Planning with Open Edges:
Focusing on Peripheral Issues or Addressing Core Concerns

Ronald Shiffman, FAICP, Hon. AIA
Professor,
Programs for Sustainable Planning and Development
Pratt Institute
Israel Association of Planners
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It is a professional and very personal honor for me to be here today to speak to you. On October 9, 1930 my father, who was imprisoned in Russia because he was a Zionist, entered Palestine under terms of an amnesty negotiated on behalf of a number of political prisoners. Despite the fact that I was raised in the United States since my family migrated there in 1939,and I have spent too few days in Israel, the promise of this land with its triumphs and tragedies has played a very important role in how I think and practice.

Indeed, a major reason I became an architect and urban planner was because of the visits of Aryeh Doudai, an Israeli architect and planner who was an icon in our family. Aryeh visited with my parents when he represented Israel at UN habitat meetings in NYC. He was my godfather, and his work on the relationship between social and physical planning, which we discussed when I had the honor to take him around New York City and some of its devastated neighborhoods, had a subtle but important impact on me.

Meeting Adam Mazor and David Guggenheim in Salzburg also had a profound impact on my thinking about the built environment. When David invited me to speak here today, I jumped at the chance to do so in part to repay the debt to him and Adam and to honor the memory of both Aryeh and my parents. I also agreed because the theme of this conference, "Planning with Open Edges," raises a number of questions.

I must admit that I have struggled with what "planning with open edges" as a metaphor means. Indeed, as I have pondered the issue and spoken to a number of colleagues the following overlapping questions emerge.

- Does it mean focusing on the periphery of a place or issue? Allowing us to avoid the core issues and deal with the symptoms and not with the causes? Or is it an entry point or barrier that needs to be penetrated to begin to address the core issues?

- Does it mean that the planner engages in a less hierarchical form of planning? If so, might that lead us to a point where the planner is

avoiding the hard and often intractable issues facing us - climate change; income disparity; ethnic, religious, class and gender conflicts? Or does it enable planners to address these and other issues in a softer, more participatory manner --ways that facilitate social inclusion and substantively address disparities that adversely affect all of the peoples of Israel?

- When we talk about edges do we view them as permeable or impermeable? If so, how might we reinforce the porousness of the edge or, if circumstances dictate, reinforce the edge by building higher walls that separate people or define issues in categorical terms? And if that is the path we choose, what are the costs of that decision?

- Do we look at edges as a means to connect, or as a means to separate and/or segregate or can we develop it as neutral ground? Or is a bit of all three?

- Do we define the edge in terms of encountering danger as in "living on the edge"? And, if that is the case, how do we intervene to move from that precipice to safer ground?

Before I address the challenges posed by the metaphor of "Planning with Open Edges," I'd like to share with you some of those early experiences and inquiries concerning the process of engagement and the value system that frame my thoughts on the topic.

I began my career during a period of time when the US was awakening to the fact that two Americas had emerged -- one predominantly affluent and the other poor and ignored; the latter an America hidden from sight and from the consciousness of most of my fellow countrymen. For too long, too many Americans ignored or were blind to the issues of class, race, gender and the powerlessness that beset women, people of color, the poor and working-class communities.

In the early sixties, the United States experienced a serious social crisis, which, if ignored, threatened to call into question its entire political and economic system. The disparities between the beneficiaries of our capitalist society on the one hand—an elite sector of the majority of the population—and, on the other, blacks, ethnic minorities, women and poor whites had become too vast to sustain. These disparities were exacerbated by the forced geographical segregation of large urban metropolises—blacks in the inner cities and whites in the suburbs. The barriers created were in essence impenetrable edges. These here-to-unforeseen realities weighed on us and seeped into the consciousness of some of us.

Many young professionals began to explore what their role as emerging

architectural and planning professionals should be, given the social justice challenges we as a nation faced.   Many architectural and planning students, especially those in schools located in or near urban areas, were also engaged in a similar inquiry. And yet the education they continued to receive—assignments to design a beach house in the Hamptons —failed utterly to address these issues. The world these students saw as they walked from the subway to the classroom, or when they looked out of the windows of their classrooms, or turned on the television, was substantively different from the one they encountered in their design and planning education.

The students desire to work directly with struggling communities on real issues was overwhelming and helped forge a powerful alliance and a dialogue between a group of young professionals and student activists. Ultimately, these intense conversations led to the adoption of a new philosophy of participatory and experiential education, a philosophy that in time became the model for a new form of professional practice-- one that sought to make the impenetrable porous. Indeed students and young professional were at the leading edge of change.

