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TOWARDS A NEW ROLE FOR URBAN PLANNING

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to suggest a new role for urban planning. In many parts of the world, a paradigm shift in urban planning is required to ensure tolerable urban living through the next century. This chapter firstly identifies the main urban issues in various parts of the world to which planning will have to respond. The third section following from the second section draws out the main elements of more positive urban planning. What is identified here are the main principles of innovative planning, although the actual form they would take will be influenced by context. The fourth section identifies the changes which would need to be in place, or the initiatives which might be supportive in promoting new approaches to planning. The last section provides the conclusion.

MAIN ISSUES FOR URBAN PLANNING IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD

There are certain urban issues which are common to all parts of the world, while others are specific to developed, developing or transitional countries.

Global urban planning issues

The various regions of the world are now highly interlinked, giving rise to a common set of urban issues.

- *Climate change*: In responding to the impacts of climate change, urban areas need to take action of two kinds. These are mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation consists of measures designed to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. Adaptation pertains to activities aimed at reducing the vulnerability of cities to the effects of climate change. Both kinds of action require urban planning.

- *Global economic crisis*: The current global recession has implications for urban areas across the world. It will adversely affect economic growth, employment, and development programmes. Less funding will be available for state-initiated urban and infrastructural projects. This in turn reinforces the need for governments to act

The current global recession has implications for urban areas across the world

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in partnership with civil society and private sector actors on urban development.

- *Energy supply and impacts*: The volatility of oil prices in 2008 showed that price is no longer a predictable factor, and that in the long-term, global oil supplies will begin to decline. The impact of CO_2 emissions from petroleum on climate change is becoming better understood and this will also encourage a switch away from oil-dependent cities. Cities across the world which were planned on the assumption of high levels of individual car-ownership will, at some stage, require retrofitting. Such settlements will have to introduce forms of public transport and plan bicycle and pedestrian movement networks.
- *Food security*: The cost of food is rising in all parts of the world. This has several implications, with the poor being most affected. Urban environments need to be planned so that they allow for urban agriculture (both crops and fruit trees) to become an accepted element of urban open space, including vacant land awaiting development.
- *Changing population size of towns and cities*: Urban population growth and decline are to be found in all parts of the world, although the latter is more common in the developed and transitional regions. In the developing regions, growth is the dominant pattern. Cities that are able to plan for urban growth will be better placed in decades to come. Properly managed decline can open up important opportunities such as releasing land for urban agriculture.
- *Income inequality*: Income inequality has increased in all regions of the world. This in turn has given rise to urban areas with stark contrasts between wealth and poverty. The challenge for planning in addressing this issue is to seek ways to promote redistributive policies, social integration and cohesion.
- *Cultural diversity*: Growing volumes of global migration has meant that cities in all parts of the world have become much more multicultural. This has implications for how built environments are managed. Cultural diversity also raises new demands on planners to mediate between conflicting life-styles and expressions of culture.

Urban planning issues in developing countries

While developing countries are affected by the issues discussed in the preceding section, they are also affected by a range of issues that are specific to these regions of the world. These are:

- *Urban informality*: Much of the new settlement and new job creation in developing regions is informal.
- *Urban growth*: Urban growth is opening up challenges as well as opportunities in the developing world, particularly in Africa and Asia, and planning needs to be able to respond to these. The need to deliver urban land at scale, linked to networks of public infrastructure is probably the biggest issue which planning is facing in these parts of the world.
- *Inequality and poverty*: This is particularly important for urban planning in developing countries, given widespread observations that the planning systems there often neglect the poor. Inequality is high in Latin America and Africa, while the latter, in addition, experiences high levels of poverty and slums.
- *The youth bulge*: Planning for a youthful population in developing countries is imperative, and places particular demands on urban development in terms of the need for education and training facilities.
- *Peri-urban development*: This form of growth presents a host of new planning issues, and is extremely difficult and expensive to service in the conventional way. New approaches to service and infrastructure delivery, in partnership with local communities, will have to be found.
- *Linking the green and brown agendas*: In developing countries, the development imperative is often seen as more important than achieving environmental sustainability. An important role for planning in these contexts is to mediate the conflicts between these different agendas.
- *Institutional and professional capacity*: In a context of rapid urban growth, the issue of professional capacity in urban planning is of paramount importance.

Urban planning issues in transitional countries

Planning issues in transitional countries tend to be a combination of those found in developed and developing regions.

