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A Difference Paradigm for Planning

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open choice making to consumers, open planning and decision processes to more and different arguments and values. In effect, permissive planning is aimed at further opening the society to the interests of minority groups, minority opinion, and minority wants. In a society becoming increasingly diverse, as this one is, the right style of planning is the one that champions difference.

NOTES

1. I first used the name in "Planning in an Environment of Change, Part II: Permissive Planning," *The Town Planning Review* (Liverpool), 39, 4 (Jan. 1969): 277-295.

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Our host has invited us here, apparently hoping that this mix of minds will somehow generate some clues about next directions for the urban planning movement. I suspect we all share his desire for a new compass, for all of us must be eager to get out of the doldrum that displaced the optimism of the '60s. Images of New Frontiers and Great Societies have been tarnished by reforms that were to have changed the world and didn't, by imaginative programs that boomeranged to hurt the very people they were to have helped, and by formulas for betterment based on theories since abandoned. We worked through several styles of professional reform during those heady days of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. We tested out quite a lot of the accumulated inventory of program plans. For a while there, many of us were pretty sure we knew how to solve the problems of the city and of the city's deprived people. By now that confidence is worn thin. Too many failures, or seeming failures, have been counted up, leaving planners rather shaken and discouraged.

Paradoxically, however, one outcome of the high promises and the frenetic activities of the '60s was widespread legitimation of planning practice in a country that had traditionally been hostile to the very idea of it. After decades of persuading and cajoling, planners finally in recent times have successfully created planning agencies in virtually all sectors of government, in Democratic and Republican administrations alike, and at just the time when planners themselves seem least confident of their own capabilities. But for the erosion of faith among the faithful, this might be the most propitious time for effective planning. It is certainly a propitious time for reappraisal. If we could just find out how and what to do, if we could just find out how to make planning work, institutionally the opportunities now may be greater than ever before.

The Eroding Myth of Scientific Planning

Despite the rising popularity and the new legitimacy of planning, the idea of planning remains ambiguous, however. I am aware of about two dozen rather different conceptions of planning, each of which is widely held. They range from management and control by central government, to polite discrimination, to precise scheduling, to being smart about the future, to controlling deviancy, to protecting consumers—and so on.

Although not universally so, two common threads tie these multiple conceptions into a rather coherent meaning that most people may attach to the name, "planning." They are the notions (1) that some kinds of collective rationality can be effectively substituted for private rationality, and (2) that social systems can be engineered to conform to some collectively willed future state of affairs.

I suppose that the seeds for those conceptions of perfectability were planted during the Enlightenment when ideas of Progress came into good currency. I suppose the images of a collective will were nurtured during the Progressive Era when reformers successfully implanted notions of the public interest as legitimate concerns of government. I suppose the prospects for social engineering have been husbanded by the several generations of scientific managers, by whatever name, who have believed that systematic application of formal knowledge can solve social problems. I suppose the most commonly accepted notion of planning is something like that—i.e., that organized societies can rationally and scientifically engineer future history, thus to guarantee Progress and to assure that the public interest will be served.

There have been any number of efforts to explain why the reforms of the '60s missed their targets. I incline to the proposition that both the reformers and their clients were taken in by the myths imbedded in that technocratic conception of planning. It is fundamentally fallacious, and so the expectations it has generated have been unrealizable. It is simply not possible to consign a set of social problems to any group of professional people, however skilled, and to then get a set of solutions delivered in turn.

The attractiveness of the idea of scientific planning has been hard to resist, for it has held out the promise of right answers, of revealing what we should want, and of saying what we need to do. It seduces with the prospect of certainty, and thus with the prospect of relief from the discomforts of ambiguity and of having to decide things in the face of conflicting evidence and competing wants.

But scientific planning is a mirage. Science has nothing to say about which valued ends ought to be sought, but that is of course the very stuff of planning. Selecting among alternative ends is among the toughest planning tasks we face, and yet there is nothing in the apparatus of science—or of engineering—that can make those evaluative choices for us.

