

STATE OF THE PROFESSION

*Manuel Da Costa Lobo, Portugal
President 1984-1987*

1. Learning from the Past

Where is the profession of urban and regional planning today?

As we get used to having a periodic review of this issue at every third ISoCaRP Congress, made by the passing Presidents, I can ask myself if there is still something new to say or something old worthwhile to repeat. After some meditation, I decided to take the risk of presenting to you some thoughts of my own, where some comments will be as old as ISoCaRP and others will try to bring something new or at least put old ideas in a new way. I remind you that Professor van Embden's State of the Profession was held 18 years ago, and the last one by Dr Lyddon just 3 years ago.

Urbanists became one of the most asked professionals in the forties and fifties for the reconstruction of our destroyed towns all over the world after World War II and to design and create the towns of the future. But people get so used to destruction by wars that urban policies forgot to settle a planning strategy for peace. Plans of that period suggested the demolition of obsolete centers, the opening of ring roads, the disruption with the old way of life to build a new one, the levelling of standards, the cold rationalism of functions for pre-conditional communities, the development based on growth.

In one sentence: a too strong planning approach for human beings!

Most people, most regions, most countries could not follow the system. They got behind, they got lost, they got marginalized. The settled format of planning has been responsible for the speed of marginalization, that became one of its more dramatic and negative side effects.

All this has already been stressed during our congresses. From the fifties and sixties onwards there was a great evolution of some principles of urban planning. They include the following changes:

- a. Planning must learn to work for development even where there is no growth. This needs new administrative strategies.
- b. Planning must learn to design updated towns and old tissues without destroying them. This needs imagination.
- c. The architectural heritage must be respected and old areas must be rehabilitated and revitalized. This needs culture.
- d. The human scale, nature and feelings must be considered. This needs participation, and participation needs information, dialogue and education.

Da Costa Lobo

- e. The town has been created and must be the home of men and every man of each community must have his place in the town in order to achieve the integration of activities and purposes. This is what a town is for.
- f. Human marginalization must be abolished and the dignity of every man respected, being a task of public administration to look for the overall strategy that could fulfil that requirement. This needs efficiency of public administration and very pragmatic management.
- g. The interdisciplinary method of work must put a strong accent on the environment, fighting the trends of increasing pollution and danger of catastrophes, and it has to learn how to develop in depth impact studies. This needs permanent research.

2. Changing Structures

Urbanists' education and training, planning approach and public administration have to change in order to cope with new goals and new awareness. Furthermore, changing must be differentiated throughout the world. Professionals must announce that planning within a frame of human freedom is not only possible, but the very way of respecting the dignity of every man and of attaining the targets of society. The concept of plans have to play the important role of communication and of settling the rules to be followed between the partners. Planning will include the process of implementation and the system of research and monitoring, of creative activity for change and development, of management, of settling objectives and strategies, of safeguarding values and heritage, of choosing the tactics.

In recent years there has been a big change in professional structures. In most European countries there are now professional associations of urbanists (town and regional planners). The former Liaison Committee, aiming at getting a link between professional associations and the EC has been transformed into the new European Council of Town Planners. In other countries and continents there are also similar organizations. Differences between them ask for working towards better understanding and better communication. ISOCaRP accepted last year collective membership of institutes and organizations within the Society. Through this initiative, we hope to get a stronger participation of professionals of distant countries and to speed up the process of common definitions of the basic concepts:

- a. the urbanist, as a recognized professional of town and regional planning;
- b. the ethics of the profession;
- c. the education;
- d. the city and the region;
- e. the urban planning procedures;
- f. the planning fields of work;
- g. the role of planners.

Furthermore we intend to expand our Society to more countries and only a regional

frame and greater international help will avoid the negative side-effects of being spread out over the world. From the regional point of view, and outside Western Europe we need some strong support and poles of regional attraction in:

- Eastern Europe and the USSR
- North America
- South America
- North Africa
- Meridional Africa
- East Mediterranean countries and the Near East
- Far East and Australia
- India, China and neighbouring countries.

We need to develop the idea of stronger links between professionals of different countries and we hope that more colleagues who are with us today will offer themselves for this effort, with their work and their enthusiasm to reach our common objective.

Each year there are more regional seminars and meetings besides our main ISoCaRP annual congress, which shows the vitality of our members. This is the way of less expensive interchange of ideas within regions. It seems to me that this is a good trend. We are also making an effort to develop our Bulletin and Newsletter, to promote the communication of facts and ideas between members. Furthermore we are trying to strengthen the links with other organizations, such as IFHP, INTA, and of course, UNESCO and the Council of Europe.

