

Media Notice 19 September 2001

Honey, I shrunk the Space – Planning in the Information Age

Under this title 200 planners met at the 37th congress of the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISoCaRP) in Utrecht, Netherlands from 15–19 September. The core question of this congress was what influence globalisation, deregulation and ICT will have on spatial development and the planning profession. After an introductory session with relevant keynote speakers from the private sector as well as from economic research and public agencies, participants presented case studies from all continents in 4 parallel sessions and discussed the developments appearing on the horizon. Even though this brought up a lot of new questions, one clear tendency emerged: In post-industrial times, private planners as well as government agencies cannot stick to physical planning issues exclusively anymore without losing relevance. The information age asks for a kind of planning that has its core competence in managing time-geographical aspects as well.

In her opening speech, Marjanne Sint (Secretary General of the Ministry of VROM) outlined the Dutch policy on ICT and the difficulties her ministry has to make plans for the next 30 years under such auspices. Ockert van Zyl (CEO of Siemens Thailand) underlined in his keynote speech, how important cultural and social differences are and will be when talking about globalisation. Bert van der Knaap (Professor at Erasmus University Rotterdam) stated that we are on the way to a space where flows get as important as places. Due to the events in the USA last week, William J. Mitchell (Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology) held his brilliant keynote via videoconference, showing participants how fragmentation and recombination of activities in spatial and temporal dimensions is taking place.

In more than 50 case studies from Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa and the Americas participants then went to an in-depth analysis in 4 workshops during 3 days. The topics were “cultural identity and spatial segregation”, “dynamic networks and floating nodes”, “cyberspace and loss of concentration” as well as an open platform “the marketplace”. Topics as new urbanism and gated communities were discussed, as well as new airport cities or the digital divide. Safaris to “the Dutch planning wildlife” in the Utrecht and Amsterdam area completed the case studies. An intensive discussion on the lessons out of all these examples took place, at least partially answering the core question of the future role, tasks and tools of planning in steering spatial development.

In the closing session, General Rapporteur Andreas Schneider (Switzerland) and his team presented their findings and compared them with those of the TAN group published in the TANmanifesto earlier this year after a 4 years research. They could clearly figure out that the context in which planning works has postmodern characteristics, and that planning cannot be a clear-cut discipline anymore. Planners have to take into account that their work – steering spatial development – cannot be done in the built space alone, but means influencing on the spaces of flows and of information as well. In connection with this diversification of objects, a diversification of planning tools seems quite probable – with a loss of importance of formal planning instruments and a rising importance of informal actions to influence spatial development.

The core congress was preceded by a young planners' workshop and will be followed by an implementation lab after the congress. In the first workshop at from 12–15 September 26 young planners made proposals for developing the business science park corridor in Enschede. In the implementation lab from 21-23 September 15 experienced planners will work on the consequences of globalisation, deregulation and ICT for regional planning of the South wing of Randstad Holland.

Andreas Schneider
General Rapporteur ISoCaRP Congress 2001