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PRINCIPAL, THE STREET PLANS COLLABORATIVE

TAUBMAN COLLEGE, AGORA 1 ALUMNUS

It's an honor – and a bit of a surprise – to write the introduction to this, the 10th edition of Agora. I don't believe the handful of us MUPs who created the publication in 2006 envisioned the publication growing into its tenth year. One could call that poor planning! However, we're thrilled that Agora has brought forth such an impressive breadth of content over the years. On behalf of the founders, I want to say thank you to everyone who has carried Agora's mission forward.

As you might imagine, this occasion has given me a chance to reflect on the career I've built since leaving Taubman College in 2007. But more importantly, it has allowed me to consider how much our cities have changed in the past decade.

Here's a shortlist that comes to mind:

In 2006...

...the majority of the world's citizens were not living in cities; American suburbanization was still in full swing; the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 had yet to arrive; climate change was an inconvenient truth, but the details remained conveniently fuzzier than they are today; and of course Black Lives Mattered, although Twitter wasn't around to catalyze online hashtags into offline actions carried out in public space.

Additionally, back in 2006 protected bike lanes were still thought to be a northern European curiosity; there wasn't a national movement underway to eliminate 33,000 traffic deaths per year with tough Vision Zero policies; Uber and Airbnb had yet to pimp out – sorry, “disrupt” – how we look at and utilize some of our largest individual assets; and no one could really predict how fast rising post-recession urban property values and shifting lifestyle preferences would hasten the inversion of poverty from the central city to the suburbs.

Finally, there weren't any hip micro-units or an urban beach in downtown Detroit!

The cause, effect, and meaning of the above are great fodder for professional conversation and academic debate. However, one cannot deny that since we launched Agora, cities have continued to do what cities do best: change.

With this in mind, urbanists everywhere should look to the next decade as a tremendous opportunity to shape and be shaped by unknown models, technologies, policies, and social movements. This is why I believe "Progression" is such a fitting theme for this year's Agora. However, as we move forward into the 21st century, we must also find better ways to make cities more accessible, free from carbon, full of social opportunity, and resilient against environmental catastrophe.

That's where you come in, reader. Taubman College provides a wonderful springboard for you and your career. You will be presented with opportunities, challenges, and experiences that you can't yet imagine. But remember, whether an architect, urban planner, or urban designer, you are above all else a city-maker. This is your privilege and your advantage in finding holistic ways to improve urban life.

I invite you to enjoy the ideas, issues, and projects presented in the 10th edition of Agora, but to also join me in the bold project of leaving the 21st century a better place than we found it.

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