We concentrated, above all, on the idea of *community:* how could we as professionals, or soon-to-be professionals learn from those struggling to empower themselves, and how could we forge valid working relationships with them? What did we as professionals have to offer them in their fight against the poverty and decay that pervaded their communities? What role could we play to allay the growing sense of alienation that was the legacy of decades of exclusion and exploitation?

A general shift in the overall political and economic context of the late Sixties also played a key role in stimulating the discourse that took place. For some time the intellectual community had been shaking off the legacy of years of lethargy and blind acceptance of a post-war conservatism borne of the materialism of the time, masked over by a booming economy. It was a conservatism that, combined with the explosive growth of the suburbs and the manufactured ideal of the nuclear family, the single-family home with its white picket fence in a whites-only neighborhood, had drastically and often adversely affected the structure of our cities and metropolitan areas.

Slowly, the paranoia of the "fifties," with its hunt for a communist in every nook and cranny of our society, began to yield slowly to a more nuanced acceptance of a country born with the best of democratic intentions yet seriously flawed and defective—a country that had crafted both a democratic constitution and a bill of rights yet had not extended those rights to all of its citizens. It was a country that had within it another country, a country of contradictions, and a country with places of intense poverty where people of color were segregated either by the force of law or the reality of their economic circumstance.

On the political level, our newly elected President, John F. Kennedy, had been influenced by the writings of the American democratic socialist thinker, Michael

Harrington, whose 1962 book, "The Other America: Poverty in the United States," was a catalyst for much of his administration's domestic policy. Kennedy's traumatic assassination in November 1963, not unlike that of Rabin's many years later, fundamentally changed the course of history and was a wake up call for many to dedicate our professional lives to his legacy and the path that we perceived he would have taken had he lived.

In the following decade, the chorus grew louder as sociologists, planners and urban policy critics built upon Harrington's insights about what was going on in America's urban and rural communities. Collectively, they called for greater professional accountability to communities and focused on the need to engage people in the planning and development processes that affected their lives. Each built upon and reinforced the concept of "community empowerment."

I share these reflections with you, not merely to recount history but to highlight the conditions that led to the redefinition of the role of the planner in the 1960's. We were confronting conditions and challenges based on human needs that unfortunately still need to be addressed in the United States and elsewhere, including Israel. And, which are as relevant today as they were 50 years ago.

To paraphrase one of my favorite philosophers, Manfred Max-Neef, fundamental human needs are the same throughout the world and over time. What changes from place to place and from time to time, is how we satisfy those needs. Max-Neef defines those needs as subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity and freedom—"identity and freedom."

The role planners play, the means and process of planning that we engage in and how we advise the policy makers and decision makers within our societies should determine the approaches we take as planners. The needs we as planners address are fundamentally the same, but how we satisfy them and how we plan for them must be adapted to the cultural, social and political context and the times in which we live and practice.

As many of my colleagues and I were refining our understanding of our role as urban practitioners given the emerging emphasis on fighting poverty and racial discrimination, Dr. Rhoda Metraux, an anthropologist, speaking at the 1965 American Institute of Planners conference eloquently pointed out.

> "It is a truism that we are living in the world in transition and the greatest difficulty we face lies in giving direction to change in the midst of change. However, … it is less clearly recognized that there are no permanent solutions; there are only solutions that can narrow or widen the choice in the future. Peace keeping, controlling the balance of the world's population, protecting the earth's finite resources, feeding, sheltering and educating the world's peoples – all these are problems that mankind must now face with full consciousness of the interrelationships and must

continue to face as long as there are men to think about social problems and to benefit by good planning or to suffer the consequences of poor and inappropriate planning. "

To avoid suffering the consequences of poor or inappropriate planning in the face of peace keeping, controlling the balance of the world's population, protecting the earth's finite resources, feeding, sheltering and educating the world's peoples -- that was the challenge then and continues to be the challenge today. How do we engage in good planning, realizing and acknowledging that planning that avoids addressing 'human needs' or emphasizes only the needs of some and ignores those of others is doomed to be poor planning. The question before us today is "is planning with open edges good planning "or is it another "professional metaphor that merely allows us the luxury of avoiding hard decisions.

