

STATE OF THE PROFESSION

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Nearly seven years ago, our President Sam van Embden spoke to us on the State of the Profession, on the problems at hand, on the increasing range of aspects and arguments to be considered, on the professional role of the planner.

In preparing this conference, the Executive Committee felt it might be a good idea to take up this topic, to review the situation and the changes apparent in it from time to time. So we thought each President of ISoCaRP should once within his period of office address the General Assembly and give his opinion on the State of the Profession and on the direction in which it seems to move - and possibly in which it ought to move. This will happen roughly on a three year basis - time enough to register some changes in the landscape of planning and in the underlying principles, methods and values.

I have to cover a wider span of time, and many things have happened within these years. Nevertheless, the main features of the picture that Sam van Embden sketched are still valid. There is still much criticism directed against the results of planning, the interpretation of planning as a dynamic process with a need for flexibility has gained even more weight, and we are still in need of better cooperation between planners and researchers, in need of a closer linkage between planning concept and the shape of the three-dimensional environment. On the other hand, there are some changes in emphasis and some new developments, so that the picture is somewhat different today. Most of the more visible changes in roles and regulations are, of course, national in character, yet there seems to be a strong common undercurrent of thought sweeping across national boundaries. I shall try to identify some of its components.

1. Planning has come to be recognized more widely as a political task, as a procedure to choose between possible alternatives in the allocation of spatial and financial resources. The awareness has grown that, behind such alternatives, there are not only technical and aesthetic variations, not only different ways to attain a given goal, but more often different goals or combination of goals - or even different concepts of society.
2. Therefore, we encounter an increasing degree of interdependence between the content of traditional physical planning and a variety of measures of social, economic, and fiscal policy. Obviously, this has to do with the growing complexity of the mechanisms with which we try to direct the course of society. I do not say that we are mastering this problem, the danger is undeniable that such mechanisms become so unwieldy as to stifle most actions.
3. A similar trend is apparent in the procedure of planning: the political implications lead to an increased sensitivity of planners and politicians to public opinion, this is reflected in the emphasis on public participation and on other means to improve

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and to make more transparent the processes of decision making. Consequently, we encounter new interpretations of the planner's role in society. He seems to be bound by a double loyalty, as it were: to his authority and to the people involved - two different manifestations of his abstract client: society.

4. On the other hand, much stress has been laid on more comprehensive theory as a prerequisite for better decisions. This has led to a flood of publications in this field, some of them very abstract, and to a corresponding disappointment of those who expected from theory the output of blueprints for action.

The tide of models to aid planning decisions was still rising when we listened to Sam van Embden at Düsseldorf. Today, it obviously has passed its highest point and is ebbing away. Of course, quite a number of models and simulation procedures which have been developed, are in continuous use, and are worthwhile keeping - but the hopes for a much brighter planning horizon due to large scale models have been largely buried. This cannot surprise: obviously, the city may be considered as a system, but this system is by far too complex to be reproduced adequately in a model. Moreover, the natural preference of the model for quantitative aspects - since this is the only food it can digest - makes it rather insensitive to questions of quality which in the end are our main concern.

5. But behind the fascination by models was more than just an interest in the numerical representation of a part of reality. Behind it was a remarkable optimism with respect to the ends and means of planning. Many of us were more careful in this respect, and Sam van Embden's speech reflects this scepticism of the experienced planner. However, "change" was still a good word at that time, whereas by now it has lost much of its charm. On the contrary: there is a strong feeling, at least in Western Europe, and probably in some other areas of the world, too, that change has been too widespread and too fast, that change has not fulfilled the promises it seemed to hold, that change ought to be controlled if not arrested.
6. This has also to do with the realization of possible "limits of growth", with the depletion of resources and the increasing difficulties to dispose of the waste of our industrial civilization. Population stagnation in some countries is a related phenomenon which has contributed to what I am tempted to call a new climate in planning.
7. All this has nourished considerable scepticism directed toward the products of modern planning and modern architecture, and has strengthened the tendency to conserve the buildings of earlier periods as documents of continuity and of local individuality. The European Architectural Heritage Year was an indication of this turn of the tide: it would not have been as successful as it was, were it not for an underlying disposition of many people to mistrust change and to stick to what we have. This holds some dangers in store for rational planning: conservation may easily be overstressed, overloaded with too high expectations.
8. Education for planning has been broadened in scope, taking in a number of new

fields, and has increased in recruitment. Many young people were motivated by the challenge of the situation and by the desire to contribute to the common cause by directing their efforts toward improving the environment. In some countries, however, there are signs of overproduction in market terms: although tremendous problems are still unsolved, the positions in public service and the funds for employment of consultants are lagging far behind. This is a dangerous situation for the future of planning.

These few points give, of course, only an incomplete description of the present situation and of the climate of planning. To round it off, let me say that, in very general terms, I see the situation of planning characterized by three major contradictions:

- We see that more and better legal instruments are necessary, and so bills are drawn up, put before Parliament and enacted - but along with the provision of new tools we develop so many precautions against their misuse that many of the instruments prove impracticable.
- We want to give the citizen more right to influence planning, and this works best at the local level. But at the same time, with growing complexity of planning, more and more real decisions are being made on higher and higher administrative levels, leaving relatively unimportant matters to be decided locally.
- Realizing this complexity of planning we have tried to learn more and more about the interdependencies of man and environment: we should, therefore, be able to make better plans by virtue of our improved knowledge. But it seems that this increase in knowledge has reduced our disposition to act, our courage, and our good conscience. It looks like Hamlet's problem:

"And thus the native hue of resolution
is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

Some of you may feel that this picture is a little overdrawn - but I hope they will concede that the general tendencies seem to work into the directions indicated. If this is so, the new situation cannot but affect the planner, the scope of his activities, his notions of desirable goals, his self-interpretation.