3. Last Year's Main Trends

Besides the general evolution in town planning and in the role of professionals which I referred to before it seems possible to think about the developments in planning over these last 3 years. Let me suggest 7 points to stimulate your thoughts:

1. The population of industrialized countries is declining in number and in number of persons per family, most of them getting more sophisticated jobs which often leads to strong labour force migrations, even between continents. Demographic increase in developing countries is still going on but shows, here and there, some signs of slowing down.
2. Ecological disasters are becoming more frequent and known and society is becoming more conscious of the decline of natural resources and of the danger of hazardously taken decisions with negative ecological side-effects.
3. Cultural heritage conservation is becoming a subject of high priority for governmental policy. The awareness of cultural and architectural heritage values is increasing very rapidly. A theoretical approach is being developed and conservation is being included in the aims of political programs. Rehabilitation has

Da Costa Lobo

been the subject of research and experiments. Creativity of professional planners and architects demonstrates that it is feasible and positive to bring the past back to life. This is the new direction of urban development, much richer, much more human and more promising.

4. The well-known interdisciplinary and systematic concept of planning is developing new formats, being more integrated, open to new sciences and professions, and experimenting interschool training courses.
5. A new boom of planning is taking place in several places. Professionals are organizing themselves within national and international associations of planners, and experiments have been undertaken with new formats for plans and planning. As far as non-planning has been tried: facts showed its failure - a kind of trap for public administration and people in general: less coordination, malfunctions, economic losses and utopic increase of personal freedom, only possible beyond planning limits by reducing the freedom of others.
6. Land used as a capital good is increasing very rapidly and its acquisition for economic investment is becoming a general concern all over the world. Prices are going up and land turns out to be an alternative to gold. It became an important component of the planning strategy. Agricultural land is therefore decreasing, land ownership is being questioned and a kind of anxiety touches millions of families.
7. Economic crises are developing in industrialized countries and spreading to the Third World. The main alternative switch from weapon industry (creating jobs) to science and advanced technology (to spend on big international infrastructures, like tunnels and bridges, or new ways of transportation and communication) and to Third World aid programs, including housing. The latter forms the link of these thoughts with the subject of our congress - the homeless issue - and with the aim of peace and solidarity.

These seven points are enough to show us how important the development in town planning has been during the last three years and how relevant this development is for professional strategies.

Looking at Professor Albers' "State of the Profession", eleven years ago, I think we could still repeat most of his remarks, as the one, for instance, where he stated that planners needed a basic academic training leading not only to knowledge and research but also to decision and actions, within permanent conditions of uncertainty. He also spoke about modesty while both Professor van Embden and Dr Lyddon asked for humility. I would claim, today, for more professionalism of urbanists, including also care for urban space and other important qualities to perform our tasks. It also seems to me that some changes in emphasis are taking place on the way of planning. We all agree on the need of supporting the process of decision, but the importance of forecasting went down while the importance of monitoring went up, asking for a kind of planning and management that brings the careful timing of decisions and actions to the first place of our professional targets. Strategic planning becomes crucial and now we learn that

shape and size of towns can play a part in it. Urbanists are well aware that they must work within a team, where they play their role through their knowledge and experience on spatial arrangements but strongly inter-facing with the other professionals. Our job must be a formal synthesis, where the creative and artistic capacities of the planner and the culture of the community must come together to get the final result.

We also learn that participation is a must for success, but not a kind of participation limited to freedom to give an opinion on planning matters. What we need is real participation, meaning effort, work, investment and all other inputs of people. Plans need to fit well with them and operate. This is why professionalism is so important.

Fitness of planning includes the concept of conservation of cultural heritage in a dynamic way. This is why we have not to ask today for a balance between innovation and conservation. Urbanists discover how to get them together, discovering that innovation can be done through a new concept of conservation and rehabilitation and that conservation is only possible through innovation and imaginative creation and inputs.

Looking now to Dr Lyddon's address 3 years ago, we can conclude that he was right. The planners' crisis was beginning to be solved and new ways were being discovered for our professional role and behavior. The professionals in charge of arranging things on the territory work either at their offices, with sophisticated methods, in cooperation with architects and engineers who contribute to the projects. Or they are directly working in the field - namely where there is no time for sophistication of procedures and where the projects are executed by the heads and hands of traditional builders. Sometimes the urbanists become even so-called "barefoot" planners, where other means are scarce. The point is that we must be present everywhere. Where a locational issue is raised, a complete structure has to cover the needs.