Science and planning are very different sorts of enterprises. As my colleague, Horst Rittel, has noted, because scientists seek to observe, describe, and explain, they have powerful incentives to leave that which they observe untouched. Planners are quite the opposite; their purposes are to change whatever it is they are confronting, preferably, of course, to improve it. Although planners, *qua* interveners, are fundamentally dependent upon scientifically acquired knowledge, they are users of that

prove impossible, I am then led to the strategy of cultivating a plurality of planners, rather as Paul Davidoff suggested a decade ago, such that all groups might be represented by their own professional advocates. The possibilities for pluralism of either style need to be further explored; for, however it is to be accomplished, I suggest the goal is of overriding importance.

It should be apparent by now that permissive planning exploits quite different techniques from those that have been stock-in-trade for the professions. Regulatory standards that set minimum qualities for products have also made for standardized products, even as they have protected consumers from fraudulent and greedy suppliers. As one result, some minorities have been unable to get the kinds of goods or services they may prefer—or those they can afford. It is not self-evident that housing standards serve the interests of low-income persons who are thereby unable to buy new and low-cost housing. It is not self-evident that standardized school curricula best serve the diversity of pupils, as so many recent critics have made clear. And so, permissive planners are going to have to find some alternatives to these sorts of standards. Preferably they will be procedures that compel nonstandard outcomes—that foster differentiation of product lines that might then better serve diverse consuming publics.

Performance standards offer one promising approach to that end, and a lot of experimentation seems to be underway on these approaches now. Cash payments to consumers as alternatives to governmentally supplied services are being strongly advocated by commentators across the full political spectrum—from both the right and the left. Americans' peculiar objection to redundancy in government has made for monopoly-like service agencies, which inevitably supply standardized services, frequently barricaded behind complicated administrative screens. Perhaps privatization of some of these services will make for greater differentiation and hence for better service to consumers, but an income-supplements policy will obviously be a necessary counterpart strategy.

These approaches suggest that among the more radical techniques for fostering difference is the invention of market-like production-and-distribution systems for social services that are presently administered through central governmental agencies. Whether supplied by governments or by private corporations, the effort would encourage a diversity of suppliers to offer a variety of goods and services, thus to help assure that consumers can make choices on their own, rather than having to accept whatever styles and qualities might have been centrally determined to be right for them.

And that may be the essential mark of the permissive planning style. It would seek to open the processes of government to all parties. It would

effective deliberation and argumentation. His skills are essentially cognitive. Perhaps in some modern sense they are Socratic; for he seeks to draw out implications, to provoke contention among potentially differing parties, to help all comers to explore potential consequences and their implications. His role may also be that of mediator, perhaps in the style of labor negotiators who help engage contest in accord with systematic procedures, then help resolve disputes by structuring negotiating and bargaining processes. In some senses he is teacher, who by example teaches others how to ask "What if?" in the planning idiom, then walks them through the creative processes that intelligent debate can generate. His role is necessarily also the inventor's. Employed full time to worry about questions that other participants can confront only avocationally, he is constantly called upon to think up better ways of confronting problems, resolving conflicts, or improving debate. As the cognitively skilled planner who reflexively searches for alternative actions and alternative outcomes, for redistributional repercussions, for feedbacks reactions, and for compatibilities of outcomes with goals, he is patently better equipped to think out the consequences of proposed actions than are most other participants. Moreover, having access to simulation models and other formal analytic procedures, he is inevitably better informed and so better equipped to formulate new objectives, new program plans, new compromises, new techniques for creating difference. In turn, he is in position to keep public debates fueled with a continuing supply of information, forecasts, analyses, arguments, and then the countervailing evidence and propositions that might reinforce opposing sides to disputes.

