

# R.A.I. of Architects (NSW)

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STRATEGIC AND MASTER PLANNING -  
NEW APPROACHES

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MR. G. CLARKE (main speaker)

In this series we have already had very excellent talks on long range and corporate planning by Brian Scott and John Wilson. In those talks we were led gently through the process of long term corporate planning as applied to companies and corporations, the large scale modern corporation, or the large scale modern organisation, whether it be governmental or private. We were earlier in this series introduced to this strange new term "strategic planning". We were assured that it did mean something in terms of modern institutional and business organisation. Later we had an excellent informal evening, being led by R. Fortescue through systems analysis, and here in a sense we were told how strategies were evolved for systematic analysis and for strategic planning for large scale commercial or engineering projects. We were introduced to the notions of decision theory and decision trees, the concept of establishing the purpose of an exercise, the possible alternative choices that are available right at the beginning of the exercise, and the multiple branching of choices that occur in the later phases of the exercise. This was strategic planning brought down to the level of say the large marketing manufacturing process, or to the level of the large engineering or construction process. On that same evening we had Tom Heath, who again brought the concept of strategic approaches and systematic analysis down to the level of a discreet architectural problem, and the example he used was the choice of cladding to a building. This then means that the kinds of basic principles that I, and a whole generation of urban planners, have been trying to apply to urban situations, have already been explained to you in other contexts by other speakers. There is very little that they said that is not applicable to the problems of coping with, planning for, and managing urbanisation. In fact the whole sequence of thought involves going from the general principles down to particular issues with which you are familiar in architectural practice, these matters are of course simple but structured common sense, and they are used in every day life. There is a rough analogy I suppose, to the concept of the sketch drawing, and the sketch design in architectural matters, which is concentrated on the basic or strategic issues of the design and is later translated to a series of detailed investigations resulting in action plans which are particular documents specifying exactly what has to be done.

However, the way in which we apply these principles of strategic planning, systems analysis, and decision theory to our particular fields of activity differ from some other fields. First of all it is necessary in each case to interpret, or reinterpret, the nature of the business and the activity that we are engaged in, and the nature of the activity over which control is sought. Brian Scott was concerned with achieving a conscious control over the activities of a corporation, a large body of people joined together in some common enterprise. The history of business developments over recent decades shows that the way in which corporations define themselves has changed. Once upon a time they said "we are manufacturing nuts and bolts", later they decided to redefine their activity, as I think John Wilson of ACI said, to something like "we are providers of connections", and they continue redefining in more general terms, just as a builder can grow and redefine his activities into that of providing an environment. This means then that we have in the case of urbanisation to reinterpret urbanisation, to reinterpret the field in which urban planners are concerned. There is another thing that John Wilson said that is particularly relevant to urbanisation. He said that we are the elbow people. The rate of change up and until recently has been relatively slow, now the rate of change in technology and social attitudes in society is changing at an accelerating pace. We have seen this with world population, we have seen it with Australia's population which was virtually stagnant through the 30's and 40's and has only really started to grow during the 50's and 60's. We have seen it in technology and the transportation problem of the motor car and we have also seen rapid change in the opinions that people hold about their environment. We are now practically half way

through the second half of the 20th century, and I think it is becoming that urbanisation is, or is going to be, the major social problem of the second half of this century, in much the same way that perhaps one might have said public health was the major social issue of the first half of the 20th century.

It was only in the second world war that large scale efficient methods of eradication of things like malaria and T.B. were really worked out, so those professions concerned with the urban environment and town planning, as it has been called in the past, were concerned basically with a static situation, relatively slow rates of population growth, relatively slow rates of replacement of buildings, and relatively slow changing technology. Therefore there were static architectural, engineering and surveying attitudes and concepts which were applied to town planning. In Britain of course, and later in Australia, we derived concepts of the statutory plan, the rigid zoning scheme, and these were very good techniques to cope with a very slowly changing environment. However, I think that in Australia in the last 2 or 3 years we have been confronted with a situation where the problems of urbanisation has hit the middle classes where it hurts. In their own backyard, where they are overshadowed by a block of flats, or in their own journey to work and their attempts to move about their environments in search of business, pleasure of recreation. And so we have an explosion of social, political concern with this problem.

