

Alternatives


From the Editor in Chief

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Last year, while reviewing photography submissions for Agora 7, I wondered aloud again and again: where are all the people? I sorted through breathtaking images of infrastructure – artifacts brought to life through the juxtaposition of light and shadow; the loose fibers of our collective memory. But what I longed for was the experience, the process, and the space of human interaction. After all, we plan for people, for more ‘eyes on the street’ and more feet in the door; for better decision making, better quality of life, and meaningful social change. In short, I sought, and missed, a testimony to the humanity of the urban experience.

The photographer of cities attempts to capture impossible complexity, the depth and diversity of human interaction, and the influence of the built environment, all within the constraints of a medium that lacks the benefit of explanatory words or context. Each medium of scholarship or art is, in its own way, similarly limited. Consequently, we approached this year’s journal as a compendium of multiple viewpoints. We expanded the journal’s scope by exploring new platforms and media including blogs, video interviews, salons, panels, and workshops. We probed the wisdom of Taubman faculty and visiting speakers, savored the imagination of middle and high school students, and harnessed the passion of our peers.

Planning is a continuous process. We acknowledge that Agora 8 can only be a collection of snap shots, a partial cross-section of our historical moment.



However, by combining the tactics of a reflective practitioner with the knowledge of a grounded academic, we hope that the journal's gaze might include glimpses of the past and of things to come.

I thank our contributors for committing their ideas to paper and breathing life into blank pages. The authors of *Agora 8* have exhibited conviction, tempered always by the willingness to meaningfully engage with the multidisciplinary of urbanistic discourse. Though they were often forced to joust with our editorial staff, they (and we) emerge more experienced writers and scholars equipped to deal in the tricky business that is the trafficking of ideas.

The articles in *Agora 8* not only address long-standing issues in planning practice and research but also dare to think projectively; they are not content with things as they are. They propose alternatives to dominant models of housing, regional planning, project funding, environmental quality, and urban redevelopment. These authors ask "why not?" Why haven't these proposed alternatives materialized in policy and practice? They explore these issues pluralistically, as issues of theory and of practice, as issues of policy and of design. By including this multiplicity of perspectives, we hope that these articles might permit a deeper understanding of our world that enables us, as planners and designers, to propose alternatives that are both hopeful and realistic.

Agora 8 began as an aspiration: to interrogate current discourse through the various lenses of our authors, editors, and collaborators and to appreciate deeply the foundational role of humanity in urbanity and urbanism. As planners and designers working to address the obstacles posed by of shrinking municipal budgets, the retrenchment of urban services, the uneven spatial distribution of economic opportunity, and heightened public concern about environmental degradation and anthropogenic climate change, it is imperative that we learn from, make use of, and disseminate alternative methods and imagine alternative futures. We hope that the articles contained in this issue inspire you are to discuss, critique, and challenge the condition of the contemporary city and to propose alternatives.

Agora 8 stands on the shoulders of the staffs that preceded us. We thank them for their dedication to the journal and its mission; we also thank them for entrusting us with the continuation and expansion of the journal. Finally, we'd like to thank our faculty advisors Dr. Julie Steiff and Dr. Scott Campbell.

Cheers,

Alex