

Looking Back: Perspectives from Five Former *Berkeley Planning Journal* Editors

Edited By Jake Wegmann

Those of us on the Berkeley Planning Journal Editorial Board opened this academic year with a sense of excitement, proud that we were embarking not only on a wholesale redefinition of the format of the *BPJ* from print to virtual, but also that this transition would coincide with the release of the *BPJ*'s 25th volume. We thought it fitting, as we grappled with how to make fundamental changes in how the *BPJ*'s board members will do their work in the future, to take a good, long look at the past. While one could make an eminently plausible argument that 25 is just a number, the *Journal*'s silver anniversary is as good an occasion as any for us to break the usual pattern of lurching from one urgent deadline to the next, and instead take a deep breath and get ourselves acquainted with the exploits of those who came before us and bequeathed this institution, the *BPJ*, to our safekeeping.

BPJ Managing Editor Andrea Broaddus came up with the idea of a divide-and-conquer approach, where each of us on the Editorial Board would go back and read one of the previous *BPJ* volumes and report back to the group. You could say that we divvied up the task of the *BPJ* getting to know itself. The results were revealing: we noted changes in academic fashions and even several near-death experiences as students came and went from the Department of City and Regional Planning (DCRP) and levels of enthusiasm for the *Journal* rose and fell. Seeing all of these changes over the years crystallized on the printed pages of *BPJ* volumes past made us realize with a start that the previous Managing Editors who had guided these efforts are still out there in the world. As we Web-searched them, it became apparent that this was a singularly impressive group of people, who had gone on to do great things in the field of planning and beyond. Wanting to hear their perspectives, with the added benefit of the passage of time to leaven their observations, we reached out to former *BPJ* managing editors and asked them to write a reflection on their experiences with the *Journal*. We are fortunate that a number of these extraordinarily busy people were able, on short notice, to respond to our invitation.

As we contemplated how to put together this retrospective section of the *BPJ*, we were acutely aware that if we were not careful, to those not connected to the *Journal* the results could read as a series of self-congratulatory indulgences, a common pitfall when any institution engages in commemorating its own history. To forestall this fate, we decided to prime our past editors' recall of the recent (or, in some cases, not-so-recent) past by posing two broader questions to them: What do you

see as the purpose of a student journal? And what did your experience running a student-led journal mean for your own career trajectory?

The last thing we would want would be to try to muzzle the multiplicity of perspectives from this eloquent and thoughtful bunch, so we presented those two questions to our past editors as mere starting points and encouraged them to proceed in any direction they chose. As you will see from reading the five pieces here, the results vary wildly not only in content but in tone, from inspirational to reflective to sardonic to bluntly self-critical and all points in between. Furthermore, although the authors are united in their contention that there is in fact some higher meaning to the expenditure of blood, sweat, tears, and pixels needed to bring out each new volume of the *BPJ* (what a relief!), they describe the inevitable moments when this hard-earned truth is, shall we say, hard to keep in sight. But I believe that I am on safe ground in observing that the experience of helping to shape the *BPJ* was highly important to all five of these individuals. Some things, it would appear, haven't changed at all from *BPJ* Volume 1 to Volume 25.

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Raphaël Fischler, Volume 6

After I was asked if I would reflect on my past experience as editor of the *Berkeley Planning Journal (BPJ)* in 1991, I suddenly realized that I had not published in the *Journal* since 1996. And yet, *BPJ* was an important element in my training as a planning academic. My debt toward the *Journal* is real and the request of the current Editorial Board therefore became a welcome opportunity to share some thoughts I have had on academic research and publishing.