- *Slow population growth and declining cities*: Declining growth and ageing are currently presenting problems of dealing with deteriorating buildings and infrastructure in a context where the local tax base in severely constrained.
- *Urban sprawl, fragmentation and inequality*: Urban development in many transitional countries is now driven by foreign investment, which has fuelled suburban development and up-market inner city property development. This raises issues of sprawl containment, preservation of heritage buildings, and dealing with rapidly increasing car-ownership.
- *Environmental issues*: Communist-era industries were some of the worst polluters in the world. Although some of these have been shut down, many still remain and pose serious environmental problems. The rapid growth of car-ownership has worsened air quality as well as uncontrolled development, particularly in the form of sprawl.
- *The changing legislative framework for planning*: Several countries have adopted strategic planning in addition to master plans. Strategic planning has introduced issues of city competitiveness, economic growth, municipal financial reform, improved quality of life and citizen participation. Given that strategic plans are not legally

recognized, their co-existence with master plans greatly complicates the legislative environment for planning.

Urban planning issues in developed countries

In developed countries, high incomes and steady growth have helped to avoid certain urban issues experienced in developing and transitional countries, but has brought with it a different set of urban planning problems.

- *Socio-spatial inequalities and urban fragmentation*: Urban development, fuelled by a booming property market (until recently) have segregated many cities into elite enclaves and sprawling middle-class suburbs. But the changing structure of labour markets has left many urban residents poor and unemployed, and deteriorated public housing estates now co-exist with new mega-projects. Achieving integrated and equitable urban environments is a major challenge for planners.
- *Environmental issues*: High levels of resource consumption and car-dependence, large-scale waste generation, and low density suburban sprawl eroding agricultural land are all serious planning issues in developed countries.
- *Population decline and shrinking cities*: Migration from poorer regions means that the challenges of slow population growth, ageing, and shrinking cities are less extreme than transitional regions. Nonetheless, industrial restructuring and off-shore relocations have left many older industrial and mining towns without a viable economic base. In such contexts, planning has to strategize for population outflow, abandoned areas, and a declining support base.
- *Integrating sectoral policy in governments*: As city governments have become increasingly complex entities in charge of managing large resource flows and budgets, so has the problem of achieving integration between various departments, and between different levels of government. This is an important issue for planning.

The rapid growth of car ownership has worsened air quality as well as uncontrolled development

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MAIN ELEMENTS OF A REVISED ROLE FOR URBAN PLANNING

The first part of this section offers some overarching elements of a revised role for urban planning, while the second part focuses on some more specific aspects.

Overarching aspects of a new role for urban planning

There are a number of overarching elements that need to be recognized if urban planning is to play a significant and positive role in developing cities that are environmentally liveable, economically productive and socially inclusive. These are identified below.

■ The need to revisit urban planning and strengthen the role of governments

The nature and scale of current and impending urban problems are of such a magnitude that government and civil society interventions to manage urban change will be imperative. Earlier ideas that the market would resolve all urban inefficiencies and externalities now seem much less supportable. While planning in some parts of the world has been less effective, it nonetheless remains the central tool available to governments, and society as a whole, to effect change. For planning to be an effective tool, urban planning systems in many parts of the world will need to be revised.

■ Planning innovations must be shaped by the context in which they occur

There is no one model of urban planning that can be applied in all parts of the world. One important reason underlying the failure of urban planning in developing countries is in part, the importation of foreign models. Usually, these models are based on assumptions regarding the institutional context of planning, the demographic and economic context within which planning has to operate, and the nature of civil society, which do not hold in the importing country. When this occurs, the result is ineffective planning. While it is certainly possible to generalize about urban planning ideas and concepts, the way in which these might be used will be dependent on contextual factors.

■ Embedding innovative ideas

New approaches are very often simply 'bolted on' as an additional and parallel process to conventional practices and regulations, leaving the underlying system to continue as usual. Where there is a clash between the norms and values driving innovative planning ideas, and those affected by such ideas, then there is a tendency to selectively ignore or use new ideas. Innovative planning ideas will only have an effect if they articulate closely with the institutional arrangements of the context in which this is taking place.

■ Urbanization as a positive phenomenon

Urbanization should be seen as a positive phenomenon and a pre-condition for improving access to services, economic and social opportunities. In most countries, cities generate the bulk of GDP and are centres of innovation. This suggests that capitalizing on the positive potentials of urban growth should be placed high on the agenda of governments, and national urban development plans should be developed as a framework for regional and local urban planning.

