

Urban Planning and Heterodox Economics in the United States: Progressive Partners to Reduce Inequalities

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1. Introduction: Inequality in the Urban Environment

The disciplines of heterodox economics and urban planning have advanced in parallel, oblivious to each other in their quest for reducing inequalities. A collaboration between these fields of study, we argue, would help create synergies and bring to realization their core emphases on social provisioning and social justice, respectively, making progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 10¹: reducing inequalities. Informed by orthodox economics, however, most current approaches to urban planning practice reproduce, and often even exacerbate, historical socio-economic and environmental injustices and inequalities. The level of inequality in the United States is unsustainable, both in its expression as uneven development between regions and within cities (Bieri 2012; Gotham 2014), and across racial-ethnic groups (Ayala and Robinson 2020; Darity et al. 2017), expanding disparities in economic mobility (Saez and Zucman 2014). In the United States, while net productivity has grown considerably in the past 40 years, worker wages have been nearly flat (EPI 2019). Saez and Zucman (2014) estimate that those earning over USD 1.5 million per year, the top one-tenth of a percent of earners, hold an amount of wealth comparable to the bottom 90% of income earners. Real wage stagnation and unemployment generate destabilizing inequalities that shape our cities.

As humanity becomes ever more urbanized, the urban environment is an ever more effective place in which to intervene to reduce inequalities. However, many of the urban policy interventions with the intended result of reducing inequalities are paradoxically perpetuating them. We discuss how this is the case in the context of US housing policy—particularly as it pertains to the role of underlying racial-ethnic and socio-spatial inequality in generating uneven housing outcomes—where the very policies claiming to be progressive expand existing

¹ Goal 10. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Available online: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal10> (accessed on 23 May 2021).

group-based and place-based inequalities (Dawkins 2020a). We explore ways to overcome this paradox by illustrating how heterodox economics and urban planning in practice could synergistically reinforce their respective disciplinary aspirations to speed up a transition to a more equitable world. In doing so, we point out how calls for a Jobs Guarantee program, derived from heterodox economics,² together with the support of locally based planning initiatives and a Homes Guarantee program, could bring us much further than we have come before toward reducing inequalities.

Both the Jobs Guarantee and Homes Guarantee are proposals necessarily established and funded at the federal level, which need grounding in local communities. Progressive planning around the globe has long experimented with local initiatives for equitable and sustainable cities (Angotti 2011; Angotti 2020; Goldsmith 2016; Irazábal 2009b; Irazábal 2018; Koh et al. 2020). The more of these local initiatives we can put to work together with Jobs Guarantee and Homes Guarantee programs, the more robust they would become with respect to mitigating inequalities in general, and the housing crisis in particular. This is where planning can contribute to the implementation of policies rooted in heterodox economics. Planning practitioners directly engaged in the transformation of the built environment can aid in proposal making and implementation in a manner sensitive to the various contexts of communities and places. While this exploration is situated in the political economy of the contemporary US, it is also relevant for communities outside of the US. Proposals from the rest of the world could inspire policy experimentation in the US, and proposals in the US can inform the rest of the world (see Angotti 2020; Ghosh 2014; Irazábal and Angotti 2017; Tcherneva 2013, 2020).

Securing the right to a home and a job, two basic economic rights with international precedents,³ are vital steps toward reaching SDG 10 targets. To achieve necessary levels of “income growth among the bottom 40% of the population” (SDG 10.1); “social, economic, and political inclusion of all” irrespective of social identity or status, including a reduction in the “proportion of people living below

² Three such heterodox approaches to the discipline of economics are (i) post-Keynesian; (ii) institutionalists (both approaches including economists working under the framework of modern monetary theory) who have consistently made calls for a greater role for fiscal policy to achieve full employment of workers who would take a job (Forstater 2006; Murray and Forstater 2013; Fullwiler 2007; Tcherneva 2020; Whalen 2019; Wray 2020); (iii) those developing stratification economics who call for a jobs guarantee and emphasize the program as a step toward addressing racial disparities in the US (Aja et al. 2018; Darity 2005; Darity et al. 2017; Darity and Mullen 2020).

³ In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (U.S. G.P.O 1949), Article 23 calls for the right to employment with just and favorable working conditions and protections against unemployment, while Article 25 references the right to housing as a part of an adequate standard of living.

50 per cent of median income” (SDG 10.2); equal opportunity and a reduction of “inequalities of outcome” (SDG 10.3), and an increase of the worker share of GDP (SDG 10.4) will require a commitment to universal, legally enforceable economic rights. In the Millennium Development Goals, the right to employment was situated as an objective “for both its intrinsic and instrumental value,” not tied to the goal of economic growth as in SDG 8 (Frey and MacNaughton 2016). Still, both documents stop short of calling for the right to homes or jobs for all as a goal in itself. While particular nation-states, regions, and localities are more appropriate scales for planning and implementation, there still exists a need for the declaration of international human rights and their alignment with social and economic policies.

