CONSIDERATIONS ON SPATIAL PLANNING

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ABSTRACT: *Planning displays three main features. First, it is a future-oriented activity intended for the elaboration of strategies, which will lead to the achievement of the objectives set out. Many of the definitions given by dictionaries to the term of planning start with the idea of making decisions with a view to reaching predetermined goals. Secondly, planning is part of the public sector and represents a process owing to which the central and local public sector seeks to influence the activities of companies by means of guidance, rules, incentives, etc. This does not imply that the private sector is not of interest, but rather on the contrary, it means that it is important to understand the manner the public sector plans its activities so that the private companies are able to adapt. Either way, the starting point for an analysis of the planning system is an analysis of the policy, procedures and institutions that are part of the public system. Thirdly, the type of planning in the hereby paper mainly regards the physical environment, while, in different contexts, planning might regard economic or social planning. The planning under debate deals with a different meaning of the definition given to planning by dictionaries, as it is associated with drawings, buildings plans, construction sites, and urban areas.*

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1. THE NOTION OF PLANNING

Planning is a very difficult term to define. In the case of those who deal with planning, the term might possess various meanings, so that planning does not have the same meaning for everyone.

Either we consult the Oxford English Dictionary or the American Webster, we find out that the meaning of the noun "planning" or of the verb "to plan" owns varied meanings as in Romanian.

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The aspects of the urban design of planning displays a history that goes back to the ancient Greeks and Romans and a lot of planning or management courses focus on the experience and training with the drawing boards required for managers and planners. Nonetheless, most of the planning activities concern, nowadays, the physical environment without particularly considering planning skills.

Planning regards the elaboration of the strategies for remodelling and protecting the constructions and the environment. These strategies might take different forms, while their implementation does not necessarily require guidance or projects.

The aesthetic quality of the urban environment is not the only main goal of this planning as it might also regard:

- The redistribution of the resources within disadvantaged urban groups;
- The increase of the longevity of the buildings;
- The preservation of wild nature;
- The promotion of urban development.

A shared goal, like that of a sustainable development, might be achieved by means of a planned process.

The fact that planning is a term with several meanings determines more implications. The system of planning shows a predisposition to confusion and not all strategies ranging in this domain might be labelled as planning.

More and more strategies have come closer to theoretical planning: transportation, buildings, town maintenance, and pollution. The domains a planning guide should focus upon change depending on current issues and political context. The most significant ones are as follows: land use planning; environmental planning.

The British planning model has been assumed by several countries. Nonetheless, it includes concepts borrowed from the experience of other countries: the land policy and the urban design of Prussia were, for instance, the starting point of the conception regarding the planning of land use, while the assessment of the land use impact on the environment was borrowed from the United States of America.

2. IMPLEMENTING PLANNING

Owing to the systematic assessment of alternatives, planners can select a preferred course of action for implementation. Nevertheless, we should stress that this is not a *final* decision.

Within the planning process, the whole stages of modelling, assessment, and selection are permanently repeated. The objective of the process is, on the one hand, to forge a monitoring system, which can check the response of the urban and regional system to the various planning measures taken with a view to assessing progress; on the other hand, the objective looks to forge the controlling system, which responds flexibly and receptively to the data controlled by the monitoring system.

The process resembles the piloting of a sea ship or an airplane. A course is settled, while a set of instruments certified that the ship observes the course or that it deviates from the course; meanwhile, the monitoring devices, either automated or manual, take the required corrective actions.

In accordance, the monitoring system tests the matching (or the lack of matching) between the situation in the real world and the model (or "navigation map"). In the case when there are divergences, then either controlling is required with a view to match the real-world situation and the model, or the model should be changed to display a description closer to reality or a combination of the two.

The above paragraph shows an ideal planning and not the reality of planning worldwide. The world urban and regional planning looks for with a view to control is much wider and richer in content than the piece of reality represented by the course of a sea-ship or an airplane. In addition, to reduce the planning to a series of schematic terms by means of a model is much more difficult and error occurring much higher.

