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ESSAY: THOMAS J. CAMPANELLA

Jane Jacobs and the Death and Life of American Planning

"Construction Potentials: Postwar Prospects and Problems, a Basis for Action," *Architectural Record*, 1943; prepared by the F.W. Dodge Corporation Committee on Postwar Construction Markets. [Drawing by Julian Archer]

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
— T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

During a recent retreat here at Chapel Hill, planning faculty conducted a brainstorming session in which each professor — including me — was asked to list, anonymously, some of the major issues and concerns facing the profession today. These lists were then collected and transcribed on the whiteboard. All the expected themes were there — sustainability and global warming, equity and justice, peak oil, immigration, urban sprawl and public health, retrofitting suburbia, and so on. But also on the board appeared, like a sacrilegious graffito, the words "Trivial Profession." [1] When we voted to rank the listed items in order of importance, "Trivial Profession" was placed — lo and behold — close to the top. This surprised and alarmed a number of us. Here were members of one of the finest planning faculties in America, at one of the most respected programs in the world, suggesting that their chosen field was minor and irrelevant.

Now, even the most parochial among us would probably agree that urban planning is not one of society's bedrock professions, such as law or medicine or perhaps economics. It is indeed a minor field, and that's fine. Nathan Glazer, in his well-known essay "Schools of the Minor Professions," labeled "minor" *every* profession outside law and medicine. Not even clerics or divines made his cut. Moreover, Glazer observed that attempts on the part of "occupations" such as urban planning to transform themselves "into professions in the older

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas J. Campanella is associate professor of urban planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
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sense, and the assimilation of their programmes of training into academic institutions, have not gone smoothly." [2] But minority status by itself is not why "Trivial Profession" appeared on the whiteboard. It was there because of a swelling perception, especially among young scholars and practitioners, that planning is a diffuse and ineffective field, and that it has been largely unsuccessful over the last half century at its own game: bringing about more just, sustainable, healthful, efficient and beautiful cities and regions. It was there because of a looming sense that planners in America lack the agency or authority to turn idealism into reality, that planning has neither the prestige nor the street cred to effect real change.

To understand the roots of this sense of impotence requires us to dial back to the great cultural shift that occurred in planning beginning in the 1960s. The seeds of discontent sown then brought forth new and needed growth, which nonetheless choked out three vital aspects of the profession — its *disciplinary identity*, *professional authority* and *visionary capacity*.

It is well known that city planning in the United States evolved out of the landscape architectural profession during the late Olmsted era. Planning's core expertise was then grounded and tangible, concerned chiefly with accommodating human needs and functions on the land, from the scale of the site to that of entire regions. One of the founders of the Chapel Hill program, F. Stuart Chapin, Jr. (whose first degree was in architecture), described planning as "a means for systematically anticipating and achieving adjustment in the physical environment of a city consistent with social and economic trends and sound principles of civic design." [3] The goal was to create physical settings that would help bring about a more prosperous, efficient and equitable society. And in many ways the giants of prewar planning — Olmsted Jr., Burnham, Mumford, Stein and Wright, Nolen, and Gilmore D. Clarke — were successful in doing just that.

"Construction Potentials: Postwar Prospects and Problems, a Basis for Action," *Architectural Record*, 1943; prepared by the F.W. Dodge Corporation Committee on Postwar Construction Markets. [Drawing by Julian Archer]

The postwar period was something else altogether. By then, middle-class Americans were buying cars and moving to the suburbs in record numbers. The urban core was being depopulated. Cities were losing their tax base, buildings were being abandoned, neighborhoods were falling victim to blight. Planners and civic leaders were increasingly desperate to save their cities. Help came soon enough from Uncle Sam. Passage of the 1949 Housing Act, with its infamous Title I proviso, made urban renewal a legitimate target for federal funding. Flush with cash, city redevelopment agencies commissioned urban planners to prepare slum-clearance master plans. Vibrant ethnic neighborhoods — including the one my mother grew up in near the Brooklyn Navy Yard — were blotted out by Voisinian superblocks or punched through with expressways meant to make downtown accessible to suburbanites. Postwar urban planners thus abetted some of the most egregious acts of urban vandalism in American history. Of course, they did not see it this way. Most believed, like Lewis Mumford, that America's cities were suffering an urban cancer wholly untreatable by the "home remedies" Jane Jacobs was brewing and that the strong medicine of slum clearance was just what the doctor ordered. Like their architect colleagues, postwar planners had drunk the Corbusian Kool-Aid and were too intoxicated to see the harm they were causing.

Thus ensued the well-deserved backlash against superblock urbanism and the authoritarian, we-experts-know-best brand of planning that backed it. And the backlash came, of course, from a bespectacled young journalist named Jane Jacobs. Her 1961 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, much like the paperwork Luther nailed to the Schlosskirche Wittenberg four centuries earlier, sparked a reformation — this time within planning. To the rising generation of planners, coming of age in an era of cultural ferment and rebellion,

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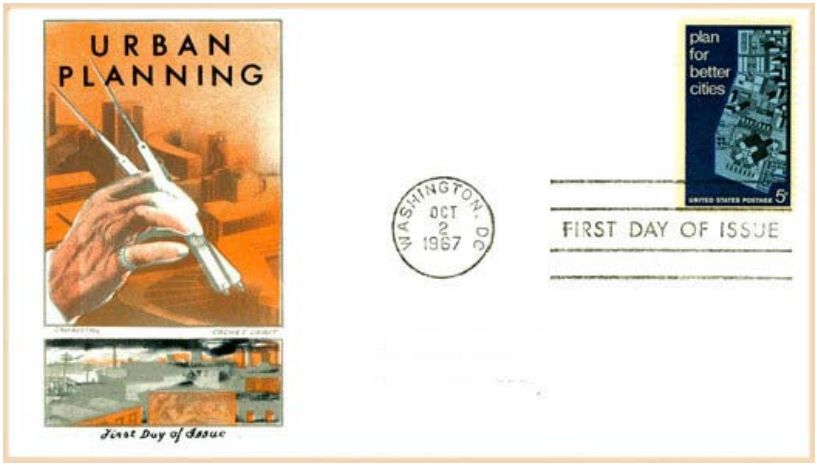
Jacobs was a patron saint. The young idealists soon set about rewiring the field. The ancien régime was put on trial for failures real and imagined, for not responding adequately to the urban crisis, and especially for ignoring issues of poverty and racism. But change did not come easily; the field was plunged into disarray. A glance at the July 1970 *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* reveals a profession gripped by a crisis of mission, purpose and relevance. As the authors of one article — fittingly titled "Holding Together" — asked, how could this well-meaning discipline transform itself "against a background of trends in the society and the profession that invalidate many of the assumptions underlying traditional planning education"? [4]



Plan for Better Cities, first day cover, Charles R. Chickering/Cachet Craft (1967). [Courtesy of Thomas Campanella]

One way was to disgorge itself of the muscular physical-interventionist focus that had long been planning's métier. King Laius was thus slain by Oedipus, in love with "Mother Jacobs," as Mumford derisively called her. [5] Forced from his lofty perch, the once-mighty planner found himself in a hot and crowded city street. No longer would he twirl a compass above the city like a conductor's baton, as did the anonymous planner depicted on the 1967 stamp Plan for Better Cities (on the First Day Cover illustration, he even wears a pinky ring!). So thoroughly internalized was the Jacobs critique that planners could see only folly and failure in the work of their forebears. Burnham's grand dictum "Make no little plans" went from a battle cry to an embarrassment in less than a decade. Even so revered a figure as Sir Ebenezer Howard was now a pariah. Jacobs herself described the good man — one of the great progressives of the late Victorian era — as a mere "court reporter," a clueless amateur who yearned "to do the city in" with "powerful and city-destroying ideas." [6] Indeed, to Jacobs, not just misguided American urban renewal but the entire enterprise of visionary, rational, centralized planning was suspect. She was as opposed to new towns as she was to slum clearance — anything that threatened the vitality of traditional urban forms was the enemy. It is largely forgotten that the popular United Kingdom edition of *Death and Life* was subtitled "The Failure of Town Planning." How odd that such a conservative, even reactionary, stance would galvanize an entire generation.