SDG 10.3 specifies the elimination of discrimination through laws, policies, and practices. Addressing inequality within cities also rests on actions that address group-based, socio-spatial advantages offered to dominant groups and those spaces they inhabit. Social identity-based discrimination, contemporary and historical, underlies the development of our cities. In the US, the isolation of white communities through private practices supported by federal policy has resulted in extensive racial–ethnic segregation (Gotham 2014). Housing policies continue to deliver advantages for whites built on the oppression of and extraction from Black, Latinx, and immigrant communities in cities across the US (Irazábal and Farhat 2008; Garay-Huaman and Irazábal 2020). Notably, SDG 10.4 recognizes the responsibility of nations to act to implement “fiscal, wage and social protection policies.” Jobs Guarantee and Homes Guarantee programs provide a meaningful step forward toward reducing inequality and securing universal economic rights.

2. Synergies between Heterodox Economics and Urban Planning: From Alienation to Allies for Reduced Inequalities

Conceptual frames from neoclassical economics such as profit and utility maximization, land and housing commodification, and externalities are incorporated and naturalized uncritically within the urban planning discourse and practice (Stein 2019; Foglesong 1986). Informed by conventional economics, current approaches to urban planning practice often fail to provide for just provisioning of urban environments and exacerbate historical socio-economic and environmental injustices and inequality (Angotti 2011; Angotti et al. 2020). Planning practitioners, directly engaged in the transformation of the built environment, all too often rely on or feel trapped around the logic of market-centric neoclassical economics. This state of affairs is both unsustainable and avoidable (Letelier and Irazábal 2018). Our cities hold untapped potential to help us solve some of the most enduring

challenges the world faces, such as eliminating poverty and reducing inequality, and some of the emerging challenges defining our era, such as climate change (IPCC Special Report 2018). Yet, paradoxically, the socio-economic and environmental policy approaches present in our cities often both compound and concentrate these challenges. These conditions are sustained to a great extent because of the type of planning and economics relied upon. This chapter problematizes the naturalized economic assumptions that support conventional planning and proposes that a purposeful integration of heterodox economic thinking into urban planning can help us overcome this paradox and inch us closer to the realization of the right to housing and the right to the city for all inhabitants.

Conventional planning too often operates as if neoclassical economics were the only game in town to provide the rationale and the policy instruments of urban interventions. Yet, economic assumptions are social constructions. There is nothing natural or immutable about them. Economics is a contested discipline with alternative traditions. While a dominant neoclassical economics approach is at the field's core, heterodox economics—including post-Keynesian, Marxian, original institutionalist, ecological, stratification economics, and feminist economics—hold a larger promise to assist planning in the delivery of the just city (Benería 1995; Fainstein 2013; Marcuse 2017). However, thus far, heterodox economics and urban planning have largely advanced in parallel, oblivious to each other in their quest for reducing inequality, resulting in their untapped potential synergies.

In the United States, urban planning's code of ethics states that its practitioners should promote the public interest, be conscious of the rights of others, particularly the most disenfranchised, and seek social justice (AICP Code of Ethics 2020). Heterodox approaches to economics, on their part, align with their intent of redefining economics away from "the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses" (Robbins 1948, p. 15) and toward a science of social provisioning (Gruchy 1987; Jo 2011).

The pervasive influence of conventional approaches to economics on planning practice is one important factor behind planning's failure to deliver on its promise. Instead of more just and sustainable cities, we see the escalation of urban injustice and unsustainability around the world, oftentimes brought about by planning interventions (Foglesong 1986; Irazábal 2009a, 2009c). We argue that informing urban planning with theoretical and empirical work from heterodox economics can provide a more historically grounded understanding of the root causes of problems faced by our cities and the institutions that sustain them, and more importantly, instruments and policy ideas to overcome them. We envision the opportunity to

create new policies situated in comprehensive approaches to reduce social, spatial, and economic inequality grounded both in heterodox economics' conception of social provisioning and planning's conception of the right to the city.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight and interrogate the potential synergies between urban planning practice and a selective set of economic perspectives often under interrogated within planning and urban studies: post-Keynesian, stratification economics, and institutional economics. Critical urban studies scholars and geographers have built up an extensive literature critiquing conventional urban planning, urban and regional economic development, and neoliberal urbanism broadly (Peck et al. 2013; Brenner et al. 2017; Angotti et al. 2020). Urban political economy, critical urban studies, and critical geography broadly endeavor together in these critiques, while also presenting imperative policies, cases, and social movements to combat market-centric neoliberalism (Di Feliciano 2016) and deliver rights to the city (Brenner et al. 2017).

