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REREADING THE SIXTIES
Reconsidering planning as a vehicle for structural change

Abstract: In the 1960s the planning discipline had a strong profile and identity. Today, after thirty years in many countries, much of this profile and professional identity has disappeared. Nevertheless important groups in society call for a clear break with existing policies. This paper reflects whether planning can be used as a vehicle to induce such change in a democratic way. It is argued that the 1960s provided some basic ideas in this respect. Criticism formulated against the often very naive way these concepts have been implemented must be acknowledged.

Especially the ideas elaborated by Jantsch, Ozbekhan and de Jouvenel provide concepts that allow us to define a type of planning that is at once integrative in its approach, European in its orientation, political in its attitude towards power structures, normative in purpose, innovative in its search for solutions and entrepreneurial in scope. These concepts will be summarily dealt with and linked with an ongoing spatial planning experiment.

Key words: planning theory, urban and regional development, spatial planning in Flanders.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although the number of professional planners in Europe is growing planning is facing a constant threat. In the 1960s in many countries the planning discipline had a strong profile and identity. In the 1980s public planning became increasingly a synonym of inefficiency, excessive cost (in economic terms) regulation, control (in administrative terms) and was considered to be an irritating hindrance to individual freedom and to the functioning of the free market economy or even to be structurally incompatible with them (ALBRECHTS, 1986). In the early 1990s the collapse of state controlled economic systems in Eastern

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Europe somehow signified the failure of the attempt to establish a way of development using rigid state controlled economic strategies.

So today, after thirty years, much of the initial profile and much of the professional identity has vanished. Moreover, in many places planning is perceived as a merely technical instrument or as merely part of another, more dominant profession or discipline (architecture, engineering, geography, economics etc.).

All this can be placed within the more general framework of a changing view of how society should be organized. The intellectual basis of this emphatic criticism of government intervention can be found in 18th century liberalism, a philosophy which stresses freedom and individualism and, as a corollary, laissez-faire capitalism (BEGG, 1988). According to this philosophy state intervention must be limited to a mere attempt to ameliorate the socially undesirable consequences of economic growth by simply adjusting the institutional or physical setting in which these economic forces operate (cf. O'CONNOR, 1973; SORENSON and DAY, 1981).

There is plenty of evidence that the (spatial) welfare distribution resulting from the pure functioning of the market along capitalist lines is fundamentally and (according to some) inevitably, an unequal distribution (cf. HARVEY, 1973; LIPIETZ, 1977; COOKE, 1983).

Many authors hold the view that economic processes shape the socio-economic-spatial fabric. This implies that (planning) actions which do not interfere with the very conditions that determine the existing (spatial, economic, social) patterns cannot interfere with/restructure these patterns. If this reasoning were to be correct, planning can only be effective if it takes into consideration the primary causes that are responsible for the problems requiring planned intervention.

Today important groups in society (e.g. environmentalists etc.) call for a clear break with existing (spatial, environmental etc.) policies/trends. This implies a request for structural change in society. This brings us to the central question in this paper: can planning be used in an overall neo-liberal policy context, as an instrument, a vehicle to induce such structural change in a democratic way? An ongoing spatial planning experiment will be used to illustrate the case.

2. CHALLENGE

The assessment of the role of planners as managers in a given (and changing) political environment was the central concern of the 1970s. If we take an example out of spatial planning the urban/regional question was indeed basically regarded as a management problem. It was conceived as a means to keep the urban/regional organization running with a minimum of fuss and to

diminish the effects of the imperfection in the urban/regional structure. In this view the planner is regarded as being the provider of specific skills and as being armed with an adequate toolkit to steer developments in a 'desired' direction.

During the last few years urban/regional governance has been oriented toward the provision of a good business climate and toward the construction of all sorts of incentives to attract inward investment. Increased entrepreneurialism has been a partial result of this process. Planners have become dealmakers rather than regulators.

Competition seems not to operate as the beneficial hidden hand but as an external coercive law forcing the lowest common denominator of social responsibility and welfare provision within a competitively organized urban/regional system (HARVEY, 1989).

