REPORT ON THE 30TH CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNERS (ISOCARP) HELD IN PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC DURING SEPTEMBER 1994

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The Thirtieth Congress of the International Society of City and Regional Planners was held in Prague during September last year and was attended by over two hundred delegates from thirty-four countries. Since its inception in 1965, ISOCARP has grown from strength to strength and reflects in its membership and attendance at its annual congresses a truly international representation. This in turn confirms its role of maintaining contact, providing a forum and disseminating knowledge within a world-wide network of planning professionals.

The quality of the papers and discussion together with the outstanding organisational contributions of the ISOCARP Secretariat and the local Czech Organizing Committee made attendance a most memorable occasion. I am indeed grateful for having been invited to attend as a reporter to the Congress. In this capacity I should hasten to add that as the proceedings are fully documented, what follows reflects only some of the highlights and my impressions of the Congress as a whole.

During the first three days preceding the Congress the delegates were treated to a truly outstanding presentation by Ivan Plicka, the Director of Public and Foreign Relations of Prague's City Development Authority, on the city's history, development and prospects: reinforced by walking excursions through the historic core and by bus tours of its environs.

The ebb and flow of cultural change of political and social turmoil and the richness of Prague's heritage is superbly reflected in its many faceted urban milieu. After lapsing into a state of limbo over the past forty years or so under Communist rule, the Czech Republic has, like Rip van Winkel awoken, to be confronted by the reali-

ties of a changed and ever changing world order. Whilst on the one hand, the preoccupation with the exploitation of industrial resources and its concomitant environmental degradation is evident, on the other hand, the fact that the then authorities displayed little interest in the cultural resources, has allowed the cultural and architectural heritage of Prague to remain largely unscathed. It is indeed significant that Prague's legacy of this period includes an efficient underground rail system, which as such is unobtrusive, and a clustering of housing estates along the lines of the earlier "Grands Ensembles", on its periphery which are only now being functionally integrated within the rail network of the city.

International awareness of investment opportunities encourages development but is not unencumbered by problems: in particular, that of how new buildings of a scale commensurate with the image of multinational organizations can be accommodated, taking cognizance of the scale and texture of the city.

The problems of growth, development and investment pressures on the one hand and the utilization of dump sites adjacent to the central areas, derelict land stretching out to the suburbs and railway precincts, which occupy large central areas, reflecting stagnation on the other, formed the context for the Young Planners' Programme, which ran parallel with the pre-Congress phase.

As an educationalist the outcome of the workshops in which the Young Planners participated was of considerable interest. Notwithstanding the obvious time constraints and occasional tinges of naïvety they acquitted themselves admirably. Apart from the positive outcomes as reflected in the planning projects the programme of

workshops provided an excellent framework for the twenty-two young planners from eleven countries, with different cultural backgrounds to work together and served as a forum for the exchange of ideas and animated and enthusiastic debate.

In his opening address to Congress the President of ISOCARP, **Serge Domicelj** incisively honed in on the core issues confronting planners. He noted that whilst planning has continued to guide within a respected set of values development changes it has within the context of rapid and often turbulent transition, - social, political and economic - at times, been found wanting. The rate and scale of change has brought about the need to re-examine not only the role of planners but the very meaning of planning. Within this context he stressed the importance of the need to create sustainable human environments in concert with all the stake-holders, as participants in the developmental processes.

Max van den Berg, the Congress General Rapporteur, supported and elaborated on these views by stressing the fact that cities and landscapes are man-made and reflect man's technological expertise and values. However, cities and countryside can no longer be viewed as separate: they are inextricably linked and form one total environment. The form, structure and shape of space are determined by political and institutional decisions arising from the interplay of the participants or actors in the system: the politicians have a mission; the experts knowledge and skills to formulate plans; the entrepreneurs have financial resources to bring projects to fruition and the citizens have needs and give support to their representatives. It is the balance of power between these which determines not only the shape

of cities and countryside but the role of urban planning, as the balance of power differs from place to place and over time.

This accounts for the differences in planning action, practices, legislation and the like between countries. Sociological and ideological shifts have focused attention on planning, bringing the earlier faith and confidence in top-down planning and blueprints for an ideal society into question. Planning is undergoing a paradigm shift away from the deterministic to one which takes cognisance of the temporal, transitory and fluid nature of events. It is through negotiation, consultation and the free exchange of ideas that the perception of the citizen regarding the legitimacy of planning is increased; the advice of experts is no longer viewed as a threat and through the involvement of entrepreneurs, implementation is facilitated. Planning to achieve the desired quality of life for future generations is in his view, unequivocally a joint responsibility of all the key actors.

