Milada Ledvinkova-Simpson
Karel Schmeidler

# TWO PARADIGMS - URBAN DESIGN AND URBAN PLANNING

The subject of this paper is dealt with by discussing relevant observation under the following headings:
• duality within the profession
• traditional interpretation
• role of the urban designer/planning concerns
• producers and consumers of the environment
• conclusions

## Duality within the profession

The duality of the urban design and planning, with the urban design being considered architecturally based while the planning discipline is more social science and politically oriented, has a long tradition, it is not a recent phenomenon.

At the beginning one should try and define the terms that are subject of our discussion. The Oxford dictionary refers to the terms urban as "of, living, or situated in, a city or town"; design is defined as "mental plan, artistic or literary groundwork, general idea, construction"; the planning as "scheme of arrangement, way of proceeding, arranging on what planning is". However, planning theory is itself unable to agree not only on what planning is, (here we talk about Town Planning as understood in Anglo-Saxon terms), but, what is worse, what planners should do and what their role is, which of course has serious implications concerning planning education.

Reade (1978) states that "Identification of planning as a mode of decision making points at the loose usage of the word, 'planning' even among planners themselves". The word 'planning' tends to be used to mean almost anything that the user wishes it to mean. During periods when it is fashionable (such as the 1960's) almost anything is labelled 'planning'. In periods when it is out of fashion, almost nothing is. In 1973 Wildawsky published a paper entitled 'If planning is everything, maybe it's nothing' which, it could be concluded suggests that planning is a catchword rather than an analytical concept.

Indeed, the word 'planning' tends to be used very loosely, and as Reade suggests, there is a tendency to use it to describe almost any governmental intervention, or any transfer of decision making away from the market forces and into the realm of politics and administration.

Another view of planning can be 'planning as future control' or as Wildawsky (1973) puts it "Planning is the attempt to control the consequences of our actions" and "the determination of whether planning has taken place must rest on an assessment of whether and to what degree future control has been achieved". It is a well-known fact that planned decisions have often unplanned consequences. It would be easy to argue with the assumption that if the aim is not achieved, there has not been any plan at all in the first place.

The other side of the spectrum is 'planning as design' which is concerned more with the physical arrangement of urban elements. Here we could associate ourselves with Lynch's definition of city design being a "skill in creating proposals for the form and management of the extended spatial and temporal environment, judging it particularly for its effects on the everyday lives of its inhabitants, and seeking to enhance their daily experience and their development as persons". This is seen as changing the city physically whilst bearing in mind the humanistic purpose, resulting in the affirmation that the quality of environment has a direct relationship to the people's behaviour.

As observed above, this duality in dealing with physical concepts (more design tradition oriented) and town planning concepts ( more loosely defined, but dealing more with the organisation of the society) has historical basis.

## Traditional Interpretations

Twentieth century planning was concerned not only with the urban form and the search for the ideal city, but also with social reformer's wish for establishing an ideal community. However closely these two trends have been related in the history, one can distinguish their different characteristics.

There are many examples of conscious design and concern for orderly layout. Consciously organised town form characterises a range of civilisations: Greek, Roman and locations in: China, South East Asia, Central and South America and the Islamic world. In Europe they were for example the bastides of England and France, Renaissance formalism etc.. There are also many examples of the search for the ideal city in design terms (See Helen Rosenan).

As an example of the second trend, the more socially oriented one, we can quote early examples ranging from Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Politics, More's Utopia etc., to worker's villages established in response to Industrial Revolution and the Garden City movement. One can distinguish a distinct British contribution among the later examples belonging to this socially oriented theme. The two fold nature (architect and social reformer as representatives) of this subject is therefore apparent in the

historical base. More recently this modal split (more of 'design' or 'planning') is evident not only according to the time scale (when) but also according to the country of origin (where). From the Second World War until the 60's a view of planning as the three-dimensional design of towns, i.e. the urban design tradition was dominant. In the 1960's (in U.S. in 1950's), through the work of McLoughlin, Chadwick and others the view of planning as a general societal management process became important (procedural planning theory - Faludi and others). (For the map of theoretical positions in planning theory in 1970's see the McDougal, Healy and Thomas-Position paper for 1981 Planning conference, Wheatley).

