

STATE OF THE PROFESSION

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Colleagues, friends :

I am pleased to continue the tradition of departing presidents in offering a concluding 'professional amen', after three years full of lessons and experiences, shared with colleagues. In one way my task is made easier by **recent comprehensive reviews** on the topic, notably by Judith Ryser and Erik Wirén on the occasion of ISoCaRP's XXX Anniversary in 1995 and the 1996 HABITAT II Forum Report in Istanbul, organised by ISCaRP and other bodies.

In another way, the task has become intricate through its newly uncovered complexity, for which there are more questions than answers. Nonetheless, the above valuable contributions are full of **pertinent issues** which ISoCaRP should now seriously examine.

My overview will briefly cover **three parts**: -

- first, current aspects of the profession;
- second, possible 'ways to go for a professional society';
- and third, ISoCaRP during 1993-96 and into the future.

A risky agenda, as a small contribution to members' valuable views, assembled over thirty years.

STATE OF THE PROFESSION : SOME ASPECTS

The addresses of former presidents have provided both guidance and critical analysis of the profession. Sam Van Embden (1960s) upheld a comprehensive and balanced approach to planning and the tools of a modern profession; Gerd Albers (1970s) critically analysed the dilemmas facing the actors in planning, at times of political upheavals; Lanfranco Virgili (early 1980s) claimed for planners a responsibility for the public good, to be exercised through expert negotiation; Derek Lyddon (mid-1980s) defined a new professional agenda for planners, consolidating an ethical role vis-a-vis the rising market influence; Manuel da Costa Lobo (late 1980s), promoted an international agenda for planners, in cooperation with development agencies, geared to tackle world problems; Karl-Otto Schmid (early 1990s) warned of the threats in a competitive economy and of the needs for re-tooling planning skills; Javier de Mesones (mid-1990s) decried the ruthlessness of the modern world and called for the adoption of new professional ethics. Over thirty years, a **rich commonality** with fluctuating emphases.

Undoubtedly, in the mid-1990s, the planning profession has continued **to diversify** in both perception and application. At times operations have become further specialised while at others the need to be comprehensive has grown even more paramount. An intractable globality and a tenacious localism have both become entrenched, often in opposition, and requiring planning intervention. In **industrial countries**, the environment and technology, reactive or proactive, now form the professional mainstream focus, but one which lags behind scientific advances. In **developing regions**, sectoral emphases continue to characterise the nature of planning practice: economic inputs in Asia, geographical ones in Africa and the sociological in Latin America (Stren, 1996).

In industrial countries, after a declining concern for planning during the 1980s, a **resurgence, with global implications**, is manifest in the mid-1990s. **Some tendencies** are:

- (i) a search for more participatory and collaborative urban governance;
- (ii) an emphasis on decentralisation, devolution and support for local government and,
- (iii) continued attempts to eradicate poverty.

Although not entirely new, these global trends reinforce the need for social equity in the face of new economic and technological circumstances, with vast political and ethical implications. New trends are evolving through painful, fluctuating transitions in which forward development thrusts challenge separate planning attempts to adapt to, or compensate for, rapid change.

Last year Erik Wirén warned us of **current challenges** to planning from pervasive global influences, unregulated market competition and scientifically based systems which, when taken together, could negate the need for the planning profession. And yet, in the face of unmanageable crises, the **need for planning physical environments has heightened** and is recognised even by endemic marketeers. It has however influenced planning briefs, defined by corporate agents, which demand **physical ‘cleanliness’, and an emphasis on the imagery of places** at the expense of basic sociocultural considerations. Cities thus become an abstraction lying between image and a project mentality. Often planners are forced to respond to stereo-typed social considerations and so to abrogate specific community responsibilities.