The Jacobsians sought fresh methods of making cities work — from the grassroots and the bottom up. The subaltern was exalted, the master laid low. Drafting tables were tossed for pickets and surveys and spreadsheets. Planners sought new alliances in academe, beyond architecture and design — in political science, law, economics, sociology. But there were problems. First, none of the social sciences were primarily concerned with the city; at best they could be only partial allies. Second, planning was not taken seriously by these fields. The schoolboy crush was not returned, making the relationship unequal from the start. Even today it's rare for a social science department to hire a planning PhD, while planning programs routinely hire academics with doctorates in economics and political science. Indeed, Nathan Glazer observed that one of the hallmarks of a minor profession is that faculty with "outside" doctorates actually enjoy *higher prestige* than those with degrees in the profession itself. [7] They also tend to have minimal allegiance to planning. [8]

This brings us to the first of the three legacies of the Jacobsian turn: *It diminished the disciplinary identity of planning*. While the expanded range of scholarship and practice in the post-urban renewal era diversified the field, that diversification came at the expense of an established expertise — strong, centralized physical planning — that had given the profession visibility and identity both within academia and among "place" professions such as architecture and landscape architecture. My students are always astonished to learn just how toxic and stigmatized physical planning — today a popular concentration — had become by the 1970s. Like a well-meaning surgeon who botches an operation, planners were (correctly) blamed for the excesses of urban renewal and many other problems then facing American cities. But the planning baby was thrown out with the urban-renewal bathwater.

And once the traditional focus of physical planning was lost, the profession was effectively without a keel. It became fragmented and balkanized, which has since created a kind of chronic identity crisis — a nagging uncertainty about purpose and relevance. Certainly in the popular imagination, physical planning was what planners did — they choreographed the buildings and infrastructure on the land. By the mid-1970s, however, even educated laypersons would have difficulty understanding what the profession was all about. Today, planners themselves often have a hard time explaining the purpose of their profession. By forgoing its traditional focus and expanding too quickly, planning became a jack-of-all-trades, master of none. And so it remains.

The second legacy of the Jacobsian revolution is related to the first: *Privileging the grassroots over plannerly authority and expertise meant a loss of professional agency*. In rejecting the muscular interventionism of the Burnham-Moses sort, planners in the 1960s identified instead with the victims of urban renewal. New mechanisms were devised to empower ordinary citizens to guide the planning process. This was an extraordinary act of altruism on our part; I can think of no other profession that has done anything like it. Imagine economists at the Federal Reserve holding community meetings to decide the direction of fiscal policy. Imagine public health officials giving equal weight to the nutritional wisdom of teenagers — they are stakeholders, after all! Granted, powering up the grassroots was necessary in the 1970s to stop expressway and renewal schemes that had run amok. But it was power that could not easily be switched off. Tools and processes introduced to ensure popular participation ended up reducing the planner's role to that of umpire or schoolyard monitor. Instead of setting the terms of debate or charting a course of action, planners now seemed content to be facilitators — "mere *absorbers* of public opinion," as Alex Krieger put it, "waiting for consensus to build." [9]

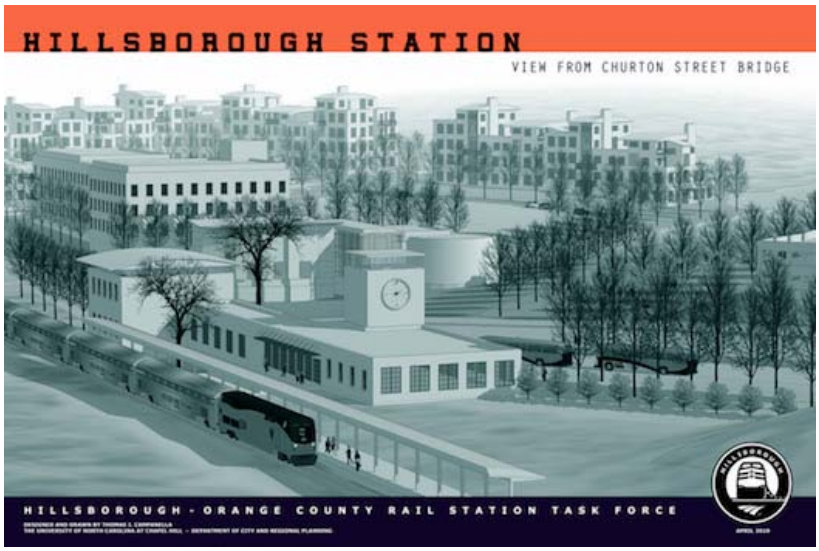
The fatal flaw of such populism is that no single group of citizens — mainstream or marginalized, affluent or impoverished — can be trusted to have the best interests of society or the environment in mind when they evaluate a proposal. The literature on grassroots planning tends to assume a citizenry of Gandhian humanists. In fact, most people are not motivated by altruism but by self-interest. Preservation and enhancement of that self-interest — which usually orbits about the axes of rising crime rates and falling property values — are the real drivers of community activism. This is why it's a fool's errand to rely upon citizens to guide the planning process. Forget for a moment that most folks lack the knowledge to make intelligent decisions about the future of our cities. Most people are simply too busy, too apathetic, or too focused on their jobs or kids to be moved to action over issues unless those issues are at their doorstep. And once an issue is at the doorstep, fear sets in and reason flies out the window. So the very citizens least able to make objective decisions end up dominating the process, often wielding near-veto power over proposals.

To be fair, passionate citizen activism has helped put an end to some very bad projects, private as well as public. And sometimes citizen self-interest and the greater good do overlap. In Orange County, part of the Research Triangle and home to Chapel Hill, grassroots activism stopped a proposed asphalt plant as well as a six-lane bypass that would have ruined a pristine forest. But the same community activism has at times devolved into NIMBYism, causing several infill projects to be halted and helping drive development to greenfield sites. (Cows are slow to organize.) It's made the local homeless shelter homeless itself, almost ended a Habitat for Humanity complex in Chapel Hill, and generated opposition to a much-needed transit-oriented development in the county seat of Hillsborough (more on this in a moment). And for what it's worth, the shrillest opposition came not from rednecks or Tea Party activists but from highly educated "creative class" progressives who effectively weaponized Jane Jacobs to oppose anything they perceived as threatening the status quo — including projects that would reduce our carbon footprint, create more affordable housing and shelter the homeless. NIMBYism, it turns out, is the snake in the grassroots.

NIMBYism has been described as "the bitter fruit of a pluralistic democracy in which all views carry equal weight." [10] And that, sadly, includes the voice of the planner. In the face of an angry public, plannerly wisdom and expertise have no more clout than the ranting of the loudest activist; and this is a hazard to our collective future. For who, if not the planner, will advocate on behalf of society at large? All planning may be local, but the sum of the local is national and eventually global. If we put parochial interests ahead of broader needs, it will be impossible to build the infrastructure essential to the long-range economic viability of the United States — the commuter and high-speed rail lines; the dense, walkable, public-transit-focused communities; the solar and wind farms and geothermal plants; perhaps even the nuclear power stations.

