

Urban and regional planners

Urban and regional planners are among the most important professionals working to make communities more sustainable, resilient, and just, and their capacity to align their technical skills with their civic ones will be indispensable to effective and democratically legitimate climate strategies. Since the 1960s, when communities pushed back vigorously against top-down urban renewal schemes, planners have developed a set of alternative planning cultures that are more responsive to demands for public participation and ecological design.

While these planning cultures and tools vary, they increasingly serve as components of more integrative sustainability strategies. Given the complexities, uncertainties, and disruptions of climate change in the coming decades, the “democratic professional” ethos and skill of planners can enable citizens and stakeholder groups to collaborate for productive purpose, enhance equity, help legitimate difficult democratic choices, and hold in check the broad assault on expertise.

Sustainability planning cultures and toolkits draw upon ecological and landscape design, neighborhood culture and social capital, regional, smart growth and new urbanist perspectives, environmental justice and transportation equity, and deliberative and communicative process. Major professional associations in the broad planning field, such as the American Planning Association, the American Institute of Architects, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and the National Association of Transportation Officials, have committed themselves to fostering civic, green, and just alternatives, and public policy should reinforce their creative initiatives.

Brief history

Urban and regional planning in the U.S. offers a rich set of traditions that, according to Robert Fishman, had to grapple with distinct challenges rooted in the absence of a strong national state (compared to European countries) and correspondingly strong rights of private property. Land speculation drove not only westward settlement but urban settlement as well. “Thus, the American city was always a kind of double speculation – the effort to lure a critical mass of capital and skills to a speculative urban center in order to open up the surrounding territory for speculative sale as farmland.”

During what Fishman calls the “urban era” of 1830 to 1930, cities played a formative role in the development of national economy and culture, although cities were never mentioned in the federal Constitution. Much was accomplished by mobilizing ad hoc commissions, special authorities, and public-private partnerships, as well as leveraging the city as a legal corporation to borrow to finance railroads, docks, warehouses, paved streets, and other forms of aid to manufacturing and trade.

As historian Mary Ryan shows in her rich study of local democracy in mid-19th century New York, San Francisco, and New Orleans, the democratically assembled people “wove together the public and the private” and “wrought fine-meshed linkages – of citizens, neighbors, councilmen, workers – into a social continuum along which common needs were met on a largely voluntary basis.” Local citizens might assess themselves in dollars and hours of hands-on work to build and upkeep a street corner or square, but often did so according to standards monitored by public

officials. The democratic public constituted itself in “heterogeneous compounds and kaleidoscopic varieties,” typically providing an array of public goods through wide social networks passing “around and through the formal government.”

In the early 20th century, Progressivism generated new participatory reforms, such as the initiative and referendum, as well as textured forms of engagement and collaboration by women in city governance. But it also brought strong claims that the expertise of planners, city managers, engineers, economists, and other professions would produce a superior combination of efficiency and representative democracy. Urban governance and planning culture were marked deeply by these claims in the ensuing years, leaving the work of planners and other experts largely disconnected from community engagement and fragmented into technocratic specialties. Modernist architecture and planning, as in the influential work of Le Corbusier, displaced community culture and local knowledge to the periphery.

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Emerging alternatives

Dissatisfaction with technocratic planning cultures came from various directions, including “highway revolts” against plans that cut through neighborhoods and across cities, as well as resistance to urban renewal in Black, Latino, and white ethnic neighborhoods.

Among the major perspectives through which planning theory and practice moved towards more democratically engaged and ecologically attentive models are the following:

Street life and neighborhood culture

Several important critiques of planning emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s that helped revitalize planning as a democratic project. Two authors were especially important and in dialogue with each other, one the architecture critic and activist Jane Jacobs, and the other sociologist and urban planner Herbert Gans.

In her 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs presented a sweeping critique of many traditions within American planning, including City Beautiful but especially urban renewal. As an “uncredentialed woman” without a college degree, she drew especially, though not exclusively, upon her close observation of the life of the streets where she lived, the West Village of New York City. Arguably, the latter narrowed her appreciation for other types of communities, as some of her critics contended, yet it nonetheless yielded many insights. As Robert Fishman notes, Jane Jacobs’ “analysis of the city became the starting point for a redefinition of the goals and methods of urban planning,” not least because it left room for the initiative and creativity of citizens.

Among the major emphases in Jacobs’s work helping to revitalize planning were:

- *close-grained diversity*: the city draws its great diversity from the little plans of ordinary people, not the grand plans of the great builders, such as Robert Moses in New York City. Small urban enterprises sustain and are sustained by a dense and diverse population with variegated tastes and needs.
- *eyes on the street*: lively sidewalk life generates order and safety because many people, whether walking their dogs or cleaning their storefronts, serve as eyes and ears for potentially unlawful activity. The first line of order is not police but citizens watching out for each other.
- *urban ballet*: a successful urban street is a complex blend of neighbors and strangers, familiar and chance encounters that define boundaries yet welcome outsiders.

