

NEW DIRECTIONS IN PLANNING THEORY

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The author examines three approaches to planning theory: the communicative model, the new urbanism, and the just city. The first type emphasizes the planner's role in mediating among "stakeholders," the second paints a physical picture of a desirable planned city, and the third presents a model of spatial relations based on equity. Differences among the types reflect an enduring tension between a focus on the planning process and an emphasis on desirable outcomes. The author defends the continued use of the just-city model and a modified form of the political economy mode of analysis that underlies it.

The past decade has witnessed a reinvigoration of theoretical discussion within the discipline of planning. Inspired by postmodernist cultural critique and by the move among philosophers away from logical positivism toward a substantive concern with ethics and public policy, planning theorists have reframed their debates over methods and programs to encompass issues of discourse and inclusiveness. In the 1970s and 1980s, proponents of positivist scientific analysis battled advocates of materialist political economy. Although the divide between positivists and their opponents persists, other issues have come to define the leading edge of planning theory. Contemporary disagreements concern the usefulness of Habermasian communicative rationality, the effect of physical design on social outcomes (an old debate resurfaced), and the potential for stretching a postmarxist political economy approach to encompass a more complex view of social structure and social benefits than was envisioned by materialist analysis. Although discussions of

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communicative theory and political economy have transpired within academic journals and books,¹ the body of planning thought concerned with physical design has grabbed public notice and received considerable attention within popular media.² Building on widespread dissatisfaction with the anonymity and sprawl of contemporary urban growth, the “new urbanism” espouses an outcome-based view of planning based on a vision of a compact, heterogeneous city.

In this article, I discuss and critique contemporary planning theory in terms of its usefulness in addressing what I believe to be its defining question: What is the possibility of consciously achieving widespread improvement in the quality of human life within the context of a global capitalist political economy? I examine the three approaches referred to earlier under the rubrics of (1) the communicative model, (2) the new urbanism, and (3) the just city. In my conclusion, I defend the continued use of the just-city model and a modified form of the political economy mode of analysis that underlies it.

The first type, sometimes called the collaborative model, emphasizes the planner’s role in mediating among “stakeholders” within the planning situation; the second, frequently labeled neotraditionalism, paints a physical picture of a desirable city to be obtained through planning; and the third, which derives from the political economy tradition, although also outcome oriented, is more abstract than the new urbanism, presenting a model of spatial relations based on equity. This typology of planning theories is not exhaustive—there remain defenders of the traditionally dominant paradigm of the rational model, as well as incrementalists who base their prescriptions on neoclassical economics, and Corbusian modernists, who still promote formalist physical solutions to urban decay. Nor are the types wholly mutually exclusive—each contains some elements of the others, and some theorists cannot be fit easily into one of the types. Nevertheless, each type can claim highly committed proponents, and each points to a distinctive path for both planning thought and planning practice.

Differences among the types reflect the enduring tension within planning thought between a focus on the planning process and an emphasis on desirable outcomes. In the recent past, neither tendency has fully dominated because theoretical orientations toward process and outcome have respectively affected different aspects of practice. Thus the concept of the rational model represented an approach based wholly on process, with little regard either to political conflict or to the specific character of the terrain on which it was working. As Beauregard (1987, 367) put it, “In its fullest development, the Rational Model had neither subject nor object. It ignored the nature of the agents who carried out planning and was indifferent to the object of their efforts [i.e., the built environment].” This model has provided the metatheory

for planning activity in the decades since the 1960s, incorporating the faith in scientific method that swept through the social sciences during the cold war period. Within planning practice, it has primarily been used for forecasting impacts and for program evaluation. At the same time, however, as the rational model held sway among theorists, planning practitioners engaged in the development of zoning and environmental regulations, upholding an atheoretical, physical outcome-oriented vision of what Jacobs (1961, 22-25) sarcastically termed the “radiant garden city.”³ Outcome-oriented physical planning has left its mark on metropolitan areas in the form of urban renewal, low-density development, and spatial and functional segregation.

Although the rational model and the physical master plan were the dominant, late twentieth-century modes of planning practice throughout the world, they did not escape a powerful critique. Their opponents, who decried the distributional consequences of these approaches, generally adopted a political economic analysis. From this standpoint, critics persistently inquired into who benefited from planning efforts and associated themselves with social movements seeking to block displacement of low-income urban inhabitants, build affordable housing, halt the movement of capital out of distressed cities, and ameliorate racial, ethnic, and gender disadvantage.

The recent theoretical moves involved in the typology sketched earlier represent a reaction both to previously dominant modes of thought and also to events “on the ground.” Thus the communicative model responds to the imposition of top-down planning by experts deploying an Enlightenment discourse that posits a unitary public interest to be achieved through application of the rational model, the new urbanism is a backlash to market-driven development that destroys the spatial basis for community, and the just-city formulation reacts to the social and spatial inequality engendered by capitalism. In common with earlier critics of the rational model (see Fainstein and Fainstein 1979), theorists within all three schools doubt the applicability of the scientific method to urban questions; none of the three approaches relies on scientific justification as the rationale for its vision. Whatever their differences, they are all three postpositivist.

THE COMMUNICATIVE MODEL

The communicative model draws on two philosophical approaches—American pragmatism as developed in the thought of John Dewey and Richard Rorty and the theory of communicative rationality as worked out by Jürgen Habermas.⁴ The two strands differ somewhat in their methodologies. Neopragmatism tends toward empiricism, with its exemplars searching for

instances of best practices within planning from which generalizations can be drawn. Thus

The big question for the pragmatic analysts is how practitioners construct the free spaces in which democratic planning can be institutionalized. The idea . . . is to uncover examples of planning that are both competent and democratic, and then to explore who the practitioners were who did it, what actions they took to make it happen, and what sorts of institutional conditions helped or hindered their efforts. (Hoch 1996, 42)

Communicative rationality starts instead with an abstract proposition. According to Healey (1996, 239),

A communicative conception of rationality . . . replaces[s] that of the self-conscious autonomous subject using principles of logic and scientifically formulated empirical knowledge to guide actions. This new conception of reasoning is arrived at by an intersubjective effort at mutual understanding. This refocuses the practices of planning to enable purposes to be communicatively discovered.

