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Keith Pezzoli

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Journey of the Global Action Research Center

On July 15, 2010, John Friedmann and Leonie Sandercock hosted the launch of the Journey of the Global Action Research Center (ARC), a 2,000-mile-long bicycle trip I did starting from the University of British Columbia (UBC; the Cosmopolis Multimedia Lab) and ending in a struggling *colonia popular* (low-income neighborhood) located in Tijuana (Mexico). The Global ARC, a nonprofit organization I cofounded in 2009 dedicated to coupling environmental and social justice through community–university partnerships and civically engaged research, organized the Journey. John knew about the Global ARC's aspirations; he encouraged us. When I asked John and Leonie (his life partner and scholarly collaborator for more than 30 years) to host the Journey's launch, they enthusiastically said yes, especially on knowing that our team included activist researchers and videographers. John and Leonie rolled out the welcome mat, giving the trip a fitting start with a tour of UBC's Cosmopolis Lab and large university farm. By the end of the 2-month, 2,000-mile Journey traversing the U.S. West Coast north to south into Mexico, we captured 30 stories featuring sustainable solutions and practices led by grassroots community groups, citizen scientists, nonprofit organizations, and diverse public and private sector innovators, including planners.

I chose the Cosmopolis Multimedia Lab at UBC as the launch pad for the Journey given how both Friedmann and Sandercock so deeply appreciate the power of storytelling in planning, including the potential of good stories and normative countervailing narratives to inspire and instigate insurgencies for progressive change, especially at the neighborhood and local scales.

Back in the 1980s heyday of the University of California, Los Angeles (CA), Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning (GSAUP), when Friedmann was the chair of urban planning, he hosted small informal discussion groups, including storytelling, at his home in the evenings for faculty, invited guests, and graduate students, including me. Friedmann chaired my dissertation committee; he also wrote the forward for my first book a decade later. The informal discussions Friedmann hosted at his home often brought up dramatic human interest stories focused on diverse social and ecological struggles gripping poor people around the world. John had a brilliant, gently coaxed, Hegelian way of getting those of us sharing these stories to reflect critically. We'd haul out into the light the

culprits causing misery in the case under scrutiny while also identifying the countervailing agents of social change, including the people and leaders mobilizing to bring justice and health to their neighborhoods, towns, cities, and working landscapes. Friedmann also organized public seminars during GSAUP's heyday to encourage dialogue at the intersection of radical planning theory and practice.

Friedmann's life work calls for normative reflection, dialogue, and visioning in face-to-face interaction at a small (human) scale. This aspect of Friedmann's work integrates critical pedagogy and struggle for substantive democracy in ways that resonate with the works of Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky. Herein lies one of Friedmann's most significant contributions to the practical aspects of planning, notably radical (emancipatory) planning.

Linking Knowledge to Action for the Good Society

Friedmann defines planning as the linkage of knowledge to action for creating the good society, and in so doing he brings into critical perspective the multiplicity of competing knowledges relevant to planning practice. Community knowledge, Friedmann argues, is a distinct type of knowledge (compared with, for instance, technical knowledge held by the state). Local residents inhabiting disadvantaged communities gain through their lived experience and social learning a distinct and potentially very useful understanding of—and knowledge about—poverty, environmental stressors, neighborhood activity, assets, liabilities, and so on.

At the same time, Friedmann recognizes that yes, community knowledge matters, but it is often suppressed, undervalued, or difficult to access. This creates a problem for planning practice aimed at enabling meaningful community engagement and authentic dialogue. The public spaces and resources needed to engender, inform, and sustain this kind of civic engagement are few and far between. And as if this deficit were not enough, Friedmann is quick to point out that that fierce intercity competition for footloose capital is not sustainable or equitable; it undermines people's attachment to local places, it dehumanizes the urban, and it alienates people from one another and their place. Market forces tend to undervalue precisely the kinds of microspace in communities where glimmers of conviviality, mutual aid, and communitarianism actually take place. Despite this, Friedmann maintains his hopefulness, even rising to the defense of utopian thinking (Friedmann, 2000). He says, "I believe that we can re-humanize the urban by focusing on and reviving urban neighborhoods" (Friedmann, 2010, p. 152).

Friedmann argues that "place-making is everyone's job, local residents as well as official planners, and that old places can be 'taken back' neighborhood by neighborhood, through collaborative people-centered planning" (Friedmann, 2010, p. 162). Planners and local citizens, Friedmann argues, should "engage in a joint search for genuine betterment in the physical conditions of neighborhood life" (Friedmann, 2010, p. 149). Herein lies a major challenge. Polices of the past three decades have all but starved the community sector, weakening its capacity to be an equal and proactive partner in policy development and/or implementation. Although it is important to finally recognize the importance of community-based knowledge in addressing today's most pressing problems, it is equally important to recognize that tapping into that knowledge requires a significant investment in strengthening civic infrastructure.