In many cases, journalists can trace the origin of their careers to their days as editors or writers for a student newspaper or magazine. The same cannot be said of the editors of academic journals: student-run journals in our field are few and, except in a very limited number of cases, academic editorships in planning are temporary stints, not professional careers in and of themselves. Even if our professional mandate is not to edit academic journals, it is to publish in them and to serve as referees for work submitted by our colleagues. Given that not all students have the opportunity to submit their work for publication during their schooling, and given that even fewer students are asked to comment on manuscripts, participating in a student-run journal offers useful training in an activity that will be part and parcel of a future job. Student-run journals such as *BPJ* serve also to socialize their contributors as members of academe. Much like attending a

conference, serving on an editorial board imparts a sense of belonging to a community of scholars. Especially when contributors to the journal hail from an array of universities (instead of belonging only to the journal's host institution), the work can also be an opportunity for real networking.

Student-led journals, we see, have many advantages and real benefits. But, depending on how they are run and what they publish, they can also pose a real danger. If they are run like a good number of academic journals in our field, they may lead young scholars to emphasize rigor over relevance and make them part of an academic community whose ties with practice have weakened over the past decades. To avoid these dangers, it is important to know what purpose a scholarly journal serves.

The primary purpose of academic publishing in our field and in quite a few others is not to improve the world. It is to provide evidence of scholarly productivity in order to obtain tenure and get promoted. Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying that academic research in urban planning is not useful to cities and their residents. I am saying that it is more useful to its authors and their colleagues than to the public. I am making that claim for two reasons. First, some research is simply not meant to be useful to practice; it is meant to make us more historically or politically aware, to expand our 'culture' of planning rather than inform our decisions or improve our tools in any direct manner. In that sense, its main use is to improve the education of planning professionals and planning amateurs. Second, policy and planning are not driven by research; they are informed by research but driven by political demands from various stakeholders. Unlike research in science and engineering, our research cannot affirm or conclude but only suggest, inspire, prepare, frame, alert, legitimate, etc. Research is at its most useful to practice when it is a reflection of practice and a reflection on practice, that is, when scholars put themselves at the service of practitioners and help them analyze and, if warranted, diffuse their new ideas and methods. Planning scholars have the time and opportunity to do what planning practitioners have too little time and opportunity to do, namely to assess what their practice does and what it means.

BPJ and similar student-led journals can be places of training and socialization for aspiring academics. But they can also be spaces of critical thought on what it means to be a researcher and a teacher. With every issue, or at least with every new editorial board, basic questions must be raised anew: What is our aim? What difference do we want to make? Who are we serving? I do not recall that we asked those questions in 1991, when I was *BPJ* editor. At least, I know I did not ask them explicitly and I know I would not have been ready to entertain answers that departed significantly from the standard answers we give to them: that we publish journals to diffuse research that will be of interest to our peers and that, in so doing, we are

strengthening planning as an academic field and advancing our own careers in it.

Toward the end of my doctoral studies—nearly twenty years ago—a classmate and I had a frank discussion about the role of research. My friend, whose research skills far exceeded mine in methodological scope and depth, expressed fundamental doubts about the usefulness of scholarly inquiry. He knew that only a small minority of works—some seminal books and articles—really make a difference in the field and thought that all the rest was fodder for academic resumes. True to his beliefs, he did not pursue an academic career and became a successful, socially conscious professional. (He did maintain strong ties to academia and taught as an adjunct professor). I couldn't disagree with him but was wedded to the idea of becoming a professor, because the professor's life was the life I wanted. Seven years later, a number of historical and theoretical articles earned me tenure at a good university. That position, in turn, gave me a platform from which to engage the policy and planning debates in my community. My most influential work for local policy-makers and planners has come in the form of research reports commissioned by government agencies, briefs submitted to public commissions, and op-ed pieces published in newspapers. The scholarly research that appears in these documents mostly serves a function of legitimation, as do my academic and professional titles. The real work of influence comes from well-expressed, educated opinions that mix fact and expressions of value.

We are very fortunate in North American planning to have a real community of scholars who, aside from occasionally making nasty comments in anonymous manuscript reviews, generally get along well and enjoy each other's company. Being a member of that community is a privilege and a source of satisfaction. As a ticket to membership in that community, *BPJ* is a very valuable institution. How valuable it is for cities and their residents, however, is a question every editorial team needs to answer for itself.

