

## INTRODUCTION: Planning without Walls

*You cannot step twice into the same river.*

— Heraclitus, 513 B.C.

Though most of us will not admit it, as planners we tend to like walls—walls specifically in the sense of boundaries. We are very accustomed to them. If we take a look around, we see them everywhere. I doubt if our profession could last long without them. There are political boundaries, areas defined by zoning, general plans, neighborhood boundaries, census tracts, just to name a few. In our lives as practitioners we struggle to keep everything within these lines, to find ways to define what is inside and outside of these city and community “walls.” We are constantly faced with the need to understand a bounded area and what do with the problems in and around it. NIMBY-ism (not-in-my-backyard), as an example, refers to a phenomenon in which a group of citizens are very aware of a smaller boundary condition (namely their own lot lines), but are vocal about what happens around that boundary, particularly as it affects property values.

Those of us entrenched in the academic life are no less accustomed to walls, though we prefer to call them paradigms. We spend a great deal of effort defining what our field is, and what our contribution can and should be. With a relatively short history (as a field of recognized academic pursuit, planning has been around less than a hundred years), it may be necessary constantly to define and specify the exact boundaries of planning thought. Even the process we use to frame and analyze planning problems has been given a more contained existence, with one of the more appreciated and cited works proposing a “bounded rationality” (Simon 1976 [1945]). In a world of turfism, not understanding the boundaries may mean losing ground, simply because one doesn’t know when it happens. In some universities, the inability to define and defend the field has meant the reduction of planning department resources, and in some cases either the disbanding or reorganizing of the department.<sup>1</sup>

The true irony is that while the field and profession are so preoccupied with boundaries, the world around us is becoming harder and harder to define easily with a simple line or two. We live in a society that is beginning to dissolve traditional walls. The topic is one that has been broached by *Journal* editors in the past. Ruth Steiner, in her introduction to Volume 7, describes the articles that year as being illustrative of the “...broad and ‘wall-less’ boundaries of the planning profession” (Steiner 1992: 3). Hilda Blanco, editor of the first two *Journals*, describes the debate among planning academics and whether or not planning has been successful in its efforts to define itself as a separate

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profession. She goes on to say, "There is something inherent in planning that doesn't love a wall" (Blanco 1985: 2).

From the paradigm perspective, this boundary debate is familiar to most students of planning, starting perhaps with Wildavsky's invective and challenge to the profession in "If Planning is Everything, then Maybe It's Nothing" (Wildavsky 1973). Rational decisionmaking and comprehensive planning came under direct fire. Theorists retreated from the neatness of Simon's bounded rationality, and began to discuss planning issues in terms of "disjointed incrementalism" or being ill-structured (Mitroff 1974). Problems quickly lost their solvability, becoming squishy (Strauch 1976), messy (Ackoff 1974), lumpy (Hill 1986), and finally took a sinister turn. According to Rittel and Webber the problems were, in fact, "wicked" (Rittel and Webber 1973). The planner was told the best he could do was "muddle through" (Lindblom 1973 [1959]).

Beyond the academic debate, there are three additional ways in which society is breaking down traditional boundaries: through technology, economics, and perspective. Technology is perhaps doing the most to encourage "wall-less" planning. Telecommuting, for example, has the potential to alter commuting patterns. The "Internet" and ubiquitous "e-mail" have created opportunities for interchange and contact with people all over the globe, and can be done from one's own home. The integration of fax technology and modem capabilities have made the old traditional letter almost obsolete. In a typical home session on my computer last week, I communicated with colleagues in three countries by e-mail, and sent a fax from my computer to someone in another state. As multi-media takes a firmer grasp of the market, the range of capabilities will seem limitless. AT&T, in recent television commercials, depicts an executive on the beach participating in a conference call, and sending an important fax from a pen-based computer pad. Whether this is feasible as means for all of us to do business is doubtful (beaches will get awfully crowded). The role of the "information highway" as promoted by the Clinton Administration, however, will offer a number of opportunities to do things in non-traditional ways, and certainly ways that are no longer constrained by spatial location or geographic distances.