These two introductory presentations provided the framework for the examination of and discussion on the Congress theme, "Expanding Demands on Planning" and were followed by six papers presented in the Plenary Session, which are briefly reviewed below.

Gerd Albers, of the Technical University, Munich, cogently drew attention in his "Review of Historical Parallels" to the fact that although one tends to conceive the processes of social and urban change as being gradual, evolutionary or continuous with notions of planning reflecting this continuum, it is possibly more correct to visualise this complex process as being periodically interrupted by a series of breaks. A process more steplike in its configuration than linear. Each break is accompanied by a reevaluation or reassessment of the nature of planning, the role of the planner and the range of skills required. By way of illustration he cited the appearance of the first learned periodicals - *La Ciudad Lineal* in Spain (1898), *Der Städtebau* in Germany and Austria (1904), *The Town Planning Review* in Britain (1910) and the recognition of planning as a sepa-

rate discipline, with the institution of chairs and courses in planning at universities. These together with the holding of congresses and exhibitions in the first decade of this century, heralded the "Birth of a Profession". As he noted, it was at this time that "a general understanding of planning was established which did not change in essence until well after the middle of the century".

Most characteristic of planning during this early period was its "sense of mission". As with all visionaries, solutions to the problems of the contemporary city embodied dogmatic elements, to achieve a perfect answer to man's urban needs. Whilst this approach held sway even during the early period of reconstruction after the Second World War, an awareness of the influence of broader social, political, legal and financial considerations rendered the notion of the blueprint and masterplan, unrealistic. In consequence the "plan" was superseded by the "programme" and the "process" replaced the "blueprint". Consultation and advocacy planning assumed centre stage and reflect a further step in the interpretation of planning.

Events during the early seventies, for example the "oil (price) crisis" and the discovery of "limits of growth", caused as Albers noted, planning to move away from the notion of "maximising the promise of the future ... to minimising its threats". The notion of incrementalism i.e. small steps and reversibility, begins to inform planning agendas. New concerns come to the fore including, individuality, choice and diversity, the built and natural environment and the potential of what is termed the "public-private partnership".

Over time the role of the planner can be seen to shift from a kind of superman to a member of a team of advisors, in which he is not only responsible for executing political decisions but in shaping them. Within the context of change, during the eighties, and the notions of the position of cities in the national and world market the planner assumed the role of "a manager or even a mediator of the forces of change rather than as their master".

To do justice to Gerd Albers' insight-

ful and thought-provoking views in the context of this report is impossible and the essence of his concluding message can best be conveyed in his own words:

"Thus the main lesson seems to me: more modesty is needed in the face of the world's complexity, more consciousness of our limited knowledge of the 'system' - if we may call it thus - connecting man and environment. We have learned that all easy-looking solutions based on simplified interpretations of this system have failed or at least fallen far short of their aim. There is no blueprint for creating an 'optimal' environment - if there were such a thing. We must accept each case in its own right, considering it, without a preconceived opinion of what should be the solution, on its specific merits. ... In spite of all such reservations, let us not be discouraged. Let us accept the limits of our knowledge while trying to make the best of it in any given case. There is no reason and no room for resignation; we may not be the masters of the future but we could still be its servants by helping to shape it for the benefit of society."

The transformation highlighted by Albers was pursued in greater detail by **Richard Welch** in his paper on the "Impact of Changing Economy on Local Policy". In his exposé he elaborated on the recent emergence of a "new and complex political-economic environment" and how in consequence the nature and role of planning have become the subject of intense reevaluation. He illustrated how in the emergence of neo-liberal agendas, with their emphasis on market driven forces together with post-modernist ideology, which places on centre stage the notion of individual rights over collective rights and its emphasis on the concomitant processes of "democratization" and the devolution of power, the role of local authorities and that of the planner has shifted from "provider" to "enabler".

Planning in this new context has of necessity, notwithstanding a hankering

on the part of planners to retain at least the semblance of planning's earlier "rationalist roots, critical distance reformist intentions" etc., come "to reject the idea of comprehensive solutions with unitary logics" and planners have had to "learn to live with uncertainty and with temporally and spatially limited strategies".

