

## RESEARCH YOU CAN USE

### Edgy planning issues

The dictionary defines edgy in two ways: (1) tense, nervous, or irritable and (2) at the forefront of a trend, new and unusual in a way that is likely to make some people uncomfortable. Of course, this column uses the term in the second way. Recent issues of the *Journal of the American Planning Association* contained “edgy” articles that raise the question of how planners can be effective in the face of social change.

I asked a couple of graduate students at the University of Utah to categorize articles published in two leading planning journals, *JAPA* and the *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, as well as the tracks of sessions at recent planning conferences. Looking at materials from 2001 to 2014, they concluded that edgy isn’t exactly a term that applies to planning research (see table).

But there are signs of change. In 2013 in *JAPA*, Karen Trapenberg Frick reviewed the challenges posed by Tea Party and property rights activists to regional planning efforts in two case studies: the Plan Bay Area in San Francisco and a one percent sales tax increase for transportation projects in the Atlanta region. (The

article was a *JAPA* Article of the Year, one of two that year.)

Opposition tends to occur when planning is thought to restrict individual rights (for example, threatening property value or development options) and when local government autonomy is threatened by regional planning efforts. Trapenberg Frick was interested in the arguments made by Tea Party and property rights activists, the tactics they used, and ultimately how planners changed their plans and processes.

After collecting information through social media, websites, blogs, field research, public meetings, and in-depth interviews, Trapenberg Frick found that both planners and the opposition groups were quick to dismiss each other’s claims. Thus, she offered three recommendations for planners:

- address plan impacts on fiscal issues, property rights, and property values, as these are often at the root of concern for activists in opposition
- be more transparent, particularly in how public involvement helps to shape the plan in question

- conduct more research on the planning process at multiple levels and different geographies, and pay attention to how social media affects the process.

*‘Edgy’ articles raise the question of how planners can be effective in the face of social change.*

Another edgy topic came from Michael Smart and Nicholas Klein, also writing in *JAPA* in 2013. They investigated social connections within gay and lesbian neighborhoods (which they defined as neighborhoods with a large share of households

with same-sex partners or heads of household) and how those can influence travel. They hypothesized that partnered gay and lesbian residents of gay and lesbian neighborhoods have shorter nonwork trip distances than their straight neighbors or than gays and lesbians living outside of gay and lesbian neighborhoods.

The researchers’ models bore out the hypothesis for gays, and suggest that straights living in the same neighborhoods also make shorter trips (though not as short as gays). Gays tend to cluster around recreational sites, social spaces, shops, bars, restaurants, and jobs that they

## Typical Topics

TOPIC	NUMBER OF ARTICLES	PERCENT OF TOTAL ARTICLES
METHODS, TOOLS, AND NEW TECHNOLOGY	28	4.49
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	31	4.98
ENVIRONMENT, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, ENERGY, DISASTERS	76	12.2
DIVERSITY IN PLANNING (GENDER, MINORITY)	26	4.17
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	74	11.88
LAND-USE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE	40	6.42
FOOD SYSTEMS, HEALTH, SAFETY	38	6.1
PLANNING EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY	38	6.1
THE PLANNING PROCESS, ADMINISTRATION, LAW AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION	66	10.59
PLANNING THEORY	28	4.49
REGIONAL AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL PLANNING, GROWTH MANAGEMENT	41	6.58
TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE, TRAVEL BEHAVIOR	59	9.47
URBAN DESIGN AND PRESERVATION	18	2.89
INTERNATIONAL PLANNING	40	6.42
NEW URBANISM	11	1.77
PLANNING HISTORY	9	1.44

Over the past dozen or so years, the topics covered in the journals were standard planning fare, with housing and community development slightly leading, followed by the planning process and the law. More recently, *JAPA* and *JPER* have been a bit edgier—and that’s a good thing.

are drawn to. According to the authors, “Planners have a role to play in supporting gay and lesbian neighborhoods, in part because they are the kind of communities we often seek to create with smart growth and other policies.”

Another new concern for planners is the medical marijuana industry, which has been legalized in 23 states and Washington, D.C. (Recreational marijuana use is legal in four states: Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington, plus in D.C.). As a result, planners are grappling with land-use issues related to medical marijuana dispensaries. (For more, see “Pot Report” in the July issue of *Planning*.)