Planners are less and less able to maintain even the facade of being concerned with those outside the 'loop' of economic prosperity (BEAUREGARD, 1989). The competition (both nationally and internationally – between Eastern and Western Europe) between urban areas/regions in the cutthroat game of seeking to convince inward investors that they have the best location may easily turn into an exhaustive struggle for survival which will often be at the expense of the local population. This is especially true in an age of scarce financial resources.

Recognizing the importance of the structural conditions imposed by the macro-level economic tendencies (a new restructuring wave of industries) together with the past experience of numerous attempts to govern these very conditions, also includes the recognition of the limitations of an approach based on traditional intervention. The argument suggests that the commonly used planner's toolkit, which as a matter of fact was primarily developed during a period of uncontested belief in overall economic and social progress and in an environment of relative abundance of resources, has to be completely redesigned and adjusted to the needs of today's society. The traditional policies (incentive based policies, welfare policies in the social arena and land use zoning in physical planning), implemented during the 1960s and early 1970s to mutually attune physical, social and economic processes seldom attained the anticipated goals and they became increasingly ineffective during the late 1970s and 1980s.

While developing new concepts for planning during the coming decade these considerations should be taken into account (cf. HEALEY, 1989). Rather than continuing the well-known incentive system, it will be necessary to replace it by a system in which planning and the planner more directly intervene in the social fabric. Such a new approach demands a paradigmatic shift from planning for capital to planning for society. This is by no means a plea for the planner to direct the economic forces himself. Not only does he not possess the means nor does he have the political power to execute such a task, but this also transcends the role ascribed to planning by most western societies.

The search for an adapted planning concept brings us back to some of the ideas that have been put forward in the 1960s. The thesis is that a critical re-reading of (some) of the 1960s literature can provide valuable and useful views for planning as a vehicle for change.

3. OLD ROOTS FOR A NEW APPROACH

In the 1960s planning was considered as being a very important instrument of long-term structural change.

To recall some ideas/theories of the 1960s I rely heavily on the work of OZBEKHAN (1967, 1969), JANTSCH (1967, 1970) and de JOUVENEL (1964). To these authors it was obvious that planning is an activity which operates on something for some specific purpose. The 'on' factor in the planning equation is relatively easy to identify; the 'for' factor becomes more difficult to pin down. Our next question must be to ask about the why of the action upon the object? The answer that immediately emerges is that it is meant "To effect a change in the object". Clearly more must be implied in this response because any intervention could bring about such change. So the answer has to be modified and read as "to effect pre-intended change in the object". This 'pre-intended' distinguishes planning from other acts.

If one acts upon something with the purpose of changing it one would rationally do so because one has been able to imagine a state of that object which is more desirable than its present state. This brings us to the distinc tion between the particular, subjective, individualistic idea of the desirable in contradiction to more general ideas of betterment (the social dimension). The most important (planning) problem is to give content to the ideas of 'desirable' or 'betterment'. Typical examples in this respect were the policies to achieve a morally sound distribution of social benefits and burdens among society's members (equity) (YOUNG, 1990). The underlying motives of such policies were basically inspired by considerations of social justice. The rationality of such policies is eliminating or reducing disparities which would eventually result in politically unacceptable and possible socially dis rupting conditions.

Planning essentially deals with 'futures' (in the Latin sense of *futura*). To think in such terms what 'is' must either be elongated in time (what we call extrapolation) or be subordinated to normative issues ('oughts' as Ozbekhan calls it). The latter conception of the future merely transcends feasibility and might (must?) be imagined as differing radically from present reality. Such a future should represent situations which are not merely temporal extensions of the here and now. It is the result of an act of choice involving valuations and judgments. Any change that is not a structural one merely extends the present rather than that it creates the future.

These ideas reflect the possibility of creating a future for society but at the same time they do clearly recall the enormous responsibility for humankind to build up/construct its own future. This future merely transcends feasibility and results from judgments and choices formed with reference to the ideas of 'desirable' and 'betterment'. So the point of planning becomes the need to change the present to fit the image of a 'desirable' future rather than to project the present into a conception of the future which is derived from the logical vectors that happen to adhere to it.

These ideas had a strong influence in the sixties and early seventies and influenced planning practice.