2.1. Heterodox Economics and Urban Planning: A Fruitful Partnership?

Both urban planning and heterodox economics face shortcomings on their own when put to the task of overcoming the challenges of contemporary cities. On their own, they have proven incapable of delivering policy solutions that lead to equitable and sustainable cities. Urban planning provides us with tools to make planning, policy, and project interventions for the betterment of cities and the people who inhabit them. However, too often, the normative stance found in much of the discipline's stated goal faces barriers to its full realization.⁴ Planning's conventional focus on local and regional scales, on project interventions, and over-reliance on market-based solutions often impede its ability to fully promote public interests. While explainable in the current institutional arrangements and ideological hegemony of neoliberalism, this narrow planning focus inhibits a deep problematization, let alone transformation of the structural dynamics and institutions that generate inequitable outcomes. Realities of identity-based discrimination, income and wealth inequality, environmental degradation, and the institutions underlying the perpetuation of these social ills frequently remain unexplored, untouched, and worst yet, reified in planning practice.

⁴ In the US context, the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) has established a code of ethics that centers on justice and sustainability.

Heterodox economics, with its emphasis on analyzing and proposing strategies to surpass political-economic forces generating inequalities across time and space, can aid in overcoming some of the shortcomings of planning practice. The potential is there, given that heterodox economics focuses on how society solves the “economic problem” of social provisioning—“the process of providing for the material well-being of society”—through its social relations of production, consumption, and distribution and the institutions through which we organize material provisioning (Heilbroner and Milberg 2012, p. 1; Forstater 2004). Heterodox economists share the endeavor to present an alternative to mainstream economic thought and practice of the 20th and 21st centuries. Heterodox economics, in its many forms, carries the common goal of explaining the social provisioning process (Lee and Cronin 2018). In this chapter, we emphasize the heterodox schools of economic thought termed post-Keynesian economics, original institutionalist economics, and stratification economics, all of which have made contributions to heterodox economics and rely on a long tradition of political economy.

On their part, however, various strands of heterodox economics often lack consideration of the urban scale and a theorization of the production of space and the urban environment broadly (Obeng-Odoom 2016; Sheppard 2016). Economic analysis often lacks a meaningful interrogation of spatial relationships and conditions. An important exception is critical or Marxian urban political economy, which has often shown up in academic planning work for the critique of planning and social theory of urban environments “as are,” but has not sufficiently informed planning “as it should be” nor has it bridged the gap to planning practice (Castells 1979; Harvey 2009). When focused on the urban scale, there is a tendency in heterodox economics to focus on critique over proposal making when considering policy changes or institutional adjustments. Traditionally, heterodox economics primarily focuses on theoretical understandings of structural processes and institutional forces. Nonetheless, planning’s focus on real places and communities and on proposal making can provide heterodox economics with some much-needed grounding.

2.2. The Promise of Partnering Urban Planning and Heterodox Economics

Planning practice is hamstrung by its reliance on conventional approaches to economic theory and practice, often referred to as neoclassical economics. The main building blocks of the theoretical edifice of neoclassical economics are choice (preferences), rational individual agents (consumers maximize utility and firms maximize profits), competition (supply, demand, and the price system), equilibrium, and scarcity (Glaeser 2008). The combination of these elements generates theoretical

and empirical social constructs that neither capture the complexity of social reality nor generate analyses and policy prescriptions outside of those with the market as a catch-all solution to economic problems.

Those working from the perspective of neoclassical economics are often unable to generate a compelling understanding of urban environments or a way of acting on them capable of addressing historical injustices and generating effective policies to redress the uneven and unsustainable developmental status quo (O'Connor 1989). One salient example of this is urban economics' over reliance on the concept of spatial equilibrium. Glaeser (2008, pp. 2–3) states: “[t]he economic approach to cities starts with the assumption that locations are chosen and that those choices are not entirely irrational,” and this process generates, he adds, “the most important concept in urban or regional economics: the spatial equilibrium.” Spatial equilibrium is represented mathematically as an objective function to be maximized, subject to some restrictions. Using the concept, Glaeser (2008, p. 165) arrives at the conclusion that “urban poverty is evidence of urban strength . . . cities are poor because poor people choose cities, not because cities make people poor.” This mathematical–deductivist method is not only unrealistic, but it has hardly any explanatory power (Lawson 2003; Sheppard 2016). At its worse, it can have perverse effects. Reliance on approaches based on neoclassical economics leads planning practitioners to focus almost exclusively on market-based policy interventions—placing faith in the market to generate socially optimal equilibrium outcomes at the urban scale.

From a planning standpoint, there are many worrisome implications that emerge from relying upon neoclassical economics. Given the ubiquitous influence of the notion of scarcity, we selectively focus on it briefly. As mentioned before, the aim of neoclassical economics is to determine the optimal allocation of scarce resources. The assumption is that, given humans' unlimited wants and needs and the limited number of available resources, it is impossible to fulfill all our material demands. Thus, scarce resources must be allocated optimally. There are, however, two major problems of contemporary economies conceived through the lens of scarcity. On the one hand, the current system of production and consumption is causing ecological devastation (IPCC Special Report 2018); on the other, the great majority of the world's population has not reached a decent level of material provision, with uneven outcomes across groups and places.