Due to the complex character of the human resources involved, the control systems of a planner are more unrefined and less efficient than those a ship captain or an airplane pilot have on hand. History has proved for good that even within the most powerful and efficient planning systems the world changes in every way and the planners are not able to predict these changes.

Due to this feature, planning might display serious problems regarding its matching the reality and, although we might control the responses in the urban and regional system to exert pressure more efficiently, this might be impossible politically.

In practice, as a series of important planning disputes have shown, a ranked set of planning systems might operate wrongly in a variety of ways. First, the knowledge on the external environment of the planning decision might increase rapidly determining unpredictable results.

The changing economies producing nuclear and conventional energy might invalidate a program from the point of view of a power station location; the variations among the noise emission levels of jets and the improvements in terrestrial transportation from town to airport might entirely change the model of a decision that concerns the location of an airport (while a change of the size of the aircrafts might require a new airport); the development of less noisy or no noise cars might influence the building of highways.

In practice, it should be possible to predict technical changes and their impact better than this is done nowadays. It seems extraordinary that, for instance, just after World War II, when the jets already used to fly, the impact of their noise was apparently ignored when planning the main civil airports worldwide. Nonetheless, despite all predictions, a considerable element of incertitude and chance will always come forth.

This drafting where models interact with the real world through comparative analyses and where the control processes are subsequently applied to the real world, strongly resembles the analogies and intuitions of cybernetics.

Secondly, planning might function wrongly due to the complex interpolations among the different levels of the planning system and the different elements of the planning situation. Accordingly, a strategic high-level policy drawn up by a national or regional planning authority for an apparently good cause might determine unexpected effects at a local planning level.

In Great Britain, for instance, the policy regarding the development of office buildings was introduced in 1965 to restrict locating such buildings in London and other cities and promoted decentralization in the new town and the development areas.

The restrictions have determined delays in modernizing parts of London, such as Piccadilly Circus, whose trade value depends on such office buildings. The process might, to a certain extent, operate vice versa. In accordance, although almost everybody agreed upon building a national highway from London to the southern part of Wales to ease the traffic along the old road, works for the new route were delayed more than ten years as one local authority after another successfully deviated the road from their area. Once built, the fact that the highway follows the path with fewest damages on the environment might be comforting.

Thirdly, in time, human values or at least the values of those actively preoccupied tend to change.

Lately, there is evidence that the pace of such changes increases: the fashion in planning is inclined to change as rapidly as the fashion in the clothing industry. As complex planning inevitably requires time for preparation and implementation, the result might be contradictory. With this in view, urban modernization offers a good example.

At the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, the keyword was "comprehensive redevelopment": to promote a better environment and to separate people's activities from the dangers and pollution of traffic, wide cleaning works were required in several old urban areas. Nonetheless, by the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, there was virtually a reversal: the keywords were "preservation and "urban spontaneity", and younger planners were those who especially wanted to preserve the chaos and mess of the older towns, which they perceived as pleasant.

The planning that represented the older scheme of values, such as the development of Covent Garden or the rebuilding of the area of La Défense in Paris, was strongly attacked exactly for those qualities admired a few years before. Similarly, the end of the 1960s saw a change of the opinions concerning the building of highways, with protests from San Francisco and London to New Orleans and Paris.

Earlier, the fact that urban traffic should have taken separate routes, specially planned with a goal in view, was axiomatic. Nowadays, the opponents start to set forth the disadvantages of highways: noise, visual discomfort, and change of traditional districts. As it was impossible for a town to properly match the increasing car traffic, the opponents considered that the correct policy was to restrict the use of cars in towns and to build instead a good public transportation.

Finally, it is quite clear that it is very difficult to match various value judgements as most planning controversies involve a rights conflict, although the debating might hide the issue.

As other things might be legal, it seems fair to build urban highways to alleviate traffic congestion in the case when there is no other way to stop people buy and use cars, which, in fact, offer the expected personal mobility. Accordingly, urban highways represent the best way to cope with the issue.

The problem is that this is not the only thing to be considered. As opponents show, highways are disturbing and disrupting, although they might be better planned than most of the other roads; the amounts spent for them might be deviated from public transportation and, even in the case when most of the people own cars, as in the mid-1950s, in the U.S.A. and the mid 1980s in the United Kingdom, most individuals won't have free access to highways, most of the time. It results that the controversy is essentially a matter of priorities.