Programmes, increasingly linked to economic development, particularly at local government level, emphasise the shift into the arena of public-private initiatives in which the distinction between planners and property developers, for example, becomes fuzzy. The general lack of clarity in the postmodernist theoretical arguments which as he notes are at times obscure and confusing, compounds the problem of defining the nature and role of planning practice, and that although planners may not necessarily like these changed scenarios they must learn to operate in and adjacent to (the realities of) this "post-welfare world".

Erik Wirén in a sense explained in his paper "A Mission for the Future" the confusion or lack of congruence resulting from these paradigm shifts and the ineffectiveness of earlier planning models to deal with strategies for sustainable development, in terms of a conceptual vacuum in which we find ourselves. In his words, "we will not be able to treat this situation in a responsible way until we have conceptually placed mind and society in their technical, biological and geographical contexts, this is the real challenge" in that it reflects "the multiplicity and complexity of modern society" and takes cognizance of the failure of fragmented development predictions and planning inputs in dealing with the complexity and interwovenness of man's social, economic and physical environments.

The instrumental approach to planning only deals at best with partial solutions or the tip of the iceberg, what lies below he described as the areas of ignorance and uncertainty. As a way out of this dilemma Wirén highlighted a number of alternative approaches and their shortcomings.

One approach is that of Habitat II and its outcome as reflected in Agenda 21. Within the overall objective of striving for sustainable futures the questions that arise are legion and have, in order to render them manageable, to be reduced and sorted - this by its very nature means that consensus must be reached as to what is important and what is less important. A choice must be made as to what indicators should be used to compare alternatives and to determine "what ought to be done, where, when and by whom". Clearly this is no mean task and as he warned: "We are not as well prepared as we may think in moments of enthusiasm for active global planning missions".

Another approach is to view these global issues from a "grassroot-perspective". In many ways this assumes that each individual is a planner and that everybody is able "to make her or his own scenario or vision". However this approach too seems to be thwarted by the fact that each of us hold different, diffuse and often disparate views of the world. For Wirén, planning may be viewed as a "Triptych": in which the planning process is comprised of three phases, "the creation of the idea, the planning for realization and the accomplishment".

To bring the various approaches closer together entails the desectorization of the process i.e. a moving away from the prescriptive top-down and the accommodation of the grassroots-approach for as he stressed "no 'plans' can be carried out unless the *environment as a totality* is taken into consideration." It is a process through which survival is gained by *co-operation*: between people and between people and the environment, for as he stressed "there is no other possible ground for action on global/local level than the human-ecological one".

Martin Wentz noted in his paper "Politics have to Deal with Change" that contrary to often commonly held beliefs there is as far as the western parts of Germany are concerned, evidence of a new surge in land consumption for residential purposes, due largely to immigration. This is particularly evident in the large urban agglomerations and has and will lead to increased pressures to provide more building land. In this context he stressed the importance of planning in accommodating urban growth on the one hand and the requirements for free space on the other. Whilst previously, cities' growth could be conceived as a function of "parochial" regional factors, this is no longer the case. Within a unified Europe, structural changes over the past 20 years have brought about changes in the spheres of urban influence, the free movement of people, financial resources and the opening up of markets - merchandise and services - have added a new dimension to competition. In consequence the economic potential of an area can no longer be taken for granted. By way of illustration he cited the case of Frankfurt which has assumed the position of primate centre within a polycentric metropolitan region. As such it has taken over responsibilities for sewage and waste disposal, as cultural centre and as the hub of a significant transportation network - road, rail and air. In addition, as he pointed out, albeit less well known, Frankfurt has been burdened with providing a large share of social security benefits for the region. In consequence significant concentrations of those in need of help are found in the city area of Frankfurt. The shortage of accommodation combined with the stream of immigrants has led to patterns of segregation developing within individual urban districts. The provision of quality housing has developed into an extreme social burden. However, this illustrates only one facet of the housing question: the dynamic development of the city as a whole has brought with it an enormous need for land for residential construction - in the order of 400 - 700 hectares per year.

