

Town Planning and Peace Building in Polarized Cities

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What should be the role of town planning in politically contested cities such as Jerusalem, Belfast or Nicosia or in cities re-emerging after war and conflict such as Beirut, Berlin, Johannesburg, and Sarajevo? More broadly, what can town planning do in the many multiethnic cities across the world that do not face daily violence but nonetheless experience frequent tensions owing to group-based differences?

At first, it seems that many aspects of planning practice are ill fitted to the challenges and circumstances of ethnically polarized cities. Such aspects include planning's regulatory basis, orientation toward the preservation of the status quo, and its hands-off non-recognition of religion, ethnicity, and race as legitimate classifications. Sennett (1999) observes that "the politics of conflict is hard to relate to urban design." And Anwar Nusseibeh (in Sennett 1999) states, "you cannot show me--even supposing democracy is possible between victors and the people they have captured--what a democratic space looks like. What effect can the mere shape of a wall, the curve of a street, lights and plants, have in weakening the grip of power or shaping the desire for justice?"

Yet, we must not forget that planning is the operational form of power. As Micheal Romann states in Baskin and Twite (1993) regarding planning in Jerusalem, "we cannot dissociate the urban planning question from the underlying political conflict because confiscation, building, boundaries, all express unequal opportunity." Planning affects the material and social-psychological attributes of the urban system—such as viability of ethnic neighborhoods, economic opportunity, socioeconomic integration, and cultural symbolism—in ways that may independently produce or hinder mutually tolerable multiethnic living environments. While cities are likely not the primary or direct influence on the level of ethnic or racial tension between competing urban groups, they also do not appear to be inert and passive reflectors of larger societal processes and attitudes. Cities matter, and by the nature of the urban assets that they effect, planners have influence.

Planning and its effect on development, housing, services and opportunities is linked to several emerging international understandings of human rights and security. Urban development and planning policy are closely linked to the provision of basic human needs—public services, human rights, employment opportunities, food and shelter, and participation in decision-making—of which minimum standards have been endorsed by the United Nations in 1966 in its *Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and *Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. Further, planning is intimately linked to the "right to development" articulated in U.N. resolution 41/128 of 1986. Similar linkages are evident between planning policy and the "right to adequate housing" put forth in the *Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements* in 1996. Such housing rights encompass aspects of urban living such as access to public services, livelihood, and planning and settlement decisions. Finally, the concept of security defined in 1994 by the United Nations Development Programme was broadened from strictly freedom from fear and aggression to freedom from want encompassing those aspects of day-to-day survival, job opportunities, education, health care directly and indirectly influenced through planning and development policy. Because of these connections between planning and human rights, town planning must not be viewed as mundane, technical or beside the point, but as capable of playing a fundamental role both during and after ethnic conflict.

There are four planning strategies that urban regimes may adopt under conditions of political and ethnic polarization.

Models of Urban Policy Strategies (adapted from Benvenisti 1986)

Neutral Address urban symptoms of ethnic conflict at individual level.

Partisan Maintain/increase disparities.

Equity Address urban symptoms of ethnic conflict at ethnic group level.

Resolver Address root causes/sovereignty issues.

A *neutral* urban strategy distances itself from issues of ethnic identity, power inequalities, and political exclusion. Planning acts as an ethnically neutral, or "color-blind", mode of state intervention responsive to individual-level needs and differences. Planners channel disagreements between ethnic groups away from sovereignty and identity-related issues toward day-to-day service delivery issues solvable through planning procedures and professional norms. A *partisan* urban strategy, in contrast, furthers an empowered ethnic group's values and authority and rejects claims of the disenfranchised group. Strategies seek to entrench and expand territorial claims or enforce exclusionary control of access. An *equity* strategy uses criteria such as an ethnic group's relative size or need are used to allocate urban services and spending. An equity planner is much more aware than a neutral planner to recognize the needs for remediation and affirmative action policies based on group identity. A *resolver* strategy seeks to connect urban issues to root causes of urban polarization--power imbalances, competitive ethnic group identities, and disempowerment. Planners challenge the impacts, and even authority, of government policy and attempt to link scientific and technical knowledge to processes of system transformation. A multi-year study of the polarized cities of Belfast (Northern Ireland), Jerusalem (Israel/West Bank) and Johannesburg (South Africa) [reported in full in Bollens 2000 and 1999] found these patterns of planning engagement.

URBAN POLICY STRATEGIES IN THREE CITIES

BELFAST	NEUTRAL
	Manage ethnic territoriality in a way that accepts physical barriers, but otherwise sacrifices strategic policymaking.
JERUSALEM	PARTISAN
	Use strategic planning to embed Israeli presence spatially and demographically and assure that urban system is indivisible with no physical barriers.
JOHANNESBURG (post-apartheid)	RESOLVER
	In political negotiations, city-building issues were successfully connected by nongovernmental and opposition organizations to root political empowerment issues; planning connected to human and political rights.
	EQUITY
	Restructure urban decision-making and policy techniques toward urban integration, compaction, and the addressing of massive urban inequalities.

Cities experiencing intense nationalistic and ethnic conflict offer urban planning and policymaking the opportunity to transform itself--from a profession capable of technically and neutrally implementing partisan policies to a morally articulate profession dedicated to the accommodation of deep differences. Conflict in polarized cities is ultimately about sovereignty and territoriality, not about urban service distribution. Thus, urban policymakers should contribute to larger sovereignty debates their ideas concerning territorial identity and characteristics; communal requirements for land, urban services, and natural resources; and basic social organization at sub-municipal and municipal levels. The key for planners is to make use of the connection between planning and politics to broaden, not restrict, opportunities for peaceful co-existence. It is unlikely that an urban profession such as planning can, by itself, create freedom and peace. But, it may likely be capable of creating urban conditions that are enabling of such human goals.

What is the relationship of urban/community peace building to broader processes of negotiated peacemaking? Must city policymakers await larger peace advancement for there to be improvement of urban life, or can actions within cities assist and even precede larger peacemaking? I argue that urban policymaking should not await larger peace processes, but in and of itself can play key formative and facilitative roles in larger peacemaking. Urban planning can be connected to root political issues, as

evidenced by the Johannesburg example. Cities can be laboratories for on-the-ground tolerance. Policies dealing with the delivery of urban services and benefits, jobs, the protection of ethnic identity, and territorial issues of control constitute peace-building efforts at the level of the street, neighborhood, community, and workplace. At the same time, urban policymaking must not get too far out ahead in which case local peace-building could be counterproductive to national-level advances. Rather, planning as local peace building should be viewed as an essential companion, not replacement for, larger peacemaking endeavors.

Those who see planning as most appropriately a support or technical profession would likely state that urban planning policy can most effectively act—to solidify and extend peace—only after a negotiated resolution of political conflict. But its ultimate value may lie further upstream—in its potential capacity to facilitate national peacemaking by connecting the principles and practices of urban coexistence to the restructuring of a country's basic political parameters.

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