In a perfect world, with no economic issues, unlimited resources would exist for very well-planned highways, integrated in the urban environment and the efficient public transportation system - without mentioning all the other similar investments such as the replacement of old schools, of hospitals and prisons or of shelters for disadvantages individuals. Nonetheless, resources are far from being unlimited and the community should decide on what kind of good things it mostly needs.

Finally, most of the main planning decisions are political. Unfortunately, as people know well, taking politically influenced decisions is quite an imperfect matter. Common people are given the opportunity of choosing every 4 or 5 years for a national government or every 3 or 4 years for a local council.

People must vote based on the various policies that mess them and where planning issues are mentioned low on the list. A lot of such issues, as previously shown, might be general and abstract so that it is difficult for common people to assess their impact until critical and probably irrevocable decisions are taken.

Pressure groups might deploy efficient actions targeting certain issues, but they tend to be formal and disproportionally populated by those groups in the society that are better educated, better informed and better organised, which, in moist cases mean wealthier. The recommendations of Roskill Board for the third London airport were finally overcome by the minister after a greater demand from the public; and a lot of planners thought that the minister was right. Meanwhile, a lot of people did not agree upon the fact that while the board's work cost over one million pounds, the pressure group against this project spent 750,000 pounds for the recommendation to be refused.

The danger here consists in the fact that, the greater the call for the public participation to the planning decisions, the greater the possibility that decisions might favour the richest and best organised against those who scarcely look for their interests.

A certain stringent issue of divergent values that is obvious in several planning decisions regards the trade among the interests of various generations. For instance, should we build public housing to reflect the standards and aspirations of the first dwelling occupants or of the second or third dwelling occupants? In the case when such houses are built according to the minimal contemporary standards, there is risk that they are regarded as substandard dwelling places after one or two generations, when their re-planning would be impossible at a reasonable cost.

Moreover, in the case when the dwelling places are built to match the standards of tomorrow, then fewer resources would be available to meet the urgent needs of today. Similarly, most preservation decisions involve questions about the interest of different generations. For instance, the demolishing a dwelling places area in a town might be cheaper than its rehabilitation, but the Community must later choose between the needs of those who leave in the area and the value of the area for the future inhabitants.

Similarly, building green belts around the British towns after WWII involved sacrificing those who lived further from their work places, while most of the urban population at the time could not enjoy benefits as they lacked cars to go on trips to the protected areas; the real benefits would be probably experienced by the future generations, which will use cars to travel through the green belts long after the belts were planned.

In such a case, the planners might claim that, through their intervention, they preserve the interest of posterity, including the interest of the unborn generations.

In practice, a well-administered planning represents a long path from the neat sequences of theoreticians. It involves, from the beginning, the impossibility of predicting future events; the interaction of the decisions taken at various political spheres determine value conflicts that cannot be entirely settled through rational debates or calculations.

The un-matching of the organized pressure groups and the defending of the interests invested determine conclusions that come out of the complex inner relations among the decisions at various levels and scales, under certain circumstances. As a result, the systemic or cybernetic dimension of planning, targeted by the planners, will never become a complete reality.

3. NEW PARADIGMS IN PLANNING

Due to such issues, as was probably inevitable, in the first half of the 1970s, there was an important reaction against the planning style of the systems, just as before the system planners had reacted against the managing planners. Certain planners started to question the primary principal of system approaching, the scientific notion, in the sense that the world might be fully understood, and its future might be predicted.

There came forth the opinion that the planner might be able to determine selflessly what is best for society, that the welfare of all people could be maximized, without too much concern for distributional issues and that planning meant to adapt to the rapid increase and growth data.

These ideas regarded two types of planning, which dealt with the main issues of the 1960s: transportation planning, to cope with the explosive growth of car owners, and sub-regional planning, to cope population increase and decentralizing. Although continuously criticized due to technical issues, there is no doubt that, in these domains and with regard to the structure planning at the beginning of the 1970s, the systemic approach represented an important progress compared to the older, inflexible planning style. The issue grew even deeper and the attack on the systems planning came out earlier. First, there was the request for public participation into planning.

