

An abstract painting with a textured surface. The background is a deep, vibrant blue. Scattered across the canvas are several soft, out-of-focus shapes in bright yellow and hints of red. The overall effect is one of depth and movement, with the colors blending into each other in some areas while remaining distinct in others.

# JUSTICE, EQUITY + SUSTAINABILITY

PROJECTIONS *volume 8*  
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**Isabelle Anguelovski**  
**Anna Livia Brand**  
**Rachel Healy**

# **EDITORIAL**

Justice, Equity, and Sustainability are values and goals that planners and urbanists hold in high esteem. History has shown, however, that achieving those goals is incredibly complicated and that unjust, inequitable, and unsustainable policies and plans are implemented at every scale of government and citizen action. Similarly, history continues to show that achieving justice, equity, and sustainability requires coming to terms with varying and competing definitions of these terms, making their achievement all the more complex. For instance, civil society organizations have questioned unjust policies and development models and advocated for programs and projects based on ideas of justice, equity and sustainability that directly benefit local communities. In the 1990s, for example, environmental advocates in the United States began to redefine, re-envision, and reclaim open spaces as community spaces, sites of empowerment for local communities. Several community and environmental groups embraced community gardens, farmers' markets in low-income communities, landscaping projects, and park and recreational opportunities in high-density areas. In Los Angeles, the local organization Friends of the L.A. River, together with other Asian and Latino neighborhood activists, environmental groups, and public interest lawyers launched a battle against a powerful developer over a plan to develop warehouses and light industry in a large undeveloped lot adjacent to the river.<sup>1</sup> Their mobilization eventually saved the site, known as the Cornfield, and the developer sold it to the state of California to establish a new park. More broadly, this struggle exhibits the emblematic power of community-environment alliances to renew and reinvent nature in the city; to allow marginalized groups to have access to public spaces and greater environmental goods; and to create a higher quality of life for migrant and minority communities.

This case is one among many of failures of planners and decision-makers, who often celebrate economic development and macro-economic growth models over projects that will directly benefit local communities. Furthermore, this project exhibits the failure to understand and address the tensions between justice, equity and sustainability and the tradeoffs that it will take to reach these commendable goals. Across different planning contexts, we continue to see urban policies fail to benefit the underprivileged because they do not address underlying reasons for citizens' distrust; because they fail to unearth deeper issues of inequity and exclusion; and because they fail to question how institutional barriers maintain inequity or prohibit sustainable practices. Both in academic training programs and in planning practice, we see the repetition of proposals that ignore the nuance and history of communities and their environments; the micro and macro forces at work to establish patterns of inequity, injustice, and unsustainable practices. In many ways, we are hinged to our ideals of justice, equity, and sustainability without understanding how we undermine these ideals; we are locked in our thinking about growth models, participatory planning, and design.

However, emerging research and work, and recent conversations among and between students, researchers, and practitioners have raised critical questions about these ideals, both in practice and theory. These conversations encourage us to engage in multidisciplinary scholarship and contribute to the development of theories that are based, for instance, on the intersection of social movement theories, natural resource management research, and city planning scholarship. Similarly, we are challenged to conceive of the tensions between and the complexity of achieving the underlying values we embrace as academics and practitioners.

This volume of Projections attempts to reflect these recent conversations and offer emerging scholarship on the nexus between environmental sustainability, social equity, and justice. Our assumptions and beliefs are that sustainable communities need to be built on a foundation of justice and equity. In theory and in practice, this means that environmental and social degradation are closely coupled to

power inequities, thus compelling academics, researchers, and practitioners to conceptualize and build sustainable communities and places with these essential elements in mind. Within and between rural and urban communities and places, in developed and developing nations, we believe that achieving sustainability demands putting equity rights at the center of planning and implementation. However, the intersection of these values does not provide an easy road map for thought or for action. There are real tensions between sustainability, justice, and equity and at times, tradeoffs between them.

In Volume 8 of *Projections*, MIT's Journal of Planning, we are excited to bring together articles from academics and practitioners, who theorize, critically reflect on past experiences, and examine the intersection of justice, equity, and sustainability as a framework for planning and action. In this volume, we have welcomed a variety of papers, including critical analyses, theoretical critiques, plans, observations, photo essays and other forms of reflection to encourage a broad approach to how we might understand the complexities and possibilities of achieving sustainability, justice, and equity. This volume includes detailed analyses and what we have found to be thought provoking work focused on rights and community development in the Philippines; urban sustainability and the just and equitable allocation of parks in Louisville, KY; cases of environmental (in)justice and racism in the United States and in Sweden; rights-based planning and development in Cambodia; the role and contribution of arts to sustainability; the relation between urban sprawl, sewage delivery, and waste water treatment in poor communities in Atlanta; oil and gas extraction as related to land management practices in Canada; social and cultural constructions of natural disasters in Guatemala; and the potential for sustainable community rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. We are honored to have these papers introduced by Professor Julian Agyeman in a piece entitled, "Equity? That's not an issue for us. We're here to save the world." And we are equally honored to present a concluding reflection by Professor Gianpaolo Baiocchi in "Can Justice be Planned? Exploring the Intersections of Policy, Politics, and Planning." We have also included in this volume two additional papers from Professor Susan Holcombe and Professor Marcel Burzstyn who participated in a seminar and film series at MIT in the Spring of 2008. This series was crafted around the theme of the journal, justice, equity, and sustainability, and we were privileged to have such speakers as the above mentioned Professors Burzstyn and Holcombe, as well as Professor Nancy Jacobs and Professor John Forester. In this volume, Professors Burzstyn and Holcombe present their own research as related to the theme of justice, equity, and sustainability.

We hope you will enjoy this wealth of innovative and cross-boundary work and research. It has been quite an honor to work with all of our authors and we are grateful to the professors who agreed to deepen the discussion in our seminar series. We would also like to thank our editorial board for their support and time. And finally, our deepest gratitude is to our faculty advisor, Professor Larry Vale, and also to Ezra Glenn and past *Projections* editors for their guidance and much needed help.

Isabelle Anguelovski  
Anna Livia Brand  
Rachel Healy  
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**[REFERENCES]**

1 See Gottlieb, Robert. 2005. *Forcing the spring: The transformation of the American environmental movement*. Washington, DC: Island Press. Introduction.