The third legacy of the Jacobsian turn is perhaps most troubling of all: *the seeming paucity among American planners today of the speculative courage and vision that once distinguished this profession*. I'll ease into this subject by way of a story — one that will appear to contradict some of what I just wrote about citizen-led planning. I have served for several years now on the planning board of Hillsborough, North Carolina, where my wife and I have lived since 2004. Hillsborough, founded 1754, is a charming town some 10 miles north of Chapel Hill. It's always reminded me of a grittier, less precious version of Concord,

Massachusetts. It has a long and rich history, progressive leadership, and a thriving arts and culture scene. It is also blessed with a palpable genius loci: "If there are hot spots on the globe, as the ancients believed," writes resident Frances Mayes, author of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, "Hillsborough must be one of them." [11] The town is also located on one of the region's main rail arteries, and has been since the Civil War. Every day several Amtrak trains — including the Carolinian, the fastest-growing U.S. passenger line — speed through on their way to Charlotte and Raleigh, Washington and New York. But a passenger train hasn't made a scheduled stop in Hillsborough since March 1964, when Southern Railway ended service due to declining ridership. After a century of connectivity, Hillsborough and Orange County were cut loose from the nation's rail grid.



Hillsborough Station master plan (2010); rendering by Thomas J. Campanella. [Courtesy Orange County Rail Station Task Force]

In late 2007 a group of residents in our local coffee shop, a classic Oldenburg "third place" named Cup-A-Joe, got to talking about reviving rail service. Soon a petition was drafted, and within months several hundred had signed it. [12] At the same time, I had students in my urban design and site planning class develop schemes for a station-anchored mixed-use development close to downtown. I invited town officials to the final review. The local newspaper did an article. Six months later the town purchased the parcel and set about appointing a task force. Amtrak, unprompted, produced a study showing that a Hillsborough stop would be profitable. The North Carolina Railroad Company, owner of the right-of-way and long a Kafka's Castle of impenetrability, suddenly got interested. Task force members were treated to a corridor tour in the railroad's track-riding Chevy Suburban; we were invited to conferences and seminars. The North Carolina Department of Transportation submitted a request for funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The station was, after all, a poster child for the sort of infrastructure President Obama's stimulus package was ostensibly intended to support.

And all along I kept wondering: Why did this have to come out of a coffee shop and a classroom? *Where were the planners?* Why didn't the town or county planning office act on this opportunity? A moment ago I argued that the public lacks the knowledge and expertise to make informed decisions about planning. If that's the case, what does it say about our profession when a group of citizens — most with no training in architecture, planning or design — comes up with a very good idea *that the planners should have had*? When I asked about this, the response was: "We're too busy planning to come up with big plans." [13] Too busy planning. Too busy slogging through the bureaucratic maze, issuing permits and enforcing zoning codes, hosting community get-togethers, making sure developers get their submittals in on time and pay their fees. This is what passes for planning today. We have become a caretaker profession — reactive rather than proactive, corrective instead of preemptive, rule bound and hamstrung and anything but visionary. If we lived in Nirvana, this would be fine. But we don't. We are entering the uncharted waters of global urbanization on a scale never seen. And we are not in the wheelhouse, let alone steering the ship. We may not even be on board.

How did this come about? How did a profession that roared to life with grand ambitions become such a mouse? The answer points to the self-inflicted loss of agency and authority that came with the Jacobs revolution. It's hard to be a visionary when you've divested yourself of the power to turn visions into reality. Planning in America has been reduced to smallness and timidity, and largely by its own hand. So it's no surprise that envisioning alternative futures for our cities and towns and regions has defaulted to nonplanners such as William McDonough and Richard Florida, Andrés Duany and Rem Koolhaas, and

journalists such as Joel Kotkin and James Howard Kunstler. Jane Jacobs was just the start. It is almost impossible to name a single urban planner today who is a regular presence on the editorial pages of a major newspaper, who has galvanized popular sentiment on issues such as sprawl and peak oil, or who has published a best-selling book on the great issues of our day.

Late in life, even Jane Jacobs grew frustrated with the timidity of planners — Canadian planners this time. In an April 1993 speech — published in the *Ontario Planning Journal* — she lamented the absence of just the sort of robust plannerly interventionism that she once condemned. Jacobs read through a list of exemplary planning initiatives — the Toronto Main Street effort; the new Planning for Ontario guidelines; efforts to plan the Toronto waterfront; and plans for infill housing, the renewal and extension of streetcar transit, the redevelopment of the St. Lawrence neighborhood, and on and on. And then she unleashed this bitter missile: "Not one of these forward looking and important policies and ideas — not ONE — was the intellectual product of an official planning department, whether in Toronto, Metro, or the province." Indeed, she drove on, "our official planning departments seem to be brain-dead in the sense that we cannot depend on them in any way, shape, or form for providing intellectual leadership in addressing urgent problems involving the physical future of the city." This, I hardly need to add, from a person who did more than any other to quash plannerly agency to shape the physical city. [14]

Well, what can be done about all this? And what might the doing mean for the future of planning education? How can we cultivate in planners the kind of visionary thinking that once characterized the profession? How can we ensure that the idealism of our students is not extinguished as they move into practice? How can we transform planners into big-picture thinkers with the courage to imagine alternatives to the status quo, and equipped with the skills and the moxie to lead the recovery of American infrastructure and put the nation on a greener, more sustainable path?

"Construction Potentials: Postwar Prospects and Problems, a Basis for Action," *Architectural Record*, 1943; prepared by the F.W. Dodge Corporation Committee on Postwar Construction Markets. [Drawing by Julian Archer]

It was the Jacobsian revolution and its elimination of a robust physical-planning focus that led to the diminution of planning's disciplinary identity, professional agency and speculative courage. Thus I believe that a renewed emphasis on physical planning — the grounded, tangible, place-bound matter of orchestrating human activity on the land — is essential to refocusing, recalibrating and renewing the profession. By this I do not mean regression back to the state of affairs circa 1935. Planning prior to the grassroots revolution was shallow and undisciplined in many respects. Most of what was embraced post-Jacobs must remain — our expertise on public policy and economics, on law and governance and international development, on planning process and community involvement, on hazard mitigation and environmental impact, on ending poverty and encouraging justice and equality. But all these should be subordinated to core competencies related to placemaking, infrastructure and the physical environment, built and natural. I am not suggesting that we simply toss in a few studio courses and call it a day. Planners should certainly be versed in key theories of landscape and urban design. But more than design skills are needed if planning is to become — as I feel it must — the charter discipline and conscience of the placemaking professions in coming decades.

Planning students today need a more robust suite of skills and expertise than we are currently providing — and than may even be possible in the framework of the two-year graduate curriculum. [15] Planners today need not a close-up lens or a wide-angle lens but

a wide-angle zoom lens. They need to be able to see the big picture as well as the parts close up; and even if not trained to design the parts themselves, they need to know how all those parts fit together. They need, as Jerold Kayden has put it, to "understand, analyze, and influence the variety of forces — social, economic, cultural, legal, political, ecological, technological, aesthetic, and so forth — shaping the built environment." [16] This means that in addition to being taught courses in economics and law and governance, students should be trained to be keen observers of the urban landscapes about them, to be able to decipher the riddles of architectural style and substance, to have a working knowledge of the historical development of places and patterns on the land. They should understand how the physical infrastructure of a city works — the mechanics of transportation and utility systems, sewerage and water supply. They should know the fundamentals of ecology and the natural systems of a place, be able to read a site and its landform and vegetation, know that a great spreading maple in the middle of a stand of pines once stood alone in an open pasture. They need to know the basics of impact analysis and be able to assess the implications of a proposed development on traffic, water quality and a city's carbon footprint. And while they cannot master all of site engineering, they should be competent site analysts and — more important — be fluent in assessing the site plans of others. Such training would place competency in the shaping and stewardship of the built environment at the very center of the planning-education solar system. And about that good sun a multitude of bodies — planning specialties as we have long had them — could happily orbit.

We are far from this ideal today.

Editors' Note

"Jane Jacobs and the Death and Life of American Planning" appears, in a significantly expanded version, in Reconsidering Jane Jacobs, an anthology of essays co-edited by Max Page and Timothy Mennel, and published this month by the Planners Press of the American Planning Association. It is published here with the permission of the publisher and the author.

