

State of the Profession

Halûk Alatan, Turkey
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It is September 1999, ISoCaRP is approaching its 35th anniversary and realising its 35th annual congress.

Our world, the mankind is entering a new century, a new millennium, and the topics of this new millennium are globalisation, localisation, nation states, oil, wars, famine, natural catastrophes, migration, racism, environmental problems, nationalism, fundamentalism.

ISoCaRP, as an international NGO, has always stayed out of politics and will do so also in the future. This principle, however, does not prevent us from seeing the realities, the facts: the suffering of mankind. Just have a look at the past few years: We are witnessing an incredible human drama in the middle of Europe, which we characterise as the most developed continent. Exactly at a time we are speaking about globalisation, about the boundaries losing their importance, about people getting closer and closer to each other as regards economics, technology and culture, seeing people making war against each other is just beyond human understanding. This contradiction at the end of the 20th century is a global drama. What we have seen happening in Bosnia and Kosovo is absolutely heartbreaking. It is not important where the truth lies, who is right, who is justified and who is wrong. Millions of innocent people have had to leave their home and native country and, in miserable conditions, simply take the road to the unknown. In the chaos, it was the children and the old people who suffered most. The children had to testify scenes which all their live long cannot be erased from their brains. While the situation in Europe is like this, do you think the scenery on the other continents is much different? Absolutely and unfortunately not! Also from there we get extremely often news shattering our hopes and breaking our hearts.

In these circumstances, it is certainly difficult to speak about our profession and its problems. On the other hand, in order to get free from this tangle of controversies, to disentangle at least a part of it, becomes possible if we discuss our profession and produce some proposals for solutions. Our profession is an important element in the human history and the global culture. Our main subject, towns, are the most important instrument invented by mankind on its way to create culture. As a matter of fact, the towns founded by our ancestors to prepare a place for trampa, trade, are today the focal points of our profession. Our aim is to make the towns more liveable, more sensitive to the nature, to ensure that better service can be offered to the inhabitants in these urban areas.

Entering the 21st century our world is experiencing globalisation, localisation and regionalisation in an interesting controversial way. And the problems, instead of gradually lessening, are unfortunately increasing.

In the 1990's the idea of globalisation has gained more and more impetus. The markets of the world are becoming united, creating positive results. Unfortunately, however, increasing production and developing technology are not evenly distributed among the countries.

The "Human Development Report 1999" prepared by UNDP disclose the above fact. Here are some figures showing that developments in the two fields I mentioned above, that is, in increasing production and new technology, are not global but a monopoly of a few rich countries: 77 % of the world production is realised by 25 industrialised countries. Just the share of the USA of the world production is 27 %. According to the report, the richest 20 % of the world realise 86 % of the total production in the world.

There we have two very important points: The first one is the geometric rate of growth in the difference between rich and poor during the past 20 years. The second fact is the production monopolisation in fields, which are vital for the developing countries. As an example we can see that 85% of agricultural chemicals which are of vital importance for the developing countries, are produced by 10 companies in industrial countries.

Further, according to the Human Development Report, while the difference ratio of income between the 20 % of the richest and the poorest countries in the world in 1960 was 30 to 1, this ratio was 60 to 1 in 1990, and in 1997 it had gone up to 74 to 1. These startling, alarming statistics bring to the agenda and force us to think whether the globalisation is based on common values.

The "Human Development Report 1999" proposes a series of measures. Here are some examples: to support the anti-trust sanctions of the World Trade Organisation, to collect tax from e-mail in the developed countries and use the funds to encourage and support the use of internet in poor countries. The use of computer in planning is getting more and more important, and spreading out the use of net would at least to some extent contribute to closing the gap between countries. If a US citizen buys a computer with one month's salary and a Bangladesh citizen needs his 8 years' earnings to buy one, the importance of this proposal is very clear.

The most important point in this connection is that the developing countries reach a certain educational level and life standard. Only this way, it is possible for them to profit from the benefits of globalisation. This fact has been especially underlined in the report. Public investments are decreasing in a serious way in the competition society. This means that sufficient, adequate investments are not made in basic services like education, health and maintenance. This is where our profession shows its importance. To establish the minimum urban standards" describing the level of civilisation and determining the standards of life in towns, and distributing the areas in a balanced way on the plan, is probably the most important factor as regards investments in human life. The primary aim of physical planning especially in developing countries, is the equal distribution of social services like education, health and green areas, and of technical

infrastructure services like transportation, water, and sewage, within certain standards in urban areas.

