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Toward a Just Metropolis

By Andrea Broaddus

In this section, we present four papers selected from nearly 90 that were presented at the conference, *Toward a Just Metropolis: From Crises to Possibilities*. Hosted by the UC Berkeley Department of City and Regional Planning (DCRP) in June 2010, the conference drew more than 450 participants from 7 countries, 50 organizations, and 45 universities. This extraordinary gathering of planners, architects, designers, urban activists, journalists, policymakers, academics, students, and concerned citizens was united by a common purpose: creating a just future for all human settlements.

Toward a Just Metropolis marked the first time that four organizations for progressive urbanists collaborated to jointly host their annual conferences: Planners Network, Architects / Designers / Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR), Association for Community Design, and The Center for the Living City. A key instigator and organizer of the event was Alex Schafran, DCRP PhD student and longtime Planners Network steering committee member. He found early and staunch support in Jennifer Wolch, Dean of the College of Environmental Design, herself a longtime advocate of just and sustainable cities. Dean Wolch granted use of Wurster Hall as the main site of conference activities and participated as a presenter and panelist. Schafran worked tirelessly with a shoestring budget and all-volunteer organizing committee to, as he put it, “bring together the most diverse group of people possible, give them plenty of time to talk and present and work in both the real world and the classroom, and see what could happen.”

In that spirit, an eclectic mix of sessions was organized to appeal to a wide ranging audience of scholars and practitioners, working on a multitude of urban theory, design, and planning issues, from the scale of the firm/neighborhood to the region/state. Topics ranged from emerging research on the issues of the moment—economic crisis and skyrocketing foreclosures—to age-old conundrums like inclusionary strategies for marginalized groups like youth, seniors, and immigrants. There were sessions on “right to the city” movements, on sustainability policy and water/energy management and revitalizing post-industrial cities, on alternative methods of planning and economic development and grassroots struggles for housing justice and transportation justice. To increase community access, mobile workshops were organized together with community-based organizations at sites throughout the Bay Area with easy access to public transportation. Some high-profile conference participants were invited not just to meet with local grassroots groups, but to take part in advocacy actions, including a group of participants led by noted planning scholars Peter Marcuse and Chester

Hartman, who helped Right to the City Alliance members Causa Justa / Just Cause and POWER with a San Francisco press conference designed to bring attention to environmental justice and housing issues in both San Francisco and Oakland.

The conference was charged with a sense of urgency related to the context of national and international financial crises calling the role of planners into question. In the U.S., the foreclosure crisis-cum-financial meltdown saw Americans losing jobs and homes, a crisis with distinctly urban and metropolitan fingerprints. In developing areas, cities were growing rapidly, with only a portion of development occurring through formal processes, and with extreme inequities between haves and have-nots. Participants came seeking ways to rectify these wrongs, to help, and to prevent the same mistakes from happening again. The role of planners as agents embedded in dysfunctional systems of urban growth and management was questioned and reconsidered.

The collaboration that created the *Toward a Just Metropolis* conference has continued afterwards in a jointly organized publishing effort. This section of the *Berkeley Planning Journal* is part of a collaboration with *Progressive Planning Magazine*, published by Planners Network, *Justice Spatiale / Spatial Justice*, a bilingual peer-reviewed journal from France, and *Places: Design Observer* to invite participants to submit their work for publication, an effort that was coordinated by the New Village Press, a co-sponsor of the conference. Our joint call for papers echoed the creative energy that left conference participants feeling energized, stating, "We are creating a permanent record of the profusion of ideas, examples, and stories that emerged from that meeting, and are sharing it with a wider audience." We selected four fascinating papers from the conference for the BPJ which grapple with various aspects of the just metropolis, using cases from France, Germany, Sweden, and the United States.

The first paper in this section asks: what socio-spatial form would a just metropolis take? Sonia Lehman-Frisch explores this question by unpacking the issue of segregation. She examines the suburbs of Paris, France with the purpose of re-examining the implicit relationship between space, segregation, and injustice. She acknowledges that high concentrations of poverty and minorities in some Parisian neighborhoods are considered by many to be evidence of spatial injustice, but the purpose of her analysis is to challenge that notion. Arguing against enforced diversity, she says that perhaps desegregation of these neighborhoods would represent an injustice, due to the loss of the material, social, and cultural benefits to their residents. The just city, she suggests, may be neither segregated nor mixed, but a place where group affinities could be expressed without oppression, and where residents could roam and locate without spatial or social constraints.

The next paper considers the question of how to build the just metropolis. Eirini Kasidou tracks the role of planners in moving from the rhetoric of sustainability to reality. She documents in detail the planning processes that resulted two communities widely cited as models of sustainable urbanism: Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm, Sweden, and Quartier Vauban in Freiburg, Germany. In these cases, planners were unabashedly proactive about using municipal powers to develop greenfield sites using the highest standards of water and energy efficiency, while providing a diverse range of rental and ownership options. Both emphasize public transportation and solar power. Yet unlike previous eras of strong centralized planning, in these cases the cities engaged residents in collaborative processes, developing alliances with future residents.

The third paper in this section, by Evan Casper-Futterman, considers economic development in the just metropolis. He considers cooperatively owned firms, where workers are owner-producers in democratically run firms, as an alternative model of economic development. Presenting a network of coops in Cleveland, Ohio as an example, he finds evidence that worker cooperatives help build financial and social equity simultaneously, as workers in traditionally low-wage service industries like laundry, home cleaning, and gardening are able to build equity in a business. He suggests that the main barrier preventing this model from proliferating in other regions is not a legal or financial one, but lack of knowledge about the worker cooperative model.

Finally, an essay by Sarah Behrens and Kaja Kühl considers the question of integration in the just metropolis. They note that today's immigrants often skip over the city because they have an easier time finding jobs and supportive networks in the suburbs. Drawing upon the experience of Brentwood, New York as a point of entry for immigrants from El Salvador, they contrast the traditional "American Dream" with today's real suburb. In the midst of tensions between the established community and the newcomers, she identifies a role for planners, naming housing, transportation, public space, and schools as four areas where planners can implement strategies that facilitate both social integration and environmental sustainability, to the benefit of all residents.