Craig White – Hot Docs 2014 Has Plenty For Urban And Architectural Enthusiasts

urbantoronto.ca. April 12, 2014 .If you find yourself glued to UrbanToronto for stories about Toronto's changing urban form, new buildings, and the urban experience, then you're a pretty good candidate to fill seats at the Hot Docs international documentary film festival, set to hit Toronto over eleven days at the end of this month and the beginning of May.

The festival includes 197 selections this year from 43 countries covering a huge range of topics—essentially the best documentary films from across the globe made in the last year—along with some returning classics. There are particular spotlights on Danish-made docs this year, and Canadian ones of course, along with retrospectives of work by directors John Zaritsky and Adam Curtis. The documentaries inform, amuse, shock, and invariably take you to places you have never been, and some you have never even heard of before.

Read more: http://urbantoronto.ca/hot-docs-2014

Sina Zekavat – Becoming A Post-Soviet City: Social Housing And Urban Planning In Yerevan

Map 1: First official map of Yerevan published in 1920 prior to the implementation of Tamanian's radial plan.

ajammc.com. April 2014. It is impossible to walk around Yerevan today and not notice the melancholic presence of one building typology across this rapidly changing urban landscape: The Soviet social housing block. Far from being a clean break from the past, the Soviet housing legacy remains highly present and influential in the daily experience of Yerevan. These grey and often crumbling buildings constitute the largest share of housing in Armenia. Unlike some countries with longer capitalist heritages where social housing has become marginalized as a place for the poor, in Yerevan and in many other post-socialist Eurasian cities like Baku, Tbilisi and Tashkent, these housing blocks still provide the most common and accessible living conditions for average citizens.

Through careful observation of Yerevan's Soviet housing legacy as well as Yerevan's current transformations this article aims to explore the slow decay of socialism as a complex and multilayered process that symbolizes not simply the death of a particular utopia or ideology but also the emergence of new, and often conflicting, notions of belonging and nationhood.

Yerevan is the capital and the largest city of Armenia. With a population of 1.117 million, it contains approximately 34% of the total population and 54% of the urban population of Armenia. The city's origin dates back to the 8th century BC when settlements started to grow along the banks of Hrazdan River at the northeast of the Ararat plain.

Read more: http://ajammc.com/yerevan-becoming-a-post-soviet-city/

Lauren Royston & Michael Clark – Urbanisation: Low-Cost Housing Not Low-Cost Enough

Photo: Madelene Cronje M&G

Mail & Guardian, April 11, 2014. Urbanisation is inevitable, whether or not election manifestos or government policy documents acknowledge it as such. Approximately 60% of the South African population currently lives in urban areas. This figure will increase as a result of natural population growth and the further migration of people to cities in search of economic opportunities.

In many African countries, including South Africa, the standard government response to poverty associated with urbanisation (existing in backyard shacks, informal settlements and "bad" buildings) has been to focus on improving standards of living in rural areas in order to prevent rural-urban migration, and to criminalise poverty in urban areas by evicting people from their shacks and clamping down on informal livelihoods.

These policies have failed because they do not engage with the reality of urbanisation as a historical phenomenon. Viewed historically, South Africa is not urbanising exceptionally fast at all. South Africa's urbanisation rate is 1.21%, comparable to Spain's rate of 1% and much less than India's rate of 2.47%. In addition, more people are being born in cities than in rural areas.

Nita Bhalla – Solar Lanterns Replace Kerosene Lamps In Indian Urban Slums

NEW DELHI (Thomson Reuters Foundation) – An Indian social enterprise start-up is helping people living in urban slums to use clean energy by changing their kerosene lamps for solar lanterns and wood fires for more efficient cooking stoves through a simple payment scheme.

Ills.: Reuters

Pollinate Energy, which began operations in 2013, is one of thousands of social businesses in India which are tapping into the clean energy market, in a country where 35-40 percent of the population have no access to electricity.

