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# Urban Knowledge Arena

## 1. Introduction

Spatial Planning, Urban Planning, Urban Design, Land Use, Urban Architecture Are interrelated fields of human creative activity. In various countries there are different views, standpoints, traditions and understandings. The subject of this paper is managed with a discussion of relevant observations under the following headings: Duality within the profession, Traditional interpretation, Role of the urban designer/planning concerns, Producers and consumers of the environment and Conclusions.

## 2. Two Paradigms – Urban Design and Urban Planning

Abraham Lincoln said: "If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it."

With regard to the already established urban design discipline, as well as to an emerging planning profession, the fundamental step to be taken is to map the present situation and define the needs and aims urban design and planning professions deal with. The countries of central Europe which have a solid base and tradition of urban design and architectural education can build upon these strengths while addressing the needs facing the emerging planning profession. It is important to realise the relevance of the planning profession in the countries undergoing the transition from a practical, as well as pedagogical, point of view. The education of planners, their implementation skills, as well as their strategic thinking abilities, has to be geared to specific practical applications. The planner should become an 'enabler' while safeguarding the issues in the public interest. Among other things, his familiarity

with urban design principles, and feasibility issues related to investment and to dealing with developers, are essential. It is hoped that this paper will contribute to this discussion, and poses the following questions:

Is there a common ground between planning and urban design professions? If so, what aspects do they share? What role are urban designers going to play (or will continue to play) in the moulding of the environment? What is expected of the planners of the future? What is their role in the present process of transformation, as well as long-term prospects when dealing with market forces? What considerations, therefore, should become priorities in the establishment of curriculum for the education, or re-training, of this emerging profession?

## 3. Duality within the profession

The duality of urban design and urban planning, where urban design is considered to be architecturally based, yet the urban planning discipline has a more socially scientific and political orientation; has a long tradition, and is not a recent phenomenon.

To start, one should attempt to define the terms that are the subject of our discussion. The Oxford dictionary refers to the terms: *urban* as 'of, living, or situated in, a city or town'; *design* is defined as 'a mental plan, an artistic or literary groundwork, a general idea, or construction'; *planning* as 'a scheme of arrangement, a way of proceeding, or an arrangement of what planning is'. However, planning theorists themselves are unable to agree, not only on what planning is, (here we talk about Town Planning as understood in Anglo-Saxon terms), but, what is worse, about what planners should do and what their role is. This, of course, has serious implications for the education of modern urban planners.

Reade (1978) states that "Identification of planning as a mode of decision making points to the loose usage of the word 'planning', even among planners themselves". The word 'planning' tends to be used to mean almost anything that the user wishes it to mean. During periods when it is fashionable (such as the 1960's) almost everything is labelled 'planning'. In periods when it is out of fashion, almost nothing is. In 1973 Wildawsky published a paper entitled 'If planning is everything, maybe it's nothing' which, it could be concluded, suggests that planning is a catchword rather than an analytical concept.

Indeed, the word 'planning' tends to be used very loosely, and as Reade suggests, there is a tendency to use it to describe almost any governmental intervention, or any transfer of decision making away from the market forces and into the realm of politics and administration.

Another view of planning could be 'planning as future control' or as Wildawsky (1973) puts it "Planning is the attempt to control the consequences of our actions" and "the determination of whether 'planning' has taken place must rest on an assessment of whether, and to what degree, future control has been achieved". It is a well-known fact that planned decisions often have unforeseen consequences. It would be difficult to

argue with the assumption that if the aim was not achieved, there had been no plan in the first place.

The other side of the spectrum is 'planning as design,' which is more concerned with the physical arrangement of urban elements. Here we can orient ourselves with Lynch's definition of city design as being a "skill in creating proposals for the form and management of the extended spatial and temporal environment, judging it particularly for its effect on the everyday lives of its inhabitants, and seeking to enhance their daily experience and their personal development". This is seen as changing the city physically while bearing in mind the humanist purpose; which results in affirmation of the concept that environment quality has a direct relationship on people's behaviour.

