

# The Seventh Generation

“In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.”

—From *The Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy*

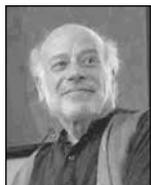
## Whither *Progressive Planning*?

Tom Angotti and Marie Kennedy

THE FIRST ISSUE of *Progressive Planning Magazine* came off the press in the winter of 2002. As the two of us plan to retire as editors, this issue, Spring 2016 will be the last, at least in its present form. We are asking our readers to follow us as we trace our history and lay out some possible scenarios for the future of the magazine and Planners Network. Most importantly, we ask you to think and act so that these institutions may thrive.

### Our History

The Winter 2002 issue was marked No. 150 because the first 149 issues were newsletters, starting with the first one put out by Planners Network founder Chester Hartman in 1975. As the newsletter evolved and eventually included more than just timely notices about people, publications and events, Tom Angotti and Ann Forsyth pushed it one step further and assumed responsibility for editing the magazine, at that time called *Planners Network: The Magazine of Progressive Planning*.



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Since 2002, the magazine has been published four times a year and mailed to PN members. The newsletter continued, but has been published with less regularity. The editorial group has changed over the years but it continues to be an entirely volunteer operation. A modest fee is paid for the excellent professional layout while the largest expense is for printing and mailing.

### Three Problems

This situation is no longer sustainable for three reasons. The first has to do with editorial responsibilities. The overwhelming bulk of responsibility for editing the magazine has fallen on the two of us. Happily, for us, we have had senior academic positions that gave us the time and freedom to do this. But we have also been deeply concerned about what will happen after we retire.

The second reason this situation is no longer sustainable has to do with Planners Network. The magazine is one of the major benefits for the roughly 300 dues-paying members of the organization. It is also PN's single largest expenditure. Over the years, the suggestion that the magazine shift from print to digital publication has been resisted by many of our oldest members – including ourselves – who appreciate the tangible enjoyment of the hard copy. But now we feel that if *Progressive Planning* continues, it has to go digital. There are many alternatives using digital media, and these can help reach a younger and more diverse audience with information and analysis about progressive planning today. Without the expense involved in the print version, resources could perhaps be freed up to build

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The City is also directing banks to make vacant units available for refugee resettlement, with municipal resources and support. This is part of an effort spearheaded by Ada Colau to create a network of Spanish “safe cities” among the municipalities with elected leftist governments, to challenge the anti-refugee stance of the dominant conservative party.

### Barcelona, Spain, and Beyond

Clearly Barcelona is testing the limits of what can be accomplished at the municipal level to confront the anti-democratic politics of national and global institutions and actors. It has provided a model for local anti-displacement and affordable housing activism in gentrifying cities, and for reinventing urban democracy.

On a larger scale, these local efforts contributed in no small measure to Podemos’s strong showing in last December’s parliamentary elections. In alliance with progressive local coalitions including *Barcelona en Comú*, Podemos won 21% of the vote, upending the traditional two-party system that has dominated Spanish politics for the past 40 years.

At the same time, the PAH made its anti-displacement platform (endorsed only by Podemos) a central issue in the national electoral campaign. The PAH has also spearheaded international mobilizations against Blackstone, joining forces with anti-eviction allies in the US, London and elsewhere.

At least for now, social movements in Barcelona appear to have found a way to engage in electoral poli-

tics without compromising their autonomy or activist identity. Despite its participation in the *Barcelona En Comú* convergence, and the prominent role in government played by activists like Ada Colau, the PAH has maintained its organizational independence and is not beholden to any political party (including Podemos). This new model is a welcome departure from recent experience (e.g., with Latin America’s “pink tide” governments), where independent social movements have been coopted, subsumed, marginalized, or crushed by successful leftist parties that have captured state power.

A perennial question generated by the experience of social movements and leftist governments is whether the impetus for progressive change comes from inside the institutions, or from the streets. In Barcelona today, it seems that both strategies are needed, and are working collaboratively.