Pragmatism and communicative rationality emerge from different philosophical traditions. Whereas Dewey's work comes out of British philosophical realism and empiricism, Habermas's original approach traces back to Hegelian idealism and marxist critical analysis and then later to Wittgenstein's scrutiny of language. Pragmatism and communicative rationality, however, converge when used to provide a guide for action to planners. This guide is the antithesis of Daniel Burnham's admonition to "make no small plans," an ambition that was once seen to embody the noblest aims of planning. Within communicative theory, the planner's primary function is to listen to people's stories and assist in forging a consensus among differing viewpoints. Rather than providing technocratic leadership, the planner is an experiential learner, at most providing information to participants but primarily being sensitive to points of convergence. Leadership consists not in bringing stakeholders around to a particular planning content but in getting people to agree and in ensuring that whatever the position of participants within the social-economic hierarchy, no group's interest will dominate.

Judith Innes (1998, 52) commented that "what planners do most of the time is talk and interact" and that "this 'talk' is a form of practical, communicative action." Innes (1995, 183) contended that the communicative model, which establishes the planner as negotiator and intermediary among stakeholders, has become so widely accepted as to form "planning theory's emerging paradigm."⁵ Healey (1997, 29) summarized this theoretical turn as comprising the following emphases:

(1) all forms of knowledge are socially constructed; (2) knowledge and reasoning may take many different forms, including storytelling and subjective statements; (3) individuals develop their views through social interaction; (4) people have diverse interests and expectations and these are social and symbolic as well as material; (5) public policy needs to draw upon and make widely available a broad range of knowledge and reasoning drawn from different sources.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL DEFICIENCIES

In its effort to save planning from elitist tendencies, communicative planning theory runs into difficulties. The communicative model should not be faulted for its ideals of openness and diversity. Rather, its vulnerability lies in a tendency to substitute moral exhortation for analysis. Although their roots, via Habermas, are in critical theory, once the communicative theorists move away from critique and present a manual for action, their thought loses its edge. Habermas posited the ideal speech situation as a criterion by which to register the distortion inherent in most interactions. As such, it supplies a vehicle for demystification. But when instead ideal speech becomes the objective of planning, the argument takes a moralistic tone, and its proponents seem to forget the economic and social forces that produce endemic social conflict and domination by the powerful. There is the assumption that if only people were reasonable, deep structural conflict would melt away. Although unquestionably many disagreements can be ameliorated through negotiation—the attainment of exactions or planning gain⁶ from developers by community groups offers an example—persistent issues of displacement as a consequence of modernization and siting of unwanted facilities proximate to weak constituencies are less susceptible to resolution. Even when relatively powerless groups may prevail in individual instances—usually as a result of threat, not simply acknowledgment of their viewpoint within a planning negotiation—they still suffer from systemic bias and typically end up with meager, often symbolic benefits.⁷

The communicative theorists make the role of the planner the central element of discussion. Both the context in which planners work and the outcome of planning fade from view.⁸ Unlike the rational modelers, the communicative theorists have found a subject, but like them, they lack an object. Whereas in legal theory the object of analysis is the relationship between the legal system and society and in medical theory the concern is with the human body, in communicative planning theory the spotlight is on the planner. Instead of asking what is to be done about cities and regions, communicative planners typically ask what planners should be doing, and the answer is that they should be good (i.e., tell the truth, not be pushy about their own judg-

ments). Like the technocrats whom they criticize, they appear to believe that planners have a special claim on disinterested morality:

Planners must routinely argue, practically and politically, about desirable and possible futures. . . . They may be sincere but mistrusted, rigorous but unappreciated, reassuring yet resented. Where they intend to help, planners may instead create dependency; and where they intend to express good faith, they may raise expectations unrealistically, with disastrous consequences.

But these problems are hardly inevitable. When planners recognize the practical and communicative nature of their actions, they can devise strategies to avoid these problems and to improve their practice as well. (Forester 1989, 138-39)

The present trend among communicative planning theorists is to avoid broad examinations of the relationship between planning, politics, and urban development.⁹ Much recent work in planning theory has been devoted to examining the meanings of planners' conversations with developers and city officials, deconstructing planning documents, and listening to planners' stories:

The challenge we face, as planners and policy analysts more broadly, is . . . to listen carefully to practice stories [i.e., stories of planning in practice] and to understand who is attempting what, why, and how, in what situation, and what really matters in all that. That challenge is not just about words but about our cares and constraints, our real opportunities and our actions, our own practice, what we really can, and should, do now. (Forester 1993, 202)

Katha Pollitt (1999, 35), bemoaning a tendency toward solipsism among feminist writers, commented that

"The personal is political" did not mean that personal testimony, impressions and feelings are all you need to make a political argument. The important texts of feminism have, in fact, been rather un-self-revealing. Simone de Beauvoir spent more than 700 pages in "The Second Sex" analyzing women's position in society through every conceivable lens: anthropological, economic, historical, literary, psychoanalytic, biological, philosophical, legal—except that of her own life.¹⁰

Similarly, the concern of communicative planning theory, itself influenced by feminism, has become subjective interpretation rather than the identification of causes, constraints, and substantive outcomes (see Campbell and Fainstein 1996). In fact, the search for explanation either gets lost in the thicket of hermeneutics or dismissed as totalizing (Milroy 1991; Beauregard 1991). The assumption is that explanation is necessarily reductionist. Yet even if we accept the premise that the purpose of planning theory is simply to

tell planners what they ought to be doing, such knowledge depends on an accurate appraisal of the situation in which planners find themselves. Explanatory theory allows the observer to identify the general characteristics of a situation, and these characteristics cannot be inferred simply through the examination of discourse (Yiftachel forthcoming). This is not to deny the usefulness of experiential learning or of case analysis in contributing to understanding. But it does mean transcending individual experience, placing cases in a broad context, making comparisons, and not limiting analysis to exegesis.

In addition to questions of method, communicative theory runs into the fundamental issues of pluralist theory. Communicative theorists avoid dealing with the classic topic of what to do when open processes produce unjust results.¹¹ They also do not consider the possibility that paternalism and bureaucratic modes of decision making may produce desirable outcomes. Various studies of the European welfare states and of the New Deal in the United States have concluded that the principal measures for ensuring health and security were generated by state officials with little reference to interested publics (see Flora and Heidenheimer 1981; Mencher 1967; Skocpol 1985). Even though these measures would not have been approved without supportive constituencies and the threat of oppositional social movements, the actual formulation of policy (i.e., the planning of it) was highly insulated from stakeholder input.