A fundamental challenge to the ingenuity of the planner is how we apply macro socio-economic, political, environmental and planning policy and theory to the practice of community development, planning and design at the local level. In the 60's when we first engaged in the process of "participatory planning" we sought to engage in the process in the context of a value system built upon empowerment, inclusion, and social, and economic equity.

The task we faced was how to effectively engage a population that, to a great extent, had been excluded, alienated, and disempowered. They were rightly suspicious of engagement with local government officials and with planners and planning processes. Our task was to build a level of trust where none existed before and, in the process, build the capacity and awareness of those that we sought to help. This meant we needed to engage as planners and urban designers in ways that here-to-fore did not exist.

Many communities that did not have access to the advice of designers, planners and others with an understanding of development processes were often victims of poorly designed urban regeneration plans. Conversely, many areas with poor housing and other socio-economic conditions that were in need of some form of government assistance were ignored, while the needs of more affluent and politically powerful communities were addressed.

Because of these inequities, we at Pratt decided that our clients would be those that traditionally did not have access to the resources of planners and designers and who were often the victims of that lack of access. That meant that low and moderate-income communities would be our clients It meant working hand-in-hand with the grass roots leadership that we met in these communities to form the nucleus of a planning team comprised of professional and community leaders. These planning teams met extensively and engaged in community building processes designed to foster a high degree of mutual respect within a short period of time.

The planning efforts that followed were a blend of the traditional types of land use and planning analyses coupled with intensive and ongoing contact with area residents. Small teams of young planners met on a regular basis with community leaders, reviewing the survey methodology, getting to know the block leaders, and meeting in the kitchens and living rooms of area residents. Findings were shared in one-on-one mutual education sessions; data was discussed and interpreted, words defined, issues clarified, questions asked and answered. The boundaries that separated the professional from the community were transformed into porous and open edges.

Three ingredients to successful revitalization efforts emerged. The first was the need to develop a in depth knowledge of the area rather than just a superficial cosmetic understanding; second, the development and sustained growth of trust between the planner and the community and third, the concept of focusing and building on an area's assets –human and physical - rather than merely attempting to address its problems.

We learned experientially how to demystify the planning process and how to help people recognize the power that they had and how to engage in planning of their own community and their own future. That period of exploration and innovation in advocacy and participatory planning processes was critically important in building an informed, empowered and knowledgeable community development constituency and created a model for effective participatory planning- one that we have refined and adapted in different contexts until today. Simply stated we learned that good participatory planning processes needed to:

- Develop a common language –one that can grow in complexity over time but should be understood by all participants.
- Develop a level and equitable playing field for all of the participants - a parity of power where no one actor or group has more power than another, and where all of the participants know what the others know.
- Share knowledge and explore different ways of solving a given problem or achieving a proposed set of objectives, including how others in other places and communities addressed similar problems so that solutions were not limited to what they already knew or experienced.
- Recognize and honor what each participant can contribute to the better understanding of the issues and opportunities that needed to be addressed.
- Learn that success is dependent on the development of the community's trust in their own capacity, as well as in the capacity of others.
- Recognize that the community, as it defines itself, are the leaders and decision makers, not us.

The Pratt team discovered that describing a problem or opportunity, which planners

and technicians were able to do with ease, was not equivalent to understanding. Understanding, we learned, was the prerequisite to action and that could only be achieved after what was observed and surveyed was discussed, digested, and filtered by those whose experiences, aspirations and goals may or may not have been the same as ours.

We learned that local residents, unlike many professionals, refused to prioritize or put into separate silos important community needs such as housing, education, health, participation and community empowerment. Residents believed that all of these needed to be addressed concurrently; and although the language they used was different, they clearly espoused a comprehensive and holistic approach to revitalization. We soon learned that the elimination of silos meant penetrating the boundaries that denied us the ability to see things synergistically and replacing them with processes that were built upon porous and open edges.

We learned that the means and ends were both important. The success of the endeavor was dependent on and integrally related to the positive interplay of means and ends. Means were dependent on a critical assessment of the various modes of intervention that were necessary given the socio-political context on the ground and the resultant design of the participatory process.

The planning and design of the process of engagement -–the means-- is as important, if not more important, than the design of the end product. The process, if designed appropriately, can help build a strong sense of community --one strong enough that diversity and pluralism is not feared but embraced.

Each participatory process we engage in needs to be adapted to the culture, history, memory and power of those involved and the level of organization that exists within that particular community. In pluralistic settings this becomes more complex and therefore more challenging but, again, if done appropriately, can lead to greater social cohesion and community building. We learned that social cohesion that ignored social inclusion was fragile and lacked the moral authority to sustain itself over time.