■ The environmental challenge

Cities in all parts of the world will have to make adjustments in response to climate change and resource depletion. Coastal settlements will face the challenge of responding to different coastlines and sea-levels, some settlements will face water shortages, while others will need to find ways to deal with the effects of flooding. What these changes imply is that governments will have to return to an interventionist role in cities not seen since the post-war period in the developed world, and perhaps never seen in parts of the developing world.

Cities in all parts of the world will have to make adjustments in response to climate change

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■ Relationship of urban planning to the market

New approaches to planning have also recognized the need to redefine the relationship between the planning system and the market. One important implication of rapid urbanization and city growth is the escalation in urban land prices and urban development driven increasingly by land speculation and developer-led projects. This is placing unforeseen demands on urban infrastructure, as well as resulting in fragmented and inefficient urban growth and negative social and environmental impacts. The urban planning system is potentially an important tool for governments to better manage these forces.

Specific aspects of a new role for urban planning

There are quite a number of more specific aspects of a new role for urban planning, relating to both the planning process (procedural) and content of plans (substantive), as well as to the fundamental objectives and values of planning.

■ The guiding values of planning

Planning systems need to shift away from their original objectives. This will imply shifting away from objectives that relate to aesthetics, global positioning, replicating western lifestyles, to the far more demanding objectives of achieving inclusive, productive, equitable and sustainable cities. It is necessary to recognize that such values are unlikely to be universal. Unless planning values articulate closely with the values of the society in which it is taking place, urban planning is unlikely to be socially and institutionally embedded to the extent required to be effective.

■ Shifts in the form of plans

In the mid-20th century, many thought that the best way to undertake urban development was to prepare a plan, which then was expected to be followed by all those 'producing' the city. However, over time, it has been realized that planning agencies usually lacked sufficient power and/or stability to exercise such control over all the agencies involved in urban development. Instead, plan-makers have had to give more attention to the way other agencies operate, and recognize the limits of their ability to predict future development trajectories. Essentially, the purpose of planning is not just to produce planning documents, but to set in motion processes which will improve the quality of life of urban residents.

■ Shifts in planning processes

There is also the recognition that planners are not the only professionals to be involved in planning. A wide range of related professionals, stakeholders and communities also need to be involved. Experience has shown the value of participatory approaches in planning. It is important to recognize that planning is inevitably political, and is usually at the heart of conflicts over land and resources. A central role for planning is the mediation of these conflicts.

■ Shifts in urban form

There is some agreement that an equitable and sustainable city will have the following spatial features: higher densities but low rise; mixed uses; public-transport based; spatial integration; a defined and protected open space system; and an urban edge to prevent sprawl. This spatial model may be far easier to achieve in developed countries. In developing countries, municipal governments may not have the capacity to bring about compliance with these ideas. However, achieving these principles in different contexts remains a worthwhile goal.

■ 'Urban modernism' as a problematic built form model

Most cities in the world have in part, been shaped by early 20th century urban modernist thinking. Currently, this takes the form of mega-projects delivering commodified versions of waterfronts, theme-parks, and retail and leisure centres. This image of a desirable city is usually strongly promoted by property developers; and in developing countries, by politicians who believe that this demonstrates an ability to modernize. However, this model of built form cannot produce cities that are environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive. In fact, it excludes the poor and encourages unsustainable consumption patterns.

■ Planning with, and for informality

Informality will shape the bulk of new urbanization in Africa and Asia. A central challenge for planning is devising ways of supporting, protecting and including the poor and the informal in urban areas, while at the same time being careful not to destroy their livelihoods and shelters with excessively stringent legal and process requirements.

■ Revisiting both directive and regulatory aspects of the planning system

Experience from various parts of the world shows that it is often not too difficult to change the nature of directive plans, but far more difficult to change the regulatory system, as this usually affects people's rights in land. Besides, politicians are often reluctant to change the regulatory system for various reasons. Consequently, the regulatory system often contradicts the directive plan, making the latter impossible to implement. Changes to land-use management systems are necessary and include: allowing for a greater mix of land-uses and urban forms; permitting more flexible land-use categorizations that include informal settlements; and allowing for performance-based criteria rather than use-based criteria for approving land-use change.

■ Planning and institutional integration

As urban governments become more complex and specialized, there has been growing awareness of the need to achieve sectoral integration within government and between levels of government. One potential role of planning is to provide a mechanism for sectoral integration. Such a role is also important in terms of plan production and implementation, as it encourages planners to work together with other urban professionals and benefit from their areas of expertise.

