

March 1979

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Statement of professional and research interest

1. My interest, since childhood, has been in the practical ways people perceive, use and act to change, their everyday physical environment. This first led to interests in architecture, urban design and urban planning. The difficulties of making urban design decisions led to an interest in perception psychology, and how perception is influenced by experience of socio-cultural value systems.
2. The difficulties of making, winning a consensus for and implementing self-conscious urban and regional plans led me to seek to understand the nature of conflicts in the process of making decisions about urban change.
3. This led through a study of underlying socio-cultural and economic determinants to a study of the political and bureaucratic processes through which conflicting interest groups compete for influence and power on particular issues.
4. In the 1950's, I became keenly aware that the social rhetoric of the planning profession was convincingly denied by moral and political philosophers of the anti-utilitarian or realist schools, as well as by experienced managers in government and private corporations. Hans Morgenthau of Chicago, Professor Percy Partridge of Sydney (later Canberra), Chester Barnard and Martin Meyerson were early influences whose writings of the 1940's and early 1950's warned that social policies and plans (no matter how well researched) are not controlling agencies in social development and that in attempting to put some policy or plan into operation, we discover - and could not have discovered in any other way - certain features of our social environment which force us to modify the ends and policies we entertain, if, that is, we wish to continue as effective participants in the shaping of policies and plans.
5. The core of my professional and research interests since leaving M.I.T. in 1959, has been in the practical usefulness of redefining planning as a cyclic process of conflict-management.

This approach recognises that most social planning problems, including urban and regional problems, are "wicked" in the ways so succinctly defined in the 1969 Webber - Rittel paper "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning". This approach accepts the fact of "wickedness" and seeks to devise, put into operation and monitor research, planning and implementation processes, procedures and techniques which cope with "wickedness".

6. For the first 6 years after I started my own practice at the age of 28, in 1960, my work concentrated on economic analysis, market research and location studies for industrial, commercial, retail and residential development, following through into detailed physical planning of particular projects deemed feasible and detailed development regulations deemed desirable for particular areas. ←

Economic boom conditions obscured the wickedness of many problems and I served my apprenticeship as a technocrat striving to integrate research, planning and design.

I pursued my core interests by writing ~~several~~ papers, including "Policy conflicts in the Green Belt controversy" (1960), "The organisation of urban renewal" (1962) and "Canberra's significance for Australian Planning" (1964) and "Understanding the nature of the city core" (1965), for publication in local professional journals where they might have some educative effect.

7. However, my interest in tackling "wicked" problems, particularly in central cities where conflicts are most complex, and in areas bedevilled by Federal, State and Local inter-governmental relations, increasingly determined the type of problems I sought. As my interests became recognised, more "wicked" problems were brought to me. ←

Since 1967, ~~from~~ my role has been that of sole or prime consultant, project director and team leader on a continuing series of strategic ~~and~~ policy formulation and action programming processes which I have designed and operated to cope with "wicked" problems of local, ~~state~~ regional, state and national authorities.

The core of my professional interest since then has been devising, and optimising the cycle time, of research and planning techniques and procedures which balance the desirability of basing objectives and plans on the highest practicable degrees of scientific knowledge and of consensus; ~~and~~ the necessity to test those objectives and plans in the real world so as to obtain and use the feedback of new information to review, modify and update the initial objectives and plans

~~in such a way that
the conflicts are managed so that
full stop.~~

(P3)

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