While Barcelona’s combative grassroots movements do not always see eye to eye with elected municipal officials or with Podemos party leaders, their relationships at the moment seem to be strengthening the progressive left, both inside and outside the political arena. “There is a difference in what you can achieve in each framework,” Ada Colau recently told *The Nation*, “but they are both indispensable. For real democracy to exist, there should always be an organized citizenry keeping an eye on government – no matter who is in charge.” **P<sup>2</sup>**

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### Whither Progressive Planning?

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up Planners Network’s extremely modest infrastructure, offer at least modest compensation for editors and writers, or help finance our dynamic conferences, which always operate on a shoe-string.

The third and perhaps most important roadblock to the sustainability of the magazine, and any possible successor to the magazine, has to do with the challenge of staking out a progressive editorial approach. Many of the unsolicited submissions and queries we get put forth ideas and analyses that clearly are more appropriate for the American Planning Association’s *Planning* magazine. They are about pet programs, best practices and self-promotional stories of community organizing that fail to go beyond superficial “win-win” scenarios. They often conceal deep racial and economic contradictions instead of helping to understand them. In fact, most of our issues are put together by combining articles from a small number of regular writers with others that we seek out. We have been fortunate to have occasional guest editors who have contributed their own time and efforts, but these issues require almost as much of our own time.

It is a constant struggle to keep the focus on what distinguishes our publication and organization from the mainstream. We worry that the magazine could easily slide into the

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pack of interesting and trendy but politically centrist publications giving voice to budding professionals and academics no matter where they stand on the fundamental issues of economic and social justice. An allied concern is that it will become yet another outlet for academics, turning away from the activists and practitioners and speaking in jargon instead of straight talk.

Our own approach has been openly political. It is reflected in the many ways that *Progressive Planning* ventured into territory that is forbidden elsewhere. In what other planning publication will you consistently find articles about Israel's apartheid wall and practices, queer urbanism and how racist policing and prison policies are connected to planning? Where else will you find a clear critique of APA and PAB (Planning Accreditation Board) policies, and the planning code of ethics? What other publication features stories of inequalities and struggles for justice in Africa, Asia and Latin America, without being shy about the imperial role of the US? Or articles about Occupy Wall Street, the Peoples Climate March, the injustices of immigration policy, gentrification and displacement of communities of color, planning and racial justice in the South, New Orleans after Katrina and New York after 9/11?

Our approach relies on constantly questioning the orthodox wisdom of the planning establishment. For example, when we talk about transportation we immediately think about transportation justice. When we talk about the environment, we think about environmental justice. When we talk about food, we think about food justice and food sovereignty. While we have sought to stretch the limits that restrict what planners talk about and do, it is our sense that much of planning has narrowed its focus and returned to a technocratic emphasis on the physical environment, removed from any real struggles for social and racial justice in the US and throughout the world.

Planners Network, and its predecessor Planners For Equal Opportunity, have opened up possibilities for a different approach. But can it be sustained? We must

stand on the shoulders of the networkers who grew up as champions of advocacy and equity planning but we also have to move forward. We believe that in the ranks of Planners Network, there are progressive planners with the ability and desire to take *Progressive Planning* into its next phase. The time has come to test that belief.

### **Looking Ahead**

In sum, we believe that *Progressive Planning* is no longer sustainable in its current form. First, the two of us are largely responsible for producing it and we are stepping down. Second, the obligation to produce a printed product four times a year is a heavy financial burden on Planners Network and the reasons to go digital are compelling. Third, we are raising the question of whether there is a clear political space for a publication like *Progressive Planning* and propose that it is critically important to have an open discussion to figure this out before making any decisions about what should be done.

We are prepared to work with others on a transition towards new forms of dialogue and discussion among progressive planners that may replace the magazine. We don't know who among our readers and members that might be. If you are interested in taking responsibility for the transition and whatever emerges from it, please get in touch with us. An essential requirement is a clear sense of the broad political space that the magazine has occupied, including sensitivity to questions of race, gender and global inequalities, and an ability to write clearly for a broad audience. Most of all we need people with experience as editors who have dealt with diverse writers and readers, including students, activists, practitioners, and academics.

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Contact us at [editor@plannersnetwork.org](mailto:editor@plannersnetwork.org).

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