See also "Jane Jacobs, Andy Warhol, and the Kind of Problem a Community Is," by Timothy Mennel, from the same volume, and on Places.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of Jacobs's landmark *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, and the fifth anniversary of her death, at age 90.

Notes

1. For the record, it was not me who contributed "Trivial Profession."

2. Nathan Glazer, "Schools of the Minor Professions," *Minerva* 12, no. 3 (1974): 346-64.

3. F. Stuart Chapin Jr., *Urban Land Use Planning* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1965), vi.

4. William Rich et al., "Holding Together: Four Years of Evolution at MIT," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 36, no. 4 (July 1970): 242-52.

5. I refer here to Mumford's long-winded critique of *Death and Life*: "Mother Jacobs' Home Remedies," *The New Yorker,* December 1, 1962, 148-79.

6. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 17-18. It is astonishing that Jacobs would fault Howard for being a planning amateur; she was, after all, herself a journalist with an equal lack of professional training in planning or design. Lewis Mumford was especially piqued at Jacobs's dismissal of Howard, his mentor and hero. See Mumford, "Mother Jacobs' Home Remedies."

7. Glazer, "Schools of the Minor Professions."

8. As William Rich observed of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology faculty in the 1970s, members "from outside often tended to identify more strongly with their professional colleagues in other departments and schools than with the planning staff." Rich et al., "Holding Together," 244.

9. Alex Krieger, "The Planner as Urban Designer: Reforming Planning Education," in *The Profession of City Planning: Changes, Images, and Challenges, 1950–2000*, ed. Lloyd Rodwin and Bishwapriya Sanyal (New Brunswick: Center for Urban Policy Research / Rutgers University Press, 2000), 209.

10. Matthew J. Kiefer, "The Social Functions of NIMBYism," *Harvard Design Magazine* 28 (Spring/Summer 2008), 97.

11. Michael Malone et al., *27 Views of Hillsborough: A Southern Town in Prose and Poetry* (Hillsborough, N.C.: Eno Publishers, 2010), back cover.

12. See Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General*

Stores, Bars, Hangouts and How They Get You Through the Day (New York: Paragon House, 1989).

13. In no way do I mean this to be a criticism of our town planners, who are capable and well-trained professionals. But even the most gifted young professional has his or her hands tied by the institutional structure and professional strictures within which planning must operate in most American communities.

14. Jane Jacobs, "Are Planning Departments Useful?" *Ontario Planning Journal* 8, no. 4 (July/August 1993), 4-5. The speech and subsequent essay ignited a firestorm of debate among Canadian planners.

15. We need a three-year curriculum for the master's degree in planning. Landscape architecture, architecture, law, and business all long ago moved to this model. There is nothing aside from inertia stopping us from doing the same. The planning profession is an order of magnitude more complex than it was 50 years ago, and yet we still expect students to master it all in two years.

16. Jerold S. Kayden, "What's the Mission of Harvard's Planning Program?" *Harvard Design Magazine* 22 (Spring/Summer 2005), 4.

COMMENTS (27) | **JUMP TO MOST RECENT COMMENT >>**

Bob Beasley
04.25.11 at 12:57

Sir,

First, I am a geographer with a planning interest. I read Jane Jacob's book years ago and now I believe it is time to read it again. Cities and the art and science of planning are not what they once were. Your essay makes this very clear. I appreciate the insight and hope that this is the start of a change in the profession.

Thanks for an outstanding and timely article.

Tim Kynerd
04.25.11 at 04:05

I have to disagree partly, as an amateur who has read extensively in the field.

I think planners learned the wrong lesson from Jacobs. To my mind, the major complaint she was making in "Death and Life" was that planners weren't paying any attention to how cities actually worked, nor to the actual results of their interventions. She was arguing for an empirical approach, rather than the existing approach which was to follow principles that were supposed and assumed to work, without following up to see what the effects of those plans were.

Instead, as you write, the lesson planners learned was: Don't plan. That isn't what she said, and that's probably the basis of her bitter complaint in Toronto that you mention. I think she believed that planners had a role to play, but that they needed to go about it differently...and yes, more humbly, but not more *timidly*. Those aren't the same thing.

Mary Simpson
04.25.11 at 05:21

Delightful read compliments of Richard Florida's tweeter.

The essay sums up my experience as an "environmental planner" on the fringes (- facilitating pubic participation processes as part of siting Toronto's landfills within Ontario's environmental assessment legislation, as one example. Because I'm a generalist and farmer at heart, I moved on to rural community economic development where I remain.)

Planners would need the same intensity of training as doctors. BUT today's doctors seem to be totally narrow focussed and blinded by the control of pharmaceutical companies and government/insurance interests. They lack the "wide angle" lense despite their robust training.

The essay does not seem to address the fact that planners don't make final decisions. Policians do.

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david
04.25.11 at 08:02

Olmsted: Landscape Architect
Burnham: Architect
Clarence Stein: Architect
Henry Wright: Architect
Nolen: Landscape Architect
Gilmore Clarke: Landscape Architect

Also, what about the fact that many of the great projects referenced were created by private companies (Sunnyside Gardens, the rail

system).

Planners' educations are rooted in the basic truth that governments can determine land use, density, etc. This is at odds with the reality that municipalities and states usually turn to private industry to figure out "what should happen."

To paraphrase Mary Simpson,

"The essay does not seem to address the fact that planners don't make final decisions. Financiers do."

Dave M
04.26.11 at 08:19

Jane Jacobs wrote several other books, and while none are specifically aimed at planning as a profession, they all expand the ideas she had. I wish someone would read them and stop quoting "Death and Life..." all the time.

@Tim Kynerd is right about an imperical approach versus principles. @david (not me) is right about financiers making final decisions.

These two pieces add up to all the things that happen to make individual buildings that planners have no control over and will never have any control over. Planners want financiers to do things based on principles that they believe. It's never going to happen.

Jacobs' main concern, in the end, is with coercion. All of the things that planners are supposed to do to create great places amount to coercion of financiers. That's not going to happen. So instead, planners sit in government offices coercing homeowners and site developers into following simple and silly rules that they can enforce, because they're just lousy enough to be easy (I'm talking about single-use zoning).

So yes, as a profession, planning is a weak sort, and always will be. What is at risk is not the stature of the professionals engaged in it (at least I'm not worried about what people will think when I say I'm a planner) but rather the ability for good design to occur.

For this, you cannot look simply at the people working in the field and the rules of that field. The status quo in home appraisals that cannot adjust to new urbanist designs or passive house designs will continue to slow needed change. The idea that homeownership is good and for everyone actually forestalls more freedom in the adaptation of our built environment, because it creates specific requirements for homes. Redlining, while no longer practiced, is an easy target for criticism. However, financing practices in general still have more effect than all the great plans of men like Burnham ever could.

Planning, as a profession, doesn't need to become more focused on physical space. It needs to ask questions and shake things up in the long-established and firmly-entrenched things that restrict innovation and design... things that are discovered through empirically looking at a city for what it is, and not based on the principles you think it should be built by.

Georgia
04.26.11 at 09:20

The gentleman whose hand sported a pinkie ring on the Plan for Better Cities postcard may have been an engineer*. What does that say about city planning during that period?

* From Wikipedia: "The Engineer's Ring is a ring worn by members of the Order of the Engineer, which is an association for engineers in the USA . The ring is a plain stainless steel band worn on the little finger of the working hand."

Coco J. Harris
04.27.11 at 12:59

This otherwise insightful piece skips the politics of planning. Who funds practice of those "core competencies related to placemaking, infrastructure and the physical environment?" Who pays planners to plan?

Publicly-funded planning in the post-Reagan era was largely subjugated to the construction industry and corporate development interests who dominate local government. To place responsibility for the profession's decline on "self-inflicted loss of agency and authority" ignores this context.