Beginning with the official endorsement of the Skeffington Report, in 1967, which had as a result a statutory request stipulating that participation should be part of the planning process, the issue attacked one of the main elements of systems planning: the concept of the planner as a scientific expert. From here, it was just a step to the opinion that the official participation in planning was by itself an action designed to manipulate the public, which was not able to question the substance. Under such circumstances, it was important to involve the citizens in drawing up plans for themselves and not mere public consultations. This sounded as a request, which, nevertheless, was difficult to reach in those urban areas where people were did not care too much and were less informed on the opportunities.

The idea of a community action in planning began in the United States and rapidly spread in Great Britain, at the end of the 1960s, helped by the new preoccupation for the social issues of the town in both countries.

From the beginning, it tended to be radical and, especially in Great Britain, it came to influence the intellectual trends towards Marxism.

In addition, such a situation could be easily predicted: community action inferred that local people should be organized and, through definition, such a thing could not happen formally; those people who assumed that role believed in a radical mission capable of elevating people awareness.

The projects targeting the development of the community rapidly determined conflicts between the teams and the local councils resulting in the quick ending of the experiment. On the other hand, there was a large variety of semi-official and nonofficial groups involved in various projects and displaying different political opinions, from left liberal to left Marxist. A lot of them started to play an important part in the cities when, after 1977, the government gave funds to the authorities for partnerships and programs.

In short, it appeared that Marxist theory was applied to the development of modern capitalist economy, which determined profound changes of the economy of the industrially advanced countries in Europe and North America, which, at their turn, determined powerful regional and urban impacts.

Production rationalizing determined important location changes in industry and significant labour reductions that mainly affected the older and larger towns in the former industrial regions. The essence of this approach resides in the analysis of the structural changes of ownership and control supporting the new developments.

Nonetheless, the main success of this trend consisted in analyses and not in recommendations or bans, or, put another way, I urban studies and not in urban planning. If political recommendations exist, they tend to be conventional, in the form

of an extension of the state sector, of an increase of cooperative production form and of a control of the liberty of private industrial companies to shut down factories.

Yet, the whole analysis certainly shows a deep sense that regards the power of the modern multinational corporations capable to affect towns and regions - a power that, quite often, seems to be greater than the government capacity to influence their actions.

The analysis was specifically penetrating during the 1980s, when both in Great Britain and in the United States, the right-wing governments withdrew from planning and, nevertheless, encouraged the approaches that could determine urban regeneration. The situation determined an odd separation between practice and theory in urban planning and development, which had never happened before.

The main issue of the neo-Marxist approach of planning during the years 1970s and 1980s resembled, oddly enough, the issue of the systems planners the Marxists used to criticize. The burden of Marxist criticism consisted in the fact that systems planners, considered worthless, could never realize that they were intrinsically dependent on values they were only the technical planners who could discuss how to reach to a given end and not only to an end.

Those Marxists whose education enabled them to understand the laws of human social development were the only ones who could understand this subtlety. As soon as they managed to understand that, as was the case of the systems planners before them, they could legitimately aspire to plan and control.

Nonetheless, their main issue, which was like that of the systems planners, regarded the public questioning the perception of their work as being generally valid. In fact, the problem of planning legitimacy was still topical, as a considerably larger part of the public became interested in the impact of planning. Irrespective of the planners' ideology, it appears that people are not willing to accept their omniscience any longer.

Meanwhile, since people know planning is a public asset that might determine positive or negative impacts upon them, the controversies regarding the planning proposals tend to become more tensed.

Under such circumstances, we cannot only say that people have disputed with planners; quite often people have disputes with other people, as in the case of highways or centrally located buildings. Especially during the periods of negative growth, when resources are limited, planning might become, according to the American economist Lester Thurow, a "zero stake game", where in the case one wins the other loses.

With or without zero stake, today, few people doubt that planning decisions critically affect the so-called "real income". Real income is much more than the money income; it includes an intangible physical income such as the one given by fresh air, lack of noise, king neighbours, crime-free milieu, good education, services that could be accessed by means of an efficient transportation, and many other things.

