

## STATE OF THE PROFESSION

*Javier de Mesones, Spain*  
*President 1990 - 1993*

It is an ISoCaRP tradition that the last speech of the President is related to the "**State of the Profession**".

I do not like to turn this paper into a "medical report", because neither planning nor planners are, or will be, a "Unit of Intensive Care".

The world population grows daily at the frightening rhythm of about 200.000 people, which means theoretically that every 24 hours one new team of numerous planners could devote their whole life to design, build and manage a new big city. It seems that there is no shortage of work.

Under these circumstances, the "**planner's role**" is often considered as a theme of top interest, probably because it is supposed that the planner, in permanent confrontation with change, has to constantly modify his position and to adopt always a new and different attitude with regard to a society in a non-stop evolution.

BUT IT IS NOT LIKE THIS, at least not in its authentic reality, because I am not referring to the external, formal or accidental aspects. I am referring to a **whole, deep and characteristic substratum of our profession**.

For hundreds of years the planner faced the **same set of problems** which have only changed in quantity but not in quality. The issues are changing their intensity without modifying their inherent nature.

You know well that I am not speaking about technical issues, which could also be seen through the same philosophy, but to a whole spectrum of **attitudinal conflicts** which are more important than technical issues.

I say that they are more important, because they have something to do with the planner's position regarding society and his attitude when faced with the wide range of planning challenges.

Recently I read "**The Power of Myth**" by Joseph Campbell, and I was struck when I discovered that two great historical personalities, responsible for the way of life of thousands of millions of people, had **parallel experiences in similar situations** in their lives. I refer to the famous temptations to which **Buddha** was exposed and which were repeated six centuries later for **Jesus**.

As is known, **Buddha** had to confront and overcome three propositions before reaching illumination.

-----  
de Mesones

*'In the first temptation, the Lord of Lust displayed his three beautiful daughters before Buddha. Their names were Desire, Fulfilment and Regrets - Future, Present and Past. But the Buddha... was not moved. Then the Lord of Lust turned himself into the Lord of Death and flung at the Buddha all the weapons of an army of monsters... Again, he was not moved, and the weapons flung at him turned into flowers of worship.'*

*'Finally the Lord of Lust and Death transformed himself into the Lord of Social Duty and argued, "Young man, haven't you read the morning papers? Don't you know what there is to be done today?" The Buddha responded by simply touching the earth with the tips of his fingers of his right hand... That night, the Buddha achieved illumination, and for the next fifty years remained in the world as teacher of the way [of life of thousands of millions of people.]'*

**Jesus** also was exposed to three temptations -

*'First there was the **economic temptation** where the Devil comes to him and says "You look hungry, young man! Why not change these stones to bread?" and Jesus replies "Man lives not by bread alone..." And then next we have the **political temptation**. Jesus is taken to the top of a mountain and shown the nations of the world, and the Devil says to him "You can control all these if you'll bow down to me" which is a lesson, not made known well enough today, of what it takes to be a successful politician. Jesus refuses. Finally the Devil says, "And so now, you're so spiritual, let's go up to the top of Solomon Temple and let me see you cast yourself down. God will bear you up, and you won't even be bruised." This is known as **spiritual inflation** [or temptation.] But Jesus...says, "You shall not tempt the Lord, your God." Those are the three temptations of Christ, and they are as relevant today as they were [two thousand years ago.]'*

-----

The evolution and development of mankind in its demographic, cultural, social and economic aspects is the engine of **CHANGE**.

The physical and legal reflection of **CHANGE** over the binomial **CITY/REGION** is the object of **PLANNING**.

To answer conveniently to **CHANGE**, **PLANNING** often has to alter the delicate balance between **URBAN and RURAL LAND**, sometimes by urbanising rural areas or, at other times, by intensifying the use of certain urban areas that also were rural in the past.

Every intensification of use, both the change from rural to urban and the increase in quality or quantity of its potential use, implies an **ADDED VALUE**, in accordance with the inexorable law of supply and demand.

-----  
de Mesones

It is evident that planning has the power to generate added values as an inseparable consequence of its proper object, and as a result of its specific activity.

The logical and unavoidable generation of added values has to be done **WHERE the CHANGE** requires it, that is to say, where it will be more positive for development.

The planner has to **FULLY JUSTIFY** his decisions and to adopt his determinations in the most scientific way, always along the principle of sustainability of the proposed development.

But do not be mistaken! Let us be sincere, at least with ourselves... **Decisions are not taken only by planners.** They have, in each case, to design the plan and to shape it in accordance with decisions adopted by others.

Who these other partners or agents are has been the topic of some of our past congresses. When the proposals are promoted by **ECONOMIC AGENTS**, the political-administrative agents and the planners are responsible for their analysis and approval - or rejection.

When the decisions come directly from the **POLITICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE AGENTS**, without prior technical justification or without full cooperation with planners, the decisions might seem at least **suspicious**.

In many countries Land Acts establish fairly that a part of the **added values has to revert to the society** whose evolution justifies and produces the change. This premise is only applicable at the end of the process, once the real added values have been generated. It often happens that the one who obtained the profits has vanished by then.

-----,-----

Children of my country write letters to the **Three Wise Men** asking for toys. It is said that the night of January the 5th, the Three Wise Men, mounted on exotic camels, leave the toys in the children's shoes. In other countries, children write to Santa Claus, a kind, elderly man, who also gives them toys on the night of 24 December.

I ask myself, what politician or businessman has not at one time or other been tempted to write a letter to Santa Claus asking for money, power or social esteem? We, the planners, are often like Santa Claus and our plans frequently leave important gifts in someone's shoes.

Let us now look at the scenery from the other side, from the part of Santa Claus. Which planner does not like to be rich, powerful or socially esteemed as well, in the same way as others are going to be owing to his plan, as payment for changing stones into bread (rural land into urban land)?