In contrast to the scarcity approach, heterodox economics concerns the study of the social provisioning process—“an emergent system of socio-economics activities that generate an array of surplus goods and services needed to sustain households and their social relationships, and thus society as a whole” (Lee and Cronin 2018,

p. 36). It is a pluralistic and often interdisciplinary approach to the study of economics. A social provisioning approach focuses on group-based analysis and collective action instead of the methodological individualism found in neoclassical economics. This approach directly relates to the shift among critical urban scholars since the 1960s, moving away from the supposed scientific rigor of a positivist methodology that avoided normative statements in favor of developing scholarship that explored normative concepts of justice and equity (Fainstein 2013). Neoclassical economics embraces an objectivity pretense, whereby “values are obscured by the attempt to be a value-free science” (Dugger 1996, p. 32).

Defining economics as the science of the social provisioning process has major implications for theorizing both economics and planning, and for devising planning interventions. Reconciling planning’s divergent priorities would not be conceived as forced trade-offs between economic growth, ecological sustainability, and social justice, as it is commonly perceived (Campbell 1996). Instead, it would open up a different paradigm that can be built on the grounds of pluralist heterodox economics, from which different strategies for reducing inequality in cities can be comprehensively pursued.

In the often-cited article on the “planner’s triangle”, economic, environmental, and equity planning objectives are theorized under the notion of conflicting, although potentially complementary, interests (Campbell 1996). There is competition between economic–environmental, economic–equity, and environmental–equity goals. While Campbell attempts to explain the sometimes complementary nature of these interests, underlying these potential conflicts is a notion of competition, which obscures what would be possible if planners were to incorporate the notion of social provisioning. At the core of what Campbell calls the “divergent priorities of planning” are not just the conflictual relations of different disciplinary languages (e.g., environmental, economic, and political) and the divergent planning objectives emanating from them. Instead, there is a deeper ideological challenge that goes beyond interdisciplinary misunderstandings. It is an epistemological and ontological stand that extols a restrictive notion of competition as a fundamental feature of human relations. However, the “fiscal constraints” limiting the ability of planners to pursue their disciplinary goals gain nuance and can be rethought in light of the work of heterodox economics (Campbell 1996; Kelton 2020; Wray 2020). Planners do not need to divide themselves between the competing interests within the “planner’s triangle” in the manner described by Campbell.

Heterodox economics and urban planning have a shared concern for providing the necessary goods and services that allow social reproduction and the well-being

of households, societies, and cities. The social provisioning approach provides the umbrella to connect both disciplines, and to critically deconstruct the developmental status quo, uncover naturalized developmental myths that sustain it, and propose progressive urban development alternatives that could improve the living conditions of marginalized urban communities and attain equity and sustainability (Irazábal 2021; Metawala et al. 2021; Todorova 2013). A refocus of the “economics” of urban planning away from market-centric foundations toward the more holistic approaches found in heterodox economics and the unifying concept of social provisioning can support planners’ efforts to address socio-spatial inequalities present in our cities and neighborhoods.

Below, we focus our discussion on housing because of its central place in both heterodox economics and urban planning. Both disciplines emphasize the human right to housing as a central aspect of promoting healthy cities. Housing is a material requirement for sustaining socially defined acceptable standards of living, and it is a key goal of urban planning to address housing needs. We also focus on housing because, in US urban environments, there is a direct connection between place-based and group-based inequality in the form of low-wealth, low-income, immigrant, and racialized communities chronically lacking access to safe and affordable housing. We consider housing policy in the context of the wider needs for community development (e.g., food access, health services, employment, commercial development, nearby amenities, access to credit, etc.) that support local residents.

3. What Is Required for the Equitable Provision of Housing as a Human Right?

Our current planning and economic institutions create and maintain qualitative and quantitative housing deficits (Cohen 2019; Timmer et al. 1994). Even when decision makers act progressively with the intent of addressing the housing deficit, within the current paradigm they can only partially address its symptoms (i.e., add a few affordable housing units here and there, usually for the upper-income and middle-income classes and little, if anything, for the income- and wealth-poor groups). The trend toward a greater share of high-skill jobs (Rodríguez-Pose and Storper 2019) and high-end housing construction in urban centers (Joint Center for Housing Studies 2019, 2020) makes the status quo more unsustainable. Pushing low-income housing cost-burdened residents out of urban centers generates a dearth of workers required to keep cities functioning, longer commute times, and greater burdens on infrastructure and the environment, among several other negative effects. Addressing these symptoms, planners and policymakers have little room to maneuver before upsetting market principles and the powerful stakeholders that

benefit from them. Thus, what is implemented to create affordable housing under these conditions is often too little, too late. Not only has this maintained the status quo, but it has widened the gap between the haves and have-nots, compounding the crisis.