This is also reflected by the development of the difficult conceptions of planning. As a reaction to the comprehensive planning which was thought to be too physical and lacking the decision making phase, the concepts of structure planning, systems approach and advocacy planning was developed.

Regarding the structure planning, the technique is considered important; in addition to more sophisticated survey and analysis methods also goal definition and evaluation methods are used. There are two levels to this structural planning process - the policy (or structural) level and the technical (or development) level. This concept is therefore more activity and land-use oriented and concerned with the implementation and decision making factors.

According to Roberts (1974) Systems Approach planning "places the greatest emphasis of all different views of planning on technical expertise - in analysing the urban system, in forecasting the future and in stimulating alternative futures. It is characterised by its view of the subject matter of planners as systems and sub-systems of man's activities, with their physical manifestations and their inter-relationships". Chadwick, the British proponent of systems approach, describes three kinds of system - engineering (fairly predictable, deterministic) ecological and social (more difficult to predict, probabilistic).

Chapin listed the basic entities for planning system under the headings of Objects, Activities, Physical infrastructure, Land and Policy , cross-referencing them with Population, Goods and Vehicles headings.

In advocacy planning the planner's role is that of an advocate for certain causes, pleading for particular needs of many interest groups, building up a case for their implementation. "Plural plans rather than a single agency plan should be presented to the public" (Roberts 1974). Therefore this very much involves the choice and determination of the goals and evaluation of the alternatives.

This push and pull towards one school of thought or another , and adherence to one of the positions is also well documented in the literature published on the subject. The belief in importance of physical or social environment varies considerably according to the author. On one hand Herbert Gans appears to dismiss the physical environment

as a factor in human situations, when he says..."The physical environment does not play as significant role in people's lives as the planner believes. Although people reside, work and play in buildings, their behaviour is not determined by the buildings, but by the economic, cultural and social relationships within them", and "the primary effect on people is not created by the physical, environment of the community, but by the social environments". The other extreme can be demonstrated by Neutra's statement: "Let me design a house for a happily married couple, and I can have them divorced within six months". The author does not associate herself with either of these views, which are considered extreme, i.e., it is believed, that the physical environment is neither deterministic nor irrelevant in human affairs, rather that the physical environment interacts with multiple complex patterns of activity, or as Stanford Anderson argues: "the physical environment allows, or encourages ranges of activities, bounded by what are broad limits of the possible, narrowed by constraints of cultural or social origin to those uses and meanings that may be socioculturally coincident, collaborative or symbiotic with the environment.

## Role of the Urban Designer/planning concerns

Different trends and attitudes were discussed above to provide background to the question of the role of the urban designer. If we know what is to be the subject of his activity, we are nearer to answering which way we should be guiding his education. It is believed that the changes of attitude outlined above are not only changes of fashion, but that they are economic and human reaction to existing conditions or developing trends, perhaps even potential situations. This can be illustrated by a British example: In the sixties, during the economic boom the 'physical approach' was frowned upon. Later, in recession, there was no time or money for the social or political scientist to go on theorising, while being influenced in his decision making by one or the other party in power: As a result the physical designers came to the fore (it was much easier for them to find work) rather than social scientists, who were viewed more as a luxury in the poorer economic climate.

The social science branch of planning has a further difficulty in being subject to an identity crisis of its followers, who find it difficult to define their role. As Wildavsky suggests - "the planner has become the victim of planning, his own creation has overwhelmed him. Planning has become so large that the planner cannot encompass its dimensions. Planning has become so complex that planners cannot keep up with it. Planning protrudes in so many directions, the planner can no longer discern its shape. He may be economist, political scientist, sociologist, architect or scientist. Yet the essence of his calling - planning - escapes him. He finds it everywhere in