In *JAPA* in 2014, Jeremy Nemeth and Eric Ross investigated how local jurisdictions regulate MMDs and whether regulation results in the equitable distribution of these facilities. A 2010 Pew Research poll showed that although 73 percent of adults are in favor of medical marijuana legalization, 44 percent say “not in my backyard.” Dispensaries are thus regulated in a manner similar to liquor stores and other nuisance land uses, which means that they are disproportionately located in areas with large low-income or minority populations.

The recommendations that follow from this study, one of the first to investigate the equity implications of MMD regulations, are to consider whether dispensaries should be treated and zoned as locally unwanted land uses—LULUs, in planning parlance. The study also urged planners to realize that zoning, more so than proximity buffers, contributes to the inequitable distribution of MMDs.

All three studies address potential challenges and provide helpful insights to placemaking and regional planning. It remains to be seen how planners will adjust their planning processes, including public engagement, to accommodate the evolving planning field.

—Reid Ewing

*Ewing is a professor of city and metropolitan planning at the University of Utah, an associate editor of JAPA, and an editorial board member of JPER and Landscape and Urban Planning. More than 40 past columns are available at [www.plan.utah.edu/?page\\_id=509](http://www.plan.utah.edu/?page_id=509).*

## LETTERS

### Keeping Tactical Urbanism from Becoming a Fad

Martin Zimmerman’s piece (“We Own This City,” July) posed the question, “Is tactical urbanism here to stay, or just a passing fad?” Mike Lydon’s answer [in that article] hits the nail on the head. Incremental urbanism that turns our cities into laboratories for urban innovation is critical for finding short- and long-term solutions to everyday issues and to achieve results quickly.

However, three things are needed to make sure that tactical urbanism is a lasting strategy—and that public and private funds are allocated responsibly: clear identification of user groups, implementation education, and innovative policy frameworks. Those three factors will help these projects be truly catalytic.

Tactical urbanism is an organic, typically grassroots effort focused on a hyper-specific issue or opportunity. This can lead to a truncated process where people outside of the circle may be marginalized. Citizen advocacy groups, local governments, and design-planning teams must hit the streets and engage with the community in creative and nontraditional forums to identify user groups and build support to overcome barriers.

Frequently those who drive the process will ultimately be responsible for implementation, management, and long-term maintenance of these spaces. Some level of design and implementation education is needed to prepare and empower groups to succeed—because short-term solutions with no long-term plans can deteriorate quickly. Initiatives like Million Trees NYC are creating insightful, simple how-to documents that go a long way to empowering citizens. But professional design and construction support can also be an important part of the mix.

Innovative policy frameworks such as “People St,” developed by the Los Angeles Department of Transportation, can help citizens and organizations with placemaking. These frameworks establish clear rules that address issues of design quality,

safety, and intent. In Louisville, Kentucky, an initiative called #RSquared (ReUse & Revitalize) is developing sustainable methods to reduce blight and vacancy in the city’s neighborhoods through tactical and long-term solutions.

Communities can be empowered through informed, supported, and long-lasting means, even as public funding dissipates.

—Louis Johnson, LEED GA, ASLA  
Gresham, Smith & Partners  
Louisville, Kentucky

### Parks today and tomorrow

I agree with Rutherford Platt and Peter Harnik (“New-Age Central Parks,” July) that we are no longer building new parks on the scale of New York’s Central Park (with few exceptions) and that we must look at alternative or nontraditional locations like landfills and above freeways. The parks discussed in the article are wonderful and inspiring; I hope to visit some of them soon, especially Chicago’s 606.

Here in Los Angeles, my department is currently working on a number of exciting new park projects, such as the *Puente Hills Landfill Park Master Plan* and the *Earvin ‘Magic’ Johnson Recreation Area Master Plan*. The former involves the transformation of a portion of a 1,365-acre former landfill site into a regional park, while the latter is the redesign and redevelopment of a 104-acre county park aimed at addressing the community’s growing and diverse recreational needs more comprehensively.

We are also in the process of conducting a countywide parks and recreation needs assessment ([lacountyparkneeds.org](http://lacountyparkneeds.org)) to document and better understand the recreational needs of county residents as well as the quantity and quality of the county’s park infrastructure. One result will be a list of priority park projects (with cost estimates) for each study area plus a list of land opportunities for the creation of new parks. The assessment may be used to guide the potential development of future funding mechanisms (like bond measures) and to leverage federal and