While the majority of those without power live in rural areas, many poor urban communities are also forced to live by candlelight, use polluting fuels like kerosene, or "steal energy" by illegally tapping in to the power lines of wealthier neighbouring residences.

In Bangalore – best known as India's IT hub – Pollinate Energy markets and sells renewable energy lanterns and stoves on a five-week, interest-free payment plan to families living under tarpaulin sheets in the city's slums.

"There are actually a lot of organisations selling clean energy products in the rural sector already, and we found that there was a big gap in the market in the urban sector," said Monique Alfris, co-founder of Pollinate Energy. "Nobody believes that there are people in urban environments who are using kerosene for light."

Read more: http://in.mobile.reuters.com/article/

Africa Check ~ Kate Wilkinson – Does the ANC have a 'good story to tell'?

The African National Congress has been in power in South Africa for twenty years. In the run-up to the 7 May election, it says it has a "good story to tell" about its performance over that period. This is the first of two reports evaluating key claims. Researched by Kate Wilkinson for AFRICA CHECK.

In this – the first of two reports – we evaluate some of the key claims that the ANC has made in its campaign to win over voters ahead of the country's general election on 7 May.

"In 1994, 1.2-million families were without homes. In 2013, more than 3.3-million families have free homes."

The claim is *incorrect* and the comparison is flawed. In 1994, the Housing White Paper estimated that there was an urban housing backlog of 1.5-million houses, not 1.2-million. Two years later, in 1996, the national census revealed that 1,400,000 shacks or informal dwellings remained in the country. This represented

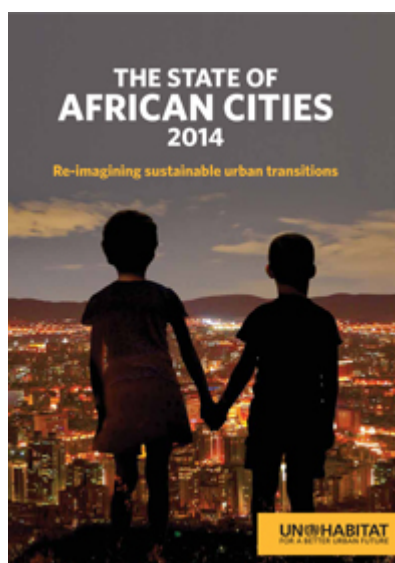16% of the nearly 9-million households in South Africa at the time.

The 2011 national census found that the number of informal dwellings or shacks had increased to just over 1.9-million. This represented 13% of all households in South Africa; a decrease of 3 perecentage points since 1996.

Data compiled by the Department of Human Settlements shows that almost 2.8-million "housing units" and 876,774 "serviced sites" were completed between 1994 and December 2013. This is a total of nearly 3.7-million "housing opportunities".

The ANC claims that 3.3-million families have free homes. But the real picture is far more complex. By definition, "housing opportunities" created by the department are not all free and increasingly involve the provision of "serviced sites", not houses.

Read more: http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/africa-check

UN Habitat – The State of African Cities 2014

The African continent is currently in the midst of simultaneously unfolding and highly significant demographic, economic, technological, environmental, urban and socio-political transitions. Africa's economic performance is promising, with booming cities supporting growing middle classes and creating sizable consumer markets. But despite significant overall growth, not all of Africa performs well. The continent continues to suffer under very rapid urban growth accompanied by massive urban poverty and many other social problems. These seem to indicate that the development trajectories followed by African nations since post-independence

may not be able to deliver on the aspirations of broad based human development and prosperity for all. This report, therefore, argues for a bold re-imagining of prevailing models in order to steer the ongoing transitions towards greater sustainability based on a thorough review of all available options. That is especially the case since the already daunting urban challenges in Africa are now being exacerbated by the new vulnerabilities and threats associated with climate and environmental change.

Download the PDF: http://unhabitat.org/the-state-of-african-cities-2014/