During these recent decades, those people who have called themselves urban, regional, or physical town, or city, planners have increasingly come to recognise that they are not so much concerned with physical designs or physical planning, but as a group they are concerned with social issues and social policies. They are concerned with social choices about social values, and about the way in which the environment should be consciously shaped to serve those notions of what is the most desirable way to live. And so physical planning has become increasingly inter-related with social manner. At a conference in 1967 in Toronto, of people from all over the world concerned with metropolitan issues, which Mr. Ashton and myself attended, one of the conclusions reached was that planning prophecy and politics are very closely inter-related.

I think that most of you will see how politics, that is policy formation and arguments about policy formation, are tied up in planning issues. In the last year or two we have seen increasingly how local councils have been thrown out of office on planning or environmental issues, and we know that our politicians at all levels of government are increasingly talking about these issues. By prophecy, I mean that generations of planners now have been offering visions of a better way of life. The great London plan of the 1940's offered a prophecy, hypothesis is another word for it, about how life could be better organised and better lived if in fact the urban region was structured according to that plan, i.e. by a series of connected sub-regional centres and centralised towns. Here in N.S.W. we exercise in planning politics and a prophecy in the Cumberland county plan, which was founded on political rock, but contained elements of prophecy. Similarly the state planning authority is now engaged in an act of prophecy related to the outline, plan, and which in a sense is a strategic plan, an act of faith and an act of prophecy, in putting forward the idea that it would be socially, as well as economically, desirable to have a satellite city at Campbelltown.

Now if we seek then to redefine the field of urbanisation as not being really a physical field, but one involving questions of what kind of physical structures, what kind of physical arrangements of roads, or parking stations or public transport, or housing patterns, we should have in order to serve our political values about what is the good life. If we see then that in order to move forward in this field, since we are dealing with people, we have in fact to hypothesise that certain arrangements would be better and

then test them. We see that we are in a very complex field. A field much more complex than the composition of a piece of music or, the composition of architecture, or in fact than mere organisation of a few hundred people or a few thousand people in a business corporation.

We are dealing essentially with a problem of how to control the processes of urbanisation so as to serve values which are themselves constantly shifting. In doing this then, urban and regional planners are increasingly called upon to produce hypotheses about a better arrangement, to serve a higher form of social life. They are constantly called upon to test these in the process of politics, and of course at the same time they are called upon to implement these things in many technical ways which involve economic studies, geographic studies, transportation studies and the many forms of technical and professional work which I do not think we have time to consider tonight. The social planner then, or the urban planner, has great difficulties in claiming to be scientific. But increasingly planners are concerned that their methods of work and procedure should follow some scientific method, and this I think is where we enter the new definitions of approaches to planning. Approaches which start off with an attempt to establish goals, or closer to the context, of a city or an urban region or a municipality, to establish the essential roles that a piece of dirt has to fulfil and to work then from the general to the particular. We are of course getting away from the 19th century and the early 20th century concepts of the masterplan, and many new words are being used to try to explain this new type of approach.

Such phrases as functional planning, outline planning, structure planning, policy planning, strategic planning, all of these terms have been used at different places and different times in the United States, England and in Australia. In each case there is an attempt to choose a new word that is not stale by usage, in order to shock people, to make them sit up and think, and that is an important reason for the use of so many terms. Our problem is that we still lack a common language. The British have traditionally regarded town planning as very much connected with social welfare planning, that is with housing for the lower income group, with the alleviation of social problems. The whole slum clearance movement used to be a moral concern for social issues. In Italy and Continental Europe generally, the concern has been more with the design of the specific architecture of the city and with the visual environment. In the United States the concern has been traditionally with economic efficiency. There again these have been partial approaches, and we are now trying to bring all of these things together into some balanced system approach to any further problem.

When we redefine our fields of planning physical environment so as to meet the social needs, we realise that we are getting involved in very deep social issues, and social and political processes. We have then to look to the literature of sociology and of political science in order to seek some guidance. Professor Percy Partridge at the Australian National University in writing about the social and political movements of Europe during the 1920's 30's and 40's, is also concerned to illustrate that our policies change, and that plans once polished become an element in a situation. He argues along the lines that a realist would deny that it is possible to formulate any social policy by which social events are simply guided towards some result previously determined by a set of so called social goals. Our policies, and the ends we profess, change from moment to moment as we are affected by the succession of events. It is not only a matter of taking into account the characters of certain social conditions when we formulate a policy, but it is often the case that in attempting to put some policy into operation we find out for the first time, which we could not have found out in any other way, certain features and characteristics of our social and political environment, and we modify in consequence the ends of policies that we entertain. The formulation and modification of policies is something that goes on continuously as part of the social plight. In this sense any planning authority concerned with

urbanisation, finds itself constantly dominated and coerced by events, and compelled to take up positions far removed from the position it had intended to take up before.

