

Retrospective on the BPJ

By Hilda Blanco

The idea for the *Berkeley Planning Journal (BPJ)* came to me at a final exam I was proctoring when I was a Teaching Assistant for Department of City and Regional Planning (DCRP) Professor Karen Christensen in 1983. I had failed to bring anything to occupy myself, and wrote up the idea during the exam. The *Journal* was conceived with the law review model in mind: doctoral students editing and producing it, publishing both student and faculty work.

To move from idea to print took about a year, involving applications for funding to the College of Environmental Design, the Department, the graduate school association (which funded student activities), and other university sources. The Department and its Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IURD) were particularly encouraging and helpful. Mel Webber, who headed IURD at the time, lent the full support of the Institute for the effort. IURD was so instrumental that I thanked each and every one of the staff by name in the first issues. Their help was essential because we were able to process and typeset the first issues through the UNIX system, saving on printing costs. I remember sitting with a member of IURD's staff, for hours, on several days, to make sure the issue was typeset the way we intended. But most important, the *Journal* was successful because of the efforts of many doctoral and masters students who made the *Journal* their project, and assured its continuity. Two of the editorial associates of the first issue, Nancey Green Leigh and Cliff Ellis, became subsequent editors. DCRP faculty were also enthusiastic, and we enlisted about half of them to review submissions and help in other ways.

As set out in the introduction to the first issue, the main purpose was to develop the *BPJ* as a vehicle for communicating thought and research among faculty, students, visitors, and alumni, as well as the profession at large; basically, as a vehicle to build community. It was also meant to serve educational purposes for graduate students by allowing them to improve writing skills and to provide opportunities to publish their work. The *BPJ* also published abstracts of professional reports, theses, dissertations, and alumni as well as departmental news, such as summaries of research projects. As I saw it, the articles as well as the abstracts and the news items all served the same purpose of building community. At that time, several people objected to the hybrid nature of the *BPJ*—a cross between a scholarly journal and a departmental newsletter. For some time, I did not have an answer to this objection, but took the opportunity in the introduction to the first issue to make a point about the nature of scientific inquiry. In

effect, this argument was that our understanding of science over the last few centuries had evolved from conceiving of science as something mostly made up of facts, then of scientific laws, then of theories, then finally to the unit that generates knowledge, namely, communities of inquiry, that is, open communities that share a commitment to methods of inquiry. As I pointed out, if Berkeley was interested in advancing knowledge, then the best thing it could do was to build its community by enlarging its means of communication.

In that first issue, I also identified a Berkeley orientation or idea with three broad features: a distinctive theoretical orientation; a close connection to the social sciences and social research; and a social conscience, expressed in the *BPJ*'s early rejection of the planning profession as something consisting entirely of technical expertise, its critical attitude towards established institutions, and its strong advocacy for social justice. This framework gave me the excuse to rephrase Peirce's metaphor: the community does for the idea what cellulose does for the beauty of the rose: it affords it opportunity (Peirce 1931). The Berkeley idea, I argued, deserved a strong community and a lively means of communication.

We published important work in those first issues, often in its early stages. Before the rise of communicative theory, the articles by Rosen, Christensen, and Drury developed early participatory, consensus-seeking approaches; articles by Kroll and Glasmeier, Hall and Markusen, and Markusen et al. presented regional economic studies on suburban office markets, high-tech growth, and the regional effects of defense spending. But in reviewing the first issue of the *BPJ* recently, I was struck by the current relevance and insights of the first article, "The Future of Social Policy in America" by Peter Marris (1984), who had been a visiting professor at Berkeley from UCLA during the previous year.

Marris began his article with newspaper accounts of the effects of unemployment on the lives of people, during a time, analogous to the present, when the country faced financial crisis and devastating plant closings and job losses in the manufacturing sector, with the average national unemployment rate in 1983 reaching 9.7 percent, the highest since the Great Depression. (In comparison, during the recent recession, the average national unemployment rate reached its highest rate in 2010 of 9.6 percent. [Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012]) The article was written at the beginning of the Reagan administration, amidst the rise of the free marketeers and the dismantling of social programs.

Marris went on to point out that at any one time only half of the population is gainfully employed, while the other half is either too young, too old, too sick, or lacks access to employment. As a result, all societies have to establish principles to decide how the half with direct resources are to share

them with the other half, thus defining social policy. He indicated that in the history of human societies, there are four main answers or principles: kinship, charity, insurance, and rights. A combination of these four typically defines a nation's social policy. After WWII, Marris argued, the conception of social policy that emerged in the United States had emphasized universal social rights expressed as membership in social insurance programs, such as social security or unemployment insurance. In these, contribution and benefit were loosely coupled, with benefit determined more by policy than by contribution. The same was the case in other initiatives, such as welfare programs, that were not dependent on contributions and that were less clearly seen as entitlements. Marris argued that this post-WWII conception of social policy was repudiated by the Reagan administration. As he put it, "instead of comprehensive welfare rights, the President [Reagan] proposes a 'safety net' to take care of the destitute under traditionally punitive conditions of eligibility" (ibid).

I was struck by Marris's insight that the liberal ideal of the welfare state could not be revived. "Once discredited, the ideologies that justify policies, unlike the policies themselves, rarely return" (ibid). And history over the past three decades confirms the insight, as even the Democratic Party itself under the Clinton administration pushed to end Welfare "as we knew it." Marris further argued that when such ideologies are discredited, there is an opening for a new ideology, and he reflected on alternative assumptions for a progressive social policy. In his reflections, he took for granted the staying power of social insurance programs, and argued that social policy in the future needed to go further and address people's wellbeing in terms of their unique attachments and of the meaning of their lives, and not just the economic loss of a job. Furthermore, he argued that the management of uncertainty is crucial for living a meaningful life.

Today, in the absence of an alternative social policy, we are faced with a situation in which even the major social insurance programs, Social Security and Medicare, can no longer be taken for granted—final evidence of the erosion of post-WWII social policy. Marris's ideas on how we manage uncertainties and commitments to keep our options open, and thus shift uncertainty asymmetrically to those less powerful than us is a sophisticated theoretical analysis that has yet to be fully appreciated. However, his insight that social policy needs to go beyond monetary losses and address people's well-being is beginning to make inroads even in economics, with the emergence of hedonic economics (Dolan and Kahneman 2008; Kahneman and Kruger 2006; Kahneman and Sugden 2005). But overall, this seminal *BPJ* article challenges us, again at a time of social crisis, to imagine a new meaningful and sustainable social policy for our times, one that will live up to Berkeley's ideals.

In conclusion, let me congratulate all the cohorts of students and faculty who have contributed to reaching this 25th anniversary milestone for the *BPJ*. Thank you for carrying the idea of the *Journal* forward. I hope you have found your involvement a lively and enriching experience.

Section editor's note: Hilda Blanco founded the Berkeley Planning Journal, serving as its first managing editor. In this reflection, she looks back on her experiences starting the Journal, articulates the underlying values with which she imbued the Journal (which, I would argue, continue unchanged to this day), and relates larger trends in planning and in our political economy from the mid 1980s to the present day.

Today, Professor Blanco is a Research Professor at the Sol Price School of Public Policy at the University of Southern California. She also serves as the Interim Director of the USC Center for Sustainable Cities.

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