THE FUTURE *of* URBAN PLANNING *and* DESIGN:

UCLA Faculty Interviews

For Volume 20 of Critical Planning, the Editors interviewed several faculty members at the forefront of their fields to see what they think about the future of cities. We asked them not only to identify how their work addresses the current trends and challenges in their field, but also to speculate on how the changing physical and social landscape of cities will affect the way urban planning and design is practiced.

Looking at all four conversations, it is clear that globalization and technology will play a key role in shaping the urban environment. However, issues of social justice and environmental sustainability remain more important than ever before, as global flows of goods and people create increasingly diverse communities with growing informal economies and insufficient affordable housing.

As these scholars tell us, future planners and designers must be more open-minded, and allow for an inter-disciplinary approach to problem solving. Top-down planning must become a thing of the past, as urban planners and designers—in academia as well as in the professional sphere—allow for activism and community engagement to become more important tools in their kit.

ANASTASIA LOUKAITOU-SIDERIS

Professor of Urban Planning

CP: *What are current trends in your area of specialization?*

AL-S: My area of specialization is urban design, and I define urban design in a much broader way than it is typically defined. Not simply as large-scale architectural design but also as a consideration of the social, cultural, political, economic forces that affect the built environment, and how to take them into account and respond to them. That said, I've witnessed two recent trends in urban design: one is to include more landscaping and ecology considerations in design, and the second is more emphasis towards what some have called "tactical urbanism," which is a grassroots and bottom-up instead of top-down approach to design. For example, how can communities identify residual spaces of everyday life and convert them into small parks? Or how do you take more streets from the cars and give them to bikers? Things like that.

What are the challenges or issues in your area of specialization?

Urban design is always more challenging than architecture, because it is dealing with the public domain. So urban designers really need to act as mediators among different stakeholders, who may need different things from the spaces of everyday life. Urban design is really about the public spaces of the city, the sidewalks, the parks, the streets, etc., which are huge resources for cities, and can be very successful spaces for everyday life.

How do your work and research address these issues?

First of all, I am someone who is very

much interested in contexts, and not simply designing top-down for the average users. I am also very much interested in how different cultures define spaces, and how we should respond to specific socio-cultural needs. A lot of my work focuses on the users' perspectives and how different users require different things from different types of environments.

What are your predictions of what cities will experience in the future?

I think technology will be a huge factor. Already it is affecting cities in big ways in terms of how we navigate spaces, or even shop online from the privacy of our homes, for example. I am hoping that technology will not only be a limiting factor that creates more privatization or more inward orientation, but could also be used to help people. For example, I recently brainstormed with someone who wants to create an app for women that will help them to feel safer in the city and avoid areas that are dangerous. I think we'll see more applications like that in the next several years.

How do these predictions affect the way planning is practiced?

We are trying to educate planners to be much more open and sensitive to questions of social justice and equity. I think that by creating a more humane type of planning

and design—again coming back to the idea of bottom-up instead of top-down. How can planners help communities have the type of everyday space that they need, while also acknowledging and addressing the fact that these may not be the same for everyone? This is an important issue for future planners.

What advice do you have for future planners?

To be very open. To be very observant and to see how people want to live instead of assuming they are experts. Planners could also learn a lot from other fields, such as the humanities and other social sciences. There are a lot of other disciplines that relate to planning and urban design, and future planners need to be open to that.

DANA CUFF

*Professor of Architecture,
Director of UCLA's cityLab*

CP: *What are current trends in your field of specialization?*

DC: Two trends that interest me, but which on the surface seem far apart, concern architecture's relationship to the humanities and to sustainable technologies. With regard to the former, UCLA is one of a number of institutions that are building new intellectual and practical bridges between the humanities and design. We are working across disciplines on issues of concern in megacities like Los Angeles and Tokyo that no single discipline can address alone. On the other hand, experimentation with intelligent and sustainable technologies is particularly promising. For example, solar fabrics, responsive materials, and ambient informatics could not only change the shape of the built environment but produce new environmental benefits. In my view, these two trends are not so distant from one another because advances in technology are rather empty without the perspectives brought to bear by the humanities, and my own studies depend upon environmental, technological, and humanist approaches to urban and architectural design.