In order to avoid these spiraling down dynamics, we would need to move beyond considering housing as a commodity and exclusively material provisioning process and redress the institutional forces preventing the implementation of policies to realize in tandem the right to safe and affordable housing and the right to the city for all urban residents. Envisioning the provisioning of these rights will require that we change our urban economics paradigm, scaling up and broadening the scope of housing policy to encompass systemic investments in people and places.

For example, supported by urban planning and heterodox economics, a Homes Guarantee program, coupled with policy proposals for a Jobs Guarantee program, can move us toward these goals. A Homes Guarantee that centers the right to housing through social housing provision, support for municipalities to house displaced peoples, regulation and policing of developments and landlords, greater control over housing outcomes to tenants facing housing insecurity, etc. shows promise when coupled with efforts to reduce growing income and wealth inequality (Austin 2019; Di Feliciano 2016; People's Action 2019). A Job Guarantee program would further support the equitable and sustainable development of communities that have faced disinvestment (Wisman 2010). During the COVID-19 pandemic-induced economic crisis, in June 2020, nearly one-third of workers filed for unemployment benefits. At the same time, nearly one-third of households in the US were unable to make rent payments. In times of crisis and economic upheaval, a Jobs Guarantee program would provide wages and economic stabilization, allowing families to stay in their homes and shelter in place during a public health crisis.

Within a Jobs Guarantee program, unemployed and underemployed workers would be given the opportunity to earn a living wage with benefits, which the existing market will not or cannot provide without requirements for minimum education level or skills, means testing, or time limits (Tcherneva 2020). Above and beyond its role in generating jobs, the Jobs Guarantee program places participation over alienation as an automatic stabilizer during swings in the business cycle. The price anchor of an employer of last resort program replaces the role of unemployment to generate economic and price stability (Wray 2020). Labor and housing policy should aim at providing for the rights to employment and housing in tandem.

Even when the official unemployment rate is below the problematic conventional conception of the “natural rate of unemployment” in the US today,⁵ working-class wage growth has been stalled for 40 years (EPI 2019; CRS 2019). A Jobs Guarantee program would disproportionately benefit those who have been the least successful at securing work that pays a living wage, provides a benefits package, and affords the opportunity for economic mobility. The program can be designed in such a way so as to provide residents of marginalized places with on-the-job training and jobs that meet the skills and needs of local residents, providing public service employment to the community in which they live and doing so while generating environmentally sustainable cities (Forstater 2006).

A Homes Guarantee program would entail durable investments to support those lacking the right to housing, providing safe, healthy, accessible, and affordable homes for all. Informed by existing social housing programs in other countries, calls for a Homes Guarantee program propose congressional legislation to build 12 million homes for those facing an extreme housing cost burden, paying over 50% of their income to rent (People’s Action 2019). This is accomplished through a public option for housing, social housing, owned and operated by municipal governments and a USD 200 billion Community Control and Anti-Displacement Fund to give grants to local governments to re-house displaced people, regulate exploitative developers, and provide communities with the resources necessary to build alternative ownership models, such as resident-run co-ops and community land trusts (CLTs) that support true community control. (People’s Action 2019, p. 14)

This would entail the construction of new housing units and reinvestment in existing public housing.

Proposed benefits of a Homes Guarantee program include reduced hospital and psychiatric admissions and incarceration rates, more mixed-income residential communities, environmentally sustainable development and decarbonization, increased social cohesion in neighborhoods, accessible workforce development and employment opportunities, healthier homes, and displacement prevention. These provisions would “improve education, health, and employment prospects for tens of millions of people” (People’s Action 2019, p. 19). These programs are an investment in our people and communities, akin to those created in the United States in the post-WWII period. Economic rights are also at the center of the enduring struggle

⁵ The natural rate of unemployment or non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment (NAIRU) makes a positive rate of unemployment a central policy goal, codifying the severe social costs of unemployment (Galbraith 1997).

for civil rights in the US—the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Sadie Alexander’s calls for economic justice through a Jobs Guarantee (Banks 2005),⁶ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (U.S. G.P.O 1949), and Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s proposed Second Economic Bill of Rights, all of which call for the recognition of legally enforceable economic rights to employment and shelter.

Rent control, zoning regulations (e.g., city-wide independent central zoning), a vacant land and building tax, and square footage tax would be effective insofar as these policies reduce market power and speculative behavior and can create socially beneficial incentives to develop affordable housing. The federal government would tax and regulate so as to reduce speculation and price-setting behavior of powerful real estate development interests rather than to raise revenue to subsidize the building or renovation of units for affordable housing (Kelton 2020; Wray 2020).