While we were engaged on the local level, we were also in touch with planners with similar value systems that were working regionally and nationally. What we learned locally was transmitted to our allies nationally and began to inform the development of national policy and programs that could benefit the work that we were engaged in on the local level. These included programs and policies that dealt with the inequities and disparities that existed on a local level and sought to create places where edges are no longer borders or barriers.

From the very beginning, this holistic yet bottom-up approach to planning was coupled with a fundamental understanding that there were overriding sets of international and national principles of democracy, equality and human rights

that were inalienable - - rights that can't be taken away or denied.

In today's world, be it in the United Sates, the EU or Israel, how we address this overriding set of universal inalienable principles while, at the same time, allow the individual and local communities to express their needs, is a challenge that planners and decision makers alike must address.

These experiences led me over the years to refine the process of participatory and advocacy planning that my colleagues and I practiced. Based on those experiences the definition of "good planning" that I would offer is one that is predicated on the integration of vision, reason and democracy.

- Planning is the result of the **"critical tension"** between vision –the ability to imagine and develop alternative approaches to problems and opportunities; reason – is trust in the capacity of the mind to understand nature and society; and democracy -- is trust in the capacity of people for self-governance.
- Vision is dependent on ingenuity and creativity; reason is dependent on a rational systemic analysis and democracy on the empowerment and participation of the people directly and indirectly impacted --as long as the interests of minorities, the less powerful and future generations are respected and considered.

The topic of "Planning With Open Edges" before us therefore has a number of dimensions. One, is how do we make sure that what we do does not avoid the hard and often intractable issues of gender inequality, climate change, income disparity, and ethnic or religious conflict. At the same time, how do we empower people so that they can constructively address their needs based on their own set of locally held values.

This "critical tension" becomes even more complex in societies that are pluralistic and democratic. Dictatorships, theocracies, oligarchies and places that are homogenous don't have these internal struggles. And while things are simpler in those societies, I would bet that no one in this room would accept those options over the messy challenges that democratic societies like ours face.

Given that construct, the theme "planning with open edges" or any other formula for planning might be misplaced. These approaches to planning often have a predetermined game plan, What we need as planners in a democracy is to first come to an agreed upon set of national values and goals, and then use that framework to best design strategies to achieve those goals, while concurrently addressing local spatial characteristics and respecting pluralistic and culturally defined needs and aspirations.

There must be a debate on a national level about rights and obligations, about

immigration and citizenship, among other difficult issues. This means that we must break down the invisible borders that we create in our cultures, in our minds, and sadly, at times in our hearts.

In the US, which is a pluralistic country comprised of a diverse set of immigrants, these are complex and often contentious issues. In Israel, these issues are far more complex because of relationships with your Arab neighbors, the pluralistic nature of your population and the diverse religious and historic populations that have occupied this land for centuries.

For years, Israeli planning efforts were predicated on absorption of large numbers of Jewish immigrants from Europe and Russia and then North Africa and other middle-eastern countries, and from the need to defend Israel from attack from the countries that border Israel. Today, these determinants have been made even more complex by the need to address the growing diversity within Israel's own boundaries and how as a democracy those needs are addressed.

Planning with open edges can't become an excuse to avoid confronting these contradictions or the need to reaffirm your democratic and inclusive values – values that the founders of this State espoused, or values that many would argue are both universal and inalienable.

It means developing planning strategies that protect your way of life and the security of the nation, but at the same time protect the inclusive values that make this nation a unique and strong democracy. It means taking as many risks to achieve peace as one would take to win in case of conflict.

Within the framework of an agreed upon set of national values, the planner could then begin to engage in a form of bottom up community-based planning that acknowledges the pluralistic nature of Israel's population. This pluralistic planning process might be an adaptation of the process that I described earlier or, more appropriately, one based on approaches that have emerged here in Israel, some of which will be discussed in other sessions over the next few days.

Most importantly, the skill of the planner and designer must become more like that of the physician in that before a planning process is initiated, the planner should diagnose the situation and prescribe the proper type of intervention. This might be an intensive set of interventions, or depending on the area, it might be a more subtle set of interventions or what many are now calling "planning with open edges. "

Kevin Lynch in his classic, "The Image of the City," defines edges as

"the boundaries that separate one region from another, the seams that join

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two regions together, or the barriers that close one region from another. … They can be physical edges such as shorelines, walls, railroad cuts, or edges of development, or they can be less well-defined edges that the individual perceives as a barrier."