I think that is a very realistic description of a social process, at least in western countries. I would say that our power to plan and the kind of plan to make depends upon the extent of control that we exert over the materials at hand, and the extent of consensus and agreement we can gain among all the bigger groups, and among those who have power to stop us doing it and the scientific knowledge or predictability that we can draw on. In Soviet Russia, of course, they have absolute power because of the way people are educated there. From childhood they have absolute consensus and consequently they do not need too much strategic planning, or flexible planning, they do not have planners in the sense that we have them, they simply have architects and engineers. They say "there shall be a new city there" and they give the job to architects and engineers to carry out. Of course, in our society we have relatively little consensus about what should be done. Planners play a large part in engineering some kind of consensus or winning support for their prophecies that medium density housing is good or that we ought to have green belts, or that we ought to have satellite cities of a certain size. Planners are also concerned with knowledge of course, or predictability, and in our society here in Australia we find great difficulty in making economic projections or demographic projections of what the situation will be in the future. So in each situation we have different degrees of low orders of consensus, and we generally, as a controlling organisation in Australia, have low orders of power and low powers of predictability. If you have absolute knowledge of what is going to happen in the future you can of course plan quite simply. If you have absolute control, planning becomes relatively simple, and if you have absolute consensus to a thing whether it is right or wrong, then you have no problem. Here in Australia at the moment in each area we have very little of those requirements, therefore instead of going ahead with masterplanning we first of all put it to the nation, that a masterplan should be an impermanent constitution and that it should be flexible.

That is fine, but lately new approaches derived from systems analysis have entered the field, and I can give you a number of references, that you might like to follow up, which will give you a good background in this new intellectual discipline applied to organisation planning. For a general approach to the whole series of planning I think a very good text is "Planning Aspects and Applications" by Melville C. Branch, published by John Wiley & Sons, New York, London, etc., 1966. This talks of the differences between project planning, city planning, corporate planning, military planning and then finally the comprehensive planning process. There is another book which I think is an excellent text to carrying the matter further, it is "The City Planning Process" by Alan Altschuler, published by the Cornell University Press, 1965.

These intellectual concepts of policy making, strategic decision making, and practical decision making, have gradually been translated into practical techniques by planners, and possibly for us here in Australia the most seminal document in this area is of course the report of the British Government Planning Advisory Group published by HMSO, "The Future of the Development Plan". It is basically the messages of this document which are gradually seeping into Australian planning practise, and we are modifying them and working out our own approaches. All the British have done is to apply the common sense notions of working from the general to the particular to the field of town planning which has been so defogged and befuddled by statutory procedures and by legalistic machinery. They talk about a new type or urban plan which the emphasis is on the broad structure of the town and which deals in policies, objectives and standards, rather than in the detailed and static land use allocation of the old style of town plan.

The urban plan's principal aim is to provide a basic planning document which is capable of expressing the clear and integrated way in which the policy and the objectives will shape the town's future. As we see it the new type of urban plan, which is a type of strategic, or outline, or structure, or policy, or functional plan, should set out the local planning authorities main objectives and policies and put these before the public and the minister. It should clarify the physical structure of the town, put special emphasis on the communications network and the main traffic generators, the grouping of environmental areas and the general form and direction of the town's future growth and renewal. It should define the transport policy for the town including the relationship between public and private transport, and the reconciliation of their acceptability in environmental standards. Most if not all of the policies and proposals which the plan should cover can best be set out in writing supported by sketch maps or diagrams in the text. The criterion for inclusion in such a strategic plan should be whether the particular policy is likely to have an important bearing on the structure of the town or on the general pattern of its growth and renewal. Certain components are clearly essential but in addition to the projections of population growth and the general problem of policies for accommodating this growth there are other possible components which are of considerable but are not of critical importance, and therefore in a situation where the world is changing all the time, as is happening in Australia, it is absolutely essential that we conserve our energy and that we attack only the critical strategic issues. If these issues are not tackled, then we decline, but up until recently 95 or 99 per cent of the actual effort of governmental planning authorities has been directed very much towards the detailed day to day examination of particular developments and the resolution of particular problems.