As observed above, this duality in dealing with physical concepts (more traditionally oriented design), and town planning concepts (loosely defined, but having more to do with the organisation of society) has an historical basis.

#### 4. Traditional Interpretations

Twentieth century planning was concerned with, not only, urban form and the search for the ideal city, but also with the social reformer's wish for the establishment of an ideal community. However closely these two trends have been related in history, one has always been able to distinguish their differing characteristics.

There are many examples of conscious design and concern for orderly layout. Consciously organised towns form the characteristics of a range of civilisations: Greek; Roman; and locations in China, South East Asia, Central and South America and the Islamic world. In Europe they were, for example, the bastions of England and French renaissance formalism. There are many other examples of the search for the ideal city in design terms (See Helen Rosenan).

As an example of the second trend, the more socially oriented trend, we can quote early examples ranging from Plato's 'Republic', Aristotle's 'Politics', and Moore's 'Utopia', etc., to worker villages established in response to the Industrial Revolution and the Garden City movement. One can distinguish a distinct British contribution among the later examples that belongs to this socially oriented theme. The two-fold nature (representative of architectural and social reformation) of this subject is, therefore, apparent in the historical base. More recently this modal split (more of 'design' or 'planning') is evident not only according to the time scale (when) but also according to the country of origin (where). From the Second World War until the 1960's 'planning' was seen as the three-dimensional design of towns, i.e. urban design tradition was dominant. In the 1960's (in U.S. in the 1950's), due to the work of McLoughlin, Chadwick, and others, the view of planning as a general societal management process became important (procedural planning theory – Faludi and others). (For the map of theoretical positions in planning theory in 1970's see the McDougal, Healy and Thomas-Position paper for 1981 Planning conference, Wheatley).

This is also reflected in the development of the difficult concept of 'planning'. As a reaction to *comprehensive planning*, which was thought to be too physical and lacking during the decision-making phases, the concepts of *structure planning*, *systems approach* and *advocacy planning* were developed.

With regard to the *structure planning*, the technique is considered important; in addition to the more sophisticated *survey* and *analysis* methods utilised, *goal definition* and *evaluation* methods are also used. There are two levels to this structural planning process – the policy (or structural) level and the technical (or developmental) level. This concept is, therefore, more activity and land-use oriented, and concerned with implementation and decision making factors.

According to Roberts (1974) *Systems Approach Planning* "places the greatest emphasis of all different views of planning on technical expertise – in analysing the urban system, in forecasting the future and in stimulating alternative futures. It is characterised by its view of the subject matter of planners as systems and sub-systems of man's activities, with their physical manifestations and their inter-relationships". Chadwick, the British proponent of the systems approach, describes three kinds of system – engineering (fairly predictable, deterministic) ecological and social (more difficult to predict, probabilistic).

Chapin listed the basic entities for planning systems under the headings: *Objects, Activities, Physical Infrastructure, Land* and *Policy*, cross-referencing them with elements under the headings: *Population, Goods* and *Vehicles*.

In *advocacy planning* the planner's role is that of an advocate for certain causes, pleading for the particular needs of various interest groups, building a case for implementation. "Plural plans rather than a single agency plan should be presented to the public" (Roberts, 1974). Therefore, this very much involves choices, and determination of goals and evaluation of the alternatives.

This push and pull toward one school of thought or another and an adherence to one of the positions is also well documented in the literature published on the subject. The belief in the importance of the physical or social environment varies considerably according to the author. On one hand, Herbert Gans appears to dismiss the physical environment as a factor in human situations when he says: "The physical environment does not play as significant a role in people's lives as planners believe. Although people reside, work and play in buildings; their behaviour is not determined by the buildings, but by the economic, cultural and social relationships within them," and "the primary effect upon people is not created by the physical environment of the community, but by the social environment". The other extreme can be demonstrated by Neutra's statement: "Let me design a house for a happily married couple, and I will have them divorced within six months." The author does not associate herself with either of these views, which are considered extreme; i.e., it is believed that the physical environment is neither deterministic nor irrelevant in human affairs, rather, that the physical environment interacts with multiple complex patterns of activity, or as Stanford Anderson argues: "The physical environment

allows, or encourages ranges of activities, bounded by what are broad limits of the possible, narrowed by constraints of cultural or social origin, to those uses and meanings that may be socio-culturally coincident, collaborative, or symbiotic with the environment.

