

How does the New Urban model become a tool for social engineering, and what happens when a service corporation is able to shape and control it? This is a question among many that I will search to answer this summer while doing research in Val d'Europe, a "New Town" built east of Paris that encircles Disneyland Paris and has been developed by the Walt Disney Corporation. The topic first interested me in spring 2009, as the idea for a final research paper for *Comparative Urbanism* in which I compared the American new urban/Disney development of Celebration with its Parisian counterpart. While studying abroad in Paris last fall, I had the opportunity to visit the *Ville Nouvelle* several times, which gave me a new set of ideas for taking this preliminary research a step further. For my senior thesis for *Growth and Structure of Cities*, I plan to live and conduct research in Val d'Europe for one month, compiling a case study of the new town while addressing some of the following questions/themes:

- The novelty of this "public/private partnership" and Disney's prominent public role in the town: Do local elected officials and/or residents view this relationship as potentially problematic or overly interfering?
- Social Engineering: the manipulation of the New Urbanism model; the use of urban planning, architecture and the strategic exclusive spaces.
- Residential lifestyles in Val d'Europe; how often do residents venture into Paris? Where do residents work: in the back-office business complexes (built by Disney) or in the city?
- Janet Wasko's idea of the "Celebration consumer" versus the "Celebration citizen." Do "Valdeuropeans" contribute actively in the creation of their communities, or do they seem to passively consume the lifestyle that Disney creates for them?
- The presence of social housing in Val d'Europe: is it accessible? How does this situation differ from that of Disney's approach to mixed-income housing in Celebration?

Through these points I will return to where I began: How does Val d'Europe resemble Disney's other New Urban experiment, Celebration, FL? What are their similarities/differences? What about Val d'Europe suggests that Disney might have learned from its mistakes in Florida?

While attempting to respond to these questions for my 2009 project, information gathered online sufficed as a basic introduction of Val d'Europe and its unique circumstances. However, writing a senior thesis will require further, detailed information, obtained through face-to-face interactions. Taking several trips to the site during my semester abroad in Paris last fall led to a flow of possible directions to follow when approaching the politics and planning that continue to define the extraordinary growth of this corporate-sponsored New Urban town. The Hanna Holborn Gray Research Grant would enable me to travel back to Val d'Europe and immerse myself in its lifestyle for one month.

Answering my questions would require interviews of Val d'Europe residents and local public officials. Disney employees, some of whom live in the development, and families (children included) should also provide valuable information. The Val d'Europe branch of Marne la Vallee University (specializing in Urban Planning) can serve as another source of information both in academic resources and conversations with experts. Yet, as Andrew Ross and Janet Wasko have shown in their work on Celebration, living on-site is also part of the experience, the myth and the practice. Whether dealing with mass transit, adjusting to malls or learning what people do on Saturday night, my study of Val d'Europe now demands a sense of people and place simply not present in the literature I have read. It is in this regard as well that I would like to add a week in Celebration to my itinerary at the end, to reread Disney after my French immersion.

On my return, I will use this information to guide my senior thesis in Cities. The information I gather will be used to write a parallel paper for my Interdisciplinary French Studies major thesis next spring.

Estimated Budget (Val d'Europe, June 2011):

Hanna Holborn Gray Research Grant
Research Proposal

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| Plane ticket, round trip: | \$943.00- 1,100.00 USD |
| 1-month rental student apartment: | \$ 756.00 to \$820.00 USD |
| Public transportation: | \$ 172.00 USD |
| Bike Rental: | \$167.00 USD |
| Food: | \$400.00 USD |
| Phone: <i>SFR card, 4 hours</i> | \$91.00 USD |
| <i>Estimated Total (VDE):</i> | \$ 2,529.00-2,750.00 USD |

Additional trip to Celebration, FL (August 2010):

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| Plane ticket, round-trip: | \$250.00-300.00 USD |
| Car Rental: | \$320.00 USD |
| Lodging (Celebration Hotel): | \$210.00 USD |
| Food: | \$100.00 USD |
| <i>Estimated Total (Celebration):</i> | \$880.00-\$930.00 USD |

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| ESTIMATED OVERALL TOTAL: | \$3,409.00-\$3,680.00 USD |
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