Healey (1997) used the term *collaborative planning* to describe the process by which participants arrive at an agreement on action that expresses their mutual interests. She argued against a structuralist or political economy approach by contending that people do not have fixed interests. In other words, a particular structural position (e.g., capitalist) does not automatically produce a particular policy position (e.g., deregulation).¹² Discussion can lead capitalists to understand how they could benefit financially from environmental regulation when they might reflexively have opposed any attempt to restrict their freedom to pollute. And indeed, the vulgar marxist view that interests can be immediately inferred from relations to the means of production is indefensible. The marked differences between the attitudes of American and European business executives toward the interventionist state, whereby Europeans are much more accepting of state leadership, indicates the extent to which interpretations of interest by groups in similar structural positions can vary. Nevertheless, the different perceptions of interest held by those in different structural positions are not resolved simply through the exchange of ideas. If European and American business leaders have different perceptions of interest, ideas alone are not the cause. Rather, they exist in different historical contexts and different fields of power. Major changes in

perceptions of interest require restructuring as a consequence of crisis or of a social movement, not simply verbal assent (Lukacs 1971).

Even if perceptions of interest are biased or misdirected by distorted speech and even if structures are socially constructed, changing speech alone does not transform structures. An intervening stage of mobilization is required. Ideas can give rise to social movements that in turn change consciousness, ultimately resulting in the adoption of new public policy, but this is more than a matter of negotiation and consensus building among stakeholders.¹³ In the instances of both environmentalism and neoliberalism, discontent among influential fractions of the population became a social force when mobilized by a set of ideas that seemed to define a reason for feelings of dissatisfaction. The aroused consciousness that puts ideas into practice involves leadership and the mobilization of power, not simply people reasoning together. Moreover, transformative social movements, whether conservative like neoliberalism or progressive like environmentalism, themselves contain distortions. Marx and Engels (1947), in their critique of the Hegelians, asserted that the world was changed through struggle, not the force of ideas. They did not mean, as they are often misinterpreted, that economic structures automatically determine outcomes and that human agency is helpless to affect them. But they did mean that words will not prevail if unsupported by a social force carrying with it a threat of disruption. To put this another way, the power of words depends on the power of the speakers. To quote Bent Flyvbjerg (1998, 234), "When we understand power we see that we cannot rely solely on democracy based on rationality to solve our problems."

The theoretical lacunae of communicative theory reveal themselves in practice. Scrutiny of efforts to base planning on dialogue reveals serious problems of implementation and the continued dominance of the already powerful. Perhaps the most interesting contemporary example of a conscious effort toward meaningful, inclusive, consensual planning has been in South Africa. There the transitional situation, after the elimination of apartheid and before the establishment of new local governments, presented a unique opportunity for developing policies outside normally constraining structures. Preexisting policies and institutions did not require typical deference, and huge policy areas were open to new determinations. Yet, as described by Mary Tomlinson (1998, 144-45),

The loudly acclaimed "consensus" [on housing policy] supposedly hammered out by the stakeholders in the National Housing Forum which should have been achieved by hard bargaining among the parties was, in fact, the result of fudging vital differences between them. Faced with a conflict of vision between those who favoured a market-oriented strategy led by the private sector, and

those who preferred a more “people-centred” approach in which “communities” would be the central players—or at least retain a veto—the forum parties opted for both, despite their incompatibility. Thus all parties wanted immediate and visible delivery—but some also wanted “empowerment.” So both were included, despite the fact that they would prove to be contradictory in practice.

By the second year of implementation of the housing subsidy scheme the consensus hammered out at the National Housing Forum had not, as its architects hoped, succeeded in binding all key housing interests to the policy: some key political actors had not been party to its formulation—and therefore did not feel bound by it—while crucial private interests proved ready to abandon it if it conflicted with their interests, or if it did not seem to produce the rate of delivery that had hoped to achieve.

A study of the implementation of the economic development plan for South Africa’s Western Cape, which was also devised in a policy forum, comes to a strikingly similar conclusion:

Amongst the public of Cape Town, the plan [produced by the Western Cape Economic Development Forum] is probably better known than any before it: it is frequently referred to, usually in a positive light. It remains, however, a paper plan and an abstract vision. On the ground large-scale private investors have continued to follow their own locational logic, and low-income housing has continued to spread in low-density fashion on the city edge, where cheaper land is available. Certain of the well located parcels of land earmarked by the plan for low-income housing were allocated to Olympic sports facilities or other upmarket developments, others still stand empty. (Watson 1998, 347)

Innes (1996) used the example of the New Jersey State Plan to demonstrate the efficacy of the communicative model. Here stakeholders from throughout the state participated in a series of meetings that produced a document targeting some areas for growth or redevelopment and others for conservation. Implementation depended on “cross acceptance,” whereby localities, rather than being forced to conform to the statewide plan, would agree to conduct their planning in accordance with it in return for certain benefits.

Yet the same issues that cropped up in South Africa affected the implementation of the New Jersey State Plan. To start with, to win approval of the various participants in the planning process, the plan contained only weak requirements for the construction of affordable housing, suburban integration, and compact development, even though lack of housing for low-income residents, suburban exclusion of the poor and minorities, and lack of open space were identified as the principal problems that planning was supposed to overcome. Then, despite the moderate nature of the plan and the cross-acceptance process, its implementation has been half-hearted at best and

often strongly resisted by local planning boards. The principal result of consensual planning in New Jersey has been the continuance of a system whereby the market allocates land uses.¹⁴

These examples point to one problem of communicative planning in practice—the gap between rhetoric and action. The problem is perhaps most severe in the United States, where historic antagonism to a powerful administrative state has always limited the possibility of implementing any plan, regardless of how formulated (see Foglesong 1986). In Europe, where power is more centralized, corporatist bargaining has been institutionalized, and locally based interest groups are less able to block state action and the devolution of planning power to stakeholders; hence their assent to a plan is more likely to produce tangible results. Even there, however, agreement by participants to a document does not necessarily mean that anything will happen.