Simultaneously, quite different opportunities for engaging planners may result in a **close cooperation with communities**, with their regular involvement in the provision or rehabilitation of local services and places. However valuable, such interventions often go unrecognised, leaving the impression of insignificance in the face of powerful pervasive forces, which originate beyond the local environment and away from its control. Although leading to community improvement, such planning efforts have not created the sustained development of human resources, and may result in the loss of professional status. One conclusion is that the concentration of strategic resources on the one hand, and the sustenance of cultural diversity on the other, have contributed to the proliferation of planning roles, in response to different clients and requirements. **Pursuing very different challenges the profession has lost focus rather than credibility.**

A matter which is fundamental in our uncertain times is, as John Udy reminded us in Cordoba in 1992, **the perception of planners’ roles, whether inside or outside the profession.** In analysing an intriguing variety of roles, originating from both practice and theory, he listed no less than sixteen! Of his comprehensive list, **in view of the enormity of problems** affecting cities and regions and our traditional concern for communities, I feel the critical need for **two roles to be exercised: the reformers** (such as advocate planners) and **the synthesizers** (human strategists). Of course, the others must continue to exist and develop too.

One **consideration** is that, in pursuing traditional social aims, **planners should improve the effectiveness of their delivery to the community, and so clarify their professional focus.** This will only be achieved by tackling diverse problems in a range of circumstances by different means. In practice, the scale of demands will only be met if planners secure **extended partnerships and further define their own roles.** While planning activities along these lines have been observed for some years (often with participation by the informal sector), they now need urgent strategic attention. **The 1996 Professional and Researchers Forum**, held in Istanbul within the UN HABITAT II Conference, developed this approach and the means to apply it.

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Partnerships and Roles at the 1996 Istanbul FORUM

The **Forum's report** states that planners need to **redirect their sense of professionalism**, recasting the current understanding of skills, performance and, ultimately, service to the community. This implies new knowledge, information deployment and ability to negotiate in situations of conflict. First, **a new understanding of civil society, governance** and the nature of public resources is thought to be essential in creating alternative paths for human development (Porio).

Second, there is the need for **new information**, as the basis for a 'social production of knowledge' (Malusardi). A fortunate phrase which considers at least two systems: one translating the use of natural resources into everyday terms and the other ensuring their informal, creative use by disadvantaged communities, in their unorthodox quest for improvement. Third and fundamental is the development of **mediation skills** to resolve conflict and to develop amongst stakeholders a sense of shared, or at least mutually respected, goals.

In implementing the above approach, it was thought in Istanbul that professionals should develop a diverse range of roles **to extend service within the informal sectors**. Through modified forms of expert intervention, they could function reactively, proactively or **interactively**, according to the specific needs of clients and communities (Srinivas). Professionalism depends on flexibility in the choice of clients and partners, to respond effectively to competing briefs. Finally, and significantly for professional bodies such as ISoCaRP, the ability of communities and **professionals to establish truly global partnerships** gave hope for a more precise understanding of complex development matters.

The 1996 Istanbul Forum report concluded by outlining the technical instruments by which professionals could contribute to improved development - essentially through the establishment of '**collective urban pacts**' in collaboration with governments and communities (Das). To clarify complex urban issues, a partnership of professionals and empirical researchers was thought essential. From the earlier analysis and the Forum, it can be concluded that planners need to redirect and focus their activities, mediating transactions over the allocation of resources and space in city and region. Significant new circumstances and opportunities make this challenge exciting, with high stakes and looming crises.

Operational Issues for a Professional Isocarp

Erik Wiren analysed with- clarity the conditions affecting the opportunities for professional societies to operate effectively in today's complex world. Derek Lyddon responded with a different proposal while Gerd Albers, through the 1996 Bulletin, commented and encouraged further views. **The debate amongst members is open** and is essential for the future of the Society.

The recent HABITAT II Conference and its preparatory meetings opened new possibilities for professional exchange. ISoCaRP led preparations on behalf of planners and the professional Forum itself. It was also represented on the International Facilitating Group of NGOs led by the Habitat International Coalition, of which it is a member. We now have to hand both recent experience and networks to orient global activities with **better insights of 'primary source, developments**, on the ground.

With appropriate partners, public and private, ISoCaRP is now well placed to extend its international activities. Our **'bridging-nexus'** role helps us to offer a profile which is open to new associations beyond the profession. Our greatest strength is the **professional expertise** of our members. As John Udy reminded us, we should take stock of our knowledge base and articulate it as a collective, exchangeable resource. **Selective tailoring of our deployment** could be to the perceived commonality of planning issues and/or to the requirements of societies in need of planning, such as countries in a state of transition.