The failure of planning to keep its promises, that is, to guarantee a more balanced growth pattern, a more equal distribution of welfare and a more democratic society...provoked major discontent. Very soon critical questions concerning the gap between this approach and the actual (political-economic) functioning of society were raised. In addition to that the structural crisis of the 1970s and 1980s raised some critical issues concerning the planning agenda. The legitimation of planning as a political process to guide the forces which determine the development of an object (whatever that might be) in a socially acceptable (desirable) direction increasingly began to be questioned.

The point now is how to rescue some of these ideas without falling into the trap of loosing contact with the forces that shape reality.

4. PLANNING AS A VEHICLE FOR CHANGE

There are of course several models of planning trying to respond to this challenge. (FRIEDMANN, 1987, 1992; ALBRECHTS, 1991; JENSEN-BUTLER, 1992; ROBERTS, 1992). My personal, biased answer to this challenge is that if planning wants to play a (major) role in the next decade we need a kind of planning that is at once integrative in its approach, European in its orientation, political in its attitude towards (traditionally unchallenged) power structures, normative in purpose, innovative in its search for solutions and entrepreneurial in scope (ALBRECHTS, 1993).

4.1. Integrative in its approach

The far-reaching division and political compartmentalization of the various policy domains that intervene in problem areas constitute major obstacles for coherent policies. Spatial policy for instance cannot be isolated as an independent and self-contained public decision area. The basic reason why spatial poli-

cies can only achieve spatial redistributions in 'development' is that such policies do not affect the underlying determinants of social and economic change (GORE, 1984).

Planning has helped to bring into the open and to the consciousness of governments and of the general public, the importance and desirability of being concerned with relationships among people, physical objects, ecological and social forces, and of trying to integrate these things (MEYERSON, 1956; MEYERSON and BANFIELD, 1955). Integration, coherence and cooperation must therefore be keywords.

Although many planners consider planning as a discipline in its own right, substantive planning theory consists in general of more or less independent components and the integration of the various parts, the thread that should bind the components together, the substantial frame of reference, the common denominator of all different types of plannings gets too little explicit treatment.

This plea for integration is however not meant to let totalitarian planning slip in again through the backdoor. The negative historical experiences with integrated planning in France or socialist countries have to be acknowledged.

4.2. European in its orientation

The process of internationalization of regional economies and the creation of political-economic 'leitbilder' such as the Single European Market, both increase the pace of the internationalization of the European space economy. Planning problems increasingly have an international dimension and can only be tackled at a supranational (often European) level. A knowledge of the international forces which cause, influence or determine the process of internationalization is therefore essential for planners working at local, regional or national levels of government or in the private sector, in international consultancy or development. In the future, planners in Europe, even those working exclusively at a local level, will have to relate local/regional policies and development problems to international development and prospects.

4.3. Political in its attitude

Planning is not an abstract analytical concept but a concrete socio-historical practice, which is indivisibly part of social reality. The planner lives in a political world of which the characteristics often are at odds with the planner's ideology of reason, and the planner himself or herself is affected by the structural processes that shape social reality.

Especially in the 1980s some planning professionals, academics and many politicians defended the thesis that planning cannot and may not intervene in the process of economic development, their assumption being that the economic factors (capital, labour, management) tend to develop either spontaneously or through mediation of limited state intervention toward an optimal state of affairs.

It was argued that planning may be used as a vehicle aimed at inducing structural changes. The planner's political role comprises a contribution not only to the substantiation of these changes but also to the mobilization of the social forces necessary to realize the proposed policies. Towards the target group the planner has to engage in politicising and consciousness enhancing activities. In this respect, the planner could act as mobilizer and initiator of change and simultaneously perform the function of a catalyst around whom a number of initiatives and processes of change can germinate and gain momentum. Besides lobbying and negotiation, the planner has additional major tasks in actively searching for the necessary support (including building alliances) and means to realize the various projects involved.

4.4. Normative in purpose

Structural change implies putting forward an image of the state of the planning object which is more desirable than its present image. The normative orientation of planning reflects the capacity to be involved and to take part in the creation of a future for society. At the same time this orientation recalls clearly the enormous responsibility of society to take part actively in the construction of its own future.