Civic Infrastructure

Civic infrastructure, as defined here, refers to formal and informal institutional as well as sociocultural means of connectivity used in knowledge–action collaboration and networking. Civic infrastructure is necessary to enable bidirectional learning among community, university, and municipal collaborators; it is thus necessary to resolve one of the most serious practical problems Friedmann identifies in his advocacy of progressive planning (i.e., that yes, community knowledge matters, but it is often suppressed, undervalued, and/or difficult to access). For the community to come to any policy table as an equal, it must have access to the same knowledge and information as the others at the table, it must have equivalent resources to support its representatives being at the table, and there must be legitimate resident organizations to which community representatives are accountable (Friedmann, 1999; Oswald, 2013).

Friedmann's theory of change and his call to rehumanize the urban by focusing on and reviving urban neighborhoods has inspired, in very practical ways, a series of projects that are integrating urban planning, design, research, and action in neighborhoods of San Diego (CA). The neighborhood-based projects, with funding from a range of sources, are led by the Bioregional Center for Sustainability Science, Planning and Design (BRC; http://bioregionalcenter.ucsd.edu/) based at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). The BRC brings diverse people and organizations together to collaboratively study and equitably improve environmental health, wellbeing, and justice in neighborhoods and city regions. One of the BRC's multiyear projects is focused on Getting Neighborhoods EQUIPPED (Engaged thru Quality University-Community Infrastructure for Participatory-research and Popular Education) in southeastern San Diego.

Getting Neighborhoods EQUIPPED

The BRC operates out of UCSD's Urban Studies and Planning Program. Friedmann's influence can be seen in the BRC's Getting Neighborhoods EQUIPPED project, which is investing a half-million dollars, over a 2-year period, in the creation of a neighborhood learning and research center. The EQUIPPED project aims to a) strengthen the transformative capacity of equitable and just civic engagement in science, technology, and democracy; and b) establish knowledge-action networks, along with participatory planning-design and decision support systems, that enable research universities, disadvantaged communities, and municipal entities to work together in mutually reinforcing ways. The neighborhood learning and research center is a community-based institution designed to provide resident organizations with the technical support necessary for them to be equal, proactive participants at planning and policymaking tables (dealing with, for instance, food justice, water security, green infrastructure, and affordable housing).

Friedmann, I venture to guess, would be very supportive of this type of neighborhood-based civic infrastructure: It is a direct response to his call for democratizing the equitable co-production and use of diverse knowledge in planning practice. The neighborhood center is cultivating a rooted ethos of care, mutual aid, communitarianism, sustainability, and justice in a narrative framed by healthy place making; it sheds light on crucial concepts such as attachment and affection in ways that suggest how we might improve human–nature relations.

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Delineating the Shape of Planning Practice: John Friedmann's Legacy

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As a licensed architect practicing in California, I came to the planning profession in mid-career, having already experienced the thrill of putting together the intricate puzzles that go into creating buildings, seen structures built to meet people's needs, and bemoaned what interior decorators were doing to "my spaces." The arc of my professional life as an architect was clear, attainable, and assured. It called for pragmatic, orderly, and at times exhilarating effort. It also involved managing people, organizing and overseeing execution of construction, and meeting the changing desires of clients. But there was little call to consider how personal and professional lives might weave symbiotically together to examine larger questions about individual and societal purpose. I wanted by then to make greater sense, beyond professional competency, of my architectural practice in Mumbai (India), Tokyo (Japan), Cambridge (United Kingdom), and now Los Angeles (CA).

I applied to the doctoral planning program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), hoping to expand my worldview; to make broader sense of personal experience and professional work; and to see whether I could find a way to integrate my knowledge of India, the country where I was born, and my experiences of professional architectural practice. My knowledge of planning was limited to only one course in town and country planning in the fifth and final year of my architecture training in Mumbai. And exposure to the social sciences consisted of one course in sociology that addressed the city and bemoaned squatter settlements.

I was employed as a project architect by a full-spectrum construction firm in Pasadena (CA). On hearing I was admitted to the doctoral program, I hesitated to leave a profession in which my trajectory seemed set. It was the spring of 1974. I arranged to meet John Friedmann, who was then the department head of planning, on the UCLA