Raphaël Fischler was the Managing Editor of the 6th edition of the BPJ in 1991. Nowadays he is an Associate Professor in the School of Urban Planning at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, as well as the School's Director.

J.S. Onésimo Sandoval, Volume 13

The phrase “academic scholarship” conjures up many different images. Over the past decade, I have had the good fortune to have time to reflect on the meaning of academic scholarship. Strolling down memory lane, I have fond memories of my time as co-editor of the *BPJ*. At the time, I did not realize how important this academic endeavor would be to my professional life. As I reflect on my experience as an editor, I would like to

share three themes that helped me evolve as a scholar. The first theme is community. After becoming an editor, I soon realized that any academic product would require a team effort. We could no longer approach this intellectual project with an individual consciousness but rather we needed a collective consciousness. My experience as co-editor gave me a small taste of the collective effervescence that is created from community scholarship. Little did I know, at the time, that most of my academic work would be with other collaborators that have similar academic interests. My desire to work in a team setting stems from my positive experience with collective effervescence as co-editor of the *BPJ*. Contemporary academic scholarship is rarely an individual accomplishment. Much of what we produce today is a product of peer reviews, a community of ideas, and synergistic scholastic enterprises. My experience as a *BPJ* editor helped me dispel the myth that academic scholarship should be pursued as an individual activity.

The second theme is human justice. One of the factors that motivated me to become a scholar was my desire to write about the contradictions of the human condition in cities. When I became a co-editor of the *BPJ*, I was determined to use the journal as a vehicle to address social inequality in cities. I was finally in a position to work with other editors to frame the research agenda that encouraged scholarship on social equity. Negotiating the fine line between my research desires and the general interest of readers of the *BPJ* gave me the experience and confidence to use my power as an academic to continue to frame research around social and spatial injustices found in the American metropolis.

The third theme is academic excellence. The pursuit of higher education is motivated by many factors: knowledge, recognition, creativity, etc. Regardless of the specific motivation, the end result is academic excellence. Our contribution to the academic community and society at large is our written words found in our libraries. At the end of the day, when we all die, we will leave a part of ourselves in our libraries for the next generation of scholars.

Volume 13 represents an important milestone in my academic career. Yes, we had many long nights, last minutes changes to articles, and other mishaps with the publisher, but in the end, we gained valuable academic experience, we matured as scholars, and we embraced the intellectual challenge to continue to work on the project that is called academic scholarship.

J.S. Onésimo Sandoval served as co-editor of BPJ volume 13 in 1999. He is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri.

Peter V. Hall, Volume 14

Academic publishing is a mysterious thing. What better way, what more fun way, to learn about writing, editing and reviewing, about submission, revision, acceptance and rejection, than by editing the *BPJ*?

More than this, what the *BPJ* also did—does—is bind together the DCRP community and us to it. Communities are held together by more than good feelings and shared spaces; they need practices and institutions that remind us that we're all in this together. Jonathan Mason, Larissa Muller, Mike O'Dell, Mike Reilly, and I edited the 2000 journal as the second year cohort. Accompanied by burritos and red wine we held long meetings in the Ph.D. student office, then temporarily relocated to a building at Fulton and Kittredge during the seismic retrofit of Wurster Hall. That's right, there was once a time when California had money for things like that. After Planning Theory, those meetings were the last great activity we undertook together before our various specializations, fieldwork, and careers took us in different directions. But the *Journal's* community-building stretched beyond the editorial cohort; as first-year students we had eagerly anticipated being invited to review articles, and as senior students we continued to submit and review articles, and see abstracts of our dissertations published. We had the good fortune of having Jennifer Dill as our business manager, by then in her third year on the job. Faculty members took turns serving as the *Journal's* advisor—ours was Karen Christensen—while also contributing articles and serving as reviewers.