This future transcends those more feasible issues and results from judgements and choices formed with reference to the ideas of 'desirable' and 'betterment'. Planners are more than navigators who keep their ship on course. They are necessarily involved in formulating that course (FORRESTER, 1989). That implies that planners must (re)dedicate themselves to the substantive ideas and consequently become more heavily involved in the development process. Rather than the neutral eunuch, the planner him or herself is a strong partisan for some outcomes over some others, for the interests of some groups over others, for some styles of governance, for some conceptions of justice, some patterns of future development etc. (WEBBER, 1978; FORRESTER, 1989).

The failure of planning to keep its promises was reflected in these images, that is to guarantee a more balanced growth pattern, a more equal distribution of welfare, and a more democratic society, provoked major discontent. Very soon critical questions were raised about the gap between this

approach and the actual (political-economic) functioning of society. It is
clear that the rather naive, utopian and unsuccessful ways some of these
concepts were implemented in the past (mainly the 1960s and early 1970s)
should be avoided and advantage should be taken of the criticism formu-
lated and of the evolution in planning in the 1970s and 1980s.

4.5. Innovative in searching for solutions

Planners need the skill and the innovative and creative ability to design
certain social choices as an answer to problems posed. He or she has to be able
to embody those choices in a coherent proposal within a given social structure
and to evaluate the repercussions of the projects on a number of related domains
and on society as a whole.

A design oriented approach seems appropriate in this respect: design, not
only in its traditional meaning but also in terms of the design of alternative
(economic, social, spatial) configurations that somehow possess reality and
represent a structural and creative solution to the problems. Strong and
appealing principles of (spatial, economic, social) organization may become a
vehicle for reaching a community's consensus on its future development (see in
this respect the concept of planning doctrine by ALEXANDER and FALUDI,
1990).

4.6. Entrepreneurial in scope

Since planning is becoming increasingly action-oriented, other skills and
qualifications will play a key role in the planners, professional tool-kit. Planning
has to think about implementing strategies right from the beginning. Without an
orientation towards implementation planning becomes meaningless. Traditional
planning has hardly any possibilities to put this action oriented strategy into
practice. Indeed the technical skills, as well as the power to allocate sufficient
means to implement proposed actions, usually are spread over a number of
diverse sectors and departments making a more integrated approach a somewhat
difficult task. In this regard the planner can and must nevertheless play an active
and important role.

Planning and the planner have to intervene more directly in the social fabric.
This implies negotiation with all the parties involved taking into account
existing power structures between and within social groups. The planner can act
as a bridge between public and private domains, between knowledge and action.
Furthermore, the planner can establish contacts between firms, financial
sources, knowledge centres and the people.

5. LINK WITH PRACTICE

The dominant neo-liberal approach in Flanders[1] neglects and obscures explicit attention to matters such as equity issues, democratic control and sustainable development, highlighting the dominance of market orientation and utilitarian tendencies in planning cultures.

In spatial planning this approach was reflected in a demand-driven planning. Space was considered to be available for all kinds of infrastructural socio--economic activities. This resulted in an overwhelming evidence of an ever--increasing decline of the environment: increasing ribbon-development, green zones and agricultural areas cut up into bits, a non-adapted road pattern, urban decline etc. The structural reorientation of this policy has a major impact on the functioning of society as a whole and on spatial planning in particular. Indeed these tendencies are part and parcel of society with inherent development and expansion patterns. Doctoring the spatial impacts is not sufficient to remove the negative consequences of this development.

A new structure plan for Flanders is used as a vehicle for introducing structural change in the field of spatial planning. To avoid the often rather naive, utopian and certainly non-successful way previous planning concepts were implemented, advantage will be taken of the criticism that was formulated and the evolution planning went through in the 1970s and 1980s.

Very briefly an indication will be given of how some of the issues mentioned in the previous paragraph were tackled. This of course is but a glimpse of what is happening in practice.

5.1. Integrative

The vertical integration of the plans is subject to a very specific condition that, at a central (Flemish) level, only those issues may be integrated that can be adequately addressed and controlled by a central plan. The uniqueness and specificity of the lower level(s) can only be optimally dealt with, within the framework of a limited plan formulated on a higher spatial level (ALBRECHTS, 1986a). This implies that the directions and restrictions of central decisions have to be strictly followed, however taking into account the necessary feedback relations. The central plan therefore constitutes the integrative frame for the various lower (provincial) plans (vertical integration).