A second practical problem of communicative planning is the lengthy time required for such participatory processes, leading to burnout among citizen participants and disillusion as nothing ever seems to get accomplished. Cynical South Africans referred to the various policy forums as “talking shops.” A third issue arises from the difficulties involved in framing alternatives when planners desist from agenda setting. Thus, for example, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the city established a neighborhood planning process whereby residents formulated five-year plans for their neighborhoods and were allocated fairly substantial sums of money to spend. Planners assigned to facilitate the process were committed to a nondirective role and therefore only proposed actions when asked. The result was that some neighborhoods reached creative solutions, especially when participants were middle-class professionals, but others floundered in attempting to rank priorities and to come up with specific projects, sometimes taking as many as three years to determine a vague and hard-to-implement plan (Fainstein and Hirst 1996).

Finally, there is a potential conflict between the aims of communicative planning and the outcomes of participatory planning processes if planning is conducted within narrow spatial boundaries. The familiar specter of NIMBYism (not in my backyard) raises its head whenever participation is restricted to a socially homogeneous area.¹⁵ Communicative theorists are committed to equity and diversity, but there is little likelihood that such will be the outcome of stakeholder participation within relatively small municipalities. Organizing planning across a metropolitan area to encompass diversity of class, race, and ethnicity requires extending the process through multiple political jurisdictions to escape the homogeneity imposed by spatial segregation. The obstacles to involving citizens in metropolitan-wide planning, however, are enormous, and doing so means sacrificing the local familiarity that is the rationale for participatory neighborhood planning.

The failures of planning during the heyday of massive urban renewal programs substantiate many of the objections to top-down, expert-driven planning and make desirable the communicative turn in planning. Nevertheless, the cruelties of massive clearance programs were not simply the result of deference to expertise. In the United States, business and political interests, not experts, constituted the power base on which the urban renewal endeavor was mounted, and the experts directing the programs were almost all physical determinists drawn from the design and engineering professions rather than planners and housing analysts (Gans 1968, chap. 18). The federal government terminated the program precisely when reforms, instigated by mobilized community groups and in reaction to urban civil disorder, had made it more sensitive to affected communities and less profitable for developers; this turn of events illustrates how problematic any policy is that circumvents power relations. Moreover, the present generation of planners is more likely to be responsive to the needs of neighborhood residents and ordinary citizens.¹⁶ To the extent that they are not, the difficulty can only be partially remedied by open processes. City building for the benefit of nonelite groups requires empowering those who are excluded not just from discussions but from structural positions that allow them genuine influence. Ability to participate is one resource in the struggle for power, but it must be bolstered by other resources, including money, access to expertise, effective organization, and media coverage. Communicative theorists probably would not deny the importance of these resources, but neither do their analyses dwell on them. This omission constitutes the fundamental weakness of the theory.

THE NEW URBANISM

New urbanism refers to a design-oriented approach to planned urban development. Developed primarily by architects and journalists, it is perhaps more ideology than theory, and its message is carried not just by academics but by planning practitioners and a popular movement.¹⁷ New urbanists have received considerable attention in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in Great Britain.¹⁸ Their orientation resembles that of the early planning theorists—Ebenezer Howard, Frederic Law Olmsted, Patrick Geddes—in their aim of using spatial relations to create a close-knit social community that allows diverse elements to interact. The new urbanists call for an urban design that includes a variety of building types, mixed uses, intermingling of housing for different income groups, and a strong privileging of the “public realm.” The basic unit of planning is the neighborhood, which is limited in physical size, has a well-defined edge, and has a focused center:

“The daily needs of life are accessible within the five minute-walk” (Kunstler 1996, 117).

The new urbanism stresses the substance of plans rather than the method of achieving them. In practice, it has stimulated the creation of a number of new towns and neighborhoods, of which Seaside, in Florida, is the best known.¹⁹ Fundamental to its development has been a critique of American suburbia:

In the postwar era, suburbia became the lifestyle of choice for most Americans.

While this new way of living had many advantages, it also fragmented our society—separating us from friends and relatives and breaking down the bonds of community that had served our nation so well in earlier times. . . .

The costs of suburban sprawl are all around us—they’re visible in the creeping deterioration of once proud neighborhoods, the increasing alienation of large segments of society, a constantly rising crime rate and widespread environmental degradation. (Katz 1994, ix)

In this analysis, suburbia is responsible for far more than traffic congestion on the freeway and aesthetically unappealing strip-mall development. It is also the producer of crime and anomie.²⁰

In its easy elision of physical form with social conditions, the new urbanism displays little theoretical rigor. Unlike other trends in planning, however, it is noteworthy for the popular response it has achieved. Although its appeal results partly from widespread dissatisfaction with suburban development and nostalgia for traditional forms, it also stems from the strong advocacy of its supporters, who have joined together in the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU). The new urbanists do not fear playing the role disdained by the communicative theorists—that of persuasive salespersons for a particular point of view and deployers of strategies aimed at co-opting people. Thus Andres Duany unabashedly declared,

Now, although it’s important to be flexible, open to new ideas, it’s also important, when you confront the world, to maintain principles that are inviolate—one thing you can learn from LeCorbusier is that to influence and persuade, you must be polemical. You can’t convince people by equivocating, by saying “Well, on the one hand this, on the other that.” You’ll bore them, and they’ll chew you up. As a polemicist, you have to clarify matters. . . . And you have to attack. Whenever I’m invited to speak to the Urban Land Institute [an organization of property developers], I try to destabilize them with my certainty that they are wrong. (“Urban or Suburban?” 1997, 48)

Duany did make a gesture toward participatory planning in his endorsement of citizen involvement in the *charette*, the lengthy design workshop that

furnished the details of his developments. But one suspects that the purpose is as much co-optive as informative. When asked whether his use of neotraditional architectural styles was “like your use of language, a way of concealing what you’re doing,” he replied, “Yes, exactly.” He commented that architects who insist on using a style without mass appeal, by which he meant high modernism, are “separating themselves from where the power really is, which is the ability of architecture to transform society, to be of genuine social benefit” (“Urban or Suburban?” 1997, 60).

Thus Duany and his confederates in the CNU did not fear distorted speech, nor did they shrink from using democratic procedures in responding to the public’s stylistic preferences as a screen to achieve their desired socio-spatial arrangements.