We have, of course, an example of the strategic plan in the Sydney region outline plan. Previous to that we have had people working in this direction in W.A. where the metropolitan region for W.A. has been evolving gradually this strategic or flexible approach. In Victoria when the minister for local government called for a report from the town country planning board on how Melbourne should be planned for 5 million people, the word strategic was first used in application to this sort of planning in Australia. In recognition though, I should say that the concept was first introduced into Australia by the Cumberland County Council back in the late 1940's, when it produced what is called a functional plan for the County of Cumberland and hoped that this could be adopted as a policy document against which all particular proposals could be measured. We had to wait for 20 years before we got another functional plan, or strategic plan or outline plan. In Melbourne the emphasis in the report "Organisation for Strategic Planning" published by the Town and Country Planning Board of Victoria, was to set out the magnitude of the problem over the next 30 years of accommodating in the Melbourne region the projective additional 2½ to 3 million people, and a physical diagrammatical sketch structure concept was put forward. But this was not the essence of the document, the essence of that particular document was in the organisation for strategic planning.

We are gradually throughout Australia trying to think in terms of the different vertical levels of planning, and it seems to me that we need at the Federal Government level a national strategy for the population distribution, a national strategy for the location of industry, and a national strategy for the location of new ports. These things will give us the strategy within which the states can work. Similarly at the State level, we need a state strategy for the location of population, and major investments in interest structure. We need this also at the local level. At each level, we need to get the electorate to think in terms of strategy first, agreement on basic principals, on what kind of place it is supposed to be, what kind of functions it is meant to serve. And then we can pick out the basic elements of policy strategy, get those adopted and understood, then pick out the critical problem areas, the crisis point, and to concentrate efforts on those. The particular

attacks on the critical problems identified in the strategic planning process, are called action plans.

When I set this out it all sounds very much like commonsense, but when we are dealing with cities and towns we are dealing with things that are very hard to control. We are dealing with institutions which are very slow to change their thinking, and so it is not unnatural that in applying relatively commonsense notions, our urban governmental structure and our urban management procedures should be the last institutions in our society to change.

MR. J TOON (supporting speaker)

I am not at all sure that I am really qualified to talk about strategic planning. My reason is that I decided to find out what 'strategic planning' was; I looked up the Oxford English Dictionary for a definition and found that 'strategic' means 'by serving the ends of the strategy designed to disorganise the enemy's internal economy and to destroy morale'. Strategy was defined as 'artifice or trickery for deceiving the enemy'. Then I looked up planning, which was defined as 'contriving, cunning, purposeful, scheming, up to something, plotting or conspiratorial'. Obviously quite a nasty business! Strategic is also given as an alternative for planning, by which time I was thoroughly confused. Is 'strategic planning' equal to 'planned conspiracies' or to 'plan planning'?

My point is that the name does not mean very much; it is a phrase that is popular these days and perhaps it tends to divert attention from what are really more important considerations.

I think the main problem with planning is to define the objectives. In terms of a strategy, say a war, then the objective is clear because you are out to win the war. If strategic planning is applied to a business or major project the objective is usually clear-cut; in the case of a business: it is to increase productivity and output and eliminate rivals if possible; in the case of an engineering project it is to get something done in the most efficient way.

Planning objectives are exceedingly difficult to define. Referring to an excellent book which I recommend to you all, "Ideas for Australian Cities" by Hugh Stretton, the author talks about ideology; he is simply talking about planners and the morality of planning. Should, and can, planners be politically mute technicians or reformers? How democratic can planning be? Who is to say what is right? These are very difficult and complex areas of value. Judgement and how they may affect planning policy. Policies vary as some see the city as an 'organism', a popular phrase with my planning colleagues, or as a market place or an arena. What is a progressive attitude to change, how does it meet with the progressive attitude to conservation and what politics may be concealed in notions of urban efficiency, community needs, common good or functional design? This is indeed a very difficult area.