Herb Gans had offered an important critique of planning in the field's leading journal in 1959 and insisted in his contributions over the next decade that "democracy in all spheres of life" should be a guiding mission. His classic 1962 ethnographic study of the Italian working class neighborhood of the West End of Boston, *The Urban Villagers*, established an important framework for empirical analysis of the destructive impact of planning and urban renewal on class and ethnic subcultures. While he recognized *Death and Life* as a "path-breaking achievement," he argued that it suffered from "the physical fallacy," emphasizing buildings and streets, and tended to ignore social, cultural, and economic factors that account for urban vitality and urban problems.

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Participatory planning

During the 1960s, participatory democracy emerged as an ideal and set of diverse practices in many arenas, including the student and antiwar movements, especially Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); in the younger wings of the women's movement; and in the civil rights movement, which included mainstream and youth groups, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). When President Lyndon Johnson (1963-1969) announced a War on Poverty in 1964, it was inconceivable to his key advisors that the poor could be excluded from participation, especially but not only in those cities where civil rights groups already had strong foundations.

Several programs responded to pressures from below to design policy and planning for democratic participation:

- *Community Action*: announced in 1964, this federal program included a mandate for "maximum feasible participation" of residents in the areas served by community action agencies, set up with funding from the new Office of Economic Opportunity, located within the White House. While administrative deficits were often significant, community action agencies helped to build further civic capacity by developing

participatory skills among new actors, especially community women in minority neighborhoods, and by fostering partnerships and nonprofits at the local level. Community action ranged from self-help to militant challenges of entrenched bureaucracies, and included other programs that were later spun off, such as Head Start, Legal Aid, and community health centers.

- *Model Cities*: created in 1966 as part of the new Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Model Cities was aimed at revitalizing urban areas through planning. While designed to reign participation into authoritative city structures to accommodate mayors, it nonetheless included a requirement for “widespread citizen participation,” testifying further to a normative shift in the urban field, backed by legislatively granted rights for community groups to appeal exclusion from the process.

While federal funding was limited to areas specified in city applications (covering no more than 10% of the city’s population), contiguous areas often mobilized to claim similar participatory rights, which city planners tasked with managing these and other programs typically granted. Participation, in short, had strong “isomorphic” tendencies in the urban mix of the 1960s and 1970s, and HUD technical assistance aided this and recognized, even encouraged, the more robust models on a “ladder of participation,” in the famous formulation of Sherry Arnstein, chief adviser on citizen participation at HUD.

Local planners and administrators improvised in response to citizens’ insistent demands for “partnership” and their own common-sense understanding of heuristics that could legitimate programs in citizens’ eyes. Though highly underfunded relative to the number of municipalities eventually included in the program and unable to coordinate effectively across local or federal government agencies, Model Cities reached beyond social service agencies to a broad range of municipal services and for the first time established extensive participation in land use planning, such as housing demolition and construction, transportation routes and freeway construction.

- *neighborhood planning*: while neighborhood associations had a long history in many cities, they claimed a formal role in local planning in some and developed into full-fledged neighborhood institutional systems in a few. Social movement cultures of participation were important in some cities, but so too were the legacies of Community Action and Model Cities.

In the cities studied by Berry, Portney, and Thomson in *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy* (1993), citywide systems that provided resources for neighborhood association staff and a general template for nonpartisan problem solving, as well as communication with and accountability to city offices, were the most robust on a variety of measures of engagement, inclusion, and responsiveness to low-income groups. They also demonstrated a dynamic synergy among other organizational forms, such as local environmental groups and community development corporations.

Land-use planning was the major albeit not the only focus of neighborhood associations. Over time, planning for sustainability became a central theme, as in Portland, Oregon, which had an early citywide neighborhood system (1974), and coupled it with extensive participation in regional growth management and a citizen energy commission. By the 1990s, Portland was engaged in sustainability and climate planning and was recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in the field.

Seattle borrowed from Portland and several other cities in crafting its citywide neighborhood system in the late 1980s, and then developed perhaps the most robust policy design for neighborhood planning in the 1990s as part of its comprehensive plan, *Toward a Sustainable Seattle* (1994). Its policy design was partly inspired by Jane Jacobs, enhancing local neighbors' capacity and resources to shape streetscapes and urban villages in distinctive ways, yet within a comprehensive planning framework that vetted their designs with relevant expert bureaucracies and democratically accountable city council oversight on norms of inclusive participation, sustainability, and other stated public values.

To be sure, many of the neighborhood planning systems were not as responsive to democratic engagement, and even Portland and Seattle have had to make major adjustments to accommodate groups not organized along neighborhood boundaries, such as racial, ethnic, and immigrant associations, youth, senior, and LGBTQ groups, and local social service agencies. Seattle responded with a Race and Social Justice initiative beginning in 2005 and has incorporated an "[equity analysis](#)" its 2035 plan.

See **CivicGreen City Desk:** [Portland](#) and [Seattle](#).

Many planners who worked within one or more of these frameworks, or still others, came to align their professional identities and skills with the creative action of local citizens and associations, and their shift was recognized by the American Institute of Planners and within planning school curricula and training. Many worked within local planning agencies and others worked through nonprofits and university centers, providing assistance directly to neighborhood groups. In combination with other factors, such as required environmental impact statements, these local movements, professional shifts, and planning systems helped to dramatically shape local administrative and environmental law in ways that provide many opportunities today for collaborative action for sustainable, resilient, and just communities.