general and nowhere in particular;....planners have difficulty in explaining who they are and what they should be expected to do" . Many planners in Britain are now desperately concerned to demonstrate their 'relevance' to local councils, to central government and to a highly critical public. This makes them very "vulnerable to the change that they are nothing more than blind operators of the system within which they find themselves". (McDougal et al.). This professional identity crisis of the planner in the Western world is no doubt damaging not only to the content of his work, but also to his professional image. On a larger scale this is no doubt connected with market being defined as an alternative mechanism of organising and allocating material goods and other privileges, or as Dahrendorf defines it: "the market is a place of exchange and competition, where all comers do their best to improve their own lot. As for the art of architecture, it is becoming increasingly a question of a design of one particular building, architectural quality having different characteristics to the spatial quality of the relationship between the buildings. Urban design is concerned with the design of a group of buildings, which means bringing buildings together, where they cannot only give visual pleasure which none can give separately, but also the uses are functionally dependent on each other, the whole becoming more than the sum of the parts. In the Western world there is a noticeable antipathy between the architectural and planning professions, Alexander goes as far as describing architects as being "in the habit of creating completely mad idealistic utopias, while planners have established a tradition of boring attention to detailed facts...offering no comprehensive vision of a better future". He proposes bridging this gap by "careful consideration of psychological problems leading to major revisions of environmental form". In my view the contributory factor to the feeling of this professional 'schism' is also the link of the architectural profession with the development side, usually associated with market forces, while planners are trying to stop these 'dark forces' and become guardians of 'public good'. This was apparent during the Town Planning in Oxford some years ago, when simulating a public enquiry (a tribunal where both sides present their point of view and the reasons for specific development to go ahead to be refused). The developers' side was usually represented by architects, while on the opposing side the planning issues were being put forward by social scientists. If one can generalise, the 'safeguarding' role is usually dominant during the economic boom. During the recession however, the planning is keener to play an enabling role, encouraging the development. It is not therefore surprising that architects and urban designers, qualified as planners are sought after in the job market, both in public and private sectors.

From the above discussion transpires the implied role of urban designer who is neither an architect, nor a planner, his position being in between of those of, architecture and planning, but having his own domain the creation of three dimensional form in the urban context; he is concerned with change over a long time scale. The urban designer "has to view the environment under consideration in historical perspective... understanding the evolution of the existing situation in terms of human activity and built from response to economic, social and political forces. (Goodey 1981). The 'sense of place' must be recognised and articulated, (Lynch 1972). One of his roles is to direct development of change in an area towards a phased series of desired ends. Pedagogically, it is very important to make the urban design students realise their future role. It was shown how dangerous can be the 'identity crisis' suffered by practising planners in the Western world. This means making the future planner/designer understand what is likely to be expected of him or her, to teach them describable skills that they can directly apply in their future professional life. It is in agreement with Goodey who suggests that although it is clearly design skills that are paramount in the urban designer's training, the ability to communicate desired ends, and the means to those ends, with conviction and clarity is of almost equal importance. The urban designer has therefore to bridge the gap between creative artistic work and the concise analysis required for research and presentation.

On the other hand, the planner, in order to be able to comment in an intelligent and informed manner on the proposed schemes, should acquire certain amount of urban design skills. The planners should therefore be trained not only to work in public sector offices (e.g. strategic planning, local plans, development central) but also with their understanding of urban design, feasibility and development procedure as consultants[3] to the developers within the private sector. It is clear that the urban designers' as well as planners' communicative skills are particularly important not only for dealing with the producers, but also with the consumers of the environment.

## Producers and consumers of the environment

One cannot divorce the urban design from the societal forces affecting the practice of planning and the education of planners/urban designers. In the present concern for democracy the subject of public participation and 'who plans what and for whom' are of utmost importance.

As stated above, when adopting Lynch's definition of urban design there are some reservations on our part when he talks about inhabitants and their daily experience and their development as persons. Here one would like to stress the importance of not dividing people into them and us since only some of us could be called producers of the environment but all of us are its consumers. Of course there are potential problems with public participation and its implementation. To name but a few from this large subject, there is a danger of the professional thinking that he knows

what is best for the community and for people. For its implementation there could be a problem due to the plurality of interests in society and their sometimes contradictory character, taking into account the technical difficulty of finding out what needs exist and how best to satisfy them.