While this is a useful starting point, one's idea of what constitutes an edge is far more subjective—or influenced by one's feelings about the context in which we apply the term "edge."

The same ambiguity or subjective nature applies to the definition of "neighborhood," especially in the context of a pluralistic and democratic society. Defining the term neighborhood is fraught with difficulties and dangers. The desire to clearly define the word often leads us to try and describe what constitutes a good neighborhood. Experience has clearly demonstrated the weakness of this approach.

There are many examples of neighborhoods in the process of dramatic decline that still contain all the assets that are ascribed to healthy communities such as parks, schools and infrastructure. Yet, there are areas that have little, if any, of these amenities, but exhibit a great deal of vitality. Therefore, I believe we must allow neighborhoods to be self-defining and self-identifying.

A neighborhood is often defined through a mutual agreement between those external and internal to it. This definition is often enhanced by built barriers that form its boundaries or edges and give the neighborhood an identity as a "place."

Other characteristics of neighborhoods often cited are cohesiveness and attachment to neighbors, local institutions and traditions and the exclusion of outside people, institutions and traditions.

Lou Winnick, a former Ford Foundation official, once said that "a neighborhood is defined by the line, that if crossed, one gets beat up." Similarly, Gerald D. Suttles, A University of Chicago sociologist, describes neighborhoods as,

> "that geography that people feel a sense of control over, and as they move from its center to its periphery [or edge] begin to sense a loss of control, or an area where an ascribed grouping and its members are joined in a common plight whether or not they like it and where they often "share a common fate" at the hands of others."

Jane Jacobs recognizes the characteristics described above, and sets them in a useful context:

> "A successful city neighborhood is a place to keep sufficiently abreast of its problems so it is not destroyed by them. An unsuccessful neighborhood is overwhelmed by its defects and problems and is progressively more

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helpless before them.."

These definitions, although subjective, underscore the crucial role that neighborhoods can and must play as entry points for progressive social and economic change and an understanding of which is crucial in determining how one engages in any form of planning, especially "planning with open edges."

The challenges that face planners today are vast. They become more complicated in diverse, pluralistic and democratic societies. The importance of tackling the issues before you in the next few days and setting ambitious agendas over the next few months is essential because the clock is ticking and time is not on our side.

While that comment refers to the peace process which my country is urging Israel engage in more aggressively, I am referring to the threat of global warming or what some refer to as "weird weather." The environmental hazards we face can't be wished away and they have no allegiance to edges, borders or nation states.

Issues of clean water, waste water treatment, sea level rise, the threat of draughts and famine, the death of indigenous flora and fauna fundamentally threaten all of human kind and any one nation can't escape or build walls high enough to avoid the impacts of these conditions on themselves or on their neighbors both near and far.

Last week, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, in a dispatch from Hebron, wrote,

> "We've learned in the last few years that the colonial boundaries of the Middle East do not correspond to the ethnic, sectarian and tribal boundaries ...But neither do the ecosystem boundaries correspond with any borders or walls. And the fact that Israelis and Palestinians have not been able to reach a power-sharing agreement that would enable them to treat the entire ecosystem here as a *system* is catching up with them."

Friedman quotes Gidon Bromberg, co-founder of Friends of the Earth Middle East, who argues that Israel

> "could use its own cheap natural gas and solar power generated in Jordan …to provide desalinated and recycled water for itself, Gaza, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority."

Bromberg suggests that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators go on an eco-tour to see "the seeping time bomb that's ticking underneath both of them."
And Friedman adds,

"[a time bomb that] "will explode if they don't forge a deal... to protect the water, soil and air that they will always have in common and can only be preserved by acting in common."

Friedman also addresses the growing water crisis in Gaza where he writes that,

"Last year, the U.N. said that by 2016 there will be no potable water left in Gaza's main aquifer. Gaza has no big desalination plant and would not have the electricity to run it anyway. I don't want to be here when 1.5 million Gazans really get thirsty."

Whether in Gaza, India, or elsewhere our threatened water supply will create enormous dislocation pressures. The issues of environmental and economic refugees making their way to the US, Israel and other places of refuge are just a symptom of this growing challenge. It will adversely affect local economic opportunities, and lead to political unrest as prices escalate, water is rationed or is non-existent and farmers and others are pushed off their land.

Israel exports many products and even more ideas and "know how" to places around the world. How you address your internal planning, development and environmental issues is therefore far more important than many here may realize.