In this regard, the *International Manual of Planning Practice (IMPP)* provides an excellent basis for further programs; these could address how 'actual practice' takes place in the respective countries and regions, including the plethora of circumventions, however unpalatable. Operationally, the coordinated contributions of generous members, on a renewable time roster, could be a means of promoting member contributions. Technology could do the rest, as shown by Hari Srinivas with the Internet.

The vastness of planning as a field of professional expertise **requires focussing in discrete areas of application**. Though recognised professionally, this compartmentalisation is still to be adopted within ISoCaRP's activities. The four **'International Professional Networks' (IPN)** initiated by members (*on mediation, conservation, technology and developing countries*) are a start, but need further member inputs and programs. One topic, which responds to our first aim of association, is **advanced planning practice**. It could become the focus for a new network on **'advanced planning practice'**. Other sister organisations operate such a framework. ICOMOS, for example, in the field of conservation, has fifteen international scientific committees, focussed on processes, types of place and materials.

And a word on the **'Young Planners'** program, now in its sixth year of successful operation since Mexico, 1991. Though providing new energy and a reassuring voice in the ISoCaRP agenda, there are as yet **untapped possibilities** for an even more effective program. The views of young professionals could be posed at Congress and articulated as an **alternative viewpoint in times of rapid change**. Both the 1996 and 1997 Congresses, on topics of urgent global concern, could well serve to deploy such young universality.

With its headquarters and most members in Europe, **the geographical context and intensity of ISoCaRP's activities** have been significant policy issues. Changes in the 1980s-1990s in the world and in ISoCaRP itself have made the question relevant and have extended discussion on regionalisation and decentralisation. So far, for good reasons, unity has prevailed. In the Society's earlier years, it was seen as adding a global context to Europe I while more recently it is read as **'putting Europe in a global context'**, a process now in progress. The next stage could be the development of a global context in its own right. This I proposed on ISoCaRP's XXV anniversary.

On the separate but related issue of the **size of membership**, again, there have been two views. The 'small is beautiful', and more friendly view, has prevailed, partly by choice and partly by circumstance. Indeed, the network of good friends is such an asset to the Organisation, that colleagues wish to join for this reason alone ... (thus, of course augmenting the Society!) However ISoCaRP, being globally networked and with programs held beyond Europe, is appealing and applications for membership are bound to increase.

There was a **10% increase in membership in 1995, nearly half from outside Europe**, from twelve countries where planning is vital. This was matched by a similar ‘pruning, of members, so that membership has remained fairly stable. Conditions for growth and renewal have however been put in place as vital for development. Some growth is needed to attract excellent practitioners and, even if doubled in size, ISoCaRP will remain a small Organisation of individuals and friends!

IsoCaRP in the Mid-1990s

Continuing earlier efforts, and with the hard work of the Secretariat, the ExCo and other members, the Society has developed new initiatives in 1993-96. Some examples follow.

Through **meetings** in new regions (Prague, Sydney and Jerusalem); HABITAT meetings (in Geneva, Habana, Nairobi, New York and finally Istanbul) and planning the 1997 Congress in Japan, the global policy has been emphasised. Our counterparts in joint programs in Australia and Japan have been the national planning bodies. New **partnerships** have been established with bodies such as AESOP, AAP, UNCHS, GURI, ICOMOS, the World Bank and UNCRD, while existing ones, such as with UNESCO, have been renewed. On the **publications** front, both *Congress proceedings* and *the Bulletin* edited by Gerd Albers have gone from strength to strength, while *Network* has usefully disseminated information.

With a recent cooption, the Executive Committee now has two members from **Asia**, a region with which ISoCaRP has established firm links. The pre-Congress tour to Thailand in 1995 and, in particular, the 1997 Congress planned for Ogaki, Japan, with a tour to Seoul, offer new development prospects for the Society. The link with the Japanese Association of Planning Administration, through the good efforts of Yoshinobu Kumata, is particularly promising. Earlier contacts have been renewed, as with our representative at UN Headquarters. And the list could continue.

We are now pointing in a direction with **global** aspirations. It^{Domicelj} has been but a small step, with some commitment to continue. More member contributions and resources are needed to pursue common interests and take up the abundant challenges on the horizon. It appears the 1990s will continue not to be a decade of routine!

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