The permissive planner is literally a troublemaker. Finding persons or groups unconcerned about latent problems that will later affect them, he seeks to agitate those latent interests until they rise to the surface, then to find ways of involving those persons in pursuit of their self-interests. Finding dialogue lagging, he seeks to ignite conflict so that latent issues will become manifest. When decisions are about to be made that run counter to the wishes of some affected group, he feeds them with the evidence and arguments that might then keep the deliberations open a little longer.

I paint this permissive planner as something of an impartial and saintly soul, even though I know full well that few of us are capable of that sort of impartiality. Moreover, the planner worthy of our respect is a person who believes strongly about the issues he works on. Rather than the neutral eunuch, he is himself 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, and so on. I would hope, nonetheless, that the planner might also be capable of serving the interests of pluralism and diversity by aiding even those he opposes. And if that happy prospect should

knowledge, not scientists themselves. Although some practising planners are *also* researchers and contributors to the body of scientific knowledge, their roles as planners are intrinsically distinct from their roles as scientists. Planners use measuring instruments, build models, work with theory, calculate, and in other ways employ the instruments and techniques that scientists also use. However, they direct their efforts to understanding and changing some particular situations, not to making generalized statements about classes of phenomena. White coats and test tubes are not the indicators of science, although they may signal technical skill.

I suggest that this simple-minded distinction between science and planning has evaded a great many planners. It has also evaded far too many public officials and laymen who have been led to believe that, through science, planners could tell them what is right and hence what to want. Of course, planners have been quick to accept the seer's role. It is almost a mark of the trade for planners to tell others what ought to be. However, these sorts of assertion are necessarily based in ideology, personal opinion, group interest, or, at best, in wisdom bred of the personal knowledge that comes with extensive experience. Unfortunately, neither planners nor anybody else has technical knowledge about what *should* happen, in the sense that scientists may have technical or theoretic bases for saying what *might* happen. Goals and objectives are extra-scientific kinds of statements.

Well then, if not scientific planning, might we claim something akin to social engineering? That is, if goal statements could be formulated outside the planning system and then presented to planners, might their role then be to devise the means for accomplishing whatever are the societal ends? This view has enjoyed the plausibility of analogy with the several branches of engineering which draw upon physics and chemistry for causal theory, then invent means that will transform problematic conditions into more desirable states. Thus, for example, a bridge engineer can responsibly say to a legislature, "*If you wish to span that river with a highway, this is what you need to do.*" And he does indeed have enough accumulated instrumental knowledge at his command to show them how to build a bridge that will stand up.

It is quite true that the various types of planners are often placed in quite that role. Whenever they are also equipped with adequate theory, they may on occasion be able to create the social equivalent of that bridge. But, unfortunately, the state of social-change theory, even of urban-growth theory, is still far too primitive to satisfy any but the simplest demands. Although economists are sometimes able to make tenable recommendations about rediscount rates, spending rates, and so on (i.e., given consensus about economic stabilization goals), most of us are less well off than they. We have not been spectacularly successful in saying what needs to be done to increase the supply of low-cost housing, to reduce crime, to in-

crease job skills, to control municipal budgetary inflation, to manage urban growth, to improve childrens' performance in school, to accelerate social mobility, to stem the growing apartheid afflicting our metropolitan areas, and so on. Each of you can add your own agenda of unsatisfied aspirations. The sad truth is that we simply do not yet know enough about the workings of social systems to be able to say what can be done to "engineer" them into more desired states. Only rarely can planners say with full confidence that if A is done, B will follow.

But even if we did know an awful lot more than we do, such that we could more readily play the roles that Technocracy, Inc. once predicted or that Systems Analysts now claim, a nest of other troublesome issues would immediately arise. First off, *who* is to formulate the goals that social engineers are to serve? The notion that "society" can formulate a purposive statement is peculiar at best and pernicious at worst. Only persons are equipped to do that, and so we are unavoidably led to ask *which* persons are to set the agenda. Is it the majority of voters? the legislatures? the more-powerful interest groups? individual consumers? professional planners? Obviously an old and persistently troubling question. But a terribly important one for the planner, because what he does might be consequential. What he proposes might matter. The ends he works for may be those some special interest groups seek, or they may be those his employers seek; but they may simultaneously be antithetical to other people's purposes. The specter of Eichmann is the constant companion of the wary planner.