CRITIQUE

The new urbanism is vulnerable to the accusation that its proponents oversell their product, promoting an unrealistic environmental determinism that has threaded its way throughout the history of physical planning. Harvey (1997, 1) praised certain aspects of the new urbanism—its emphasis on public space, its consideration of the relationship between work and living, and its stance toward environmental quality. Nevertheless, his endorsement was mixed:

But my real worry is that the movement repeats at a fundamental level the same fallacy of the architectural and planning styles it criticizes. Put simply, does it not perpetuate the idea that the shaping of spatial order is or can be the foundation for a new moral and aesthetic order? . . . The movement does not recognize that the fundamental difficulty with modernism was its persistent habit of privileging spatial forms over social processes. (Harvey 1997, 2)

As a consequence of its spatial determinism, the new urbanism runs into certain dangers. One frequently made criticism is that it merely calls for a different form of suburbia rather than overcoming metropolitan social segregation. Duany responded to this accusation by arguing that because most Americans are going to live in suburbs, planners need to build better suburbs. Moreover, he contended that it is not his philosophy but, rather, political opposition and obsolete zoning ordinances that prevent him from working in inner cities (“Urban or Suburban?” 1997). And indeed, the effort to overcome the environmentally destructive, wasteful form of American suburban development constitutes the most important contribution of the new urbanism to the commonweal.

The movement is less convincing in its approach to social injustice. Harvey (1997) feared that the new urbanism can commit the same errors as modernism—of assuming that changing people's physical environment will somehow take care of the social inequalities that warped their lives. To be sure, with its emphasis on community, it is unlikely to commit the principal sin of modernist redevelopment programs—destroying communities to put people in the orderly environments that were thought to enhance living conditions. The real problem replicates the one that defeated Ebenezer Howard's radical principles in the construction of garden cities. To achieve investor backing for his schemes, Howard was forced to trade away his aims of a socialist commonwealth and a city that accommodated all levels of society (Fishman 1977). The new urbanists must also rely on private developers to build and finance their visions; consequently, they are producing only slightly less exclusive suburbs than the ones they dislike. Although their creations will contain greater physical diversity than their predecessors, their social composition will not differ markedly.

Harvey (1997) also worried that the new urbanist emphasis on community disregards "the darker side" of communitarianism. He claimed that "'community' has ever been one of the key sites of social control and surveillance bordering on overt social repression. . . . As a consequence, community has often been a barrier to rather than facilitator of progressive social change" (p. 3). He was apprehensive that the enforced conformity of community blocks the creativity arising from diversity and conflict. He thus raised issues that have been major points of debate in discussions of institutionalized community participation among supporters of redistributive measures (see Fainstein 1990): Advocates argue that community power raises the self-esteem of members, whereas opponents fear that it produces parochialism and failure to recognize broader class interests (Katznelson 1981; Piven 1970).

Two problems come to the fore here. The classic and more important dilemma results from the two-edged quality of community, which in providing emotional sustenance to its members, necessarily excludes others. A second problem arises within theories of planning and urban design that urge the creation of exciting locales: Is planned diversity an oxymoron? Although Jacobs's (1961) critique of modernist planning undergirds much of the new urbanism, she would probably repudiate its effort to prescribe what in her view must be spontaneous. And truly, if one visits the world's planned new towns and downtown redevelopment projects, even those built with commitments to diversity and community, one is struck by their physical and social homogeneity:

Sadly, the cornerstones of Jacobsian urbanism—picturesque ethnic shops piled high with imported goods, mustachioed hot-dog vendors in front of improvised streetcorner fountains, urban life considered as one enormous national-day festival—are cruelly mimicked in every Rouse market [i.e., festival marketplace developed by the Rouse Corporation] and historic district on the [American] continent. Contemporary developers have found it eminently easy to furnish such obvious symbols of urbanism, while at the same time eliminating the racial, ethnic, and class diversity that interested Jacobs in the first place. (Boddy 1992, 126n)

At the same time, relying on the market for an alternative to planning will not overcome the problem of homogeneity. The failure of the market to provide diversity in most places means that if planners do not attempt to foster it, the outcome will be increasingly segregated neighborhoods and municipalities. Nevertheless, the new urbanism, with its focus on physical form, will not do the job either:

The reification of physical models is used by the architects of New Urbanism as a strategy to create local community, by reproducing a physical environment that fosters greater casual social contact within the neighborhood. However, these architects fail to sufficiently consider segregation within the greater urban area according to class, race and ethnicity, and may, in fact, help perpetuate it. (Lehrer and Milgrom 1996, 15)

Only a publicly funded effort to combine social groups through mixing differently priced housing with substantial subsidies for the low-income component can produce such a result. The new urbanists seek to create housing integration but, in their reliance on private developers, are unable to do so on a sufficient scale or across a broad enough range of housing prices to have a significant effect. However, a serious effort to attract public subsidy for the low-income component of their communities would involve the new urbanists in a political battle for which their architectural training and aesthetic orientation offer few resources. The appeal of Victorian gingerbread and Cape Cod shingle would not override the fear of racial and social integration.

For planning theory, the most interesting aspect of the new urbanism is that its assurance of a better quality of life has inspired a social movement. Its utopianism contrasts with communicative planning, which offers only a better process. Thus there is a model of planning practice that is based not on the picture of the sensitive planner who listens and engages in ideal speech but on the messianic promise of the advocate who believes in a cause and eschews neutrality. As in all such cases, the benefits are exaggerated. But there is an attraction to the doctrine, both because of its hopefulness and because the

places it seeks to create do appeal to anyone tired of suburban monotony and bland modernism.

THE JUST CITY

In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels ([1892] 1935, 54) presented the Marxian critique of utopianism:

The final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in man's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange.