Olson

Those of us who study urban planning at the university level typically

emerge from school with plenty of ideas and inspiration. It is the job search process that typically squelches these things out of us. See how far talking about your own ideas of "speculative courage and vision" gets you in a job interview at a city government or even most planning consulting firms in the private sector.

The ideas are there, as is the inspiration from planning-trained individuals. The funding that would take a chance on creative and bold ideas in today's job market is not. Therefore the visionary planner would become a 'starving artist' (albeit a college-educated one) type if they pursue this bold approach 9 times out of 10. Planners need to pay for rent and eat too.

Great article.

04.27.11 at 06:52

I thoroughly enjoyed this article, but am still struggling with the underlying concept of "community" that is explored. Both Jacobs and Warhol had different ideas about community, and upheld different ideas about what the ideal community would be. Nonetheless, I don't believe that either idea is directly competitive with the other.

From my perspective, despite Jacobs' obsession with the sidewalk she had a birds'-eye view of cities, society, and culture; she assumed that each citizen in a city would have their own class, sphere of influence and association within a neighborhood and the overall city. Such a belief does not preclude social mobility, or the option to disengage from civic life.

Based on the article, Warhol did not necessarily intend to create a community, but based on the shared culture of the individuals he attracted one was created by default. Perhaps this is a case of a subculture founded upon mutual [leisurely] interest culminating in the creation of a new community? If so, this type of community would easily dovetail into Jacobs' vision of the city. Members of the Factory are just more people walking briefly on the sidewalk until they get where they're going, walk into their building--and assume their private life.

Communities are exclusionary; they may seek to be inclusive, but to some extent a community is determined as much by who is NOT included as it is by who is.

Blake Chastain
04.27.11 at 10:12

This is a wonderful and insightful piece but perhaps a misunderstanding at the start warps the logic of what comes after. As I understand it, city planning was not understood in the sixties to be a profession that originated in the work of late 1800's people like Olmstead or even just of such dominating figures as Moses. It is my impression that architects, activists, and all of their ilk were deeply and viscerally aware of the sinister shadows much earlier figures like the 1700's and 1800's French urban planners who ripped up Paris and defined Washington D.C. around movement of repressive (as then understood) troops and isolation and fragmenting of communities of the underclasses.

To be a social reformer in the 1950's, let alone the 1970's, was to be intensely aware of the dynamics of protest and attempts at autonomy and the ways that a built environment affects that power balance. And city planners were very much identified with laying the groundwork for immediate exercise of authoritarian power through wide avenues optimized for the swift movement of columns of soldiers. And also, as you cited, the intentional destruction or sometimes just walling off of communities considered undesirable by those in power. For generation with fresh memories of the Warsaw Ghetto and immediate awareness of our own ghettos and the misery they engendered (and were associated with), this was a deep condemnation, indeed.

I agree with all of your points. Out here in Portland I have recently been getting ever louder in my frustration with our local planning community's reluctance to more vehemently seize the bully pulpit and help our citizens understand why *they* should support bike lanes and swales and all the rest. But to understand the whys of that timidity, I recommend also the documents generated by people like Daniel Patrick Moynihan after the riots in Los Angeles, Newark, and so many other places. And the design of places like SUNY Purchase, whose many doors and sprawling buildings and broken public spaces were intentionally designed to emasculate any future possible student protests. And the period's perception of the lessons of imperialism and compulsion and all other forms of centralized power.

Rustin H. Wright
04.28.11 at 01:53

I think that if you had walked the halls of the architecture, engineering, or social sciences buildings at universities in those days, you would have heard a perception of guilt of the profession of planning. Of hubris. And a need for a new humbleness and even submissiveness. Was that pressure excessive? Yes. But it grew out of associations with deeply felt past "sins" that are worth understanding in context to fully see how the field of planning has reached its current state.

And all of that being the case, it seem to me that the skill sets you propose are *still* not enough. For planners to take the role that we hope they will, they need to learn the skills of determining stakeholder motivations and perception. And how to shape compelling narratives that sell those proposed states of affairs. Planners don't just need to be able to determine a course of action. They also need to learn to tell the story. To build a compelling narrative about those plans and that place that educates decisionmakers, the media, and citizens. A narrative that teaches all three sets the relevant variables and what will happen to them in a way that connects to their everyday lives.

And, let's face it, most could really stand to get better at plain old public speaking. Are acting classes *that* hard an obligation? Is it *that* distasteful to learn how to hold a microphone, look the audience in the eye, or learn to tell a joke? These things matter. I grew up on my father's open contempt for the public built from endless years of meetings while he worked for the California Public Utilities Commission. Yes, his stories of citizen innumeracy and NIMBYism and plain old short-sighted venality were awful. But his presentations would have done better if he hadn't so reliably walked in that room dismissive, resentful, dripping with contempt, and with talks amply larded with acronyms and boulders of jargon.

Look at the young architects and students these days in New Orleans. They are learning to sell their ideas to "normal people." And not just through endless rounds of meetings. Look at the Green Guerrillas and Growing Power. We need planners who engage the public. Who enlist them. You're right; sometimes that's just not possible. But from what I've seen we don't really know what's possible yet. Because we're doing a piss-poor job of educating right now and I've been impressed at the number of planners I've met who'll admit it.

Ben Franklin. Hyman Rickover. Robert Moses. These people and others like them reshaped our world. Hacked it. And they did so in part by treating that process of engineering, building, and selling a narrative to legislators, operational managers, AND the public as a self-evident part of any large project.

If we want better results then we need to suitably reshape our government planning departments and to teach the typical planner of the future to act that very same way.

John Kaliski
04.28.11 at 03:29

I found this post confused. Even the author admits to confusion and contradiction as he builds his logic, which turn out for me at least to be not so logical.

I sense in Campanella's insistence on planners doing physical design that he really in part wants to assume the role of an architect, landscape architect, or perhaps urban designer, or at least tell them what to do. Ironically, this type of stance is dismissive of the particular knowledge and skills that planners do bring to the environmental design process that these other professionals do not possess, nor choose to become experts at.

The science of collaboration within the context of land use policy is one of the things that good planners do well but this role seems absent from Campanella's planning dream. I would argue that teaching notions and means of collaboration between professions and professionals should be of greater concern, particularly to planners given their role in organizing and managing the built environment, than insisting that planning general practitioners do planning orthopedics.

At the same time, the insistence throughout the post on celebrating the supposed missing authority of the planner, and the posture that the production of the environment should somehow revolve about the "sun" of planning seems archaic. For me this idea is a mildly problematic ethical stance for a planner in the 21rst Century. In a democratic culture post-Jane Jacobs, I would think that planning professionals more or less accepted that debate about what are fundamentally policy issues resides ultimately in the ebbs and flows of ideas and stands of the people and elected decision-makers rather

than policy experts, who have every right to persuade, but few rights to decide.

I also take issue with Mr. Campanella's lack of recognition of the formative role and ideas that landscape architects and architects already play, collaborating with planners, in the visioning and production of the physical environment. I find it odd given his stance that he would dismiss the influence on physical environmental design and planning of someone such as Andres Duany. Whether you agree with Duany or not (while a great admirer, much of the time I do not), this architect, through the Charter of the New Urbanism and the Congress of the New Urbanism, and his firm's work has both revised the urban design arts, insisted that planning be physical, extolled the virtues of Nolen and others mentioned by Campanella, insisted on the authority of planners and designers in the production of townscape, and almost single-handily reinvented zoning practice to accomplish all this (form-based zoning anyone?) This type of physically-based planning work has become near-normative in cities and states, shaping policies as diverse as zoning plans for individual municipalities, regional plans such as the Compass Plan in Southern California, federal "first-start" mass transit policies, and Hope I - VI affordable housing programs. There are even schools of higher education, Miami and Notre Dame to name two, that teach this type of planning and design practice that Campanella pines for.