Clearly new approaches are necessary, particularly with respect to deconcentration and the like. However, as stressed by Wentz the process is confounded by a lack of any consensus with respect to standards and concepts of urban development. As possible strategies to circumvent these shortcomings he highlighted seven items which could serve as guidelines. *Growth* needs to be addressed in a way so as to prevent overdevelopment and ecological damage; *densities* should be increased to minimize the impact of development on land resources and to promote community interaction and residents' identification with place; *space* of differing quality and use should be created to generate

vitality within the city environment; *mixture*, particularly the need to redress functional segregation to allow more life and communication between living and working space; *neutrality of use* to allow for flexible action opportunities; *traffic* he contended "must be submitted to urban life" - emphasising public transport - and because there are no final solutions planners should view the dynamics of urban change in the context of planning's "regulating effect on city structures" and to "let it take effect and think". These guidelines were suggested as possible instruments for solving the task of creating livable urban environments.

In his paper, entitled "New Knowledge in Planning Practice" **Jakob Maurer** posed, what he referred to as, two tricky questions. The first pertains to what constitutes new knowledge, and the second, as to what is useful for planning practice. Drawing on his own research and practice experience he highlighted two areas which he believed to be important in clarifying these issues. The first he described as the "domains of new knowledge" and emphasised the role of "open plays", or experimental simulations in understanding the interplay between planning theory and practice on the one hand and spatial changes on the other. In the former he focused on issues such as: comprehension and the use of intellectual potential; improved project organisation; the combination of standard hard- and software to allow planners to work efficiently and to facilitate planners making "more use of their imagination and innovative capacities", and on correct argumentation with incomplete information. With respect to spatial changes he noted the following as important: social and spatial segregation, the concept of spatial networks and the worldwide interlinking of processes and virtual realities as depicted by Friedman's (1986) *World City Hypothesis* and Castells' (1989) *The Information City*.

Within this context he focused attention on the body of knowledge which is emerging on human behaviour in complex situations: in which feelings of apprehension and fear arise and give rise to irrational reactions. Typical of these are, stereotyping, the elaboration of formal procedures, focusing on methods and not problems, opportunistic manoeuvring, deferment of decision taking and the like. Attempts to negate these negative attributes, through more information, time and improved communication on the part of planners may in practice be counterproductive and merely serve to further reinforce negative outcomes.

To offset these problems which encumber the attainment of effective and meaningful planning he stressed the need to develop new planning systems and concepts.

This may in practice prove to be no mean task for as he stressed "the crisis of the conventional planning systems is part of a crisis of public institutions ..." which have "... largely become inefficient, expensive and unable to handle a complex society". Planning of necessity needs to break away from stereotype ideologies which only serve to prevent learning. Knowledge pertaining to the theories of organisations and of the limits of human beings in handling complexity, need to be assimilated if planning is to retain its relevance.

It is within this emerging diffuse and confusing array of events that planning takes place. As change has become the norm, the need to change and the ability to change become imperative. Planners must of necessity become imbued with the spirit of "lifelong learning" if they are to meet the challenges which lie ahead. This clearly was the message that emerged from the first five papers and was amplified in **Patsy Healey's** paper on "Education for Planning; A Continuous Process".

She noted that within the dynamic context of planning the planner's role has shifted from that of "designer" and "analyst" to that of "facilitator" and "mediator" and hence planning education must take cognizance of the substantive content of the planner's knowledge base in concert with a changing institutional context in which such expertise is offered. This entails a paradigm shift from an "aloof technocrat" or "divine engineer" to what Forester describes as a "critical friend".

Pursuant to this she cited the commonalities in policy statements of the RTPI, the US Planning Accreditation Board and the Association of European Schools of Planning, with respect to teaching programmes, where each focus on three areas: the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values or as she succinctly noted that of "knowing what, knowing how and knowing why". Although the RTPI stipulates in greater detail the content of these headings - largely as a result of "pressure from some practitioners for a precise checklist of what a beginning planner should know and be able to do" - it is generally accepted that a checklist approach is neither desirable nor possible. As she notes: "Beginning experts need to be trained in how to think and find things out as much as in acquiring bodies of knowledge".

However, the RTPI guidelines are indicative of the broad areas of knowledge required: for example, the nature, purpose and method of planning; environment and development and the political and institutional context.

Whilst the British and American traditions place a greater emphasis on skills as an intellectual and practical challenge, that of Continental Europe stresses the knowledge base, with the skills component being developed through practical experience.

