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Signs of Hope in the Dark[i]?

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Prompted by the twentieth anniversary of this journal, recent editorials have reflected on the continued relevance of *Planning Theory and Practice's* mission to "*challenge theory and change practice*". The general consensus seems to be that it remains as relevant as ever but is becoming increasingly challenging in an era marked by profoundly unsettling political, economic and environmental change and uncertainty.

There is a pronounced sense that we are now living through what Ziauddin Sardar (2010) has called "post-normal times", an impasse where chaos, complexity and contradictions define our experience of the world and its possible futures. It feels like nearly every day brings to light new examples of the "morbid symptoms" that Antonio Gramsci (2005, 276) famously diagnosed from an Italian prison cell in the 1930s during another "interregnum" when "the crisis consist[ed] precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born".

It's hard to feel positive about the prospects for what lies beyond the impasse too. As I began to think about this editorial Extinction Rebellion activists were on the streets of London, peacefully disrupting the city to demand urgent action to tackle the climate emergency. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2018) is now arguing for global cuts in CO2 emissions of 45% by 2030 and 100% by 2050 to contain global warming to 1.5 degrees. Warning of the high costs of failure, they acknowledge this will require "rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society". Others argue that even that may not be enough. Business as usual is clearly not an option and the next twenty years need to look very different if *Planning Theory and Practice* is going to survive long enough to celebrate a mid-life crisis.

If, as Heather Campbell argued in the editorial to issue 19.5, this journal's early years were bound up with the optimism of a new millennium, in retrospect that seems like hope bought on the never-never, a sub-prime mortgage to be repaid by future generations. As

Rebecca Solnit (2016, xii), argues, however, genuine hope is always a harder earned "alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists".

If we are to find glimmers of hope in the prolonged dissolution of neoliberal certainties about free-markets being the only path to prosperity, then planning might have a significant role to play. This is well-illustrated in the resurgence of interest in ideas of a 'Green New Deal' in the United States, United Kingdom and elsewhere, entailing calls for a fundamental reorientation of economy and society to tackle the climate emergency through a planned programme of decarbonisation and investment in alternative, job-creating infrastructure and technology.

Advocates of a Green New Deal frequently compare the scale of the response required not just to Roosevelt's New Deal but to the total mobilisation of national economies to fight World War Two. But our ideas of planning might draw succour from other places too. In their recent book *The People's Republic of Wal-Mart*, Leigh Phillips and Michael Rozworski (2019) highlight the extent to which multi-national corporations like Wal-Mart organise their operations, not through internal markets and competition, but through highly sophisticated planning of supply chains. Is it possible, they ask, that the technologies of a planned economy have been hiding in plain sight all along, shrouded in a fog of ideological obfuscation?

It's an intriguing proposition but, having been subject to decades of disdain, the prospect of a return to more directive economic planning will not be an easy sell. Pejorative understandings of state-directed development abound on the political right, but mistrust of government and a green-washed capitalism are also (rightly) shared by parts of the left and inflect important currents of planning theory. As anyone with even a casual acquaintance with planning history knows, a return to large scale planning will not guarantee socially or environmentally just transitions; democratizing the production of our collective futures will remain a crucial struggle.

The contributions to this issue of the journal provide a rich range of reflections on some of the diverse theoretical and practical considerations involved in reimagining planning. In his

paper Stefano Moroni goes to the heart of a crucial question for planning theory, arguing that generating real alternatives to the most pressing challenges societies face requires a refocusing of attention, moving away from the procedural concerns that have dominated the discipline over recent decades, towards an overdue debate about substantive planning instruments and initiatives. There are strong resonances here with Michael Hibbard and Kathryn Frank's paper. Arguing that planning thought has for too long been urban-centric, they set out to develop a framework for a *substantive* theory of rural planning capable of responding to the specific challenges facing diverse ruralities.

If both of these papers argue for a richer theoretical engagement with the ends of planning, Benjamin Flower's contribution, which explores the uneven impacts of a land titling programme in Cambodia, is a stark reminder of the need for constant vigilance to ensure that planning instruments meet the needs of the people they should serve. Flower argues that targeting informal rather than insecure tenure led to the exclusion of many of those living in the most precarious conditions and resulted in the programme becoming a "tool to perpetuate insecurity."

Elen-Maarja Trell and Marijn van Geet meanwhile illustrate the impossibility of separating means and ends by highlighting the importance of collaboration and interaction for shaping institutional capacities to adapt to flood risk in the Netherlands. Their findings on the value of a sense of urgency for bringing actors together around a shared problem is salutary. Jakub Galuszka's paper on the ambiguous potential of coproduction, meanwhile, takes us to Metro Manila, recounting the experiences of a major coalition of the urban poor which struggled to transform early success in winning political recognition into a concrete programme of action in the face of institutional resistance.

The *Interface,* edited by Lisa Bates and featuring contributions from Austin Zwick, Tamara Kerzhner, Anna Joo Kim, Ashley Baber, Jamaal W. Green and dominic moulden, continues the exploration of the platform economy begun in the previous issue. Whilst Uber, Air B'n'B and the like are attracting opprobrium and calls for new forms of regulation in many cities, the contributors here point to the ways in which such technologies both disrupt but also

enable different ways of making a living in the city. Highlighting a need to pay close attention to, amongst other things, the gendered and racialised forms of labour caught up in the platform economy, these pieces collectively point to the need to take care when formulating policy responses whilst also remaining alive to possibilities for building a very different kind of 'sharing economy'.

In the *Debates and Reflections* section Elizabeth Taylor and Rebecca Clements both address the perhaps less heralded but nonetheless crucial issues of car parking. As Taylor argues persuasively in her commentary, parking is literally everywhere and at the root of many of the pressing sustainability and liveability challenges facing cities. However, it is also such a deeply engrained part of many societies' common-sense, that perceived challenges to peoples' rights to free parking frequently meet with fierce resistance. Clements' review of Donald Shoup's edited collection, *Parking and the City*, meanwhile highlights the wide variety of ways in which new planning and policy tools are being developed internationally to tackle parking as a problem. In the final piece, Sophie Sturrup reviews *The Oxford Handbook of Mega Project Management* edited by Bent Flyvbjerg. The book gathers together an impressive range of perspectives on the challenges raised by mega projects, examining why they so consistently confound expectations but without questioning whether they are a necessary response to the imperatives to "radically alter" our cities.

If the costs of not taking action on climate change are unthinkable, the contributions here remind us, not just of the political struggles that will be involved, but also the risks and harms that might flow from acting hastily without careful consideration of the implications for people and place. In this context, the challenge of generating theory adequate to the changes we need to see in practice, the bind that hopefully ties this journal together, does indeed seem as relevant as ever. And perhaps more urgent too.

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[i] The title draws on Solnit (2016)