Now let us look from here at the perspectives of planning and the consequences for the profession. A few points seem to emerge:

1. We are going to face more criticism, more challenging of goals and procedures of planning than before. We must count on continuous political interest in - and interference with - planning. The planner will have to respond to it - becoming more alert in the political field, adapting himself to the discussion with the public. The planning office as a seclusion to think about future developments recedes into the past: more objections, more hearings, more law suits, more press conferences are in the offing; and we cannot afford to stay out of them, because otherwise our cause will suffer. This is not meant to be an elegy; the integration of planning into

politics is a price to be paid for an increased influence on reality - in contrast to the splendid isolation of earlier times with a much more secluded role, but with the disadvantage of not being listened to. Still I feel I should sound a note of warning against "overpolitization". What is needed is political consciousness and a sense of political responsibility; this does not necessarily mean political partisanship. In this respect, the findings of Aix and of Munich are still valid.

2. The time of naive extrapolations and of continuous growth perspectives has gone. Economizing resources, utilization of existing heritage will be important. This means striking a balance between innovation and conservation, between hectic change and immobility. The planner will have to exercise his judgement in preparing plans; he should be aware of the values involved, of the moral as well as of the functional side of the problem.
3. The hope for better and more unassailable decisions resting safely on more facts and figures put into EDP programmes are likely to lead to disappointment also in the future. Quantification may clarify limits for reasonable action, thereby reducing the range of planning choice - but it will not work as a substitute to the inventiveness and the creativity, the powers of combination and coordination which we expect of the planner. We should be aware of another pitfall: there has been a strong tendency to develop and to refine planning procedure as if its strict observance would safeguard the best results; one can even speak of "legitimation by procedure". But this again is expecting too much. Good planning procedure is necessary but is neither a substitute nor a guarantee for the qualitative content of planning.
4. The International Congresses of Modern Architecture stated nearly 50 years ago that they wanted to put architecture and town planning back on their real plane: the sociological and economic. Since then, social and economic goals have been considered paramount -and I should add: rightly so. However, this has led sometimes to a neglect of the qualities of the space itself, regardless of its service function to society and economy. This is clearly reflected in the increasing criticism directed against planners for their failure to take account of ecological and aesthetic problems. Different though these fields may be, they have in common that they derive directly from spatial conditions, from the autonomy of the environment.

That does not mean advocating the neglect of social and economic considerations: they still are of primary importance. But it does mean to acknowledge the importance - and the acceptance - of planning issues relating primarily to ecological and aesthetic considerations. Here also, we have the problem of a balance between competing demands - and the planner is the one who is called upon to find it.

5. There is another balance worth mentioning: the experiences of the last years have shown clearly that society is in need of planning, that the free interplay of forces cannot be trusted to bring about socially desirable results. But at the same time, experiences have shown that planning is faced with overwhelming difficulties if it tries to do away with all mechanisms of self regulation, if it tries to replace all sorts

of spontaneous decisions of individuals by a thoroughly planned system. This calls for modesty in our profession: it does not seem reasonable to construct an alternative of extremes: either market with no planning or planning with no market. What is really needed, seems to be in the middle: the maintenance of self-regulating mechanisms as far as they can be made compatible with common goals - and on the other hand, the construction of a framework for planning which will secure that the professed values of the society may find expression in the actual process of shaping our environment.

6. All this seems to make the definition of the planner more difficult. What, then, is the profession whose state we are discussing? Obviously, a group of persons with a basic academic training who, however, are thinking not so much in terms of cognition and research, as of decisions and actions. This calls again for some sort of balance: between the attempt to gain as much certainty of scientific grounds as possible and the resolution to decide even under conditions of uncertainty. This is what distinguishes the planner from the researcher: the latter will only speak if and when his findings warrant conclusions, but the planner must be ready to give his advice and to present his plans at any given time. If he fails to do so because he looks for more certainty the decisions will also be taken - but without him and probably by people who know less about the problem than he does.

Traditionally, the profession has been understood as being concerned with physical planning. In the last years we have seen a tendency to sneer at such limitations and to expand the profession's claims to all matters of change in society. Much as I understand this tendency, it seems to me far too ambitious. If a profession is characterized by some degree of expertise in a given field, I do not think that there could be a profession for planning society, economy, and spatial development at the same time.

On the other hand, we should see city and regional planning not in too narrow terms. The expertise in preparing decisions for spatial development may manifest itself in a number of different fields, influencing urban visual form, by preparing statutory plans, by designing regional economic policy, by proposing guidelines for social or even legal policy with respect to space. This may give a hint to our membership policy within the framework of our statutes. There is no stereotyped image of a city and regional planner, to which everybody would conform, but rather a wide and rich variety of people with different skills and different fields of detailed expert knowledge. What unites them and what makes them eligible for our Society is their concern with spatial development and their sense of responsibility to society as a whole.