

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 16

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This issue of the *Berkeley Planning Journal* is comprised of a lively set of articles that engage with the contemporary moment of socio-spatial restructuring. Planning has always been concerned with the problems and crises of cities and regions, with what Boyer (1987) calls the effort to “dream the rational city.” However, in recent decades, there has been a sense that the nature of the crisis has changed. With the rise of “advanced marginality” (Wacquant 1999), with the “space of flows” opened up by informational technologies (Castells 1998), with the emergence of critical theory as a challenge to standard epistemologies and methodologies (Beauregard 1991), a new world order has provoked planners and planning scholars to ask a different set of questions. Such are the interrogations that shape the contributions to this *BPJ* issue.

Blanca Esthela Gordo revisits that age-old planning concern: urban poverty, but does so in the context of knowledge economies and the network society. Presenting an important critique of the “digital divide,” Gordo draws our attention to persistent structures of destitution and impoverishment. Quite simply, she shows that while technology enables access, access to technology is another matter. Her article tempers the technological enthusiasm that has overtaken policy debates, showing how technological frontiers often reinforce rather than erase existing class, race, and gender geographies. Gordo therefore challenges planning to devise ways of enhancing access.

Ness Sandoval’s domain of research is American welfare reform. His work speaks to a rich field of debates that contest the workfare successes claimed by reformers and that critique welfare reform as a brutal application of gendered and racialized austerity policies. But Sandoval also asks another question, one that is crucially important: how and why has workfare become so popular? Why is it the regime of truth? He argues that this discursive success has to do with its implicit, and even explicit, theme of American values – a resurrection of the family ethic and work ethic that are seen to be in crisis because of welfare. The Bush

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administration, for example, is now promoting marriage as an antidote to poverty – need we say more? As Peck (2001) has emphasized in his definitive book, *Workfare States*, in such discourses, the policy problem is defined not as poverty, but as welfare dependency. Sandoval’s research shows that a responsible welfare reform policy would in fact shed this garb of morality and instead focus on structural geographies of vulnerability, from the need to fund child care and health care to plan for economic downturns. Sandoval provocatively argues that if such action is taken, workfare might be able to transcend its current status as “the sweatshop sector of the urban economy.”

Jan Whittington examines California’s energy crisis, asking whether or not planners can learn useful lessons from this particular case. Carefully mapping the changing landscape of utility regulation, she argues that California’s energy woes embody a “deregulatory capture.” Her work revisits one of planning’s core concerns: the relation between state and market. She shows how deregulation has been not only a process of privatization and marketization but also a fundamental restructuring of the state. How should planners think about the role of the state in an era of free market rhetoric? How should they think about the market? Whittington argues that deregulation requires careful regulation; or that good markets are predicated on good states. Such is the difference between the illusion of the free market and the actual practices of the market. As Michael Watts (1994) noted in a piece subtitled “The Privatization of Everything,” the invisible hand of the market often requires the visible fist of the state.

Jonathan Mason takes on a two-pronged crisis. On the one hand, Mason is concerned with planning’s future. What is planning’s core theory and practice, he asks? What *should* it be, at this moment of global change? On the other hand, he is engaged with the particular needs and deprivations of the contemporary city – from the imperative to manage complex informational networks to growing social inequalities in access to public goods. He addresses both issues by focusing on infrastructure. Make no mistake - Mason’s notion of infrastructure is not the technicist calculus of how many pipes and at what price; rather, it is the very scaffolding of cities, its material grid. Thus, Mason rightly frames his discussion of infrastructure in the context of political institutions, regional economies, and social structures. Framed thus, infrastructure emerges as the “spine” of a new-century planning.

This collection of articles confronts three key aspects of contemporary socio-spatial change. First, they demonstrate the rescaling of state activity, a process marked by simultaneous supranationalization and localization. Thus, as Bob Jessop (1994) argues, the “hollowing out” of the state is less about the disappearance of the state and rather about the spatial recalibrations of this institution. To this end, as all four pieces note, it is more important than ever before to think about state power and state capacity. Second, these reflective writings all indicate a concern with issues of social inequality. In some cases this is through an emphasis on poverty; in others it is with the implications of a political system captured by market interests. Third, in doing so, they contemplate the role of planning in the face of such challenges. “Where were the planners?” asks Whittington in her discussion of the “making” of California’s energy crisis. How can planners mitigate digital destitution? asks Gordo. What is the role of planning in the new spatial order of the world? asks Mason. And, how can planning research show the way for a less punitive and more just social policy? asks Sandoval. The exploratory answers to these self-posed questions indicate the multi-sectoral strengths of planning. But they also indicate something else: that planning is not simply about the mechanics of policy implementation but equally about the dynamism of cutting-edge theory and intellectual leadership; and that planners are not simply self-styled neutral mediators of public processes but equally scholar-practitioners able to courageously pose normative questions about allocation, distribution, and transformation.

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