunities for yoga and Pilates classes.

Houses and townhouses in all three villages will have features geared to easy living for older residents, such as wider doors, staircases, and halls; no step entrances into single floor homes; and multiple-height work stations in kitchens. Homes are clustered together along with commercial buildings with no backyards and closer than standard zoning allowances with consolidated roads to prevent sprawl. Thus, preserving land for green space, farms, woods, and parks.

**Submitters’ Commentary:** The concept of sustainable communities is an exciting one and the models which Nygren has conceived so far are compelling beginnings that may be tweaked and enhanced over time through trial and error to fit the needs and finances of community members. These communities may also be replicated in other parts of the U.S. where very large tracts of woods and farmland are available to developers. Bluestein (2016) asks the key question: “Is This Sustainable Village The Future Of Retirement?” The answer is a qualified yes -- for some people. As Mr. Bluestein states, currently, houses in Serenbe are priced from $300,000 to over $1,000,000. This price range means that residences in this “new urbanist” community are affordable only to purchasers who are financially very secure. To attract working - and lower middle-class senior citizens and other-generation residents, houses would have to be affordable as well as attractive to buyers. Perhaps Mr. Nygren and other developers will be encouraged to expand the concept of sustainable communities to include homes starting at $200,000 which lower-income people can afford to purchase through state and federal (HUD) grants and/or loans. In Mado, there may also be opportunities to build rental units which would appeal to millennials. But the same issue, affordability, applies to rental units also.

*Submitted by Helmut E. Reinhardt and Josephine A. Ruggiero. This submission is based, in part, on the article by Adam Bluestein. 2016. (August 31). “Is This Sustainable Village The Future Of Retirement? https://www.fastcoexist.com3063268/is-this-sustainable-village-the-future-of-retirement*