For Marx and Engels, social transformation could occur only when the times were ripe, when circumstances enabled the forces for social amelioration to attain their objectives. In their view, utopian thinkers, such as Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, could not succeed because they developed a social ideal that did not coincide with a material reality still dominated by capitalist interests. Only smashing the structure of class domination could create the conditions for achieving a just society. Attainment of this goal, however, would not result from a passive acquiescence to historical forces. Engels laid out a role for intellectual understanding in bringing about a desirable transformation, as well as a picture of the future that only avoided the label of utopianism through an assertion of historic inevitability—the claim that once the working class seized power, it inevitably would create a just society:

Once we understand [social forces] . . . when once we grasp their action, their direction, their effects, it depends only upon ourselves to subject them more and more to our own will, and by means of them to reach our own ends. . . . But when once their nature is understood, they can, in the hands of the producers working together, be transformed from master demons into willing servants. . . . With this recognition at last of the real nature of the productive forces of today, the social anarchy of production gives place to a social regulation of production upon a definite plan, according to the needs of the community and of each individual. (Engels [1892] 1935, 68-69)

At the millennium's end, one can hardly be sanguine that the hegemony of any social grouping will produce outcomes that will fulfill "the needs of the community and of each individual." By considering such an outcome as an inevitable consequence of proletarian revolution, Marx and Engels could simultaneously dismiss a nonconflictual path to socialism as unrealizable and present their teleological vision of revolutionary socialism as both realistic and desirable. If one does not accept their theory of historical development, how-

ever, one must either face the problem of formulating goals and identifying agents or capitulate to whatever structure of social domination exists. In this situation, a rigorous belief that people are helpless before forces such as globalization, sectarianism, and the repressive apparatus of the state produces either stasis or, at best, simply resistance.²¹

This crisis of action has led to the revival of utopian thought among some thinkers on the Left. Harvey (forthcoming), for example, has broken with the marxian critique of utopian idealism despite his continued adherence to other aspects of marxian analysis.²² In his introduction to *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (1996), he recounted his experience of attending an academic conference in an Atlanta hotel that was also hosting a convention of fundamentalist Christians. He was impressed by the much greater appeal of the Christians as compared to the academics, their greater joyfulness. Thus his new interest in utopias arises partly out of a recognition that creating a force for change requires selling a concept—as Duany so forthrightly pointed out—making people think that they want what you are offering.²³ Depicting a picture of a just city puts the planning theorist in the role of advocate—not necessarily the advocate for a particular group, as in Davidoff's concept of advocacy planning—but as the advocate of a program.

Just-city theorists fall into two categories: radical democrats and political economists. The former differ from communicative planning theorists in that they have a more radical concept of participation that goes beyond the involvement of stakeholders to governance by civil society, and they accept a conflictual view of society.²⁴ They believe that progressive social change results only from the exercise of power by those who previously had been excluded from power. Participation is the vehicle through which that power asserts itself. The political economy group, upon whom I shall focus in this section and among whom I include myself, takes an explicitly normative position concerning the distribution of social benefits. It goes beyond neomarxism, however, in analyzing distributive outcomes as they affect non-class-based groupings and refusing to collapse noneconomic forms of domination into class categories. Until recently, the political economy tradition involved a critique of urban and regional phenomena based on values that were rarely made explicit (Fainstein 1997; Sayer and Storper 1997). Although clearly the principal value underlying such analyses was equity, the discussion usually proceeded by identifying unfairness without positing what was fair. There has been, however, an effort of late, paralleling and drawing on work in philosophy (e.g., Nussbaum and Sen 1993; Young 1990), which has broken with positivism and with postmodernist relativism. The purpose of this project has been to specify the nature of a good city (Harvey 1992, 1996; Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1997; Beauregard forthcoming).

The audience for this endeavor has remained vaguely defined. By inference, however, one can deduce that the principal target group is the leadership of urban social movements. Because political economic analysis mostly condemns policy makers for being the captive of business interests, it is addressed primarily to insurgent groups, to officials in progressive cities (Clavel 1986), and to "guerrillas in the bureaucracy" (Needleman and Needleman 1974). Whereas the communicative planning theorists primarily speak to planners employed by government, calling on them to mediate among diverse interests, just-city theorists do not assume the neutrality or benevolence of government (Marcuse 1986). For them, the purpose of their vision is to mobilize a public rather than to prescribe a methodology to those in office.

A theory of the just city values participation in decision making by relatively powerless groups and equity of outcomes (see Sandercock 1998). The key questions asked of any policy by political economists have been, Who dominates? and Who benefits? The "who" has typically been defined by economic interest, but economic reductionism is not necessary to this mode of analysis; evaluation of outcomes can also be conducted with regard to groups defined by gender, race, and sexual orientation. Nor does the emphasis on material equality need to boil down to an expectation that redistribution should proceed to a point at which there is no reward to achievement.

The characteristic weakness of socialist analysis has been its dismissal of economic growth as simply capital accumulation that benefits only capitalists. Socialist doctrine fails to mobilize a following if it only ensures greater equality without also offering improved circumstances for most people. The market model and neoliberalism have proved popular because they promise increases in affluence for all even if within the context of growing inequality. Neomarxian analysis has shown that unregulated growth despoils the environment, primarily helps the upper echelons of the population, and even produces increased absolute deprivation at the bottom. Its attacks on the entrepreneurial state and its collaboration with private capital have delineated a collusion in which the interests of the majority have frequently been ignored (Squires 1989). Nevertheless, this critique did not point to a way in which the majority of the population can realize economic gains relative to their own previous position and, as a consequence, has lost popular support in the developed countries.

A persuasive vision of the just city needs to incorporate an entrepreneurial state that not only provides welfare but also generates increased wealth; moreover, it needs to project a future embodying a middle-class society rather than only empowering the poor and disfranchised. Whereas Marx dismissed the *lumpenproletariat* with contempt and placed his hopes with the working class, contemporary political economists tend to see society as

consisting of the poor and the wealthy, ignoring the interests and desires of the vast middle mass and the aspirations for upward mobility of the working class. Yet, if substantive democracy is a constitutive element of a vision of social justice, then an antimajoritarian concept of society will not do. Recent work on industrial districts, social markets, local economic development, and national growth rates has pointed in a direction more sympathetic to middle-class aspirations (Storper 1997; Sayer and Walker 1991; Fainstein and Markusen 1993; Bluestone and Harrison 1997). Still, a great deal more attention needs to be paid to identifying a formula for growth with equity (Sanyal 1998).²⁵ And such an approach has to take into account the perseverance of a capitalist world economy and the evident success, at least for the moment, of a liberalized U.S. economy.