## 5. Role of the Urban Designer/planning concerns

Different trends and attitudes were discussed above to provide background to the question of the role of the urban designer. If we know what is to be the subject of this activity, we are closer to answering how we should guide this education. It is believed that the changes of attitude outlined above are not only changes of fashion, but that they are economic and human reactions to existing conditions, developing trends, or perhaps even, potential situations. This can be illustrated by a British example: In the sixties, during the economic boom, the 'physical approach' was frowned upon. Later, while in recession, there was no time or money for the social or political scientist to continue theorising while being influenced in his decision making by one or the other party in power. As a result the physical designers came to the fore (it was much easier for them to find work), rather than the social scientists who, in the depressed economic climate, were viewed more as a luxury.

The social science branch of planning has a further difficulty in being subjected to an identity crisis of its followers, who find it difficult to define their role. As Wildavsky suggests – "the planner has become the victim of planning, his own creation has overwhelmed him. Planning has become so large that the planner cannot comprehend its dimensions. Planning has become so complex that planners cannot keep up with it. Planning protrudes into so many areas the planner can no longer discern its shape. He may be economist, political scientist, sociologist, architect or scientist. Yet the essence of his calling – planning – escapes him. He finds it everywhere in general, and nowhere in particular. Planners have difficulty explaining who they are, and what they should be expected to do ..." Many planners in Britain are now desperately attempting to demonstrate their 'relevance' to local councils, to central governments, and to a highly critical public. It is making them very "vulnerable to the charge that they are nothing more than blind operators of the system within which they find themselves." (McDougal et al.). This professional identity crisis of the planner in the western world damages, no doubt, not only the content of his work, but also his professional image. On a larger scale, this is no doubt connected with the market being defined as an alternative mechanism of organising and allocating material goods and other privileges, or as Dahrendorf defines it: "The market is a place of exchange and competition, where all comers do their best to improve their own lot.

As for the art of architecture, it is becoming increasingly a question of the design of one particular building, architectural quality having different characteristics to the spatial quality of the relationship between the buildings. Urban

design is concerned with the design of groups of buildings. This means bringing buildings together where they can offer a visual experience that none can give separately. The uses are also functionally dependent on each other; the whole becoming more than the sum of the parts.

In the Western world there is a noticeable antipathy between the architectural and planning professions, Alexander goes as far as describing architects as being "in the habit of creating completely mad, idealist utopias; while planners have established a tradition for boring attention to detailed facts ..., or offer no comprehensive vision of a better future." He proposes bridging this gap with "a careful consideration of psychological problems to lead to major revision of environmental forms". In my view, another contributing factor to the feeling of this professional 'schism' is the link between the architectural profession and its developmental side. This relationship is usually characterized by the unshared values of the developmental 'dark forces' of market economies, and planners who have been attempting to limit development as guardians of the 'public good'. This was apparent during Town Planning in Oxford some years ago while simulating a public enquiry (a tribunal where both sides present favour and opposition to specific development projects). Architects usually represented the developers, while the planning issues presented in opposition were put forward by social scientists. If one can generalise, the 'safeguarding' role is usually prevalent during an economic boom. During a recession however, planners are keener to play an enabling role, encouraging development. It is not, therefore, surprising that qualified planners such as architects and urban designers are sought after in the job market, both in the public and private sectors.