What are the challenges or issues in your field of specialization?

The post-2008 restructuring of the market for professional services is a significant challenge that architects are facing. There is a class of commissions that is swamped by risk aversion, particularly those in the public sector, where fiscal conservatism is the watchword. Large firms and firms with established track records in a particular building type are taking these commissions because they represent a no-risk

approach to buildings. Where cities used to advance social agendas and formal experiments, from schools to concert halls and sports stadiums, the very commissions that were the proving grounds for new forms of architecture have become victims of what the sociologist Ulrich Beck calls the risk society. To compete in the marketplace, young architects now find that they must be skilled in materials and fabrication, in a high-level understanding of sustainability questions, and in business economics. From an educational point of view, architecture and planning students would do well to minor in complementary specializations to adapt to this new and emerging market.

How do your work and research address these issues?

The research center I direct, cityLAB, is intended to not only respond to current trends but to lead through its experimental and innovative projects that bring architecture and urbanism together. We have four initiatives, and each represents a cutting edge: first, postsuburban studies, which takes Los Angeles as our laboratory to look at the transformation of suburbs and what it might mean to transform them for the better; second, urban-sensing, which explores smart technologies and their spatial and cultural implications; third, rethinking green, which deals with related questions about sustainability and environmental effects; and lastly, new infrastructures, and

innovations for the tremendously depleted state of American infrastructure.

What are your predictions for how architecture will evolve in the future?

I believe architecture will evolve as a more particular, site-specific creation as we grow denser, living in greater proximity to one another, with fewer resources, and as we confront more unusual left-over, infill, and constrained sites, which are far more interesting sites. New forms of architecture will reflect new materials in terms of performativity as well as visual effects, and higher responsibility to the particular could mean that we will see new narratives of occupation, new customizations, and richer, more articulated forms of representation. With our colleagues from the humanities and graduate students from all across campus, we've been experimenting along these lines on urbanism and thick mapping, film, and speculative narratives. If you want to see what I mean, check out the cityLAB website (citylab.aud.ucla.edu) and the Urban Humanities Initiatives website (urbanhumanities.ucla.edu).

What advice do you have for future architects and urban designers?

Given that the speed of change for future generations of architects and urban designers will be more rapid than ever before, the

importance of education is heightened. The real challenge for young designers is how to stay on top of their evolving discipline, its new materials, publics, technologies, opportunities, critiques, and economies. Stay connected to your graduate school; go to lectures; build strong bonds with your classmates, and revel in risky thinking.

LEOBARDO ESTRADA

Professor of Urban Planning

CP: *What are current trends in your area of specialization?*

LE: My specialty has been ethnic and racial demographics trends, particularly in the Latino population of the southwestern United States. Like with many others, I view these topics globally rather than just regionally. This is a very positive trend because global trends impact urban areas in many ways: economics, its people, and urban culture. More importantly, the levels of analysis have become deeper as we move from being less concerned with trends that tell us what, and instead move to understanding why.

What are the challenges or issues in your area of specialization?

The greatest challenge is in understanding how technology may or can change the future of the city. One can imagine technology being used to make energy use more efficient. It is also possible to imagine the panoptic/surveillance possibilities that reduce the privacy of public space, or over-dependence on technology with wide ranging impacts, should it fail.

How do your work and research address these issues?

Some of my more recent interests has focused on the role of governance and collaboration. I see this as one of the least understood and used solutions as everyone tries to protect their "space" rather than coming together to work collectively on regional issues. A second area deserving more attention is capturing grassroots and grasstops concerns in a manner that is translatable to urban management practices. Everyone is in favor of participatory

planning for example, but I see few efforts that have effectively captured the information needed.

What are your predictions of what cities will experience in the future?

