

Distinguished Planning Educator Award Acceptance Speech

Leonie Sandercock

JUST WHEN I WAS IN DANGER OF becoming a really cranky old lady, I got an email from June Thomas telling me I had won this award.

What an honor to be in such distinguished company.

Why this recognition makes me less cranky is that it's really recognition for social justice work, recognition of diversity and the importance of diversifying the academy, feminizing and indigenizing it and recognizing what Tom Angotti calls "the Metropolis of 'the others'". I see the award as a tribute to all my colleagues and students who have been and are pursuing this work, which still has such a long way to go, so I'm still cranky. And it coincides nicely with the theme of our conference – *'Justice and the City'* and with the most recent issue of the *Journal of Planning Education & Research* – featuring *equity planning revisited*. But if I may be so bold, I think we need to go even further – than social justice and *the city*, and beyond *equity planning* – toward a deep social and cultural ecological planning.

But before I go there, I'd like to express gratitude to someone you've probably never heard of, the late Hugh Stretton, a great Australian public intellectual, who was crucial in my own intellectual and *ethical* development between 20 and 30. . . . I learned many things from this scholar and activist: most notably the notion that the social sciences are always/already *political* sciences; and following from that, you do not have to leave your deepest human concerns – such as justice, love, compassion – at the door when you enter academia. The conventional wisdom of the time (1970s and 80s) was that in order to be a good scholar you had to separate yourself from what you were studying: become a divided self. Hugh was brilliant *and* passionate and wrote and worked for a more just city. He helped me to find my path, both with wise advice in moments of crisis and self-doubt *and* because he walked his talk. (He was a tireless public housing advocate.) Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance: the dance of the spiraling generations, in which the old first lead, then get to follow. I was blessed with

a great mentor. And now I have inspiring apprentices to follow!

So a couple of weeks ago I spent my Saturday at a Deep Democracy workshop organized by a recent PhD graduate of mine, Aftab Erfan, provocatively titled 'Is hope bullshit?' A hundred or so people, predominantly in their 20s and 30s, attended and what moved me most was a palpable sense of grief and rage and loss among these concerned young citizens. . . .

This grief and rage was about what is happening to our common home: the violence we are doing, as a species, to the earth *and* to each other. Listening to these young voices, I realized that they have internalized, as personal suffering, this pervasive violence, which has all sorts of urban and environmental policy expressions as well as pedagogical ones. And this internalizing is hopeful, I think, because in that process we discover what we can each *do* about the violence. As the Pope's recent encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, reminds us, we have to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.



Environmental justice without social justice is not the answer, but nor is the reverse. Hence the need for our planning education to embrace an environmental education that is less about technological fixes and more about developing an ethics of ecology and helping people to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care: which means encouraging what I can best describe as a spiritual dimension to enter the planning discourse. That's why equity planning, as admirable as it was, and still is, is not enough.

I live at the western entrance of a haunted house called Canada, whose hungry ghosts, windborne

spirits, call us to conscience. There's a foundational injustice at the heart of the Canadian (and American) nation-building and city-building project, and that is the injustice of dispossession of Indigenous peoples, which has now returned to haunt us, at least in Canada. . . . And this is why I say that to talk about justice and *the city* is not enough.

So, is hope bullshit? What do you all think?

My answer is that we have to act *as if* there is the possibility of change, or else no change will be possible! Rosa Parks and Nelson Mandela are

the stories I always revert to. Or, to quote Billie Holliday, "the impossible will take a little while."

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Thank you so much, especially to all those colleagues who wrote in support of my nomination for this awesome award, and beyond that, for our decades of affirming relationships.

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