From the above discussion transpires the implied role of urban designer. He is neither an architect, nor a planner; his position being between those concepts of architecture and planning, yet within his domain controls the creation of three dimensional forms in an urban context; he is concerned with change over the long term. The urban designer "has to view the environment under consideration of an historical perspective ... understanding of the evolution of the existing situation in terms of human activity, and as having been built from a response to economic, social and political forces." (Goodey, 1981). A 'sense of place' must be recognised and articulated, (Lynch, 1972). One of the roles of the urban designer is to direct the development of change in an area towards a phased series of desired ends. Pedagogically, it is very important to help make urban design students aware of their future role. It has been shown how dangerous the 'identity crisis' suffered by practising planners in the Western world can be. Future planner/designers need to understand what is likely to be expected of them; to be taught describable skills that can be directly applied to their future professional lives. In agreement with Goodey, who suggests that although it is, clearly, design skills that are paramount in the urban designer's training; the ability to communicate desired ends with conviction and clarity, and the means to accomplish those ends that are of almost equal importance. The urban designer has, therefore, to bridge the gap between creative artistic work, and the concise analysis required for research and presentation.

On the other hand, the planner, in order to be able to comment in an intelligent and informed manner on proposed schemes, should acquire a certain amount of urban design skills. The planners should, therefore, be trained, not only, to work in public sector offices (e.g. strategic planning, local planning, central development), but also use their understanding of urban design and feasibility and development procedures, as consultants to the developers within the private sector. It is clear that the communicative skills of urban designers, as well as planners, are particularly important for dealing with, not only, the producers, but also the users of an environment.

## 6. Producers and consumers of the environment

One cannot divorce urban design from the societal forces that affect the practice of planning and the education of planners/urban designers. In the present concern for democracy, the subject of public participation and 'who plans what and for whom' are of the utmost importance.

As stated above, we experience some reservation about adopting Lynch's definition of urban design because of the discussion about 'inhabitants' and their 'daily experience' and their 'development as persons'. Here it is necessary to oppose the division of people into categories of environmental producers and consumers. We stress the importance of this limitation because only some of us can be considered producers of the environment, but all of us are its consumers. Of course, there are potential problems with public participation and its implementation. To name one, there is a danger that the professional may think that he knows what is best for the community and for people without public consultation. During implementation, there could be a problem due to the plurality of interests in the society, and their sometimes contradictory character, even when taking into account the technical difficulty of finding out what needs exist and how best to satisfy them.

But potential difficulties should not be discouraging. From experience it is known that some of these problems may be overcome by education, by popularising the art of environment, becoming aware of the importance of time scaling (the more imminent the environmental action, the more likely it is to provoke response); and concentration on smaller, more local issues; since in this context it is more difficult to fight for general principles, and easier to protect the particular ones.

This is directly connected with the values of which the urban designer should be made aware, since public participation should be a two way process, and he, in turn, may be able to influence public opinion. In this context one promulgates the values related to one's culture, historic environment, awareness of heritage, and respect for one's roots, all-important aspects of which the public should be aware.

There are a number of benefits, which can be acquired from public participation. By involving the public in the planning

process, it is hoped not only to arrive at a more democratic, balanced solution, where man and his environment fit together harmoniously, but also to relieve the anxiety resulting from public distrust of the unknown. Furthermore, the educational benefits arising from an awareness of the nature of the environmental change process, (creative activity stressed as usual, rather than abnormal) uncover a total range of views and preferences that dispel feelings of exclusion from the planning and decision making processes.

As Appleyard has concluded: "The significance of citizen participation in environmental decisions is critically important because this is the way in which people become identified with new environmental action; the way in which they feel in possession and responsible for it."

## 7. Conclusion

As seen above, lessons can be learned which may be relevant to the emerging planning profession in the economies undergoing transformation from central planning and totalitarian regimes, to more market oriented principles. Planners should be fully aware of the extent of their role, not doubting of their own identity, so they can concentrate more fully on doing things, rather than merely justifying their existence or usefulness.

There now seems to be an ideal opportunity for striking the right balance between the market forces and planning staffs when dealing with environmental issues. 'Planning' in the old sense of the word has acquired a bad name. However, it should be stressed that planning is considered to be not only necessary, but also beneficial, when operating in the market economy. Here the need for informed environmental planning is even greater. Here the necessary mechanisms of legislation and expertise are in place to assist, encourage, discourage, or even control the market driven development within our environment.

Urban designers and planners are professionals concerned with the creation and moulding of our human environment for the future. In this context I would like to summarize with a quote from Charles F. Kettering: "I am vitally interested in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there." And that should apply to all of us.

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