For me, one of the great lesson of Jane Jacobs was to insist upon ground up empirical planning processes and procedures as a means of realizing urban experiences, functions, and aesthetics. While NIMBYISM, as Campanella points out, is one manifestation of this, it can not be blamed on Jacobs who was hardly a NIMBY in theory or practice. At the same time, North America is now replete with interesting urbanisms that never would have emerged if Jane Jacobs had not written what she wrote. Portland, Toronto, San Francisco, Vancouver, Seattle, shiny if gentrified Manhattan, even Downtown Los Angeles and many other places to numerous to mention; all are infinitely richer in their present urban experiences precisely because Jane Jacobs changed the dynamic and definition of what it means to be a planner. and insisted that planning intelligence also resided outside of professional boundaries. Hankering back to an obsolete definition of a profession or revisionist thinking that posits Jane Jacobs as the death of planning is to miss the forest of emergent urbanism, planned in part by planners, that is everywhere around us, while obsessing over a professional practice tree that has long since been chopped down.

Ned Baldwin
04.28.11 at 09:34

Professor Campanella asks 'what can be done about all this?' Well for starters, stop blaming Jacobs for the ills of our own profession.

I think that Campanella has a moment of insight is his realization about Hillsborough planners: "Too busy slogging through the bureaucratic maze, issuing permits and enforcing zoning codes, hosting community get-togethers, making sure developers get their submittals in on time and pay their fees. This is what passes for planning today. We have become a caretaker profession — reactive rather than proactive, corrective instead of preemptive, rule bound and hamstrung and anything but visionary." Too true. I used to joke that I wasn't a planner, I was a reactor.

Personally, my graduate planning education provided me with more skills and expertise then I found was called for by the available professional opportunities. Likewise, I doubt that the planners in Hillsborough lacked the expertise or skill to come up with the idea for a rail station. So why would students need "a more robust suite of skills and expertise than we are currently providing" if the prospects for a planning graduate is a job "issuing permits" and "hosting community get-togethers"? Thus, while it is understandable that the Professor wants to enhance his own realm (planning education), I think he has completely misdiagnosed the treatment.

Kristen
04.28.11 at 11:41

I don't think that more education will solve the problem of planning's perception as a "Trivial Profession", especially when you consider the difficulties that today's highly educated planning students face when trying to find employment in their profession. What is going to change that perception of planning is planners doing work that people and communities value.

There are 2 parts to doing valuable work.
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1. Are planners solving problems that people/communities think need to be solved? Because what the community/people who write the

paycheck think is valuable is often different from what the planner thinks is valuable.
2. Are city planners "marketing" themselves as providing value? When a new park goes up in my part of town (something that I find valuable), it's not apparent to me how city planners contributed to that park.

So either planners aren't solving problems that our communities want solved, or we aren't communicating the value we add or both.

Greg
04.28.11 at 03:03

I earned a masters degree in planning from one of the more prominent programs, and I'm still not sure what planning is. In New York City, few people I worked with went on to work for the DCP - most went to the EDC, DOT, for BIDs, and various other things, none of which really require a background in "planning" specifically. And the DCP seems to exist primary to capitulate to whatever the powerful real estate lobby wants.

Hendo
04.28.11 at 04:51

I call this article "uncomfortable" because it draws stark attention to a position that many planners find them selves in - that they are not the decision makers, and probably most never will be. That is no reflection upon their talent and worth, it seems to be a function of the system.

Some time ago an experienced planner told me there were, in the end, only two parts to planning: money and politics. Sadly I have come to agree that he was at least largely correct.

Should it be otherwise? Well as a town administrator who should be the driver? The planners or the administration?
As a developer looking to put money (and risk) into a project, who ultimately should he deal with? If he can't deal with the decision makers he will take his plans somewhere else.

So does that make planners/planning trivial? I don't think so at all, but if some planners out there think they are steering the boat, in most cases they are likely not. The important part to me is that they provide and educated and well-founded framework, a considered and informed benchmark that can be a reference point when considering development.

Stefan Frischauf
04.29.11 at 03:30

Dear Professor Campanella,

enjoyed reading your article quite a lot as you're exactly describing the same issues, we're facing - not only in the US - but also here in good old Europe. Though the impact of Jane Jacobs kinda grassroot and community approach wasn't as strong here as in the - so to say "Anglo Saxon cultural sector" - mainly the UK, the US and Canada - we're facing the same problems and - the same challenges to be mastered here in Germany - and with that, I dare say - with slight local or regional differences -
all over Europe.
But - with the impact of thinking on planning as a whole in a way, more or less deriving from "late Victorian principles" I was pretty much confronted within my last job - trying to impose the sustainability infrastructure part to an urban regeneration program run by a British NGO for part of Kabul's Old Town - thus a war torn place , that had become a slum by reasons of state failure, war and urban neglect. And - the balkanization process of our faculty, you're actually describing together with that kinda very conservative approach towards any conceptual or headlining principle at the end of the day prevented anything really sustainable to be built there - matching just slightly the challenges of the "Social town in times of global warming" and thus - essential needs of individuals and the community there in mid- and long terms.

NIMBY - I had to google it first and I really burst out into laughter - we here call it the "St. Florian Principle", but - it's pretty much the same - we're using the saint, you guys are using the shortcut for describing the same phenomenon.

And - after all - that kinda "professional identity crisis", you're

outlining - isn't it a sociological crisis - isn't the splattered Balkanization a phenomenon - a disease, societies as a whole are suffering from at the end of that era, that has been given many names - most of them starting with Neo- or - with Post - an era, where realities on the ground and that way also the perception of the bigger picture has suffered from a mere fragmentation ?
I personally suppose, we're trapped in kinda feeling of being "lost in tansition" (one of my favorite photo-books from German photographer Peter Bialobrzeski - http://www.lagalerie.de/PBTransitionUK.pdf) and - of course - as planners we have to focus on essentials - on visions of a "more healthy future" - cause - what else is planning than trying to impose a projection of investigation of present essentials and future demands on a place, whose character has also been appreciated as sum of departed influences of the past - the genius loci ? And - within that these days we're also facing a splattered collective memory - that's perhaps the biggest threat for all kind of "visions" - and - we definitely need to be visionary, otherwise we cannot do our job.
Saying that, I personally think, we need to find conceptual layouts, wherein essential sociological demands have to be subsumed, such as "The Social Town in times of global warming" and - we need to go for crossover territory investigations - with sociologists, economists and other faculties - for preparing the ground for that - in "shrinking cities" in the "North" as much as in exploding "Megacities" in the "South".

Best regards across the ocean - to colleagues and friends

Stefan Frischauf,
Dipl. Ing. Architect, Urban Planner,
Düsseldorf, Germany
stefan@anyarchitectsandengineers.com

Robert Watkins
04.29.11 at 10:15

Of course, let's ask what difference the legal profession has made? Most Americans would say that it has made life more complicated and difficult and given the advantage to a small elite who can afford the best legal services.

This discussion is wearisome for us planners who struggle in the trenches of political debate daily. It is not that we lack vision. Our voices are pitted against those of the legal, development, and financial professions. Decisions in America frequently favor the interests of those well capitalized professions.

Are America's problems due to the failure of planners, or are they due to the failures of the political system? Global climate change is being ignored at the national level and a terrible recession is crushing working people.

I am a planner who came out of the social and natural sciences and chose planning as a way to work on community. I am less concerned with the status of our profession than with how our communities transcend our national failures. Modern planners celebrate the event when organic solutions arise from our communities. This is how it is supposed to work.

Stefan Frischauf
04.29.11 at 11:46

Decisions not only in the US frequently favor the interests of those well capitalized professions. Indian writer and journalist Arundhati Roy called that failed political global system "economical totalitarianism". (She's a trained architect as well).
Thus - also the most powerful and best capitalized clients will run the place - wether their plans fit into the urban context or not. Wether there's a need for their implantation or not. Real estate bubbles are created like that and - I suppose, you guys in every town in the US are facing a lot of empty office and business spaces - the overproduction of real estate funds as well as we do that here. And - of course - the smokestack industries - the US are full of those - my region here - the Ruhr valley and the Lower Rhine is packed with those - thousands of acres of industrial deserts.

