

ROOTS AND ROUTES: TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF PLANNING THEORY

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In June 1938, the Architectural Students Society of the University of the Witwatersrand held a congress on town planning. The proceedings of that momentous congress were published in three special editions of the eminent professional journal, the *South African Architectural Record*, in late 1938. The following statement by Le Corbusier was used as an introduction to the third edition:

“A definite line of conduct is essential. We need basic principles for modern town planning. We must create a firm theoretical scheme, and so arrive at the basic principles of modern town planning”. Considered after a time span of more than fifty years, this statement – with its connection to the incipient town planning movement at the University of the Witwatersrand and its reference to planning conduct, principles and theory – could be credited with a prescient quality. Prescient because it encapsulates the essence of the approach to planning and to planning education which has, over the decades, been nurtured in the planning school at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The concern with the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the planning discipline, which took root slowly but perceptibly at the University after the Second World War, flowered with the establishment of the country's first fulltime Bachelor's planning programme in 1965. Since that time, the school has taken the stance that it, as an educational establishment, has a primary pedagogical and professional responsibility to cultivate and nourish the theoretical component of the discipline. This has been expressed in various ways, not least in the form of published works by the lecturing staff.

The papers presented in this special edition of the *Town and Regional Planning Journal* have been prepared by staff members to commemorate the twenty-fifth birthday – the silver anniversary – of the establishment of the

fulltime planning course at the University of the Witwatersrand. The papers constitute an assemblage of studies located in one way or another in the fertile territory of planning theory, and are indicative of the current research predilections of their authors. Inasmuch as the content of the papers are diverse, extending across the substantive, procedural, critical and normative realms of theory, the studies are illustrative of some of the research routes that have been followed since the establishment of the fulltime programme.

ROOTS

The fulltime B Sc course was preceded by the part-time post-graduate Diploma in Town Planning course, which was introduced by the Faculty of Architecture in 1945. While “Wits thus initiated the first town planning education and training in South Africa” (Bryer 1977:16), other universities introduced planning programmes in the years that followed. Writing in the late 1950's, Fassler (1959) stated that “in the field of town planning education, the Faculty of Architecture has acted as a consultant to other South African universities wishing to establish post-graduate courses. A great deal of assistance has been given to the University of Natal which now offers a diploma, to the University of Pretoria which commenced a course this year, and presently to the University of Cape Town which is contemplating one scheduled to commence in the near future”. That the Diploma course at the University of the Witwatersrand was accepted at that time as both a model and springboard for planning education around the country is, in large measure, attributable to the inspirational stewardship of the course by Wilfrid Mallows. From 1952 to 1965, he was responsible for the second and third years of study, and thereafter for the entire course as well as the new Bachelor's course until his retirement in December 1969. During those years,

he was influential not only in the spread of planning education in the Republic, but equally in the development of an intellectual climate which provided sustenance and support to the young discipline of planning. During the early Diploma years, he planted the seeds of planning theory in South Africa – which were to germinate in the decade of the 1960's.

Mallows (1962:97) drew on the writings of John Stuart Mill to reflect his educational philosophy: “What professional men should carry away with them from a University is not professional knowledge, but that which should direct the use of their professional knowledge and bring the light of a general culture to illuminate the technicalities of a special pursuit” and said of Mills' statement “I believe in that with all my heart and that, I think, is the objective we are setting ourselves at this University in designing a full-time course in Town and Regional Planning”. In other words, planning education should, above all, have explicit academic content; it should be a sound intellectual training irrespective of its technical substance. For this to be accomplished, recourse to first principles, to philosophical precepts and to theoretical approaches is required.

The influence on Mallows' own thinking – the social doctrine of Patrick Geddes, the didactics of Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, the positivist intellectual discipline of Maurice Rotival – surfaced in his teaching and in his writings. “Teaching a Technology” (1965) and “Physical Planning: a Social Process” (1968) reflect the foundations and form of his planning beliefs, as well as his preoccupation with fusion of the attributes of the arts and sciences from which could arise a “technological humanism” underpinning and exemplifying the discipline of urban and regional planning. Both publications are also significant in that they are situated in the mainstream of interna-

tional planning thinking in the 1960's: the extension of the planning function beyond physical to social involvement, and the refinement of the methodological base of the discipline. With regard to the latter, Mallows' procedural framework (thesis, analysis, diagnosis, and generalization/syntheses) is contemporaneous with contributions made to the field of procedural theory by others such as Davidoff and Reiner (1962), Harris (1967) and McLoughlin (1969). Also concurrent with developments in planning theory abroad at the time was "The Urban System" (Muller 1967); an early - possibly the first - research article in South Africa correlating systems thinking with planning.

By the time Wilfrid Mallows retired from the University at the end of 1969, he had imprinted his distinctively scholarly stamp on planning education and theory in the Republic. His work provided the major point of reference and point of departure for the investigations in planning theory that followed in the Town and Regional Planning Department at the Witwatersrand University.

ROUTES

The exploration into planning theory in the 1970's took a number of routes, some of which ran parallel to the path pioneered in the previous decade, while others took different directions. A study on planning responses to societal change (Muller 1971) extended the established departmental research interest in social processes into modes and roles of planning. This work, which drew on the American experience, can now be seen as the forerunner of the current investigations into the disciplinary responsibilities and social conscience of planning.