Each plan is conceived also to integrate horizontally the various sectorial departments whose policies have explicit or implicit spatial repercussion and which eventually should be in charge of the implementation of the plan. Each

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[1] Belgium has been subdivided in three regions: Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. Spatial planning has become the exclusive responsibility of the separate regions.

sectorial department was asked – and accepted – to formulate its own sectorial policy. These policies have to be designed and supported by all relevant sections of the sector. The technical integration of these sectorial policies takes place in a special steering committee. The balance of the spatial demands of the different sectors is made up within a substantial frame of reference approved by the entire Flemish government (including concepts such as sustainable development, carrying capacity of areas, spatial quality etc.).

It is clear that sectors are fundamentally characterized by the confrontation within the governmental apparatus of more or less antagonistic interests. The specific composition of power blocks is determined by the political climate at this very moment. Structural changes are determined by the balance of power.

5.2. Political

The credibility of the whole operation is extremely important. Therefore the minister was asked to take some very specific steps to prove his willingness to go for structural change (this was in fact a prerequisite to go along with the process).

Right from the beginning alliances have been made with the environmental movement, with the major (official) ecological and economic consultative bodies. Moreover substantial lobbying and negotiation with main pressure groups are involved.

The general public is informed and mobilized through (professional) information campaigns by means of the media (newspaper, journals etc.) and special publications (newsletter etc.) and conferences. In this way as much pressure as possible is put on the politicians so that an eventual withdrawal becomes very difficult and an initial impetus is given to value change.

Every plan must be action oriented. Implementation is therefore built into the planning process as a critical dimension involving means and strategies to overcome resistance to change within the limits of legality and peaceful practice (FRIEDMANN, 1992). Dealing with power structures is extremely important in this respect.

5.3. Normative

The statements of normative planning are derived from values and defined in terms of "what ought to be done". The normative ideas that have been incorporated into the process include equity, sustainability, economic-, social-, spatial carrying capacity of areas notion of spatial quality etc.

Starting off from these normative ideas the purpose is to create an attractive and challenging image (or metaphor) for Flanders that catches on and to try to

convince as much citizens as possible that Flanders' future is their responsibility too, and that they have to ensure that the values and normative ideas they stand for are reflected in this process.

An attempt is made to clarify what kind of a future actual trends are bringing to us, what the real problems and challenges are and which tendencies counteract the normative ideas.

5.4. Innovative

This form of planning looks for creative solutions to social, economic and spatial problems. Solutions are not seen as mere being the extension of trends but, in a realistic way, as something new responding to the basic challenges of society (sustainability, mobility etc.).

5.5. Entrepreneurial

Although to a large extent economic, social and spatial planning are governmental activities as an exceptional once-only situation, a contract to draw up a structure plan for Flanders was made up between the minister and two individuals. This gave an enormous freedom to organize the process in the way one wants to do it, the flexibility to choose for the planners one wishes to work with, to talk to anyone one wishes to talk to, to link expertise to the process by subcontracting, talking, negotiating and lobbying in a very informal way and the opportunity to reflect about structural change in the system itself. On the other hand one bears full responsibility should for one reason or another the process go wrong.

As history shows clearly that traditional planning is not able to counteract with some basic tendencies, the process is used to reflect on the kind of administrative, legal and social structures needed to cope with the kind of planning that has been proposed in this process. To make the transition from this *ad hoc* planning unit to the 'official' planning administration as smooth as possible the critical part of the latter is involved in the process.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Practice teaches that in many sections of society there is a clear pressure for real change. Therefore I have argued in this paper that some 'old' concepts of the 1960s might be used in a new way and that in this way planning could be

used as a vehicle for change. The idea of the creation of alternative possible futures to counterbalance the usual practice of thinking from the here and now into the future seems especially useful in this respect.

The type of planning outlined in this paper could provide context and focus for ethical issues, social justice, development processes, regeneration and strategies for sustainable development. Opponents might argue that this approach is at odds with the real functioning of society. Therefore it is crucial that this planning starts from the structural conditions that determine its field of action and that this planning grasps the nature and characteristics of the various actors and/or target groups as well as comprehends their interests and power relationships.

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