At the macroeconomic level, we have seen persistent levels of inflation at 2%, although we still find primary sectors that are driving up costs in the areas of healthcare, energy and transportation, higher education, and housing which are felt widely across the economy. The role of housing in driving underlying pressures, especially on low-income and people of color residents, takes on even greater importance when we look behind the veil of aggregate inflation rates.

As an “aggregate” problem, addressing failures of past housing policies requires a federal-level intervention for two reasons. First, local and state governments cannot be expected to generate sufficient funding for large-scale changes in the provision of community development through housing and employment. One of the components driving inflationary pressures in the macroeconomy is the shortage of productive capacity, which in this case refers to a shortage of viable housing units of particular types and in particular places. Contrary to the dominant theories of labor markets in economics, people are not perfectly mobile pieces of the production process who can move to other cities to chase lower housing prices. People are tied to communities, jobs, and schools in particular places. Thus, solving the housing crisis involves addressing the quantitative and qualitative housing gap in a way that is responsive to local contexts and needs, including local and regional ecological capacity, culturally appropriate housing types and modes of housing tenure, and housing conditions. Second, in addition to the context-specific demand for housing units, localities must contend with various forms of market power, such as zoning laws, the capture of local

⁶ Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander was the first African American economist in the United States (see Banks 2005).

political activities, monopsony or employer influence in labor markets, the absence of rent control, and tax-incentive power allowing powerful stakeholders to affect what the market will bear. Taxing, regulation, and changes in national standards for housing policy would ensure an equitable path forward from the housing crisis and the blunders in housing policy in the United States throughout the history of the country.

It is within the capacity of the United States to provide decent housing for all. The US federal government is not facing financial or material scarcity with respect to housing, as the public is led to believe, but institutional and political constraints. The federal budget of a sovereign monetary nation such as the US does not operate in the same manner as a state, local, or household budget despite the prevalent myth that this is the case (Kelton 2020; Murray and Forstater 2013; Murray and Forstater 2018; Wray 2020). If a state, municipality, or household spends more than it has, it accrues debt. This is not a sustainable way of managing affairs, and if left unattended, can lead to crippling financial instability and a private debt crisis (e.g., the Great Recession). Conversely, the US federal government issues its own currency or unit of account, for example, the US dollar, and the constraint of federal spending under this condition comes in the form of real, physical, or operational constraints, not financial constraints. Per our example above, the federal government would tax and regulate to incentivize socially beneficial behavior throughout the economic system, i.e., reduce speculation and price-setting behavior of powerful interests, rather than raise revenue to fund federal programs. This understanding of monetary, credit, and debt relations is a key contribution of heterodox economics to urban planning in general, and to ameliorating the housing crisis in particular. It means that, given the political will and proper management of real resource constraints, the US has all the financial resources necessary to address the housing deficit in the short run and plan for housing provisions to prevent a crisis situation from occurring again in the future.

Across the globe, destabilizing levels of inequality exist in terms of access to core economic rights. From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the New Deal era in the US to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and today's Poor People's Campaign and Movement for Black Lives in the US, there have been many efforts to provide legally enforceable economic rights as a precondition for civil rights. Aside from the moral content of arguments in support of the economic rights to a safe, affordable home and meaningful, living-wage employment (Dawkins 2021), these formal declarations in the US and across the international community demonstrate public recognition of the right to housing and employment. The degree

of monetary sovereignty present in a national economy determines the degree to which public money can be placed in public services to deliver the core economic rights to employment and housing (Ndongo Samba 2020; Tymoigne 2020). In fact, national governments are responsible for the current exclusionary and predatory social contract that targets a positive rate of unemployment.⁷ There is no natural rate of homelessness, and there is no natural rate of exclusion from the social provisioning process via unemployment (Alessandrini 2013; Tcherneva 2020).

Group-Based and Place-Based Inequalities

SDG 10.3 and 10.7 emphasize the importance of eliminating social identity-based discrimination and ensuring the “responsible migration and mobility of people” through the promotion of inequality-reducing legislation, policies, and action. Race–ethnicity, economic security (i.e., employment, income, and wealth), and housing outcomes are deeply intertwined in the US. The positions people occupy in the system of stratification due to traits beyond their control (ascriptive social-identity-based inequality) and the many structural forces that underlie persistent group-based inequalities are tied to housing outcomes (Ellen and Steil 2019; Taylor 2019). The 2019 Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies report cites growing income inequality and diversity of housing needs from different growing demographic groups as key drivers of housing outcomes in the US. The effects of mass incarceration, growing income and wealth inequality, unemployment and underemployment, exposure to environmental risks, and unsafe and unhealthy housing are not shared evenly between groups (Bullard 2019; Gotham 2014; Taylor 2019; Lowe et al. 2020). Growing inequalities in housing, along with fewer job opportunities for the working-age population, persistently high unemployment and underemployment in many neighborhoods, and declining per capita income for urban core residents, hamper the ability of low-income, low-wealth, and disproportionately Black, Latinx, and immigrant residents to access safe, healthy, and affordable housing. High-wage and high-skill jobs are on the rise in urban centers across the US, with high-skilled migration coinciding with a decrease in low-income and low-skill jobs. These structural and institutional arrangements work to maintain and expand housing inequality in the United States, whether or not public policy and zoning changes provide greater flexibility for the market-based construction of more housing (Rodríguez-Pose and Storper 2019), or with any narrow housing