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Landscape ecology planning

Urban and regional planners have also drawn upon the rich vein of work that utilizes the landscape as a template to understand the interaction of social and natural dynamics. This tradition has a long history going back to Frederick Law Olmsted, who is credited with founding the profession of landscape architecture in the mid-19th century. The practice of landscape planning is typically multidisciplinary, engaging such professions as ecologists, geographers, planners, sociologists, foresters, soil scientists, and others.

Landscape planning began to flourish in the first decades of the 20th century in combination with the regionalist approaches of thinkers such as Patrick Geddes, Benton MacKaye, and Lewis Mumford. Advances in ecology also contributed, as did several 1930s New Deal agencies, especially the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which addressed soil erosion and flood control, among other issues. Aldo Leopold, an ecologist and wildlife biologist at the University of Wisconsin, had also been involved with the SCS in watershed planning, and developed the concept of a “land ethic” to provide a civic morality for ecological landscape work.

Significant advances in ecology during the postwar period, as well as the burgeoning of the environmental movement, set the context for new advances, marked especially by the publication in 1969 of Ian McHarg’s *Design with Nature*. McHarg’s work at the University of Pennsylvania helped to train a generation of students in planning and landscape architecture, which spread to many other universities. His “layer-cake model,” which superimposed hand-drawn translucent overlay maps of soils, hydrology, geology, climate, wildlife, and vegetation, as well as a range of human dimensions, such as community organization, demography, land uses, and economics, provided the basis for complex planning design and choice, based on “suitability analysis.”

This concept influenced the environmental impact statement (EIS) requirements contained in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), signed into law in 1970, and in similar state acts (SEPA), upon which local requirements were often added. These requirements, though quite imperfect, serve as a foundation for engagement, transparency, and oversight among community groups and environmental organizations.

Advances in computer technology have permitted overlay maps to be represented in geographical information systems (GIS), with various versions of participatory or public participation (PPGIS) to enable local knowledge and citizen engagement in planning processes. The typical model involves a partnership of municipal or university organizations

with community groups. Some approaches also support local knowledge and culture, as well as coproduction and co-management, as essential to robust ecological landscape planning, although barriers to effective use by citizens for ecological planning have been significant.

As landscape architect Randolph Hester has argued in his award-winning book, *Design for Ecological Democracy*, a central challenge of our age is to learn how to combine applied ecology and engaged democracy in our complex world, and many practices now support such an enterprise among professionals and ordinary citizens.

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Regional planning

A rich and diverse history of regional planning in the U.S. goes back to the early decades of the 20th century, although some examples go back further. Especially important were the writings of Patrick Geddes, Benton MacKaye, and Lewis Mumford, as well as the efforts of the Regional Planning Association of America in the 1920s and early 1930s.

While regional planning has often been marginalized by the focus on urban planning, its relevance in very different forms has continued to grow in the face of landscape and watershed perspectives, transportation and housing challenges, and regional economic dynamics, as well as the perverse effects of some fragmented local planning choices and “free rider” incentives. As Carleton Montgomery shows in *Regional Planning for a Sustainable America*, planners utilize a broad array of tools and strategies, including urban growth boundaries, tax revenue sharing among political jurisdictions, growth management

maps, land and development rights acquisition programs, water resource planning, smart growth and new urbanist design, among others.

Citizen participation has been key to generating public support and legitimacy, and includes a mix of various tools:

- *information*: on development trends, landscape patterns, and impacts of growth, shared widely through local and regional media (print, broadcast, online web, text, and video).
- *alternative scenarios*: portraying a current-trend scenario and one or more alternatives that might become available, should civic engagement help generate support and should planning choices be otherwise reconfigured.
- *visualization*: to help make choices more vivid and comprehensible and to root public choices in regional identities and values. Maps and 2D and 3D visuals, with before and after representations.
- *deliberative forums*: to achieve broad consensus, these might include multiple and geographically distributed workshops and formal planning charrettes among citizens, stakeholders (e.g. environmental groups, affordable housing advocates, developers, racial justice groups, tribes, bicycle and watershed associations, employers), and various types of planners and public administrators. Interactive forums are indispensable and can leave room for exercises that are creative and fun. Inclusive civic forums to generate a vision might be distinct from formal stakeholder negotiation, and the overall project can include leadership training of citizens to play ongoing roles of outreach and facilitation.
- *public dissemination*: to share results of the deliberations, including the reasons for choosing one scenario over another. Use the full range of media, and combine with house meetings, street kiosks, games, and the like.

There are many variations among the several dozen cases of regional planning in the U.S., and the mix of tools they utilize depends partly upon whether such planning is mandatory or voluntary. Two emblematic cases are Portland Metro (mandatory) and Envision Utah (voluntary).