■ Planning scales

Planning at the urban or local scale cannot operate in isolation from planning at the regional, national or even supra-national scales. Certain urban problems can only be dealt with at the regional or national scale. Given that cities now extend well beyond their municipal boundaries, achieving coordination across scales and the correct allocation of legal powers and functions at the various levels is important for urban planning.

CONTEXTUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES NEEDED TO MAKE URBAN PLANNING MORE EFFECTIVE

Several preconditions are necessary for achieving more effective urban planning in various parts of the world. These will vary across regions, and the ideas presented are generalized.

Prioritizing an urban policy at the national scale

In some countries, particularly in Africa and parts of Asia, there is still some aversion to the urbanization process, and mistaken assumptions that urban problems can be addressed through rural development. However, some countries have recognized the futility of this position and have sought to integrate urban policy at the national scale. Brazil provides a good example through the establishment of the Ministry of Cities. A national urban policy should set out a framework for urban settlements and urbanization policy which can serve to coordinate and align national sectoral policies.

Planning legislation

An important pre-condition for more effective urban planning is that planning legislation is up-to-date and is responsive to current urban issues. A major aspect of planning legislation is that it should consider the different planning tasks and responsibilities which need to be allocated to various levels of government. In some parts of the world, planning is highly centralized, requiring even minor urban planning decisions to be approved at national level. This leads to top-down, bureaucratized planning, with little chance for communities and stakeholders to become involved in planning issues.

Decentralization of urban planning functions

Decisions on urban planning issues should be made as close as possible to those affected by them. This implies the decentralization of urban planning decisions to the urban level of government. This requires effective local governments, greater capacity in terms of urban planning professionals, more resources at the local level, and reconsideration of municipal boundaries in areas where urban development has outgrown older administrative limits.

The urban planning function within municipalities

In many parts of the world, urban planning forms a separate department within municipalities, giving rise to the problem of achieving integration between planning and other departments. This has resulted in the urban space becoming highly fragmented and inefficient. There needs to be a much higher level of integration between spatial plans and

infrastructure plans. Within municipalities, coordinating structures and forums need to be established to ensure communication between departments, between levels of government and with communities and stakeholders.

Monitoring and evaluation of urban plans

The monitoring and evaluation of plans and planning processes can play a key role in assessing the impact of plans; and to indicate how planning is affecting urban development. Yet, the use of monitoring and evaluation in planning is not widespread, partly due to a lack of capacity. Current research in this field points to the importance of monitoring and evaluation, even if relatively few indicators are used and there is a reliance on existing information.

Urban research and data

Planners are sometimes accused of producing plans that do not reflect the realities of cities. One reason for this is often a lack of research and information, particularly on the spatial characteristics of cities. Often, useful information may be held by international agencies and research departments but is not accessible to professional planners. The idea of an urban observatory is a useful mechanism for collating this information, as are national state of the cities reports.

City planning networks to share information and experience

Strong international networks are important for any profession to share information and experience, to build the profile of the profession and to encourage students to join the profession. In the case of planning, these networking channels are not well-developed. Some networks which have been functioning have strong representation in some regions but not in others. These networks need building and support, need to reach to those parts of the world which do not yet have strong representation, and need to begin the process of debating planning values and approaches.

Planning education

In many developing and transitional countries, planning curricula are dated, and are unable to produce planning professionals that are able to effectively address current urban challenges. The production of new planning graduates is very small, leading to capacity constraints. Planning professionals are also increasingly mobile internationally, but their training is often highly specific to the country in which they have been educated. Planning education that is able to produce graduates that would effectively respond to the urban challenges confronting cities in the 21st century

Urban planning education must be able to respond to 21st century urban challenges

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is an important precondition for more effective urban planning.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The central argument in this report is that planning systems in many parts of the world are not up to the task of dealing with the major urban challenges of the 21st century, and need to be revisited. Revised planning systems must be shaped by, and be responsive to the contexts from which they arise, and must be institutionally embedded in the practices and norms of their locales. Certain preconditions are necessary if urban planning is to play a significant role in developing cities that are environmentally liveable, economically productive, and socially inclusive. Countries need to develop a national perspective on the role of urban areas. It is imperative that governments view urbanization as a positive phenomenon and a precondition for improving access to services, economic and social opportunities, and a better quality of life. This requires that urban planning is institutionally located in a way that allows it to play a key role in creating urban opportunities, through responsive and collaborative processes. Urban planning can play a crucial integrating role in terms of coordinating the actions of different functions. Finally, planning requires strengthening through stronger professional organizations and networks, more effective planning education, better urban databases and more robust planning research.