It is important for Israel, with those here today in the lead, to redress the inequities that exist in Israel. Like my earlier description of the "other America," there is an "other Israel and a Palestine" whose needs must be addressed. The failures of past Israeli actions can't be ignored in the same way that the injustices that existed and continue to exist in the US had and have to be addressed.

Fulfilling its obligations to those Israelis – Arab and Jewish - that have been left behind and to its Palestinian neighbors would unleash in Israel the talents and ingenuity to "find inventive solutions to age-old problems" and new challenges. It would rekindle the spirit of innovation and community building that marked the birth of this nation to benefit the people of this country, its neighbors and the world. This obviously is beyond the power of those in this room alone, but that should not be an excuse to not engage as professionals or as citizens in efforts to remediate these difficult problems. Skepticism is the enemy of creativity and good planning; optimism is the bedrock upon which both can emerge.

As Ari Shavit very eloquently put it

"The foundations of the home we founded is somewhat shaky, and repeating earthquakes rattle it. So what we really have in this land [Israel] is an ongoing adventure. An odyssey. The Jewish state does not resemble

any other nation. What this nation has to offer is not security or well-being or peace of mind. What it has to offer is the intensity of life on the edge."

While living at the edge promotes creativity and innovation, planners and designers must strive to make living on the edge less dangerous, less intense, enabling us to move step-by-step from the edge to the core – to a more stable territory -- by addressing the issues and meeting the needs of those that we all, for too long, have been blind to and ignored.

This can be the foundation upon which Israel can be a modern pluralistic democracy as well as the homeland for the Jewish people --a place that adheres to Judaism's highest principles and to the commandment that "you shall have one law only –the same for the native born and stranger, for you were once slaves in the land of Egypt."

Thank You,
Todah.

Ron Shiffman, FAICP, NYS Hon. AIA
863 President Street
Brooklyn, NY 11215
917.705.8935
rshiffma@pratt.edu

Ron Shiffman is a city planner with over 50 years of experience providing architectural, planning, community economic development and sustainable development assistance to community-based groups in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. In 1964, Ron Shiffman co-founded the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development [PICCED], which is today the oldest continuously operated university-based community design and development center in the United States.

He sits on the boards of a number of local, national and international organizations committed to equitable and sustainable planning and development efforts such as The Center for the Living City, Sustainable Long Island, the Center for Social Inclusion, and Shared Interest, a loan guarantee fund established to assist Black South Africans.

Ron Shiffman is the recipient of numerous awards from community-based organizations and national advocacy groups, including local and national awards from ADPSR [Architects, Designers and Planners for Social Responsibility], the local chapters of the AIA and AICP, and the Municipal Art Society. He has authored a number of articles on urban planning, sustainable development, environmental and social justice and community economic development. He was lead editor of "Beyond Zuccotti Park- Freedom of Assembly and the Occupation of Public Space." He has been a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners [AICP] since May 1985 and in April 2002 became a Fellow of the AICP. He was honored by the NYS American Institute of Architects in the fall of 2005 when honorary AIA membership was conferred upon him. *He recently received two prestigious lifetime achievement awards: Rockefeller Foundation's Jane Jacobs Lifetime Achievement Award and the American Planning Association's National Planning Pioneer Award. The Planning Pioneer Award is presented to individuals who have*

made personal and direct innovations in American planning that have significantly and positively redirected planning practice, education, or theory with long-term results*.*

Immediately after Hurricane Katrina he worked with Tulane and Cornell Universities to organize planning professionals and educators to assist in response to the devastation that occurred. He is presently organizing and directing Pratt Institute School of Architecture's coordinated effort to assist in the rebuilding effort after Hurricane Sandy entitled "Rebuild, Adapt, Mitigate and Plan" and has forged cooperative relationships between RAMP and many of the affected communities, the AIA, the APA and a number of regional and international universities such as the University of Pennsylvania, the College of Staten Island, the National Disaster Preparedness Training Center at the University of Hawaii, Honolulu and the the International University of Catalonia, Spain.

He is a tenured professor at Pratt Institute's School of Architecture where he chaired the Department of City and Regional Planning from 1991 to 1999. He was appointed to the NYC Planning Commission by Mayor David Dinkins and served on the Planning Commission from 1990-1996. He retired as Director of PICCED in July 2003 and is now a full time faculty member in Graduate Center for Planning and the Environment at the School of Architecture at Pratt Institute.