A society as pluralistic as this one is unlikely ever to agree about anything except at rather high levels of generality. Pollsters may find virtual unanimity on issues of brotherhood, motherhood, and survival. The more specific the proposition, however, the more certain are the respondents to differ. So on questions of individuals' preferences for housing, busing and school integration, highway location, social services, or neighborhood social class composition, the disagreements are likely to be both wide and vociferous. Who is then to say which mix of policies and programs is the correct one? Which social engineer is to engineer which social situations for which social groups? And when the differences among persons are as heartfelt as these are likely to be, what is the technical expertise that will categorically assert which is right and which wrong?

The Rich Heritage of the 'Sixties

Most of us are far more sensitive about these matters than we were prior to the explosive events of the '60s. However unsatisfying we may have found experiences of the past decade-and-a-half, we have learned some important lessons well. Nowadays, almost reflexively, most of us

sorts. Where feasible, it promotes the production of differentiated goods and services and their consumption to accord with highly decentralized choices, thus permitting individual persons and subcultural groups more nearly to satisfy their wants. Being alert to the latent tyranny of majority rule, it is hypersensitive to the problems and preferences of minorities of all sorts. And so, it is constantly seeking to assure that their interests are ably represented and that they attain equal access to opportunities. It promotes deviancy as the medium of cultural experimentation, tolerates it as the prerogative of individuals, and defends it as the manifest trait of political freedom. It eschews standardized solutions to problems, and it is the enemy of regulatory standards that compel sameness.

Oriented to strengthening democratic processes of governing, permissive planning is predisposed to the *ways* decisions get made, rather than to specific preferred substantive content of those decisions. It takes its model from the U.S. Constitution whose genius lies in its orientation to processes of governing rather than to substantive statutory law. In that image, permissive planning seeks to formulate those minimal procedural rules that then permit and foster difference, being somewhat indifferent to the substance of those differences. Just as the First Amendment protects and encourages free thought, personal independence, and rights of protest, so too would the permissive style of planning foster open argumentation, seeking to find ways of joining latent conflict by creating the means for inducing debate and the media through which contending parties might effectively engage each other. Just as the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments guarantee due process of law, so too would planners promoting the permissive style seek to frame the few warrants assuring that all groups' interests are heard and the few rules governing processes of deliberation and argumentation.

Focused on improving processes of decision, permissive planning would not pursue "correct answers" to development issues or "correct solutions" to problems. It would be content to find procedurally acceptable resolutions. Accepting the essential political character of development issues and social problems, its test of a decision's goodness is whether it was arrived at through acceptable procedures. That is the judicial test of justice, and it has served us well. However often we may disagree with juries' decisions, most of us would agree that, if defendants are tried in the accepted manner, we are far more willing to accept jury decisions over other ways of assessing innocence or guilt. The essential test there is a procedural one, and it strikes me as a model worth emulating in the public policy arenas as well.

In the context I portray, the planner's role is as facilitator of debate, rather than as substantive expert. His contribution is initially as writer of constitutions, as formulator of the procedural rules that will foster more

The growing involvement of lay groups bodes well for the prospects of a politically responsive mode of planning. It suggests that an effective style of planning does not call for plans that present right answers, rather that it calls for procedures which might help plural politics reach decisions in acceptable ways. In that idiom, planning would become an integral aspect of governing, rather than a separate function of government. Its special task would then be to help assure that all parties' voices are heard; that available evidence, theory, and arguments are weighed; that potentially useful options are considered and evaluated; that latent consequences and their distributions among the many publics are identified and assessed.