Portland Metro

One of the leading examples of regional planning in the U.S. has been in the Portland metropolitan area of Oregon, where citizens voted in 1978 to create Metro, the only elected regional government in the country, to coordinate land-use planning and urban growth boundaries across 24 cities and parts of three counties. While not especially vigorous during the deep and prolonged state recession of the 1980s tied largely to the wood products industry, in the following decade Metro began to engage citizens,

environmental and civic groups, business interests, and local jurisdictions in developing alternative growth scenarios projected for the next 50 years.

Metro was a response to state legislation in 1973 that required every city and town to develop a comprehensive plan that met 19 statewide planning goals, including economic, environment, protection of farm and forest land, and citizen participation. The early round of public involvement in strengthening Metro capacities and authority in the 1990s relied upon sending 500,000 copies of a tabloid – one for every household – outlining four alternative growth scenarios and tradeoffs, and coupled these with extensive public hearings and workshops, presentations to local civic, business, and environmental organizations, and cable TV and local news media coverage.

Metro planning director John Fregonese was deeply committed to community involvement and had a video produced of the preferred vision that had emerged through public deliberation; it was widely advertised and distributed free of charge through local Blockbuster and other video rental stores, resulting in an estimated 50,000 viewings. Keep in mind, the Internet was just emerging and there were no YouTube or broadcast streaming services on TV at the time.

Envision Utah

In the 1970s, voters in Utah resoundingly rejected a referendum to mandate state land-use planning, which reflected the state's conservative culture (and Republican politics) and which limited realistic planning options. As concern escalated over the uncontrolled growth in the Greater Wasatch Area – the ten counties around Salt Lake City on the 50-mile long Wasatch Mountain Front – a nonprofit coalition initiated a process in the late 1980s to develop regional visioning as a key step towards building consensus on growth options. In 1995, Governor Mike Leavitt convened a growth summit that was broadcast live on all major TV affiliates and focused primarily on open space preservation and transportation.

Out of these efforts, Envision Utah was established as a nonprofit to help convene all key stakeholders, including those skeptical of the effort. The process began with a survey of community values, which identified various links between family time and more compact growth to limit commuting time, as well as greater housing density to enable new families among their children and grandchildren to remain in the area. Other values included open space and air quality. Values remained front and center in future visioning and subsequent planning.

More than 140 public and private organizations contributed data to compile a baseline scenario of what would result from “business as usual.” This jolted many into exploring alternative scenarios that would better preserve land, air and water quality, as well as provide housing opportunities for a range of family and income groups. Infrastructure costs to taxpayers and developers were also factored into scenarios, which helped convince many that development as usual would harm their pocketbooks as well as their environment and quality of life.

Visioning included workshops with map and photo exercises across the region to consider a set of other scenarios, which were widely publicized, inviting online responses, and then led to some 50 additional public meetings. John Fregonese (previously of Portland Metro) and new urbanist Peter Calthorpe served as consultants. Nearly 20,000 residents voiced preferences, with overwhelming support for walkable neighborhoods, bike options, and regional public transportation. Envision Utah then produced Urban Planning Tools for Quality Growth, a toolbox that enabled neighborhood design, bikeways and sidewalks, and land preservation, later expanded with tools for brownfields renewal, housing choices, and transit-oriented development, among others.

The organization then trained several thousand local officials and developers in utilizing these toolkits. Private foundation investment in Envision Utah, as well as federal grants from HUD and the U.S. Department of Transportation, were critical to developing the capacity of the organization, as were in-kind assistance from state and local government agencies. As Xavier de Souza Briggs notes, Envision Utah first enlisted influential leaders from various sectors, then managed the broader process of building consensus, and then became a capacity builder and public educator.

[Envision Utah](#) has won prestigious planning awards and continues to catalyze visioning and planning across a range of cities on the Wasatch Front and beyond. Other regions across the country have emulated its core processes, though the distinctive culture of a region that is still relatively homogeneous and dominated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS, or Mormon) supplied an unusual degree of consensus on public values and process (it was a “conversation”) and elicited network trust among institutionally diverse stakeholders, including developers and homebuilders, though largely male and white. This arguably enabled the leadership of president Robert Grow, a land-use attorney, corporate executive, Mormon, and Democrat, to navigate the tricky political waters of regional planning. He was then followed by Jon Huntsman, Jr., who subsequently became governor, partly upon the basis of his role in Envision Utah.

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Communicative and collaborative planning

Under the influence of Jürgen Habermas, the leading critical theorist of the late 20th century, various academics incorporated communicative ethics and deliberative process into planning theory. Judith Innes argued in a widely influential yet controversial article in 1995 that planning practice at its best seeks consensus based on norms of communicative rationality that incorporates diverse voices in mutual recognition. Together they search for a shared and workable truth, with strong norms of sincere and comprehensible speech and listening, in a context marked (as they later put it) by “diverse, interdependent interests and authentic dialogue” (DIAD model). In work with David Booher, she extended these insights by utilizing complexity theory to help ground complex collaborative processes, which she and Booher helped to facilitate in many planning settings, including on sustainability.

John Forester also drew upon Habermas in his studies of the “deliberative practitioner,” and added a power analysis for planners to help recognize asymmetrical power that they should seek to reduce significantly in their practice. Forester also theorizes the use of narrative to uncover the complexity of planners acting with stakeholders in pluralistic and conflictual settings, and across multiple institutional logics, where generating trust is critical.