Dr Lyddon was also right to ask for an ISoCaRP Charter. The idea was fruitful and now we have already an agreement between European town planning organizations.

Maybe we could make an analogy, whereby physical planning would play the role of hardware, in the teams, and the social sciences the role of software. The physical planners would centre their action around spatial synthesis, art and implementation, and their proposals would bring the long-term approach to:

- social issues;
- physical planning; and
- economic issues.

Dr Lyddon spoke about the two foundations of wider public policy, capturing the increase in land value for the community and ensuring participation. We can stress today that the two are deeply connected and participation would have a very poor meaning if it did not include the offer of resources, namely finance and land, that communities must get to develop their purpose. Now, may I remind you of the exercise Dr Lyddon involved us in, simulating a being which came from another planet and questioning us. Could we change it today a little and simulate a child asking us some

Da Costa Lobo

questions knowing that we are planners, creating the towns of the future, the ones for children to live in:

1. Why do you not make enough towns with sufficient housing for everyone?
2. Why do you let towns decay and be untidy?
3. Why do you destroy buildings and spaces we love, because we were born there and played there with our friends?
4. Why do you not make safe streets and safe crossings?
5. Why do you allow cars parking on the pavements, which are intended for people?
6. Why do you not make nice paths for children to go to school and urban parks for little wild animals to live in?
7. Why do you make such ugly housing estates where we are having difficulties to find and identify our own house and street?
8. Why do you not put more love in your professional tasks, getting more human scale to layouts and urban images?

The answer could be simple: "Well, there are a lot of things you are not yet aware of. When you grow up you will understand. You know, we depend on public administration and decision makers, we depend on money, we depend on human deficiencies and sins (some people are jealous, others are ambitious, other are lazy, others do not care about their neighbours, etc)". Having said so, we would fail to add, with that humility that means professionalism: "O.K. we need your help, your participation, in order to be able to build better towns".

4. The Uncomfortable Issues

Coming to the point we cannot be happy about what is going on. We know that public administration, investors and planners are too often making wrong plans, not fitting with reality, bringing side effects that are worsening the urban environment and the life of people. Planning is making people homeless, planning is forgetting homeless people, planning is suggesting long-term improvements and does not care about today's dramatic situations, planning is presenting misleading policies and actions to people, planning is shown through plans in an inadequate format. But we know that every day is good enough to change our attitude towards ourselves, towards our neighbours and towards the world population in general. Human culture has become more and more universal from the 15th century onwards and it is time to reach maturity, to feel that solidarity is not only a moral duty but also a natural development of human nature in the struggle for survival. We must be aware that most actions we launch are very often too late, though the essence of our profession is to anticipate problems.

We still have a long way to go. We have always been stressing that planning should integrate all facets of life. A relatively new planning approach is the high priority given to our environment and eco-systems. Our economic systems should take into account the environment. That is the basis for a correct planning approach. We must take action to get the needed changes. Planning must be in the center, to help big decision making, but must also develop to the periphery, where people and urban buildings are. The

two-way feed-back is essential for the strategic component of our job. We cannot be honest with ourselves without feed-back and putting research in practice into impact studies. We have to go on fighting: fighting for peace, fighting for participation and fighting for more professionalism.

5. ISoCaRP Programs

At a last point I would like to speak about our future programs and the proposal of Dr Lyddon. I would like to show it within a matrix:

	changes	ability	research	objectives
1986 Paris		x		x
1987 Delhi		x		x
1988 Taormina	x			x
1989 Switzerland	x			x
1990 Poland				

Starting in Paris with the link between research and practice in New Delhi we return to the link between ability and objectives, where practical answers have to be done on the spot and cannot be postponed. Then we have to proceed to fields where changes are urgently needed: the suburbs, the periphery of towns, the urban fringe. There we have to argue about practice, the way of dealing with the complexity of the urban fringe. In 1989 we would tackle changes in a more sophisticated way, doing research and working with telematics for the world of tomorrow, in order to anticipate moves that could be very meaningful for urban and regional planning. In 1990 we are invited by our Polish Delegation. It is time to think more deeply about that congress, but I feel that I must give way to the new President of ISoCaRP to let him talk to us about the future.