Urban planners receive questions about the distribution of the real income as a core part of the planning process. The assessment of the planning, from their perspective, should less regard the aggregated excess of the benefits compared to costs and more regard the redistribution of the real income so that the groups that, at present, own less to get more benefits.

As already suggested, the analysis cost-benefit is inferior to the disaggregated analysis of the planning balance or to the variety of matrices for reaching the goals. The recent approaches mainly regard costs and benefits distribution, while the planning balance specifically regards their incidence within various population groups. In addition, they can include elements that cannot be currently expressed in monetary terms, but which, nonetheless, represent important elements of the real income, such as the gains and losses in terms of environment quality. This represented one of the most important planning features in the 1970s.

Alongside, there was a focus on generating economic growth that reflected the preoccupations at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s.

In poor areas, growth was always a key preoccupation, which around 1981 or 1982 became universal. Despite the strong ideological battles between approaches - regarding land development or other schemes led by the local authority to regrow traditional industrial units - there was an implicit understanding of the importance of revitalizing less favoured urban-industrial economies.

The paradox was that environment preoccupations remained strong and, almost inevitably, they did not act against the goal of economic regeneration.

The previously mentioned paradox was at a maximum in the United States, where environment groups confronted the government on issues like the oil exploitation along Californian coast or surface mining in the Western states; in Great Britain, on the other hand, the paradox took more subtle forms dealing with the areas meant for urban companies or the mining rights in the national parks.

The nature of the paradox is that we deal with an "equal score" society and, to get out of this condition, certain groups must sacrifice something they care about a lot. In other words, planning is only an acute example of the core issue of society. And, during the economic revival towards the middle and end of the 1980s, such issues became increasingly prominent and the local pressure groups in the less favoured areas tried to put pressure for an increased growth in their regions.

Finally, the matter seems to regard the following questions: "What is planning methodology?" and "How does planning intend to settle such issues?", while the answer should certainly be: "Through a variant of the systems approach". Consequently, planning should not claim an instant capacity to solve complex issues nor unique expertise. And it certainly should not claim what is good for people. It should rather be exploratory and instructive.

Planning must help communities think clearly and logically about settling their issues, mainly in connection with more subtle ones such as growth and fairness. It should try to examine alternative courses and monitor the consequences of such courses on various groups of people in different places instead of avoiding difficult questions that regard the exercise of political power. It should propose recommendations instead of enforcing recommendations. In addition, it should claim with modesty that planners might be more capable than an average individual to be in charge with such issues but not that they are unique experts.

In other words, it should represent a resource for the democratic and informed decision-making process. Legitimately this is all that planning can and claim to do. And it is exactly this the real message of the systems evolution in planning.

4. REGENERATION AND PRESERVATION

These two notions complete the overall view upon the planning system through considering two different types of policy for two different categories of the built environment: pursuing regeneration by means of urban and regional policies for the areas where development and change are essential and preserving the inherited areas considered worth preserving. Urban and regional policy is traditionally expressed in terms of public investments and subsidies.

The period of Thatcher administration in the 1980s, in Great Britain, for instance, saw a trend guided more towards the market in the urban and regional policy, which persists today, at the beginning of the third millennium, although rebranded as partnership.

The most relevant policies are the following ones: subsidies for the physical improvement of lands, land transfers and promoting regeneration through partnerships. The preservation of the inherited built environment is tracked through an improved regularization that mostly regards development control. As a result, the issue finally returns to the land planning system. Na important twist of land planning came out in Romania, too, when they adopted the new Constitution, which stipulates the possibility that foreigners purchase land.

As far as regeneration is concerned, the subsidies should target the improvement of physical infrastructure, which mainly focus on the dwelling places sector with the abandoned and contaminated land.

The subsidies for encouraging the improvement of the dwelling places were long before available as part of a policy that involved the rehabilitation of slums, which, finally, supported social change and physical improvement of entire areas. Nonetheless, local authorities should still take care of the dwelling places under their power and take proper measures to repair, shut or demolish insalubrious buildings.

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