Or, on the contrary, who is not afraid of the revenge of a powerful businessman or politician, converted into a "Lord of Death", who feels ignored or betrayed because the

planner does not bow down to him fulfilling his desires?

There is a story, in which a very old profession was justified with these words "they enjoy it so much, it is so easy to me... and it resolves so many problems..." All of us are in a certain way the Santa Claus of somebody. But, beware! Do not operate, nor argue as in that old story. This way of life, in our case, has another name - its name is **CORRUPTION**, but it is something similar.

Let us not accept to **change stones into bread for anybody**; let us not bow down to the "**Lord of Lust**"; let us not kneel down to those who offer us the whole world in exchange for ourselves; and let us not tremble before the "**Lord of Death**" when he tries to press us by dread.

-----,-----

The world is every day more **overcrowded** and our society is becoming more and more **competitive**. Nowadays many young and adult people confess that their highest social goal is to be **rich and famous**. They do not care how they reach fame. The only thing they want is to be known and wealthy.

It does not matter to them which way they use to reach fame and wealth. It could be through arms traffic or by getting the Nobel Prize. Actually it is very difficult to achieve wealth and reach fame as well. Unfortunately it is **easier to kill the poet than to write a poem**.

Everyday, people need to wake up early to read in the newspapers what the latest invention has been; **what is 'in' and what is 'out'**; what has to be done to be in fashion and what has to be avoided in order not to be frowned upon.

It is necessary to be constantly high up; it is risky to get down a minute from the pedestal. Curiously the people who suffer most acutely from this illness are those who are responsible for publishing every day the figures of the 'fashion stock market'; these publicists of the social duties live enslaved to the idol that they themselves have created - **FASHION!!**

In other cases, using the same mechanism, **temples of "papier-maché"** are built to enthrone **prefabricated "idols"**, other new '**Lords of Social Duty**' whose most important worth is to have the **same ideology** or to belong to the **same lobby**.

These "idols", full of vanity and dogmatism, proclaim **compulsory by-laws** from the highest tower of their temples, convinced that their footmen are going to pick them up in the air, if their fame crashes against daily reality.

Meanwhile, the big majority read **the latest magazine at breakfast**, to design their projects in the latest style or fashion, not only in their shape but in the most basic aspects, always in accordance with the "**voice of the Lords of Social Duty**".

-----  
de Mesones

This is even more depressing and astonishing when the fashion appears to be charged with **"messianism"**.

When you are not following the messianic by-laws of the gods you are not only going to be considered **"outside the establishment"**. Even worse, you will be an **"Enemy of the People"**. One day, you may find, without prior warning, that you are the people's enemy through faulting a by-law coming from the "temple."

But **what is wrong with these attitudes** except for the **ridiculous vanity** of wishing "to be important" or always wanting "to be IN"?

Why did **Buddha** only touch the earth with his fingertips when the **Lord of Social Duty** asked him if he knew what he had to do during the day? **Why is fashion dangerous?** ...THE IMPOSED FASHION.

Imposed fashion, good or bad, is dangerous **because** it is **born a thousand times** and a thousand times replaced by the next one, which is always more attractive and beautiful, simply because it is the most recent, until the moment that it gets older, loses its value and disappears leaving, its place to the next newborn.

It is because our profession is too serious for people's happiness to be understood as a fashion.

Because there are **fashions that do not deserve to be fashions**, not even for the short time of their own lives. But, above all, because there are **fashions that have to be considered with more respect** than a simple and ephemeral fashion that will only live for the fleeting flash of fame.

It hurts me to listen to the **"Lords of Social Duty"** proclaiming their faith in such a serious matter as for example "sustainable development", forgetting that yesterday they had their mouth full with **another issue that is totally different**, if not **contradictory**.

And it does not hurt me because their faith or their publicity lasts a short time, but because they create a **'fashion object' that will be soon thrown** into the memory closet and will be replaced by another new and sparkling slogan. And those people, who only know how to live by following slogans, will abandon something that is **absolutely necessary to survive**, that is **totally scientific** for planning and that is **unquestionably serious** such as the respect for the Earth.

Let us be loyal to ourselves. Let us propose not to follow the imposed fashions, nor the by-laws of the **"Lords of Social Duty"**. But if, despite it all, fashions will have enslaved people, let us ask the "gods" **not to talk about serious matters; not to turn them into fashions** and to speak only about **trivialities**.

Years ago **Pablo Ruiz Picasso** answered a young man who asked him, following his daddy's advice, what he had to do to become 'famous': **"Say goodbye to your parents, and come back to see me again"**. Well....actually he did not say "goodbye".... but his real words cannot be translated....As a good Spaniard, Picasso always had a **hard way of expressing** his thoughts and, also as a good Spaniard, he was **never easily understood**.

-----  
de Mesones

What Picasso meant within his wild freedom was simply that we cannot reach to be something in our life if we do not decide to act by ourselves, following our proper "bliss" or our own "calling" without recipes, fashions, dreads, instructions, dependencies or by-laws.

-----

All the thoughts set out here could be defined as the deontological attitude of which today's world is so in need. In short, we ought to avoid these rejectable attitudes -

\* FEAR

\* SUPERFICIAL  
STYLISHNESS

\* CORRUPTION

\* DOGMATISM

\* FASHION

\* MESSIANISM

And we have to avoid these, without submitting to -

\* GREED

(turn stones into bread)

\* AMBITION

(I'll give you all that)

\* PRIDE

(angels will hold up their arms)

Nor should we kneel down in front of the **Lords of** -

\* LUST

**DUTY**

\* DREAD

\*

**SOCIAL**

As was taught us **thousands of years** ago by those two big figures of human history.

Many thanks for your attention.