

Letter From Faculty

In 2006, an ambitious and stalwart group of Michigan planning students first optimistically floated the idea of creating a new, student-run journal. Yes, there were skeptics: wasn't the era of print media ostensibly over, and did students with their busy schedules even have time to run a journal (and solicit articles, collaborators, funding and supporters)? But they persisted, and the first issue appeared the following spring. In subsequent years, this journal has become an integral tradition within the planning program, shepherded by successive teams of tireless and creative editors and staff. Agora has become an essential activity of planning student life here at Michigan, along with the annual Martin Luther King Jr. event, the Urban Planning Student Association (UPSA) the Expanding Horizon trips, and the capstone projects in Detroit.

At the end of each academic year, the current Agora staff passes the baton to the next cohort, attracting (and cajoling) a remarkable and committed cadre of new staff. Agora challenges students to find precious time outside their studies and other commitments to make this journal happen. They also are that rare journal that makes a substantive commitment to contributing writers to edit and re-edit over a tight, intense schedule. Importantly, they explore the power of writing as a tool beyond the classroom.

Reading these pages, one is vicariously shuttled not only through the high streets and alleyways of cities around the globe, but also through the imaginations of emerging planners, designers, builders, activists, scholars. One vividly senses their critical engagement with the city, their mix of fascination and worry about our urban futures. One also observes the tangible and rich fluidity between disciplines: the mix of urban planning, architecture, public health, policy and urban design. There is also a fluidity of cultures and places, as authors cross borders and oceans, from Nashville to Ahmedabad, Beirut to Detroit, Cleveland to Beijing. Here is an emerging new global imagination about urbanism. Yes, here one can see the barriers and inequalities that divide the cities of the world. But one also sees the shared urban challenges (housing unaffordability, climate change, traffic congestion, pollution, etc.) and the shared values (sustainability, social justice, community, healthy cities) that create solidarity between urban planners from around the world. And these pages are richly illustrated with evocative photographs, highlighting the internationalization both of planning and of our students, which is a cherished attribute of our college and the larger University of Michigan.

Congratulations to the Michigan planning students for a great issue and for all the activities of Agora over the school year (including the annual salon evening event). May the journal long thrive, evolve and capture the rich voices and experiences of the next generation of urbanists.

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