We commonly refer to such things as being in the 'public interest'. Banfield in his book 'Planning Politics in the Public Interest', has really exploded the idea that there is really only one public interest; rather that there are many public interests; they often conflict: individuals frequently support two interests with great vigour and yet they may be fundamentally exclusive. Society has always had a vast range of interests, ideas and aims which almost defy rationalisation; consequently it is common to fall back on the idea of say, functional efficiency because this is at least a little more measurable. It is the reasons why traffic engineers have got it over the planners because they are doing such a very clear task, they can measure it, they can give you facts and figures, there is not a problem because it is possible to predict with fair accuracy, the amount of traffic that is going to flow over a given network. Planners deal with a much wider range of issues which are exceedingly hard to define. I have here the Aspo "Guide to the Systems Approach to Urban Planning" which includes a chart - guide lines for urban town planning - starting with stage 1, identify objectives sub-categories, objectives should be expressed quantitatively wherever possible. This simple fact is that there



are many objectives that we cannot express in this kind of way, yet we have to ascribe a value to them.

When we are planning, making decisions, we are creating a situation which is going to restrict certain people's opportunities and perhaps give other people greater opportunities. This is almost implicit in the decision making process, which is the quintessence of the planning process. In the past we tended to take a very inflexible approach; we tended to define areas, zones, districts, in a very definite way; we supported this with ordinances which codified permissible uses in these particular areas and it led to inflexibility because many things change - for instance - transport, technology, retail technology, life styles, standards of living - which can only be accommodated in a more flexible arrangement. In the past planners have assumed the roll of advocate: in the manner of an architect they have prepared a plan and then go all out to sell it as hard as possible; in this sort of advocacy planning it is possible to bring a plan to some form of fruition. More recently there has been a realisation that it is not possible to plan in that precise manner and there has been a move towards greater flexibility. Various terms have been used, open ended planning and permissive planning, which is close to not having any planning at all. The theory is that since objectives cannot be defined because you do not know which way society is going to change, you do not know whether people are going to have more children or less children, or whether they are going to get married, or what they are going to do therefore you cannot establish anything sufficiently definite upon which to have a plan! A plan without an objective is a very interesting situation. The new city of Milton Keynes, in England, is substantially based on this concept; it is based on a system which allows anyone to do anything or to locate anywhere any activities. Its conceptual origins derive from the american idea of democracy; it is not dissimilar to the layout of early American cities, like Missouri, which are based on regular non-directional grids - the completely democratic plan.

The other problem in a non planning situation is that it not only has no objectives but does not have any image ability. A picture of nothing is difficult to sell, and it is very difficult to achieve political backing. An area which planners are going to have to explore more and more is that of interest groups. I think that we are reasonably confident that he can achieve a fair standard of physical arrangements. But it seems to me that in the process of getting a plan accepted one has to clearly identify the interests which are involved, identify their motives, establish their aims and aspirations and attempt to accommodate these. Now our current planning process works in this way but the interests that are operative are all well organised, quite powerful and have effective communication channels to chairman of State Planning Authorities or ministers. They are able to wield influence in various sorts of ways. They are usually using the planning system to their ends. There is also a vast disorganised interest group that has many interests but which is not organised and does not have effective means of communication now knows how to communicate by the various mechanisms that are open to it to wield influence or to express views. For instance South Sydney Council is trying to encourage an Erskineville redevelopment scheme. At a recent meeting to introduce the scheme to the local residents about 95 per cent were migrants, this meeting ended in an uproar after about half an hour with all the national groups dissenting loudly in their own language. Presumably this will provoke these groups into realising they have a common interest and they may play a more significant role in that proposal than they have so far, since they have not been adequately consulted, and it is really very difficult to consult them because they have no effective leaders. This is an example of the difficulty of defining objectives.

There is another group, with which we ought to be concerned. That is the 5 million people who are going to be here in the year 2000. We have a major responsibility to that group and yet it is clearly impossible to identify what their requirements and what their issues are. In looking at cities I view them as a response surface area which numerous individual groups and associations and agencies attempt to optimise their own performance. It is not just private agencies that behave in this way but also public agencies. It is a complex situation where public and private agencies interact on that response surface. In looking at this response surface one of the things that stands out is that individuals, public agencies and private agencies operate in rather the same kind of way. There is a tendency to jump into the middle of the room, to hold the middle of the room, and prevent anything else happening at a later stage. This is a process of foreclosing any alternatives. And in foreclosing options we are making life increasingly difficult for ourselves in the next year of the next decade.

I see as many options as possible as ever increasing the number of options that might be available in the future.