

Editors' Note

By Jesus M. Barajas and Nicola Szibbo

There is something endearing about a tentative swimmer who cautiously tests the water, wondering whether it will be warm, lukewarm, or ice cold. The *Berkeley Planning Journal* has not only tested the sacred academic waters with the *Urban Fringe* blog, but has fully taken the digital plunge in this endeavor. Currently, blogging occupies a liminal space in the planning world. Blogs either stem from academics, or they can be created by grassroots organizations and even ordinary citizens. It is the act of democratizing planning knowledge through blogging that both threatens and challenges the traditional ivory tower.

Although our blog of planning practice, *Urban Fringe*, was introduced and launched concurrently with the publication of our previous volume, the blog began regular publication in September 2012. Edited and curated by Ruth Miller in the fall and Christina Gossmann in the spring, *Urban Fringe* engages foremost with the Department of City and Regional Planning's Masters' students, who offer critical reflections on the bridge between planning as it is learned in the classroom and planning as it is practiced on the streets and in the community. We believe our blog authors have challenged current thinking in urban planning and have helped us define what it means to be a student journal in the era of digital publication. To highlight our experiment, the editorial board has chosen "Experiments in Planning" as our theme for Volume 26. We are pleased to announce our experiment has gone swimmingly, but readers are invited to offer their own assessment at: <http://ced.berkeley.edu/bpj/category/urban-fringe/>.

The current edition also marks the second time the *Berkeley Planning Journal* has been an Open Access publication, a political decision and successful experiment in which we take great pride. The democratization of information is somewhat of an art form, and as a socially progressive planning department we aim to uphold the vision of making planning information accessible. Indeed, we are in good company with our colleagues across the university system; the University of California recently announced its support for California Assembly Bill 609, which requires publicly-funded research produced to be freely accessible within 12 months of publication (Diaz 2013). As with our blog, we hope that this experiment in Open Access becomes a permanent aspect of academic publishing.

The collections of articles in this volume reflect experiments in planning in one shape or another. While innovation in university research is known stereotypically to come from the hard sciences and technical fields, Jennifer

Wolch, Dean of the College of Environmental Design, and Anthony Cascardi, Dean of the Arts and Humanities Division in the College of Letters and Science, explain that the social sciences and humanities have much to contribute as well. They have written an essay outlining an experiment in pedagogy, which combines methods of planning well-known in social science with methods used in the humanities. Deans Wolch and Cascardi argue that this new experiment is necessary for scholars and practitioners in training to be able to address the complex urban problems of today. Mark Tewdwr-Jones, Professor of Town Planning at Newcastle University in the UK, writes of a different blending of the humanities and planning: the perception of modern planning as depicted on film. For him, the representation of spaces, places and planners on film is a reflection of how they are seen by the broader public. Such depictions are instructive to our own understanding of the planning profession and how it may be perceived by the public.

Other “experiments” might implore us to question both the way we organize and think about planning. Ruth Miller, former *Urban Fringe* Editor, examines the multiple conflicting federal and state definitions of *rural* as they apply to the San Francisco Bay Area. She suggests that a clearer understanding of what makes a community rural—removing the “false dichotomy between rural and urban”—will enable planners to improve outcomes in all areas of California. In “Shrinking Cities,” UC Berkeley PhD student Aksel Olsen cautions us to be critical of what we mean when we label a city with such a designation. Population loss in places as wide-ranging as Eastern Europe, Rust Belt cities in the US, and secondary cities in major metropolitan areas should not be lumped under the concept of shrinkage without examining the particular contexts within which population loss occurs. In “A Gradual Reawakening,” UC Berkeley Master of City Planning student Ella Wise proposes a visionary model and recognition of the importance of nature’s revitalizing impact on humans within cities and suburbs alike. Recognizing a reemergence of interest in urban agriculture and Frank Lloyd Wright’s *Broadacre City* concept, she argues that planners must incorporate not only denser, but also agrarian design, in the latest models for urban growth. Milton J. Friesen, a Canadian doctoral student, reminds us that the role of a planning scholar is not uniquely defined. He argues that it is useful to think about three different emphases that characterize academic planners: the *broker* who links academia and professional practice, the *scientist* engaged in empirical research, or the *synthesist*, who draws on other disciplines to inform planning scholarship.

Scholars in this volume charge us to think about the role that design plays in planning. With “LEED for Neighborhood Development,” College of Environmental Design students and recent graduates Hannah Clark, Miriam Aranoff, Ethan Lavine and Kanokwalee Mam Suteethorn,

venture into largely uncharted territory in urban design research. The students note a gap in literature related to green neighborhood rating systems; and in their attempt to bridge this gap they conduct original survey research by assessing the Duboce triangle neighborhood in San Francisco for perceptions of livability. They also compare residents' perceptions of livability against current LEED-ND (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development) standards. Stanford doctoral student Aiga Stokenberga and UC Berkeley masters student Arijit Sen examine Cordonices Creek in their original research piece. They find that creekside residents' exposure to the creek's land use ordinance to be among the most important factors affecting resident's awareness and knowledge of the area's ecology.

Perhaps stretching the definition of experimentation somewhat, we can view cities themselves—and their associated economies—as products of the long-running experiment of human civilization. In her essay, Carolina Reid, who is the most recent addition to the Department of City and Regional Planning's faculty, draws on the work of Devin Fergus to historicize the subprime mortgage crisis and to highlight emergent practices in local policy that will work to prevent such crises from occurring again. Solving problems such as these, in addition to others like urban poverty and environmental degradation, require the strength of cities and the innovations they enable, Harvard Professor of Economics Ed Glaeser argued in *Triumph of the City* (2011). He shared these insights and others in a lively round-table discussion hosted by the BPJ, which was transcribed for this issue.

Finally, we are pleased to present an array of book reviews that cover the wide scope of the urban planning discipline. Contributing authors reviewed books on bicycling for transportation, city development, urban design, social movements in the city, the urban economy, and border issues. We invite readers to dive into the pages of this issue and reflect on how the work they do constitutes their own experiments in planning.

References

Diaz, Adrian. 2013. "Re: AB 609 (Nestande), as amended April 23, 2013." Letter to the California Assembly Accountability and Administrative Review Committee, April 26 http://www.ucop.edu/state/legislation/php-app/read_doc.php?id=2245.

Glaeser, Edward. 2011. *Triumph of the City*. New York: The Penguin Press.