⁷ The natural or non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment (NAIRU).

intervention, even one as bold as the construction of 12 million social housing units across the US, as advocated for by People’s Action (2019).

Several housing-specific historical and institutional factors also curb the ability to address housing challenges, among which are discriminatory real estate industry structures and actors (McDermott and Winslow 2019), financial exclusion and exploitation (Desmond and Wilmers 2019; Taylor 2019), racialized conceptions of taxpayer status (Walsh 2018, and the reification of private property rights and market-based solutions to housing need (Dawkins 2020b, 2021). In cities across the United States, the institutional landscape includes a deficient level of policy focused on affordable housing; a lack of sufficient local, state, and federal funding sources; weak or no affordability criteria in existing housing programs; a failure to preserve existing affordable units; favoring high-end single-family and multi-family housing; movement away from public housing and little non-profit housing development; and a sordid history and persistence of discrimination in housing and urban development (Dawkins and Kim 2022; Gotham 2014; Taylor 2019).

In this chapter, we affirm that a home is a human right that can and should be guaranteed through the construction of new housing and renovation of existing housing stock. We stress that housing interventions alone, however, are not sufficient to ameliorate group- and place-based inequalities in the United States. Public intervention to construct additional units and progressive regulatory changes around housing—for example, the 12 million social housing units called for in recent proposals for a Homes Guarantee program, along with the proposed steps for resident control and decommodification of housing (Homes for All Act 2019; People’s Action 2019)—is arguably insufficient in light of the underlying, systemic inequality in the United States.⁸

Economic inequality lies behind the housing crisis facing the US, and without action to address its many facets, there is little hope of solving this crisis (Timmer et al. 1994). Durable housing policy interventions would need to reflect the complex structures of institutionalized advantage and disadvantage across social groups in our cities and regions (Lung-Amam and Dawkins 2020; Rugh et al. 2015). Underlying dominant urban policy perspectives across the US, the spatial equilibrium models of the housing-as-opportunity school in urban economics fail to incorporate these aspects (Rodríguez-Pose and Storper 2019). Conventional urban economics—while

⁸ Notably, proposals for a Homes Guarantee program include reparations for decedents of US chattel slavery as part of comprehensive economic reforms within the Homes Guarantee (People’s Action 2019).

not fully implemented in the urban and regional landscape of the US over the past 50 years—suggests deregulation for the market-based construction of housing and trickle-down filtering of housing stock as a means for solving the affordability crisis (Rodríguez-Pose and Storper 2019). However, it is suggested that “undifferentiated aggregate supply policies do essentially nothing to abate the underlying structural causes of the housing crisis” (Rodríguez-Pose and Storper 2019, p. 19). The current mix of neoliberal housing policy and short-term place-based interventions is not fit for the purpose of reducing inequality in our cities, and a path forward to realize housing as a human right would require comprehensive efforts to address economic inequality.

4. How Do We Pay for It? Federally Funded Programs to Address the Housing Crisis in the United States

Despite the far-reaching and cumulative impacts of a Homes or Jobs Guarantee program, which complicate calculating cost savings and overall financial costs associated with these investments in housing and community needs, several estimates demonstrate the feasibility of such programs in the United States (Murray and Forstater 2018). Paul et al. (2018) estimate the cost of a federal Job Guarantee program at USD 543 billion, just three percent of GDP, for the employment of an estimated 9.7 million full-time workers. Wray et al. (2018) estimate the need for a public service employment program to employ an estimated 11 to 16 million people (using US Bureau of Labor Statistics Q3 and Q4 2017 estimates of the un- and underemployed). Macroeconomic simulations of the program’s effects find that the program will have “substantial macroeconomic benefits while also having a modest direct cost and much smaller net budgetary impact,” employing 11 to 16 million workers with an annual net budgetary effect of between 0.83 and 1.62 percent of GDP (Wray et al. 2018). The social (and economic) costs of homelessness, unsafe and unhealthy housing, and related community needs such as those surrounding involuntary unemployment and underemployment far outweigh the costs of addressing these needs through durable investments (Hartman 1998; Tcherneva 2017).

