

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The Agora was the center of civic life in Athens, Greece in the 5th century B.C.E. It was the physical space where goods and ideas were openly traded. It was the assembly of the people. It was the birthplace of democracy. The Agora of Athens is both architecturally renowned and hailed as the ideal by many urban planners for its accessibility and conviviality.

But for many, the word “agora” also brings to mind a more troubling notion: agoraphobia. We can see this fear of open or public space play out in many forms in contemporary society: the increase in the number of gated communities across the United States, the growing reluctance to share urban space with “Others,” and the increasing reliance on the convenience of modern communications technology at the expense of intimate face-to-face interaction. As planners, how do we reconcile idealized concepts of historical urbanism with the real conditions of 21st century life—and ultimately create better places?

To work toward answering this question, *Agora: The Planning Journal of the University of Michigan* was initiated in the Fall 2006 by the students of the Urban and Regional Planning Program. Through *Agora* we hope to encourage open and good-natured dialogue about planning issues across disciplines, as well as break down the existing fears and barriers that result from the convergence of disparate viewpoints.

Agora: The Planning Journal of the University of Michigan embodies this mission through encouraging a legitimate and open space for discussing planning. *Agora* set no themes or guidelines for this first volume and only encouraged students to submit original work that challenged ideas and explored issues related to urban planning. As a result we received work related to all areas of planning—from housing and economic development to international planning to literature and theory. This first volume of *Agora* emerged organically from this breadth of material.

Robert Fishman, Emil Lorch Professor of Architecture and Urban Planning, opens discussion with a provocation for the “Global Place: Practice, Politics and the Polis” Centennial Conference, held by the A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning in January 2007. The provocation was intended to challenge the scholars participating in the Conference to define and examine some of the most pressing issues facing our cities in the 21st century. Fishman’s piece serves as a thoughtful and provoking entrance into this first volume of *Agora*.

We then take a closer look at one of most timely issues facing planners today: affordable housing. T’Chana Bradford focuses on the Chicago Housing Authority’s redevelopment initiatives of the 1990’s and the implications of these initiatives for the future. Thomas Skuzinski addresses the controversial relationship between affordable housing and neighboring property values.

Traveling outside the U.S., we are taken through an eclectic mix of essays addressing planning in global cities. Tobias Wacker gives a first-hand account of his experience as a tourist in Malacca, Malaysia and analyzes some of the most common problems that developing countries face as they increasingly turn to tourism as a source of economic development. Tony DeLisi contemplates the role of religious spaces and historical preservation in Tokyo. Caitlyn Clauson explores alternative methods of memorializing the city in her piece on Argentinean tango lyrics in Buenos Aires. The highlights of this section on international planning are the design fold-outs by Emily Schemper and Peter Winch that depict their visions for Venice, Italy, in ten years time.

Charles Kaylor takes us back to the realm of theory as he looks at the faith that is at the very core of planning in his essay on planning as religion. A concluding set of book reviews explore a range of important texts. Thomas Skuzinski sheds new light on a classic planning text, Lewis Mumford's *City in History*. Amanda Goski, Cassia Herron and Kelly Koss round out the section by introducing us to new literature concerning planning and urban design: *Sprawl: A Compact History* by Robert Bruegmann, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space* by Margaret Kohn and *Design Like You Give a Damn: Architectural Responses to Humanitarian Crises* edited by Architecture for Humanity.

Finally, we are re-grounded in Ann Arbor, Michigan, as Aaron Clausen demonstrates his sensory experience of walking along the banks of the Huron River in a graphic design exercise.

We now invite you to take a stroll through our *Agora*—to hear what our authors and designers have to share, and to join in the conversation.

This journal would not have been possible without the wonderful enthusiasm and hard work of the *Agora* Board, all the students who contributed their work, and the generous funding from our supporters. The *Agora* Board would like to give special thanks to Dr. Jonathan Levine and the Urban and Regional Planning Program; Dean Douglas Kelbaugh, Mary Ann Drew, Janice Harvey and the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning; the Swansons for the Saarinen-Swanson Endowment Fund and the student organizations of the Urban and Regional Planning Program, including the Urban Planning Students' Association, the Martin Luther King Symposium Committee, and Planners Network. We would also like to thank those of you who gave your time and invaluable advice so that we might learn how to make this a quality journal: Dr. Scott Campbell, Dr. Rebecca Price, Dr. Paul Newman and Kelly Quinn. We are proud to present this first volume of *Agora* and look forward to many more in the future.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Johnson
Founding Editor