Cities will continue to experience transitions. Old processes and methods are changing to meet new demands and requirements and this will continue for some time ahead. There is a saying, "change is the only constant" and it is particularly true for urban areas. It is at the local urban area that implementation of policies occurs—such as climate change, safety, transportation, access to services, etc. Planning will continue to play a significant role but its role is changing. Who would have guessed three years ago that planners would be involved in food security issues or urban agriculture? Regionalization—a few issues, such as transportation and air quality, are larger than any one municipality and need to be approached on a regional level. Regionalization might also be necessary to effectively undertake issues related to water access and quality, affordable housing, and infrastructure upgrading. Cities will have to overcome local sovereignty concerns in the future to make inroads on these large concerns. Cities have generally been viewed as places with problems. I expect that in the future, cities will be seen as places with solutions.

How do these predictions affect the way planning is practiced?

Long ago planners realized that the field had to move beyond physical planning. Community planning is more complex and requires overlap between disciplines, sectors and stakeholders. Planners should become interdisciplinary problem solvers working with ease on issues traditionally addressed by public health workers, lawyers, policy makers, social workers, researchers, police, geographers, and business people. Planners need to have sufficient knowledge in all these fields to deal with the city issues now and into the future.

What advice do you have for future planners?

Planners are trained to be problem solvers. Problem solving skills will be in high demand and planners are positioned to coordinate solutions for complex issues. But planners need to move beyond their specialty and comfort zone to get out of their offices and listen to their local community representatives and work with other professionals. Silos have been the bane of planning and limited innovation. My advice is "don't get locked in" and keep growing in terms of skills, knowledge and be daring.

JACQUELINE LEAVITT

Professor of Urban Planning

CP: *What are current trends in your area of specialization?*

JL: I'll talk about this in terms of two issues: 1) housing and community development, and 2) gender. In housing and community development the issues are whether there are people in the planning field who are going to promote a housing agenda that meets the needs of low-income people. And in the area of gender, unless my forthcoming book, titled "Framing Women: Women and Rights to the City," or someone else's inspires a larger reaction, I expect planning to continue to marginalize women as a research area. This may change as a result of issues concerning violence. I don't think that the attention to public spaces and public-private partnerships fully attacks the issue of violence, and I really think there's room for that to be integrated more with an expansion of what the term violence means, extending this to larger issues of economic, social, and political security.

What are the challenges or issues in your area of specialization?

A big challenge is getting paid for any form of advocacy, for working outside the traditional planning field. It is difficult to find funding for social justice, for organizers, for planners who are going to take the issues to the next stage of implementation and ongoing watchdogging. Instead, many have to take on what amounts to a double job of work for pay and unpaid work for politics, which is extremely difficult and time-consuming.

How do your work and research address these issues?

I think that in my work one of the consistent themes is how planning can both make opportunities for people with low incomes and people of different races and classes to intervene, and be action-oriented in order to prevent environmentally unsound developments from moving forward, whether it's around high-income housing or toxic waste dumps. I'm hopeful my work is able to inform future planners about others who work in social justice planning, and will contribute to building a social movement both outside of planning as well as among planning students.

What are your predictions of what cities will experience in the future?

Predictions of what cities will experience in the future grows out of an international perspective, and I think that people who are specializing in domestic issues are too narrow in how they're looking at the issues. It is increasingly important to understand what's going on globally. This means issues of housing and slums in urban areas, land grabbing and corruption in both urban and rural areas, and a burden that falls disproportionately on poor women.

How do these predictions affect the way planning is practiced?

I think there continues to be a disconnect between the way planning is taught and the way planning is practiced. I think that in terms of practice we don't have enough examples for people that want alternatives, which goes back to the problem about how do you earn a living. I think that we tend in planning to take the easy way out, and I think that tension between what people expect when they go into planning, and what they experience in their lives—family, children, etc.—is a real problem, and each person has to resolve that the way that they can.

What advice do you have for future planners?

I think that the issues that come to the forefront in planning have a lot to do with the values that planners are taught as well as what they come in with, and that the relevancy of the field as it relates to social justice depends on the recruitment of people who take an activist position. For example, amongst our students we have many who are activists, and when they come in they are looking for skills from urban planning that they can give back to the people that they're working with. There is a need for a new generation of planners that have a commitment to social justice and equality, for women, for people of color, for all of the groups that are vulnerable to crises.