Participation in public decision making is part of the ideal of the just city, both because it is a worthy goal in itself and because benevolent authoritarianism is unlikely. At the same time, democracy presents a set of thorny problems that have never been theoretically resolved and can only be addressed within specific situations.²⁶ The almost exclusive preoccupation with participation that has come to characterize much of leftist thought since the demise of socialism in the Soviet bloc evades the problems that have vexed democratic theory throughout its history. Democratic pluralism, with its emphasis on group process and compromise, offers little likelihood of escape from dominance by those groups with greatest access to organizational and financial resources. Democratic rule can deprive minorities of their livelihood, freedom, or self-expression. Classic democratic theory deals with this problem through imbuing minorities with rights that cannot be transgressed by majorities. But what of the minority that seeks to exercise its rights to seize power and take away the rights of others in the name of religious authority or racial superiority? Democratic principles can easily accommodate ineffective or harmless minorities; they founder when confronted with right-wing militias, religious dogmatists, and racial purists. Thus the appropriate criterion for evaluating a group's claims should not be procedural rules alone; evaluation must comprise an analysis of whether realization of the group's goals is possible and, if so, whether such realization leaves intact the principle of social justice. Democracy is desirable, but not always.

Within a formulation of the just city, democracy is not simply a procedural norm but rather has a substantive content (see Pitkin 1967). Given the existing system of social domination, it cannot be assumed that participation by stakeholders would be transformative in a way that would improve most people's situation. Consequently, deliberations within civil society are not *ipso facto* morally superior to decisions taken by the state. Rather, "it is the

double-edged nature of the state, its ability to effect both regressive or progressive social change, that must be stressed" (Yiftachel 1998, 400).

The state can do both good and bad, and likewise, so can the citizenry. As Abu-Lughod (1998, 232) put it,

When one considers the wide range of associational groups within civil society that seek empowerment . . . some of them are downright evil, while others seem very admirable. Furthermore, some forms of associational organization seem to be effective in achieving their goals whereas others, equally participatory, fail.

Storper (1998, 240) picked up on her theme:

Abu-Lughod goes right to the heart of the matter in suggesting that the form of civil society—e.g. decentralized, embracing a diversity of voices—does not have a straightforward relation to the content of those voices. In this she mirrors an old debate in political philosophy, especially modern democratic political philosophy, between democracy as a set of procedures and democracy as content or substance.

Applying the just-city perspective, one must judge results, and furthermore, one must not forget that the results attainable through public policy are seriously constrained by the economy. Thus, even when the principal concern is not economic outcomes but ending discrimination or improving the quality of the environment, economic interests limit possible courses of action. To go back to the example of the New Jersey State Plan mentioned earlier, its primary purpose was environmental protection, not social integration or redistribution of land and property. Nevertheless, its content was affected by the state's dependence on private investors for new development and its implementation restricted by fears of landowners that their property values would be adversely affected by growth regulation. Thus economic interests impinge on planning even when the economy is not its foremost object.

As stated in the introduction to this article, the principal question of planning theory is the analysis of the possibility for attaining a better quality of human life within the context of a global capitalist political economy.²⁷ One way to approach this question is to frame a model of the good city and then to inquire how it is achievable. The model can be an abstract utopia—the cohesive city of the new urbanists' dreams—or be derived from the identification of places that seem to provide an exceptionally good quality of life (thus conforming to Hoch's 1996 description of pragmatic inquiry described earlier).

In a recent paper, I (Fainstein 1999) identified Amsterdam as comprising such an exemplar. Although not the embodiment of utopia, it contains many

of the elements of the just city. If one considers the two other types of planning theory discussed here—communicative planning and the new urbanism—Amsterdam also conforms in many respects to their models. There is a highly consensual mode of decision making, with elaborate consultation of social groups and heavy reliance on third-sector organizations for implementation of policy. In conformity with the vision of the new urbanism, spatial forms are physically diverse, development is at very high density, and population is mixed by class and, to a lesser extent, ethnically. These achievements are within the context of a relatively equitable distribution of income, a very extensive welfare state, corporatist bargaining over the contours of the economy at the national level, and public ownership of urban land. All this came partly out of a tradition of planning and compromise but also out of militant struggle—by workers' parties for much of the century and by squatters and street demonstrators more recently.

Amsterdam is, of course, a wealthy Western city, and the theories discussed here derive primarily from a Western discourse rooted in the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, they are applicable to the developing world, where the goal of growth with equity has been a long-standing one. Despite the contention of various Asian dictators that the concepts of democracy and rights constitute Western values, the very active global human rights movement and the rapid spread of democratic ideas throughout much of the non-Western world indicate widespread acceptance of these values. Heller's analysis of the Indian state of Kerala supports this argument:

Kerala is a striking example of equitable development: Successive governments in this southwestern state of 29 million inhabitants have successfully pursued social and redistributive strategies of development that has few, if any, parallels in the nonsocialist developing world. . . . The vigor and dynamism of civil society is matched only by the size and activism of the state. (Heller 1996, 1055)

In examining Amsterdam and Kerala, one can see that democratic procedure was crucial to their development but also that it was insufficient. Required also was a structural situation of relative material equality as both precondition and outcome of development and a culture of tolerance and commitment to equity. Put another way, both Amsterdam and Kerala operated within a mode of regulation that permitted private capital accumulation and a market economy while maintaining a large nonmarket sector. Citizens of Amsterdam and Kerala thus possess a set of social rights, not just political rights (see Marshall 1965).

RESURRECTING OPTIMISM

The three types of planning theory described in this article all embrace a social reformist outlook. They represent a move from the purely critical perspective that characterized much theory in the 1970s and 1980s to one that once again offers a promise of a better life. Whereas reaction to technocracy and positivism shaped planning theory of that period, more recent planning thought has responded to the challenge of postmodernism. It has therefore needed to assert the possibility of a guiding ethic in the face of the postmodernist attack on foundationalism:

The disrupting, enabling meaning of the postmodern is derived from the critique of universalism and the placing of difference and heterogeneity in the foreground, but such an opening remains consistently incomplete for some differences we may want to struggle against when they encapsulate inequality, and the heterogeneous, plural or local do not of themselves carry any necessarily empowering or emancipatory meaning. Clearly, the locally or regionally particular can be as violently oppressive as the centrally or globally universal. (Slater 1997, 57)

Communicative planning theory has evaded the issue of universalism by developing a general procedural ethic without substantive content. The new urbanists claim that their design prescriptions incorporate diversity and provide people what they really want rather than what archaic zoning laws and greedy developers impose on them. Thus, even though they have been criticized for imposing a particular formula on others, they defend themselves by arguing that their conception incorporates difference. Just-city theorists work from "the basic premise . . . that any distributional conception of social justice will inevitably be linked to the broader way of life in which people engage" (Smith 1997, 21). The argument is that although there may be no universal standards of good and bad, there are criteria for judging better and worse (Smith 1997; see also Fainstein 1997).