The globalization of the world economies is a second indication that we are moving toward fuzzier definitions of markets, and pushing down the traditional walls of trade. The movement to a common currency in the European Community and the recent passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) both suggest to the fact that our boundaries are expanding, or at least being radically redefined. To speak of isolationism seems quaint, but now very naive, as we quickly move toward more integrated markets and linked economies.

In addition, we are increasingly becoming a regional society. While we may have well-defined city and county boundaries, we are also beginning to acknowledge that our activities and the impacts transcend those boundaries. For example, we know from experience and research that the impacts of a large development project ignore project boundaries, potentially affecting a whole region in terms of pollution, traffic congestion, and use of resources. This regionalization of perspective has shown itself in many areas as states have passed legislation for state land use and growth management measures. Last, and perhaps most important, we have a new administration with the election of President Clinton. The change in federal perspective could be significant, as Clinton has shown support for at least two of the boundary-breaking elements I mention (the information highway and NAFTA).

But what do walls, boundaries, and perspective have to do with this edition of the *Journal*? Not surprisingly, everything. The articles this year offer a rich array of perspectives on planning and planning issues, each dealing with boundary conditions in its own way. **Irene Tinker** describes the Street Food Project in Minia, Egypt, which offers some interesting research results, forcing local officials to rethink the manner in which they regulate and interact with this sector of the economy. The impact of the automobile on traditional market hierarchies is analyzed by **Susan Handy**, who finds that a vicious cycle of dependence has been created. In terms of boundaries, she notes that traditional commercial business district (CBD) shopping has greatly diminished as the car has pushed shopping to the regional malls of the suburbs. **Pat McGovern** examines a boundary condition that has become a popular description of larger suburban centers, called "edge cities." Water is perhaps one of the elements that most resists boundaries, and as such requires considerable innovation to regulate and distribute. **Tim Stroshane** discusses the problems of water markets in California, and offers some analysis of what works and doesn't for this slippery issue.

On a micro-boundary scale, the *Journal* is pleased to offer the printed form of a lecture series on housing held in April of this year. Three prominent authorities on US housing policy offer their perspectives on, in this case, the need for walls (and roofs). **Peter Dreier**, **Marc Weiss**, and **Peter Salins** each present their perspective on the need for housing reform, which in some cases delves deeper into the underlying causes of inadequate housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income families.

In a continuing section we call *Current Debates*, we focus on the boundaries of planning theory, with three insightful essays on current theory issues. **Edmund (Ted) Egan** examines the basis for industrial location theory, **Rolf Pendall** clarifies our understanding of the research on "progressive" cities and the role of critical planning practice in

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those cities, and **Lisa Servon** calls attention to the important contributions to planning of both critical theory and feminist theory. Finally, in our traditionally light-hearted glance at life on the "Urban Fringe," **Allan Jacobs** reveals two of his favorite World Truths, which I leave to your discovery.

To close, I will reveal a bit of my own bias. If a planner's world were a coloring book, I fear that almost every picture would be colored neatly within the lines. We must be willing to resist the sometimes overpowering temptation to place boundaries around every problem and phenomenon. As a profession, we must keep an open mind about what is possible, and not whether something did or did not work in the past. To borrow from the hippest of computer phrases, planning must be able to "morph" along with our changing society. Our profession is perhaps most qualified to both adapt to and to facilitate change. We must therefore be prepared to wear the mantle of "policy entrepreneurs" (Kingdon 1984) and step into the leadership position when the opportunity arises.

In the tradition of most introductions, I would like to take a moment to thank those who really made this volume possible. First and foremost I wish to thank Rolf Pendall who, although his title is assistant editor, performed more as co-editor and made the entire process easier and at times even fun. Thanks also must go to our Editorial Collective, who this year, as in years past, made the really tough decisions regarding the screening of articles for the *Journal*. The Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IURD) provided funding, and also as in years past, the valuable staff assistance of David Van Arnam. The interaction and collaborative processes that went into the production of this volume represents some of the very best aspects of planning, and itself is an example of what is possible, rather than what is expected.

—Dave Simpson, Editor

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>At the time of writing, UCLA's planning program is under consideration for radical restructuring, and rumors abound regarding the pending dissolution of the planning program at the University of Pennsylvania.

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