Still, one of the problems with community is that sometimes you want it too much. I recall that we were thrilled when *BPJ* supporter and former DCRP faculty member Ann Markusen submitted a paper co-authored with one of her students. The paper had all the hallmarks of her incisive, empirically-rich, and policy-relevant writing. Yet, our reviewers pointed out some ways to improve the paper. Indeed, one of our senior student colleagues even dared to suggest we might... require revisions! Little did we know what an everyday event that was in academic life—that with some papers, revise and resubmit is cause for celebration. After much angst we wrote to Professor Markusen and her co-author, suggesting ever so politely that they might want to consider the advice of the reviewers. But we were unwilling to provide clear guidance. It was a confusing editorial message, precisely the kind of waffle that irritates me today. Needless to say, the paper was revised and resubmitted, and was better for it; the reviews had helped.

After the edition was published, Ann wrote to us. Her tone was stern but her message was supportive: you wanted the paper, you wanted some changes, why didn't you just say so? This was also the DCRP community we became part of through the *BPJ*—the one that extends far beyond

Wurster Hall and the redwoods. That cares enough to give advice, frankly, freely, and that takes the mystery out of a cornerstone of the academic trade.

Peter V. Hall served as co-editor of BPJ Volume 14 in 2000. Today, he is an Associate Professor in the Urban Studies Program as well as an Associate Member of the Department of Geography at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Jeffrey M. Vincent, Volume 18

There was a time when I thought *Berkeley Planning Journal* (BPJ) Volume 18 would never come to be: BPJ would never celebrate its 20th anniversary with that issue. How could it, with seemingly everything conspiring against its very existence? Let me briefly recount the ... agony.¹ And the lessons.

I was three years into the Ph.D. program. Knowing that publishing was our golden ticket to fame, fortune, and...well, at least a job in academia, I very much wanted to pull back the mysterious publishing curtain and be an editor for BPJ. I knew this was a great opportunity. And I was right. We had a good cohort and four of us signed on to co-edit.

The year was 2004 and an unusual thing was happening in the halls of DCRP: one of its most famed scholars was (gulp) leaving. Manuel Castells—whom we all revered and worshiped—was leaving his longtime academic home for shores more southern and European. To honor the occasion, Castells was giving a ‘farewell lecture’ to the Berkeley community. Without a doubt, this was an important event for the college, DCRP, and for the entire campus. The talk was beautiful, soaring in scholarly scope, charming in its reflectiveness on scholarship at Berkeley, and challenged us newbies to carry the mantle. And carry it well. I still have my notes from this lecture. Castells gave a grand, whirlwind tour of all his books, especially ‘the trilogy.’ In short, it was stunning.

We editors landed on a brilliant plan: for BPJ 20, we would print Castells’ farewell speech and solicit commentary from students and faculty, past and present. We were on cloud nine with this idea. I went to retrieve the recording from the talk. The recording was nowhere to be found. Lost forever.²

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1. Note: Some facts and minor details may be stretched, embellished, or forgotten, or have otherwise been given rigorous poetic license.
 2. To those of you laughing: this was before the ubiquity of iPhones and digital recorders.

So we asked Castells for a copy of his talk. His response was something to the effect of, “Oh, I didn’t write anything down, I just talked.” (As an aside, my mind was blown away by that.) Our brilliant idea for *BPJ* 20 fizzled before our eyes.

Once the editorial board got back to fighting weight, we picked ourselves up off the mat and came up with a new idea: special issue. I can’t even remember the topic. But I remember that it was... cutting edge critical theory something something, micro and macro at the same time. Hip, edgy, rigorous. The call went out, far and wide. I think we got all of two submissions.

Suddenly, things took (even more of a) dive. My co-editors were dropping like flies! Two got too-good-to-refuse job offers in Boston. The third had a baby. It was solely in my lap. This came at a time when the last couple of Ph.D. cohorts had been very small, enough to count on one hand. So there just weren’t that many people to bring on board.