I recently presented a concept for the conversion of a suburban neglected industrial wasteland area of about 16.4 acres in front of political representatives for that suburban periphery - which though is still administrated centrally by the town hall. Those guys didn't have a clue of anything there and - they don't know anything about community needs as well. Also presented a financial concept - working with local funds - including options to buy for locals and advertising that during the first planning phases - design and acceptance -and of course - continuous during specifications. But - I

found, that "community representatives" prefer to wait another 20 to 30 years for big investors. (I'm exaggerating - but - think, you got the point).
We're facing fragmented communities in fragmented cities exposed to conversion processes and -as much as I know the US and Canada - it's similar problems on different levels there as well.
Thus - I'm also more concerned regarding how communities and their representatives act or - just don't act - lacking any clue of how to manage the bigger picture - what you call - "national failures". Cause - communication and perception of that is fragmented intentionally as well. And - I suppose - that's the biggest threat - as well as the biggest challenge for us - as professional planners.

Robert "Doc" Hansen
04.29.11 at 02:55

Great Article! I have been thinking on this subject for decades.

The "dying profession" points are well made and feedback criticisms have major points that must be addressed. I was once a planner in jurisdictions at a high position. I have a MA in Urban Planning and found that none of my enthusiasm outside of the university campus was taken seriously. But, as stated, I had to eat and took positions that permitted me to express my professional opinion while not offending anyone in power. After 13 years and five different jurisdictions, I left the jurisdictional side and tried to drive my enthusiasm from the private side. While providing my professional opinion sometimes cost me jobs, I found it necessary to do what I was trained to do with the private client.

I always found it interesting that the people I was closest to got into the planning profession for its excitement and encouragement of change. Most of them got out of it within 10 to 15 years to pursue other professions because they were disgusted with being "janitors of regulations." We still have to eat without becoming totally disgusted with what we do. This article gets to the point...we need to revitalize our profession with new tools and new thoughts that make us competitive with other professions.

Ian McHarg was the last one that brought up a "new" revolutionary procedure. Today, we have a lot of TI people using GIS without understanding any of the theories or needs for planning. Laser scanning survey and Building Information Modeling (BIM) are very important tools that have not been implemented in the urban planning profession. Yet Urban Planners have the design understanding and can use these tools for things that are relevant to current issues that many of the technicians cannot understand. The planner with the broader background can, and has to, "think outside the box" to show how these tools can be used. I have been working with a laser scanning technician for over four years, and he is the only one that knows I'm a "planner" and appreciates it. I would like to see that change so that people begin to look for planners again because they can see the broader picture while including the minute details.

Great discussion.

Charles F. Daas
04.29.11 at 03:44

@Thomas

Thank you for a most inciteful article. You mention Nathan Glazer, perhaps most famous for his treatise "Beyond the Melting Pot." Glazer's more recent work, collected in a fine book of essays entitled From a Cause To A Style, is not only a critique of modern architecture and planning, but of the planning profession itself. In a Chapter entitled "What Happened To The City Planner?", Glazer also decries the timidity of the modern planner. Like you, he noted that the planner has devolved from visionary to bureaucrat, a paper-pusher and zoning enforcer.

But herein lies the problem. Glazer, who served in the Kennedy administration, notes that the 1960's was a time for what he terms a "professionalization of planning" as it became a tool of government during the early years of the Great Society. Linking planning with government (along with decoupling planning from architecture, where it rightfully belongs) was its death sentence. And in our modern era where, as the Harvard scholar Robert Putnam notes "over two-thirds of the United States' electorate has antipathy toward government," we can easily view the fall from that once lofty perch inhabited by Burnham, Stein, Mumford, Howard and the other luminaries of our profession.

As long as planning is viewed as a tool of government, it will be lumped in with the tax collector, bureaucrat, city official and

government stooge. Our task is to return planning to its rightful place with architecture, rather than the more mundane public administration with which it has been associated for at least a generation.

So how do we get there? Glazer notes that there are movements that have occurred outside of the planner's watch, including historic preservation, environmentalism, new urbanism, and grass roots community development such as the Dudley Street Intitiative in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood or the New Communities Program here in Chicago, which has been led by local CDCs in tandem with the MacArthur Foundation and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation. Planners have sat idly by the past two decades as these movements have flowered. Here, we see an opportunity for planners to jump on this steed and ride like the wind.

Contrary to your critique of planners as facilitators, I feel that is an essential role for planners so that low wealth communities can achieve a level of "buy-in" as well as self-worth. During the past year, I led my students at the University of Illinois-Chicago in a grass roots planning effort in Chicago's North Lawndale community where, working hand in hand with community residents, we have come up with a solid plan not only to breathe life back into one of the city's most impoverished communities, but a plan to actually put people back to work. Keep in mind that the masterful, comprehensive plans that you cite (Burnham's Chicago, Moses' New York, etc.) were directed at powerful, well-established industrial centers. Do you really believe that planners know best when working with a devastated urban community? Isn't it that kind of elitism, the top down rational planning, that put us in the proverbial dog house in the first place?

Indeed, Robert Caro didn't nickname Moses "the Power Broker" because he knew how to negotiate or play nice. We all know Moses used taxing authorities and public/private mechanisms to fund his New World Order in NYC. While some have come to admire Moses' accomplishments (which are indeed monumental) his rather ruthless tactics and nefarious schemes left quite a swath of concrete, destruction and waste. And Mr. Burnham, known for his less famous dictum "let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty," was carrying out a plan for Chicago's business interests - the Commercial Club of Chicago. Burnham, in the first Chapter of the 1909 Plan of Chicago, notes that Chicago is a city of "industry and traffic." These were his primary concerns - ultimately bringing order to the chaotic city. And what an amazing plan, resulting in Wacker Drive, the Michigan Ave Bridge, the Museum Campus, a regional rail center, the Cook County Forest Preserve System, etc. But even the holy of holies, the Chicago lakefront, was sold to the early 20th century plutocrats (his sponsors) as a strategy to gain happy, healthy workers. In the end, the greatest of all American urban plans (arguably the first regional plan), and the one to which all modern plans tip their hat, was a business plan.

I believe, as Lewis Mumford did, in what he termed "the promise of planning." Our task is to return our profession to the realm of ideas and the possible, to lead the way for innovation. Indeed, we need to work to be admired just as much as our Silicon Valley inventors, rather than kicked to the curb as tools of government. But that will require planners to get out from behind their desks and lead the way. And, rather than jettison the knowledge and expertise that we possess, can't we assume the role of the guide, the trailblazer? Contrary to the feeling of diminishing expectations at UNC-Chapel Hill, this is an enormously exciting time to be a planner. Indeed, one of our foremost allies, the Rockefeller Foundation and Jane Jacobs' champion, just dubbed this era "The Century of the City." As Jane Jacobs recommended in her magnificant essay "Downtown is for People, "get out and walk. The streets are the city nervous system - it communicates the flavor, the feel and the sights." I can only concur.

JasonM
04.30.11 at 08:46

"In fact, most people are not motivated by altruism but by self-interest. Preservation and enhancement of that self-interest — which usually orbits about the axes of rising crime rates and falling property values — are the real drivers of community activism.... For who, if not the planner, will advocate on behalf of society at large?"

Citizens are right to be very wary of these high-minded statements.