Values have become central to planning curricula not in the sense of "indoctrination" but rather in inculcating a heightened awareness of value systems and in opening the minds of planners to critical reflection.

Clearly as the planner cannot be expected to have encyclopedic knowledge, "what planning schools aim for is a basic foundation across the range and the development in depth of certain areas", i.e. at giving the new entrants to planning "an idea of what to aim for to become specialists in a particular area of planning work".

To facilitate keeping up-to-date and the honing of skills she stressed the need for on-going education as a continuous process. In her view professional expertise encompasses the following: "Knowledge in depth of the context of a particular application field, acute sensitivity to the institutional context of application, high

level skill appropriate to the application field and its institutional context, an acute ethical appreciation, a managerial capacity and a self-reflective attitude, to enable continuous learning".

Planners and planning firms need to regularly monitor their "capacity" to retain vitality and to avoid lapsing into a state of limbo. Regarding our knowledge base she cited a number of areas of weakness, amongst both planning schools and practitioners. Firstly with respect to our understanding of environmental systems and how these together with social and economic considerations can be aligned. Secondly, regarding our understanding of the dynamics of property markets and land development processes, and thirdly, the interrelation between land use allocation and transport systems.

As regards skills she noted weaknesses in the areas of urban design, Geographical Information Systems, CAD and interactive video and in planners' understanding of strategic policy making at the level of the urban region. In this context "a capacity to help communities debate strategic spatial organising ideas, without taking over the design job ourselves" leads to her fourth area of skill development, "the building up a collaborative and consultative attitude in all the work that we do".

Although planners have been open to new agendas regarding for example social diversity, policies for child care and access for the disabled, etc. "the most neglected area of our values is that of professional ethics". In this regard she stressed the need to look beyond the level of professional codes of practice to a more substantive ethics, in the sense of striving to be what she calls "a good planner". To this end planners must make use, to the best of their ability in a particular context, of the most robust and most relevant knowledge, develop the most appropriate skills as effectively as possible, and pay attention explicitly to the prevailing and changing value systems, as sensitively as possible.

The papers presented during the plenary sessions dealt in an exemplary way with the crucial issues confronting planning and the role of planners in a changed and rapidly changing world. These set the stage for the workshop and platform sessions which in turn gave "substance" to issues of critical concern. In one form or another the following emerged:

(i)   Planning and planning problems are multi-facetted and vary in time and space - in consequence there is a common aim in providing a framework for the improvement of man's condition through the creation of sustainable "environments" but not in terms of the ways in which this can be achieved. Planning must be seen in the context of the particular sets of social, political, administrative, economic conditions, as these pertain from place to place.

(ii)   The concept of the planner as "superman" no longer holds. The planner is one of many actors, - politicians, entrepreneurs and citizens - he is part of the process - as knower and agent of change, he is not concerned with control over man but in enhancing man's awareness of his sense of place in a complex world.

(iii)   Increasing speed of change necessitates the planner becoming better informed, optimization of data processing, developing skills to enhance dialogue and public participation.

(iv)   New planning procedures need to be generated to deal with and to ensure action under conditions of uncertainty.

(v)   The planner must display tolerance and humility in his dealings with people whilst providing leadership in the synthesis of solutions.

In short what emerged from the proceedings can be summarised as follows.

Planning is a learning process and planning responses need to be viewed commensurate with the demands of specific situations as they occur in time and space and vary in intensity and scope. There are no pat solutions.

Earlier ideologies, processes, methods and techniques are in need of review, if the fluidity of new, changing or expanding demands on planning are to be addressed. This means that planning theory and praxis need to develop in parallel. Planners need to promote their role as leaders. They must respond to new and changed demands proactively and not reactively in the sense of being pulled this way and that, depending on the vagaries of circumstances or by lapsing into a state of degenerative limbo where through vain attempts at clinging to the old, tried and proven techniques of the past, planning is rendered impotent in meeting the challenges of the present, let alone the future.

In conclusion the point stressed by Erik Wirén is indeed apposite: "To dream about planning is nonsense, it has to lead to real action".

This was undoubtedly a most successful conference and for me a truly rewarding experience. I can unreservedly recommend to my colleagues that you should attend the next ISOCARP Congress to be held in Sydney from 11 - 16 September this year: its theme being Habitat and Mediation in Planning.

For further details of the forthcoming Sydney Congress in September please contact:

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