A distinguishing mark of that conception of planning is the persisting question, "What if?" What if agent A does this and respondent B does that? What then? What chains of effects? What if X happens at time t , what'll we do then? What if at $t+1$? Who will be helped and who hurt? What if we want P instead of Q? What if we try program X? What if, instead, we try Y? What if the reactions to X are this instead of that? What do we do then? And if we do that, what does the other guy do in turn?

I suggest that the trait distinguishing planning modes of thought from others is that persisting analysis and evaluation of alternative actions, alternative ends, alternative outcomes, alternative redistributions, and, in turn, alternative reactions to prior actions. In this context, *planning is fundamentally a cognitive style*, not a substantive field, not a specialized departmentalized function in an organization, not a set of technical knowledge, certainly not an ideologically derived set of substantive goals about housing, economic development, human welfare, or anything else. In its generic essence, it is a special way of thinking about pluralities of individual and group wants and a special approach to satisfying those variously competing wants.

To suggest that planning is nonpartisan, being open to all sorts of arguments and group interests, is not to say that it is also value-neutral. Quite the opposite. The aim is to admit all manner of valued positions, and most especially those of minority interests whose voices are typically too muted to be heard. Nor is its openness to everyone's evidence and arguments to suggest that it seeks more closely to approach optimal solutions. As I've contended already, whenever group interests are less than perfectly aligned, which is probably always, there can be no optimal solutions. No. Its mark is neither value-neutrality nor efficiency, but rather a constant searching for equity.

The idealized style of planning I envision is fundamentally biased toward the defense of difference. Its aim, whenever possible, is to foster free exchange of dissimilar ideas and the open confrontation of divergent opinion, thus to encourage the generation of new ideas and innovation of all

instantaneously examine new program proposals for their potential redistributive consequences. Among the first questions asked is *who* will it help and *who* will it hurt? Back in the '50s those questions were seldom asked.

I hope it is accurate to say that planners have been learning how to trace potential repercussions of proposed actions—that, among their first questions, they ask: "What will be the likely chains of consequences of taking one action or another?" and, again, Which groups of persons will be affected in what ways by each of those consequences? This sort of repercussions analysis is being mandated by requirements for environmental impact reports, of course; but I suspect that, by now, the thoughtways are diffused well beyond legalistic requirements. I hope I am right about that, for, as I shall want to contend in a moment, this mode of thought is essential to the planning paradigm that may be guiding our work in the imminent future.

Recent efforts to apply the so-called systems approach have probably had some long-lasting and salutary effects. Many of us have learned to think in the language of complex systemic networks, rather than in the linear one-to-one links within the hierarchical structures we were told about in church and school. Inside complex systems, everything is indeed connected to everything else, such that actions taken anywhere reverberate throughout the whole system to affect changes in seemingly far-removed sectors. Moreover, since no condition and no event can be seen as isolated, every problem is but a symptom of some deeper problem imbedded in the next larger subsystem; and that perception compels of a depth of humility guaranteed to turn the most evangelical reformer into a cautious planner.

Systems analysis and PPBS may have had a further persisting influence upon current modes of thought, for the compulsion to assess the *outcomes* of programmatic activities has been powerful. It took a major conceptual shift to turn bureaucrats away from a preoccupation with efficiency to a concern for effectiveness and to turn instincts away from such input measures as levels of expenditure, man hours worked, and cases treated. I view it as something of an intellectual revolution when professionals in virtually the whole spectrum of social services struggled to rethink their program outputs in the language of human welfare. It turned out to be an uncommonly difficult task, of course; and by now most of them have abandoned the exercise. But the seeds of that revolution are still widely sown, and we can at least hold to the hope that the growing efforts to institutionalize evaluation of program effectiveness will extend the search for meaningful and socially relevant output measures.

One further heritage of the '60s may prove of lasting influence on the future evolution of planning. It is the huge social experiments—large-scale field trials of radical new programs, undertaken with the full apparatus of

experimental controls, monitors, and formal evaluation. In some senses, these experiments in income maintenance, education vouchers, and rent subsidies more closely resemble formal science than almost anything tried before. The aim is to find out whether the objectives initially sought are actually attained—whether the hypothesized cause-effect relations seem tenable. Essentially the same questions are asked by evaluation researchers and by monitors who apply social indicators to check on outcomes of social programs.