Further enriching this approach is the work of Robert Goodspeed, *Scenario Planning in Cities and Regions*, whose approach fosters a critical interaction over an extended period of time between technology creators and stakeholders to further reduce technocratic biases in the use of digital knowledge technologies, including those that help generate alternative scenarios. This can enable a much richer and more continuous interplay of “tools of inquiry” (John Dewey) to support the work of planners as democratic professionals who, in effect, enable publics to imagine and equip themselves as actors with plot alternatives.

While there are differences among these and other communicative and collaborative planning theorists, some convergent emphases within this tradition include:

- *mutual recognition*: all stakeholders, as well as everyday citizens, should recognize each other’s agency as public actors, as well as their distinct interests as institutionally situated actors, and should be guided by a search for shared truth in seeking to solve planning problems, which may very well entail reframing problems discursively.
- *deliberative processes*: many forms of deliberation and structured facilitation are available, and these should be chosen in ways that build trust and incorporate insight from “multiple ways of knowing,” including local knowledge, citizen science, and storytelling, not just from technical expertise.

- *shared work*: communicative planning is not just about formal deliberation, but about work that can be shared, tested, and enriched through communication in many forms, out in the field and as “side conversations,” skeptical and suspicious yet relational and building trust. Doing things together, such as restoring a river that runs through an urban area with deep environmental justice concerns, can ground dialogue in material, ecological, and pragmatic work.

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Planning for Sustainability

As the planning challenges of sustainability became increasingly evident by the 1990s, cities began to develop explicit sustainability plans, supplemented in the 2000s by climate action plans with greater stress on and measurement of GHG emissions reductions. These are increasingly supplemented by resilience and adaptation plans.

Two key features of such planning, as well as planning education, have been *integrative work* across various areas of planning – land use, energy, transportation – and *civic work* in deliberative forums, coproduction of knowledge and public goods, and environmental justice challenge and collaboration. Each of these draws upon the various alternative planning cultures and toolkits of prior decades, yet attempts to raise them to new levels of effectiveness and coherence.

Integrative work

Over the past few decades, city departments have created and implemented plans and projects specific to their missions, but with broad sustainability goals. Thus, we have bicycle plans, urban forest plans, urban gardening and food plans, healthy city plans, stormwater plans, and brownfield redevelopment plans.

An increasing number of cities have created offices of sustainability, with the task of helping to integrate these, and intermediaries such as ICLEI USA and the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) provide technical assistance, data toolkits, peer learning, and some funding to support their work. An increasing number of comprehensive plans, such as Seattle's *Toward a Sustainable Seattle*, also weave these components together. U.S. cities

that were part of the Rockefeller Foundation’s global 100 Resilient Cities project, now spun off as the Resilient Cities Network, provide additional integrative focus through chief resilience officers. Climate action plans likewise attempt to coordinate action, especially but not exclusively around lowering greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

As Rachel Krause and Christopher Hawkins show in *Implementing City Sustainability* (2021), integrative work faces fuzzy-boundary and collective-action challenges, yet many cities develop “functional collective action” strategies in various ways: lead agency consolidation, lead agency coordination, relationships and bargaining, and decentralized networks.

Civic work

Citizen participation is widely accepted as important in sustainability and climate planning, though methods vary considerably. Some cities highlight civic engagement in their plans, including how to expand it over time and include it in school and other programs. All cities can create public websites where relevant documents are available, as well as more creative tools for comparing scenarios. To be sure, local publics may have significant disagreements on the basics of climate change, as much climate communication research shows, and thus may respond better to some forms of engagement and some sequencing of plan components than others.

Some forms of engagement in sustainability and climate planning include:

- *broad array of groups*: sustainability and climate action planning often draws upon a variety of groups that have been active in developing and advocating for various planning efforts in previous years, such as a bicycle association in a bike plan, or a stewardship and restoration group in an urban forest plan. Steering and advisory committees, as well as work groups, might draw upon members of several of these groups, and some key planning staff may have staff and board ties to these organizations. Example:
 - *Chicago Climate Action Plan*: the Center for Neighborhood Technology, Chicago Wilderness, and the Chicago Bicycle Federation, among others, had been involved in various sustainability, environmental justice, forest restoration, and other campaigns over several decades, and had important seats at the table in the development of the 2008 climate action plan, initially as a nonprofit initiative and then as a formal city plan. Some had foundation grants to develop a component of the plan, others were well networked with core staff on the planning team. In cases like this, core staff and civic innovators build upon collaborative governance networks and work to extend trust across other agencies and organizations.
- *environmental justice*: planning can include greater input from environmental justice communities, such as through an equity work group formed from representatives of several organizations. Example:

- *Portland Climate Action Plan*: an Equity Work Group engaged environmental justice leaders and communities of color in the 2015 climate plan. Equity was also highlighted as the foremost concern in the Portland Plan, with “partnerships” across civic, nonprofit, market, and public agencies as the main driver of change, and a specific “diversity and civic leadership” program built around five community-based organizations: Center for Intercultural Organizing, NAYA Youth and Elders Council, Latino Network, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, and Urban League of Portland.
- *open meetings and workshops*: these are typically open to the public for deliberation, to address concerns, to offer assistance, or to develop a vision (e.g. of carbon neutrality by 2050, with interim dates for specific sectors). These discussions may then inform a formal public hearing. Example:
 - *Seattle Climate Action Plan*: staff from the office of sustainability and other planning offices, as well as city councilors, convened workshops and, in 2013, held a formal public hearing before the city council approval of the plan. While there was ideologically-driven contention at the beginning of the hearing, local citizens and activists, building upon previous workshops, offered constructive comments to help improve and legitimate the planning efforts.
- *broad media outreach and education*: use of newspaper, TV, radio, as well as a broad spectrum of social media. A speakers’ bureau available for chamber of commerce and civic association luncheons, as well as for neighborhood dinner meetings and the like. Champions and ambassadors from familiar circles and stakeholder groups can be most effective.

Since sustainability and climate plans will be revisited periodically and since new resilience challenges will rise in prominence in the face of disasters, such as sea level rise that may warrant home, business, and infrastructure relocation within and across regions, forms of engagement should be continually refined to build institutional and civic capacity, as well as the cultural capacity to welcome newcomers and integrate them fully and equitably into the texture of community life.

The overarching ethos of sustainability planning should incorporate strategies for building social capital and trust for the medium and long run, develop rich mixes of deliberative form to nurture consensus and accommodate contention, and elicit collaborative and co-productive work for ongoing implementation. There is no one best model or tool for any of these tasks, but good mixes can evolve iteratively with pragmatic tests, align with specific planning challenges, and embody robust norms of equity and justice.

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See also:

[ICLEI USA](#)

[Urban Sustainability Directors Network](#) (USDN)

[100 Resilient Cities Network](#)

Professional associations and schools

Models for public participation, civic collaboration, and ecological design have been increasingly promoted by professional associations and professional schools. Some associations have sections that focus on such models and practices, some have established general standards, and some have invested their limited resources in assisting communities.

To be sure, public engagement is not their main mission, and they have typically had to be challenged by grassroots movements and local community coalitions to find ways of aligning professional and civic practice. Increasingly, however, the effectiveness and legitimacy of their work have come to depend on including civic actors as knowledgeable and co-productive partners in their work. Models for this are often very creative, but also imperfect.

Public policy that designs for civic and green engagement could learn significantly from these associations and schools, and indeed provide resources to help raise their work to the levels that will be needed to create more sustainable, resilient, and just communities in the decades ahead.

Here we profile a few briefly, but welcome further contributions on planning professionals and their schools and associations.

American Planning Association (APA)

APA was established in 1978 from the merger of the American Institute of Planners and the American Society of Planning Officials, though its roots go back to the first national conference on city planning in 1909. Today APA counts some 40,000 members, among whom 17,000 are certified by its American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP). For the full range of its activities, research, and publications, see [American Planning Association](#), as well as the *Journal of the American Planning Association (JAPA)*.

Many in the planning profession were responsive to the participatory ethos of the 1960s and 1970s and incorporated it into curricula and practice. In the APA's comprehensive text, *Planning and Urban Design Standards*, the second major chapter – following only the introductory synopsis of types of plans, and preceding twenty-one other chapters – is now titled “Participation,” whereas such norms and practices were once add-ons of

secondary or tertiary importance. More direct attention to substantive issues of sustainability in urban planning emerged in the 1990s, thus enabling a closer interweaving of democratic process and ecological content.

APA progressively generated further policy guidance, metrics, and best practice standards, and then convened a series of task forces beginning in 2010 to learn from recent models and new pilots to produce sustainability standards for the comprehensive (or general) plan. Enjoying legal authority in most urban jurisdictions, the comprehensive plan had become the profession's archetype over the previous half-century since T.J. Kent had first published *The Urban General Plan* in 1964.

The point of departure in 2010 was that “planning for sustainability is the defining challenge of the 21st century.” The new principles that emerged from the task force, working with 10 pilot communities and tested with 4 additional completed plans, included “livable built environment,” “harmony with nature,” “healthy community,” “resilient economy,” “responsible regionalism,” and “interwoven equity” in housing, services, and environmental justice. Planning principles were accompanied by planning activities, design standards, and action tools. Authentic participation and accountable implementation are viewed as required processes.

Thus, community engagement should utilize advances in digital technologies and make determined efforts to reach groups traditionally underrepresented, as well as to help develop their leadership capacities for continuous engagement. Planning should engage stakeholders at every stage of the process through multiple forms of participation and communication channels, as well as through understandable information and the development of alternative scenarios.

As Godschalk and Anderson framed it in their 2012 report, “Planning for sustaining places is a dynamic, democratic process through which communities plan to meet the needs of current and future generations without compromising the ecosystems upon which they depend by balancing social, economic, and environmental resources, incorporating resilience, and linking local actions to regional and global concerns.”