See also: the ruination of formerly stable working-class ethnic neighborhoods brought about through an influx of underclass chaotic violent crime, enabled by welfare-state programs designed on behalf

of society at large.

http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/american-murder-mystery/6872/

Stefan Frischauf
04.30.11 at 05:53

@JasonM - In a certain way you're right - a lot of bullshit has been done in programs driven by naive altruism - by planners, who acted more with their own image of how "mixed communities" should work than with what people there really believed about their role - their positions - their and - their family lives - within their neighboorhood. The more essential is what Robert "Doc" Hansen describes and what is also implied in Charles F. Daas comment - an integrative team approach - within fieldwork - within field research studies - sending students from behind their computers to gain their experiences on the ground - and making them loose the fear of contact also of other "specialists".
Am just reading "Why sociology ?" of German sociologist Dirk Baecker - a scholar of Niklas Luhmann. Regarding the recent decline of sociology as a key science in a certain way he's actually asking the same questions - describing the same mined areas, Thomas Campanella in his great article here does. Before I read "sociology of cities" from Martina Löw - a German urban sociologist. She actually ended where a continuous dialogue with planners working on the ground would have been much more fertile for moving on with something really integrative as kinda "sociology of cities". But - instead people here - and - seemingly not only here are hiding behind the desks of their alma mater - of their faculties.
I for myself think we can only arrive at "new starting points" with serious exchanges within these different faculties - my dad always used to warn me not to become another nerd - another specialized idiot, not knowing, what's going on around him and ignoring all side effects of his or her unilateral and - thus also simple minded approaches to any kinda planning. That requires doing your job on eye level - leading other experienced specialists - and - sometimes being lead by them or - as Richard Sennett says in "The Craftsman": “To do good work means to be keen, to research and to learn from inclarities.” (Sorry -retranslated it from German - don't have the American original here). I mean - You Americans have developed pragmatism - we Germans or Europeans - we have developed idealism and -you've got the ruins of the subprime crisis in front of you, but - the ruins aren't as hot and smoky as what we here in good old f****** Europe are steered into by "leaders" lacking any kinda responsability or - just having no clue of what consequences the Eurocrash will have - doing their silly "business as usual" - faking bilances and so on. You know that better guys - you already witnessed that in summer / autumn 2008. Thus - I think, the (professional) crisis of US planning, Thomas J. Campanella is describing has to be seen in the big picture - it's a crisis, where we can only develop strategies and pathways for getting out together with neighboring faculties and - within that - with an extended dialogue. Perhaps something like a "new version of Rousseaus Contract social" - his social contract - anyway - new headliners for kinda common sense have to be found - that can only work with a lot of studies and efforts -appreciating Joe the plumber as much as all the others. I mean - it's hard to explain, but - "Change, yes we can" can only work, when it is communicated as a common effort and - it's also appreciated like that, cause - Rome wasn't built in one legislative period as well and - Cologne Cathedral lasted almost a 1000 years without a roof.

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sara spencer
05.01.11 at 12:09

I respectfully recommend this article as a cogent counterpoint to this article.

http://www.planetizen.com/node/47822

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sara spencer
05.01.11 at 12:41

Um, forgive me, it's late and I'm tired and hit enter before I meant to. To clarify my previous comment, I recommend the linked article at Planetizen by Roberta B. Gratz as a cogent counterpoint to Professor Campanella's article, which I'm not inclined to agree with. Ms. Gratz brings the points home quite nicely, especially here, as she writes:

"...enough with using Jane Jacobs as subterfuge to advocate on behalf of projects or ideas that one seems reluctant to do outright. If you want to advocate on behalf of official, big-scale projects that override substantive citizen objections, just do it honestly. If you want an excuse to approve the tearing down of old neighborhoods to

make way for new high-rise development, just do it honestly. If you think, in New York City for example, the Landmarks Commission's designation of three per cent of the city is too much, just say so honestly. And if you think modest-scale neighborhoods need a dose of high-rise development, just say so outright.

But enough of using "rethinking" Jane Jacobs as an excuse to promote these ideas.

And remember what Jane wrote: Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."

http://www.planetizen.com/node/47822

My degrees are in Geography and International Studies; however, I found myself working as a planner and decided it was an interesting way to make a living. That was over 20 years ago. As a career AICP land-use planner, I realized there was something extremely wrong with the profession around the time of the Amicus Curiae issued by APA on the Kelo vs. New London case - so I stopped paying APA dues and have never looked back. Since then I've gained more useful continuing education from programs and workshops offered in our sister fields of landscape architecture, engineering, law, historic preservation, and floodplain management that far surpassed anything I ever received through APA. My background in geography taught me that you can only do so much to land before it repays in kind, and I used to become so frustrated with public policy-type planners who acted as if the earth's skin were just so much malleable clay. This attitude was unfortunately adopted from developers whose focus is to try to make as much money from a project as possible; too many planners are just as happy to ignore environmental and real-world costs in order to be associated with something big and shiny and new. Not me. I look people in the eye when they come in my office and try to help them see realistic and fair results for their proposals. I use my ears and my education and skills to find creative solutions. I work for the public, not just the people with money.

The idea that we should in any way return to the past principles of imposing our wizened, financially-biased view on people's livelihoods and communities is ludicrous. Come down off that cross, all you whiny planners - those who have real work to do need the wood.

Lisa
05.03.11 at 08:57

I was trained in the 1980's and the academic mindset and planning regimen was purely manufacturing and suburban oriented. I think "they" did an excellent job at instilling that mindset and we've been exceptionally successful at building the resulting suburban environments. Now it's time to go back to where we started. Back to uban design. I'm very excited by this prospect and I can't wait for the day when the term "spot zoning" has completely faded from our vocabularly.

Dan Carmody
05.04.11 at 10:41

Have been thinking about these issues for the past 35 years.

As a planning student in the US and the UK I observed that planning theory was largely a US product. Perhaps owing to the private sector dominance of city-building where the best planning minds stayed in academia because of planning work frustration.

Planners in the UK and other European countries-especailly in the post war period- actually did more planning because city development was often led by the public sector.

Waking up in an 11th floor dorm room and looking at planners work - Manchester's Hume Crescents, a massive public housing complex - was enough to convince to reconsider planning as a career.

In the end my personal planning crisis was solved by reading the work of Clearance Lindbloom and associates. Consultants to the Department of Defense in the 1950's, they penned a great essay summing up their work - "Disjointed Incrementalism - The Science of Muddling Through".

Change happens in small steps and is often unconnected - for me leading or help leading a variety of communities in building better places has been a satisfying career.

After decades of badness we have developed better skills in the US at place making in our downtowns, historic neighborhoods, and better crafted urban suburbs (CNU). Though it is kind of comical at times to

heap praise on ourselves for creating places routinely built by others around the globe and by our ancestors that didn't have to deal with the affluence and access to cheap hyro-carbons that made dense city building here so difficult.

The frustration regarding our inability to consistently scale up successful place making is more that a planners problem.

The day quickly approaches when we either hit a massive national reset button to align equity, sustainability, and viability issues within a framework that is profoundly less affluent and one with much less access to cheap energy or we will not survive.

Finding the political will to challenge our current set of underlying assumptions that are clearly not sustainable should be the cause of massive and unprecedented collaboration between planners, architects, landscapers, economists, sociologists and any other professions that care about the future of this society.

Too important of work to be left to zealots of whatever stripe.

Allan Cooper, AIA, Professor Emeritus
05.04.11 at 07:32

Good article! I'm not in agreement with the author that the public seldom has the community's interests at heart. Yes, there are "nimby's" out there but there are also communitarians ("us" for example) who need to remain engaged in building a vision for the future. Once consensus on that vision is established, we then need planners to implement the vision. Urban planning is simply too serious an endeavor (unlike architecture) to leave entirely in the hands of city and regional planners. I happen to have a "spin" on architecture that is antithetical to this author's: I believe that the architecture profession has been trivialized even more than the planning profession because "name" architects arrogate design decisions without properly considering the community or the end-user. Architects are now perceived to be "vendors" by their clients making irrelevant "fashion statements" that have little bearing on the more compelling social and environmental issues of the day.

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