I have experienced and believe that the decisions in physical planning, spatial planning and sometimes even the planning of a single lot effect the development of a town. My opinion is that we should apply the directives and standards of physical and spatial planning on all scales. These lines were written before the recent earthquake disaster in Turkey. After the earthquake which was one of the biggest in this century, our neighbours as well as the whole world rushed to help us, to participate unselfishly in the rescue work, and to give their not only material but also moral support. More than 60 countries participated in the rescue work with people, rescue and medical teams, equipment and material aid. Especially the help of voluntaries from numerous countries was morally vital for the people hit by the disaster. Hundreds of people were rescued alive from the ruins. The return to life of a child made the whole world happy. I know that our foreign friends watched those scenes with tears in their eyes.

What a remarkable manifestation of solidarity it was! It really gave new courage and joy of living to everybody. It brought to us all the feelings we need to be able to look hopefully into the future of mankind. The hearts of the Turks are full of gratitude, obligation and appreciation. Unselfish helps without return, diminishing pain by sharing it, is a quality of humanity.

Mistakes have been made from the point of view of our profession.

Ignoring our warnings, necessary measures were not taken, planning decisions were not adapted in the region as regards settlement and distribution of population and industry.

Anyway, we should not look back now. The truth lies in the words: "I forget my mistakes but never their reasons". It is time for us to profit from our experiences. New important work and decisions -are waiting for us as physical planners.

As physical planners, as ISoCaRP, what can we do and what should we do? I would like to draw your attention to two issues: First, international physical planning competitions. Competitions are a means to bring planners together to work for a joint aim. International competitions offer a milieu where, besides new ideas and opinions being presented and compared, planners, executors, representatives of culture and politicians are brought closer together. The international Gallipoli Competition last year, converting First World War battlefields into a Peace Park, is a good example of this. 120 participating planner groups worked and competed to create an idea of how to turn the cold and cruel face of war into a Peace Park for international peace and humanity. Among the members of the jury of this planning competition, covering an area of 33-000 hectares, there was only one planner. This is a reason for self-criticism. In the future, ISoCaRP should participate in the Organisation of such competitions from the nomination of jury members to the final judgement of the jury. Apart from this, we should support the idea of organising all kinds of competitions on different scales.

These competitions are projects requiring teamwork. In consequence, it does not only bring about closeness between countries and understanding for each other's problems but also enhances the solidarity and co-operation between different professions. One of the most beautiful aspects of our profession is that it gives us the pleasure to work together, to search for and find solution together. Ibis pleasure is only heightened by the happiness it is bringing to people and to the new generation, and in this way giving strength to us. As our founder, Honorary President Sam Van Embden said 20 years ago: "We have to enrich our work by finding the balance between imagination and reason."

The second issue I would like to draw your attention to, is the support to and increasing the number of international, even intercontinental physical projects. As an example, I would like to present to you the Silk Road Project, which has entered the agenda lately. Once in historical times, the Silk Road was a corridor from Japan and China through Middle Asia and the Caspian Sea to Black Sea and from there to the West, to Europe. At that time, the main reason for this link between East and West was silk, but the important rehabilitation project is based on the attractiveness of oil. The richness of oil in the region of the Caspian Sea, the largest inland sea of the world, is of course the basis of West's interest in this Eurasian project. A modern infrastructure must be built in order to transport the natural resources to the markets in the Western world. The responsibility for this gigantic project, this huge investment, and not only from the point of view of trade and economy, but also ensuring careful implementation as regards environment, culture and historical values, is upon planners, businessmen, investors, politicians, diplomats and many other professionals. It must be our most important duty as planners to safeguard the protection of environment, nature and historical values on all scales, and the peace, well-being and stability between communities and people.

We should make this project, crossing boundaries and bringing nations closer to each other, a "Project of Hope" for the mankind. Ibis road will not only connect countries to each other but also history to future.