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American Institute of Architects (AIA)

In response to civil rights and other participatory movements in the 1960s, architects and other design professionals began to provide assistance to local groups for “community design” and “urban design,” helping to spark a larger community design movement. In 1968, AIA extended an invitation to civil rights leader Whitney Young, Jr., who excoriated architects at their annual meeting for their silence, even complicity in urban decay. The indictment was intentional on the part of AIA leaders, who wished to jolt their profession to engage much more directly and constructively.

AIA had established its Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) model during the previous year, which has continued its work over the decades at ever more sophisticated levels and with keen attention to issues of sustainability and climate resilience. R/UDAT teams are convened by AIA’s [Center for Communities by Design](#) on a multidisciplinary and volunteer basis, thereby providing assistance to communities at very low cost. The core process is based on a 4-day design charrette with community stakeholders and interested citizens, as well as prior relational and research work and feedback from open community meetings. The product is a design book and report that represents creative deliberation among lay citizens and professionals, which can then inform the choices of formal planning agencies and elected officials.

For more on the R/UDAT model and related initiatives on public interest architecture and design justice, see [CivicGreen Professionals: Architects](#).

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American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)

Founded in 1899, ASLA has 15,000 members organized into state chapters and Puerto Rico, with multiple chapters in some of the larger states, as well as student chapters at professional schools across the country.

ASLA builds upon the legacy of landscape ecology planning discussed above. In 2018, its interdisciplinary Blue Ribbon Panel on Climate Change and Resilience issued a report, *Smart Policies for a Changing Climate*, which articulates core principles, as well as planning and design strategies and public policies to promote healthy, climate-smart, and resilient communities. Among these are holistic planning with multiple benefits, community development, meaningful community engagement and citizen science, and environmental justice with equal access in transportation, housing, jobs, recreation, and open space. The report reviews a broad range of policies and practices.

Overlapping this effort is the “New Landscape Declaration” that resulted from the convening of some 700 landscape architects by the Landscape Architecture Foundation in June 2016, published with additional strategic contributions (“declarations”) in a bound volume of the same title. The new declaration updates the 1966 declaration, developed by a small group, with the intention of sparking urgent action and inclusive leadership.

“The urgent challenge before us is to redesign our communities in the contexts of their bioregional landscapes enabling them to adapt to climate change and mitigate its root causes.” Landscape architecture is uniquely positioned to bring related professions together to address complex social and ecological problems, and “to give artistic physical form and integrated function to the ideals of equity, sustainability, resiliency, and democracy.”

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Anne Whiston Spirn, 2020 ASLA medal winner: [video](#) 3:38 minutes.

National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)

The National Association of City Transportation Officials ([NACTO](#)) was founded in 1995 and as of June 2020 comprises 84 North American cities and transit agencies. It has been responsive to multimodal transportation options, as well as to a wide array of other street design improvements for new urbanism and smart growth. It has also made a core commitment to “public engagement that counts” in bicycle and pedestrian planning and design.

As the number of member cities and transportation agencies has grown, along with an increase in its core staff from 3 to 23 between 2012 and 2018, so has NACTO’s commitment to engaging community-based organizations and bicycle associations in local planning, as well as in the co-development of national guidelines on participation for cities across the country. It has published community engagement guides that recommend hiring staff (“on-the-ground engagement teams”) that can build relationships with communities, including lower-income, minority, and disabled groups traditionally marginalized by planning, and reducing financial barriers to using bike-sharing through various discounted public benefit and service program sign-ups.

In 2013, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) recognized NACTO’s standards as a legitimate option for bicycle and pedestrian “facility design flexibility,” and NACTO guides on urban street design, bikeways, transit design, and urban street stormwater are among the most attractive and user-friendly ones available.

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Crosscutting professional and civic associations

Other relevant associations have emerged among planners, architects, and other professionals, often with representation of civic, environmental, and social justice groups on their boards. Three that have been especially important are:

- [*Congress for the New Urbanism*](#): founded in 1993, CNU is a nonprofit with 28,000 dues-paying members and nineteen state, regional, and local chapters, which have formed since 2004, largely through a “branding agreement” with the national office. It issued the *Charter for the New Urbanism* in 1996, which begins thus: “The Congress for the New Urbanism views disinvestment in central cities, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society’s built heritage as one interrelated community building challenge.”

Central to its vision is the “restoration of existing urban centers and towns within coherent metropolitan regions.” While design alone is hardly enough for such a big challenge, the design of dense, mixed-use, diverse (age, income, race), and walkable neighborhoods, with additional public transit and bicycle alternatives to the automobile, can encourage citizens to “take responsibility” for their blocks, local parks, community gardens, and watersheds.

“We are committed to reestablishing the relationship between the art of building and the making of community, through citizen-based participatory planning and design,” as well as reinforcing the “culture of democracy” through civic buildings and public gathering places.

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- [*Smart Growth America*](#): was founded in 2000 as a coalition of organizations that provides leadership training, tool development, technical assistance, and policy advocacy. At the national level, key coalition partners include APA, CNU, and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), along with the Trust for Public Land, a major land trust organization, and the Greenbelt Alliance (San Francisco Bay area). State strategies for smart growth have also been closely tied to SGA.