It was then that I had some conversations with faculty members about the *BPJ*. I learned there was great pride in the long-standing nature of the journal as a peer-reviewed, entirely student-run endeavor. Some of these very faculty members had at one time been *BPJ* editors themselves. But the institutional support for the *BPJ* from the department had eroded. And students were more and more pressed to meet Berkeley’s new ‘normative time’ requirements for extra funding. Thankfully, three of my colleagues in the program came on board to help me out. And at this time I was bound and determined to pull this volume together.³ Eventually we did, with seven solid articles. Getting those articles to print quality was truly a collective affair. We all read at least four versions of each paper, working diligently with the authors to refine and improve them and incorporate reviewers’ suggestions. We even changed the cover design—from the traditional shot of Berkeley’s famed Campanile to the view looking out into the world. As I wrote in the Editor’s Note: “We turn the gaze around and find ourselves inside the [Campanile’s] bell room looking out.”

I came away with a newly profound respect for all things well published. The care and effort it takes to convey a solid argument, back it up with good evidence, and extrapolate useful conclusions is an art and a skill. It’s also a collective effort of many hands. Even in the face of adversity and doubt. Thanks *BPJ*.

3. Note: My wife STILL blames *BPJ* for me taking a year longer to write my dissertation than [she thinks] I should have.

Jeffrey M. Vincent edited Volume 18 of the *BPJ*, published in 2005. He is the Deputy Director and co-founder of the Center for Cities and Schools within the Department of City and Regional Planning at UC Berkeley.

Alex B. Schafran, Volume 22

Soon after getting involved in the *BPJ*, I began digging through the stacks of back issues lining a long-forgotten bookshelf on the fourth floor of Wurster Hall. I knew little about the Journal, a testament more to my general ignorance of scholarly life and academic journals than to the obscurity of the *BPJ*, yet it was clear from the long list of well-known authors who had once written for the Journal that things had changed. Introduced at a time when there were far fewer journals and much more lenient tenure requirements, the *BPJ* had slowly morphed into more of a student journal, publishing solid work by young scholars as opposed to pithy texts by legends like Peter Hall, Ann Markusen, or Manuel Castells.⁴

In the ever-expanding world of academic egos, some would look upon this change as one of 'decline,' part of our broader predilection for judgment all too often deployed on cities. Much as scholars seem completely unperturbed by discussing the influx of low-income people to a community as 'decline,' somehow featuring work by people who may one day achieve fame and fortune is not equal to publishing those whose reputation, or at least academic appointment, is relatively secure.

What was clear to me is that the role of the *BPJ* had changed and needed to change, and that the world of intellectual urbanism and planning that we were inheriting was not going to be the same. Starting with Volume 21's bilingual approach to Las Californias, helmed by Paavo Monkonnen, we tried to push the *BPJ* to open up, to see what it could become rather than simply attempt to be what it was or what it somehow was supposed to be. In 22 we pushed even further, bringing in poetry and satire to mix with the standard fare of theory and empirics. The Urban Fringe, a section from the early days brought back in Volume 21, became a regular feature, attempting to develop short, well-written pieces which were a hybrid of op-ed style writing and reportage, but with a strong intellectual bent. Volume 23 brought our first photo essay, as well as a piece by a legend, DCRP alum Peter Marcuse.

As we reflect back on 25 volumes, the question that is the *BPJ*'s future is in many ways the same question that faces DCRP, CED, and planning and urban development as a whole. The period from 1984 to 2012 cannot

4. This is a generalization, of course. The journal always published student work, and continued to publish work by non-students, but the balance shifted.

by any stretch of the imagination be labeled planning's best, a fact which should be clear to anyone who studies the current state of California, characterized by a precariousness brought on by the most profound urban crisis in modern history. The question is not what should we become, or how can we return to the glory days, but what can we become, and how can that transformation be part of the larger transformation of our entire collective enterprise. What we have done thus far is take baby steps. It is my sincere hope that the editors to come, together with the Department and the College and planning as a whole, are able to take much larger leaps forward. It is too important not to.

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