The theoretical studies of the planning school were consolidated and expanded under the talented leadership of Nic Patricios in the middle years of the 1970's. In contributing to the critical examination of the philosophical basis of urban planning, he posited three basic aims: "Firstly, an explicit value system based on the primacy of human considerations in decision-making to achieve a relevant and desirable rationale for planning procedures. . . Secondly, the holistic approach to urban planning (influenced as it is by the value system) is to

improve the quality of life by an integration with economic and social planning in a comprehensive process to solving urban problems . . . Thirdly, an area of concern (also influenced by the value system) which encompasses the whole physical environment of cities, with particular interest in the quality of the immediate environment people see around them" (Patricios 1976a:30). While the matter of planning values - which remains a fundamental research area today - was not pursued by Patricios at the time, his concern with the physical environment found fluent expression in papers on, inter alia, metropolitan planning (1971) C B D design (1972) and, importantly, environmental perception (1976b).

Beyond his active personal involvement in theoretical research, Patricios made a conspicuous contribution to the planning department by establishing the Master's course in urban design and preparing the way for the introduction of the higher diploma in planning for developing areas (now the MSc (Development Planning) course. Both post-graduate programmes broadened the base of theoretical inquiry and opened up new areas of research endeavour in the 1980's.

The 1976 Soweto conflagration and its aftermath brought the planning school's latent concern with socio-political conditions in the Republic to the surface. This has, over the last decade, been manifest in the theoretical studies of the lecturing staff which, while differing in content and accent, have tended to follow the routes of critical analysis and normative synthesis. The latter is reflected in the work of the current head of department which has, by and large, centred on a search for a legitimate and tenable form of planning in the face of institutionalised discrimination. (Muller 1980, 1982, 1983). This quest has led, as it inevitably must, to the field of procedural theory (1987) and the philosophical sources of that theory (1990). At the core of these investigations is a concern with the planner's obligations and responsibilities to the deprived black majority in this country both now and in the future.

The impact of apartheid at the regional level has been accorded close analysis

by Richard Tomlinson who, particularly in his collaboration with Mark Addleson (1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1987) has given additional depth to the research component of the department's activities. Their writings on regional economics and industrial decentralisation have assuredly broadened understanding of the impact of state policy on development.

Moving from policy analysis to the substantive area of environmental issues, Roger Boden's studies (1982, 1987) on resource development and conservation conflicts, environmental mediation and interpretive urban design have been located in the context of developing countries, and have consequently provided valuable insights into the distinctive features attaching to that context. Alan Mabin has brought extensive research experience, intellectual rigor and a socio-historical perspective to his work in the department. During the latter portion of the 1980's, he has explored such issues as land, labour, capital and class (1986a, 1986b, 1987) and has recently made a number of significant contributions to the debate on urbanisation in this country (1988, 1989, 1990). Catherine Laburn-Peart has entered the complex and demanding field of housing in her research on planning - more accurately "underplanning" - for black home-ownership (1990). This work is currently expanding into a wider analysis of planning roles in the future South Africa.

In the discipline of town and regional planning, theoretical studies can never exist in isolation if they are to have meaning. While theory is fundamental in planning education as the means of exciting scholarly capabilities, providing intellectual benchmarks and isolating principles, it must ultimately feed into and sustain practice. The statement that "theory without practice is sterile; practice without theory is blind" is particularly germane to planning - which, as a discipline built on principles of humane social action, must seek to correlate the two. This has prevailed over the past twenty-five years in the work of the planning school at the University of the Witwatersrand. The articles assembled in this edition of the Journal constitute a further set of excursions into the domain of theory which, it is hoped,

will indeed lead to an enhancement of planning practice.

ARTICLES

The first article, written by Alan Mabin, provides a critical review of the process of urbanisation in South Africa over the last twenty five years, in so doing it exposes the practices of the "urban regime", the ill-understood processes of urbanisation and the need for a re-orientation of planning practice and education. The latter issue is addressed by Catherine LaburnPeart in the second article. Utilizing a framework of five mainstream planning perspectives, she explores possible changes in the politicocultural climate in the Republic – which provides the basis for proposals on appropriate future roles for planners. These roles must, to be legitimate in a disciplinary or societal sense, be grounded in a tenable ethical base. The matter of ethics is the burden of the third paper which, in enquiring into the precepts of moral philosophy on the one hand and the moral attitudes of the planning fraternity on the other, concludes that the profession must move toward an acceptable ethical stance if it is to attain relevance and legitimacy in the post-apartheid era. The new societal structure that will pertain in that era will generate new pressures demanding new planning approaches and techniques, and Martin Drake advances the proposition that data management in the form of geographic information systems – will be a prerequisite for planning in the future South Africa. He highlights the inadequacies of the blueprint approach (which inexcusably retains currency in this country) and shows how G I S technology can contribute to more effective and responsible planning practice.

In the fifth article, Garth Klein also seeks to posit new principles and procedures for planning. His argument is structured around a critique of the role of capital and the state in the field of township housing, and on the findings of a study of Alexandra. He concludes with proposals for an emancipatory form of planning. In the final paper, Roger Boden widens the focus in an incisive discourse on the relationship between the disciplines of urban design and planning. Differences and complementarities are articulated – as

is the need for a common approach linked by processes of participation and the quest for improved urban environments throughout the country.

The authors of these papers benefitted greatly from the incisive critical comment of Professor Colin Tod Welch, editor of the Journal, who scrutinized each paper in detail and with customary discernment. The planning department at the Witwatersrand University is indebted to him for the intellectual stimulus and practical support he offered during the preparatory stages of the publication.

The papers published here are illustrative of not only current scholarly activity in the Department, but reflect the ongoing consciousness in the department of Le Corbusier's dictum on the elemental place of theory, principles and conduct in the practice of planning.

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