

What does place opportunity mean to you? What makes a place more (or less) opportune? Are there some universal dimensions of place opportunity? Some that are more specific to certain population groups?

What types of practices support opportunity mapping? How can we use the outputs from opportunity mapping exercises for deliberation and policy decision-making?

When I think of place opportunity the thing that comes to my mind most frequently is education. I grew up on the south side of Chicago in Hyde Park which has really great schools and education opportunities. However, my peers from Church who lived in other south side neighborhoods lived in neighborhoods with pretty poor schools. Poor meaning the opportunities were limited, the resources were lacking, and the school was poorly run. These peers of mine had no plans to go to college and no means to apply even if they wanted to. I tested into a school in the west loop and attended there, not going to college wasn't even in the equation at that school. I was required to apply to at least one school and my counselors met with me weekly to make sure I did. My peers at my Church didn't have counselors pushing them to apply to college, they also didn't have family and friends and one of the most prestigious universities in the world (The University of Chicago) to tutor them for free, read their college essays, etc.

I grew up in an opportunity rich place and I am so grateful for that, but it doesn't escape me that many people aren't that lucky. I always think of the phrase, "It takes a village to raise a kid." I used to think it was cliché about the great amount of work involved in raising a child. I've come to understand now, that it really did take a village to help me get to where I am today. I didn't get here alone. I am a hard worker, but if I didn't have the amazing village I had growing up it would've been so much more difficult, if not impossible, for me to get to where I am today.

This is what the concept of place opportunity means to me. In a place of opportunity nobody feels alone. In a place lacking opportunity, everyone is an island.

Sure, you can map food deserts, you can map transit connectivity, you can map walkability, you can map public spaces, and you can map schools. Can you map community though, can you map the people and the heart and soul that those physical locations require to build opportunities? I don't think you can do that very well and that is why this class poses such an interesting challenge to the field. It combines data visualization with topics that aren't data driven. That is the challenge that urban planners face today. How can we address systemic issues that are hidden beneath the surface of our physical landscape?