Of course, the values these experiments and evaluation efforts are directed to promote are determined wholly outside the spheres of science. Although they are inherently political in character, they have commonly been arrived at through consensus among professionals, increasing numbers of whom are increasingly dubious about their prerogatives. In turn, that raises a central issue we need to address.

Toward the Next Paradigm for Planning

We learned a very great deal during the '60s about potentially effective approaches to social problems, and we learned that some interventional styles are ineffectual, and some unethical. Surely we are all less naive about the magic potions that would solve social problems in short order. Indeed, many of us are by now persuaded that social problems are never solved—that, at best, they are only resolved, over and over again. And so, we are increasingly dubious about the self-styled experts with large promises, those who will turn on their systems analyses and eradicate poverty, those who purport to discover optimum land use patterns, those who have just the right touch for turning lower-class kids into top-performing students. Too many quick-fix artists, too much snake oil, too many high promises that no one could deliver on—too much scientism has left a generation of skeptics in its wake.

As one result of the oversell, many are less certain than they used to be about the proprieties of anything like a fourth-power role for planning. Some of us are being increasingly disenchanted by any conception of planning that accords it the capacities of authoritative expertise. We are becoming convinced that a science of planning is impossible, that social engineering is intolerable, and that the concentration of goal-setting in any sort of planning agency, however benign, is politically unacceptable.

And so we are searching for a style of planning that might avoid these difficulties, while being sensitive to the diversity of goals that characterize the plural politics comprising American society. I expect that search will generate a paradigm of permissive planning, conceived as a subset of politics, its central function being to improve the processes of public debate and public decision.¹

In the course of the search, I suspect the notion that there are right answers to be discovered or invented will be as difficult as any of our ideologic fixations to overcome. That fundamental doctrine has been so deeply woven into contemporary thoughtways as to have attained the status of a truism. It is nonetheless false.

Whenever people's belief systems and wants differ, there is no gainsaying who is right. Whenever governmental activities profit one person at the expense of another, there is no technical rationale that can alone supply sufficient warrants. Whenever alternative programs with divergent distributional outcomes are possible, there can be no one right way. Under virtually all the social circumstances in which planners work, the acceptable way is necessarily the outcome of political processes. That is to say, there are no scientifically or technically correct answers, only politically appropriate ones.

If that assertion be accepted, then it seems that many traits of traditional planning would be ill-suited to a style of planning oriented to improving the qualities of political decision processes. City master plans, as one example, have presented unitary policy for entire cities, on the apparent assumption of community consensus. Urban renewal plans have been designed with the explicit purpose of serving whole-city interests. Large transportation systems have been designed and built, necessarily on an area-wide scale, again with the apparent objective of serving all who inhabit the area. But in each of these examples the presumption that everybody will be a winner is patently suspect. In the traditional mode, plans were drawn up by an elite group of some kind, put through formal hearing procedures, then adopted as though they reflected community-wide policy.

That routine of professionalized plan making has been undergoing some pretty dramatic changes in the years since 1960. Increasingly, citizen groups of various sorts have been voicing their objections to these plans and their outcomes. In turn, they have been finding ways of participating in civic deliberations, making their special wants known, negotiating for projects and outcomes they prefer, logrolling and bargaining in an increasingly populist debating forum. The new widespread participation of diverse publics is serving to expose the myth that there exists a metropolitan community, for as the many interest groups make their valued ends known, it is becoming apparent they really are in conflict and that all goals cannot be served simultaneously. In turn it is becoming apparent that unitary master plans purporting to serve "the whole community" are based on a fiction, hence are inherently flawed. Under those circumstances it is scarcely any wonder that the thousands of 701-sponsored plans have left the course of urbanization largely untouched.