The progressives of the previous period spent much of their energy condemning traditional planning for authoritarianism, sexism, the stifling of diversity, and class bias. More recent theorizing has advanced from mere critique to focusing instead on offering a more appealing prospect of the future. For communicative planning, this means practices that allow people to shape the places in which they live; for new urbanists, it involves an urban form that stimulates neighborliness, community involvement, subjective feelings of integration with one's environment, and aesthetic satisfaction. For just-city theorists, it concerns the development of an urban vision that also involves

material well-being but that relies on a more pluralistic, cooperative, and decentralized form of welfare provision than the state-centered model of the bureaucratic welfare state.

At the millennium's end, then, planning theorists have returned to many of the past century's preoccupations. Like their nineteenth-century predecessors, they are seeking to interpose the planning process between urban development and the market to produce a more democratic and just society. The communicative theorists have reasserted the moral preoccupations that underlay nineteenth-century radicalism, the new urbanists have promoted a return to concern with physical form, and just-city theorists have resurrected the spirit of utopia that inspired Ebenezer Howard and his fellow radicals. Although strategic and substantive issues separate the three schools of thought described here, they share an optimism that had been largely lacking in previous decades. Sustaining this optimism depends on translating it into practice.

NOTES

1. See especially various issues of the journal *Planning Theory* and Lauria (1997).

2. An op-ed piece in the *New York Times* noted, "When [the chairman of the Metropolitan Atlanta Chamber of Commerce] . . . talks wistfully about the need to re-create the European town square in urban America, he is expressing sentiments that have spread through his entire business community with remarkable speed and intensity" (Ehrenhalt 1999).

3. By this she meant both the suburban legacy of Ebenezer Howard's garden city movement and the urban reconstruction schemes of LeCorbusier and the international movement.

4. The principal theorists who have developed communicative theory in planning are Judith Innes, John Forester, Jean Hillier, Patsy Healey, Charles Hoch, and Seymour Mandelbaum. See especially Mandelbaum, Mazza, and Burchell (1996) for an extensive collection of essays developing this theme. For critiques of communicative planning theory, see Flyvbjerg (1998), Yiftachel (forthcoming), Lauria and Whelan (1995), and Tewdwr-Jones (1998).

5. See Muller (1998) for a critique of the applicability of Kuhn's concept of the paradigm to planning theory.

6. The terms *exactions* (in the United States) and *planning gain* (in the United Kingdom) refer to the granting of benefits—for example, contributions to a housing fund, building of a public facility, and so on—by developers in return for the right to develop.

7. Stone (1989) chronicled the minor victories and overall defeat of the African-American population of Atlanta within a series of planning decisions dominated by a business-oriented regime. Despite a black mayor and a significant black leadership cadre, "the [governing] coalition is centered around a combination of explicit and tacit deals. Reciprocity is thus the hallmark of Atlanta's regime, and reciprocity hinges on what one actor can do for another. Instead of promoting redistribution toward equality, such a system perpetuates inequality" (p. 241).

8. Healey (1997) is bothered by this aspect of the theory and seeks to overcome it. Her work is distinguished by greater attention to the object of planning than is the case for most of her

colleagues in the communicative rationality group. Likewise, she is much less sanguine that good will triumph as a consequence of open discussion.

9. The first analytic case studies of planning were authored by political scientists (e.g., Altschuler 1965; Meyerson and Banfield 1955; Stone 1976) and did not contain this intense focus on the role of the planner.

10. It should be noted that much of Simone de Beauvoir's body of work did devote itself to an examination of her life; these writings, however, do not have the same theoretical importance or general applicability as *The Second Sex*. At the same time, they show the apparent contradictions between her general arguments and her life as lived, thereby raising important theoretical issues.

11. Healey (1997) again is an exception.

12. Lindblom (1990) took a similar position, arguing that interests are made, not discovered. He therefore preferred the term *volition* to interest.

13. The concept of stakeholder seems to imply that individuals and groups do have differing objective interests in a particular issue, even though the content of that interest is not fixed.

14. These conclusions are based on my own field observations.

15. American suburbs enjoy considerable autonomy and elicit substantial citizen participation in their planning processes. The outcome tends to be exclusionary zoning.

16. In a thesis examining four cases of military base conversion to peacetime uses, Hill (1998) found, contrary to her expectations, that in the most successful case, Boston's Charlestown Navy Yard, citizen participation did not play a significant role, but politicians and planners with a commitment to neighborhood development and environmental protection produced a desirable outcome.

17. Influential proponents of this body of thought include Peter Calthorpe, James Howard Kuntsler, Anton Nelessen, and especially Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberg.

18. Within the United Kingdom, Charles, the Prince of Wales, has been associated with the neotraditional movement and has sponsored development in accordance with principles of the new urbanism. In Britain and other parts of Europe, however, many of the tenets of the new urbanism have always formed the basis of planning regulation and thus do not represent as much of a reorientation as in the United States.

19. Katz's (1994) *The New Urbanism* contains pictures and plans of a number of these endeavors within the United States.

20. See Hamilton (1999) and Frantz and Collins (1999); these *New York Times* articles, published after the Littleton, Colorado, school massacre, traced problems of teenage alienation to suburban design and credited new urbanist forms with the potential to overcome them.

21. The reduction of oppositional action to simply resistance seems to be at the core of Foucault's philosophy. See Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, 207).

22. Friedmann (forthcoming) has also recently written a paper exploring this theme, as have I (Fainstein 1999).

23. According to Kumar (1991, 31), "In the abstract schemes of conventional social and political theory, we are told that the good society will follow from the application of the relevant general principles; in utopia we are shown the good society in operation, supposedly as a result of certain general principles of social organization."

24. John Friedmann and Frank Fischer fit into this category. See Friedmann (forthcoming) and Fischer (forthcoming).

25. Healey (1998) emphasized the importance of institutional forms that will support economic development and tried to show how this can occur within the framework of collaborative planning. Her formulation is more applicable to those countries that already engage in corporatist decision making under the auspices of a social democratic state than it does to the United States.

26. See Day (1997) for the particular difficulties the concept presents to planners.
 27. I do not deal here with the obviously fundamental issue of how one measures the quality of life, but see Nussbaum and Sen (1993) for a set of seminal essays on this subject.

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