Job Guarantee proposals are a compelling case to reference for answering questions about our capacity to address housing needs for several reasons, primarily because such programs would address housing as more than shelter, linking them to supportive habitats and socio-economic structures underlying inequality in housing outcomes. There are many links between producing safe and healthy dwellings and communities and policies related to Jobs Guarantee programs, such as the

potential for public service employment to support the renovation, construction, “greening,” and maintenance of housing and habitat (Forstater 2006; Tcherneva 2017; Wray et al. 2018), including the work of addressing environmental hazards that disproportionately plague low-wealth and racialized communities, e.g., lead-loaded soil and financial exclusion (Hendricks and Van Zandt 2021). Second, just as labor force indicators show the recent recession recovery period, ongoing for many groups, to be longer and deeper than any downturn and recovery since the Great Depression (Ayala and Robinson 2020), so has been the downturn in housing.

The 2019 and 2020 updates of Harvard’s Joint Center for Housing Studies report on the State of the Nation’s Housing and the State of the Nation’s Rental Housing, respectively, highlight a continuing deficit in the supply of housing for low- and middle-income households. Housing construction, in overall shortage, has been serving the higher end of the market in recent years. The reports cite labor shortages as a possible explanation, among others, for the short supply of housing. With recent developments in the US, many urban neighborhoods are becoming areas of stark contrasts. Even with the proximity to job centers in urban areas (i.e., they are located near central business districts), the qualitative nature of jobs available, services, and housing in recent decades often excludes long-time residents. Alongside urban core assets and employment centers, there often exists concentrated homelessness and a concentration of households with incomes below the federal poverty level. This concentration of income- and wealth-poverty leaves communities concentrated in many segregated urban core neighborhoods in the US more vulnerable to local and national economic downturns and increases housing instability and unhealthy housing conditions. The uneven impact of the Great Recession and sub-prime lending crisis on racialized groups shows this (Rugh et al. 2015).

5. Conclusions

The initial motivation of this study was a shared frustration by heterodox economists and urban planning scholars (the authors) about the failures of their respective disciplines to deliver in practice their goals for equitable and sustainable cities, and intrigue about the similarities of aims and dissimilarities of means may bring to their potential collaboration. We end the study with heightened hopes for what these hitherto estranged bedfellows can offer to progressive urban politics by synergistically working together.

Current planning interventions backed by conventional market-based economics, even at their best, do not deliver the basic material requirements of social provisioning (e.g., housing) at the scale necessary to solve existing and accruing

deficits, and at their worst, expand socio-spatial inequalities, as they poorly attempt such provisioning. The patterns of wealth disparities between groups and places, residential isolation of marginalized groups, and concentrated unemployment and underemployment among residents of many urban neighborhoods highlight the significance of systemic discrimination and its impacts on the ability of individuals and groups to adequately provide for themselves. Not only are the private, market-oriented strategies depended upon in ever-greater degrees since the late 1970s woefully inadequate to redress these inequalities, but they also exacerbate them.

More fundamentally, current planning interventions backed by conventional economics *cannot* in essence, and in principle, deliver planning's promise of the right to housing and to the city and reducing inequalities. They superficially focus on providing "band-aids" to the symptoms of urban problems they identify, e.g., providing a few units of affordable housing that merely make a symbolic dent, if at all, to the housing crisis. These operations can only sustain the system and maintain the status quo, however precariously and at increasing human, social, and environmental costs. Such planning interventions are consciously or unconsciously blinded to the root causes of such problems, i.e., joblessness, poverty, wealth inequality, marginalization of racialized and income- and wealth-poor peoples, and the treatment of land and housing as commodities.

Legal and enforceable economic rights are essential to provide economic security and stability, and federal Homes and Jobs Guarantee programs provide two reinforcing and inseparable paths to economic security. The sustainable and equitable implementation of Homes Guarantee and Jobs Guarantee programs has the potential to generate a true and lasting right to housing and to the city, building on the synergies of urban planning practice and heterodox economics. Urban planning provides insights into the material, organizational, design, and regulatory structures requiring adjustments for the provision of a right to housing. Heterodox economics illuminates the existing logic and institutions that aid and impede institutional adjustments and help retool them toward the provision of the right to housing and addressing the causes of community distress. The strategic, synergic collaboration between these two disciplines can transform our cities into spaces that effectively serve the public interest and help attain equitable and sustainable cities.

We need a system for the equitable provision of housing to generate investments in communities and within groups facing housing needs and instability. This is within our capacity. We argue that redirecting planning's attention to heterodox economics can redeem it from its lacking service to the market—at the cost of public interests, equity, and sustainability—and realign its energy and imagination with its

ethical mandates. Conversely, purposefully cultivated attention to urban planning by heterodox economists can provide them with the necessary grounding in existing communities and places that their theoretical and methodological schemes have often sorely lacked. Given the promising findings of this initial exploration, further studies of and experimentation with the synergies between urban planning and heterodox economics are fruitful grounds for future research and practice aimed at reducing inequalities.

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