Also involved is a widening circle of groups with emphasis on social justice and community development, such as PolicyLink and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). At the state and regional levels, SGA affiliates include 1000 Friends of Oregon, created in January 1975 to defend the state’s land-use management act of 1973, which established “citizen involvement” as the first of nineteen planning goals to be incorporated into local comprehensive plans; and other state groups imitating its “friends” nomenclature and structure (a core of regular small donors) in Florida, Iowa, Maryland, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania.

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- [*U.S. Green Building Council*](#): founded in 1993 by a group of architects with the collaboration of the Natural Resources Defense Council, the National Audubon Society, and the Rocky Mountain Institute, USGBC has led the green building movement, especially with its LEED (Leadership in Environment and Energy Design) rating systems. USGBC lists as the first of its strategic goals to “catalyze and lead the building sector’s active participation in the movement to achieve sustainable cities and communities.”

The USGBC took LEED a step further with the formal release of LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) in 2010, refined further in later iterations and in its [*LEED for Cities and Communities*](#) initiative.

School districts such as the Poudre School District in Fort Collins, Colorado, have utilized green building as an occasion to spread leadership across professional categories (architects, engineers, teachers) and blue and pink collar trades and staff (plumbers, custodians, HVAC, kitchen), and to extend partnerships to other city, community, and environmental education groups. The “flat team approach” that district staff initially developed was akin to building relationships in some community organizing models, but with direct democratic tests for bond approval and representative democratic tests of the school board and city council.

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Summing up...

The history of planning and its various cultures over the past half century reveals many ways that professionals can help shape sustainable, resilient, and just communities in the face of the crisis of climate change. Their toolkits have been enriched enormously, even if they are still very imperfect and even if planners work within institutional fields marked by deep asymmetries of power and resources that require additional public policy designs and social movement initiatives to reconfigure.

Many planners and planning students have questioned narrow technocratic roles and have committed themselves deeply to the goals of sustainability and democracy. Not only are their technical skills indispensable, but their roles as civic partners capable of enhancing the knowledge and capacity of lay citizens and the broadest diversity of community residents and stakeholders are also vital to democratic empowerment, effective co-production, and responsible governance. We simply cannot meet the challenges ahead without an enhanced presence of planners who see themselves as “democratic professionals.”

The decades ahead will present many challenges for good professional planning work, not least from those suspicious of experts. There are many good reasons and varied styles for democratic professional work among planners; securing sufficient legitimation for planning choices that often have uncertain results and complex tradeoffs is certainly one of them.

Academic analyses, as well as much case study work, reveal roles that democratic professionals in planning can play that are challenging yet enormously creative and deeply rewarding. Among them are the following:

- *sharing knowledge*: more creative than hoarding knowledge. Planners can enable citizens to utilize digital, mapping, and visual tools to appreciate ecological and institutional complexity. They enjoy seeing “light bulbs go off” in a workshop or public meeting, and can mentor those willing to assume educative and leadership roles.
- *facilitating dialogue*: more generative of good planning decisions. Planners can use their skills to enable productive disagreement and search for workable solutions based on trustworthy data and informed wisdom about how systems work.
- *brokering relationships*: more generative of trust that can sustain difficult work. Planners can help clarify stakeholder and institutional interests that need to be taken into account, and they can help broker workable compromises and co-productive work.
- *enabling public narratives*: more enriched, culturally and ecologically rooted than technical discourse. Planners can generate space to listen to community and landscape stories – stories of grievance as well as beauty, hope, and active agency – and can help

enable professionals and ordinary citizens alike to craft more robust public narratives of shared purpose and problem solving.

- *revealing power*: more ethically rewarding than disguising power and inequity. While planners must operate within appropriate boundaries defined by their institutional homes and must rely upon movements, advocacy, and policy to shift the terrain, they can help level the playing field and enable strategic and pragmatic thinking.
- *restoring democratic faith*: more ennobling than technocratic fealties or narrowly economic devotions. Planning skills can enrich everyday democratic culture and help defuse some of the polarization that results from intractable problems, mysterious processes, and unaccountable decisions.

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CivicGreen Professionals: [democratic professionals](#)

... and moving forward

How can the planning profession be enhanced in the coming years to enable more robust and effective democratic professional work? Several areas of initiative suggest themselves:

- *professional education*: schools of urban and regional planning, landscape architecture, and related fields could deepen their focus on the democratic skills, tools, and ethos of

their training. The next generation of planners and architects will be central to any robust response to the twin crises of climate and democracy.

- *professional associations*: these should continue to refine and deepen their work on civic engagement as a central component of planning for sustainability, resilience, and environmental justice.
- *federal policy*: climate and sustainability policy could include substantial grants for community-based, regional, landscape, and environmental justice work and this should be paired with substantial funding for democratic professional initiatives aligned with this work.

For a policy proposal that combines these components, see:

Carmen Sirianni, [*The Civics of Federal Climate Policy: Designing and Investing for Community Empowerment and Public Participation*](#) (August 2020).

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We welcome comments and suggestions for improvement: civicgreen@tufts.edu.