The potential difficulties should not discourage one. From experience some of these may be overcome by education, popularising the art of environment, being aware of the importance of time scaling (the more imminent the environmental action, the more likely it is to provoke response), and concentration on smaller, more local issues, since in this context it is more difficult to fight for general principles and easier to protect the particular ones.

This is directly connected with the values the urban designer should be made aware of, since he in turn may be able to influence public opinion, (since public participation should be a two way process). In this context one means the values related to one's culture, historical environment, awareness of one's heritage and respect for one's roots. The important aspects of which the public should be aware.

There are a number of benefits, which can be acquired through public participation. By involving the public in the planning process, it is hoped not only to arrive at a more democratic, balanced solution, where man and his environment fit better together but also to relieve the anxiety resulting from a meeting of the unknown. Furthermore, educational benefits consisting of an awareness of the nature of the environmental change process, (creative activity being stressed as normal, rather than abnormal) uncover total range of views and preferences and dispel the feeling of not being able to contribute to the planning decision making.

As Appleyard concludes: "The significance of citizen participation in environmental decisions is critically important, because this is the way in which people can become identified with a new environmental action, the way in which they can possess and feel responsible for it".

## Conclusion

Abraham Lincoln said: "If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it". Regarding the already established urban design discipline, as well as an emerging planning profession, the fundamental steps to be taken are those of firstly mapping the present situation and defining the needs

and aims the urban design and planning professions will have to deal with. The countries of central Europe which have a solid base and tradition of urban design and architectural education, can build upon these strengths, while addressing the needs facing the emerging planning profession. It is important to realise the relevance of the planning profession in the countries undergoing the transition, from practical as well as pedagogical point of view. The planners' education, their implementation skills as well as their strategic thinking abilities have to be geared to specific practical application. The planner should become an 'enabler' while safeguarding the issues in public interest. Among others, his familiarity with urban design principles, feasibility, issues related to investment and dealing with developers are therefore essential.

It is hoped that this paper will contribute to the discussion when following questions are posed:

'Is there a common ground of planning and urban design professions? If so, what aspects do they share? What role are the urban designers going to play (or continue to play) in the moulding of the environment? What is expected of the planners of the future? What is their role in the present process of transformation as well as long term prospect when dealing with the market forces? What consideration should therefore become a priority when establishing the curriculum for the education or re-training of this emerging profession?'

As seen above, lessons can be learnt which may be relevant to the emerging planning profession in the economies undergoing transformation from central planning and totalitarian regime to more market oriented principles. Planners should be fully aware of the extent of their role, not doubting their own identity, so they can concentrate more on doing things rather than justifying their existence or usefulness.

There now seems to be an ideal opportunity for striking the right balance between the market forces and planning when dealing with environmental issues. The 'planning' in the old sense of the word has acquired a bad name. However, it should be stressed that planning is considered not only necessary, but also beneficial when operating in the market economy, when the need for informed environmental planning is even greater, with the necessary mechanism, legislation and expertise in place to assist, encourage, discourage or control the market driven development within our environment. Urban designers and planners are professionally concerned with creating and moulding our human environment for the future. In this context I would like to end with a quote by Charles F. Kettering: "I am vitally interested in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there", and that should apply to all of us.

# References

*Alexander, Ch.* 1968 **Major changes in environmental form** required by Social and psychological demands.

*Anderson, S.* **On Streets;** studies Toward an Ecological model of the Urban Environment.

*Appleyard, D.* April1979 **The Environment as a Social Symbol:** Within aTheory of Environmental Action and Perception. APA Journal.

*Chadwick, G.F.* 1971 **The alternative futures of alternative futures;** in Planning outlook, New series, 10.

*Chapin, F.S.* 1968 **Activity systems and urban structure:** a working Schema; in Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 3 Jan. Cherry, G.E.Influences on the Development of Town Planning in Britain; in Contemporary History.

*Cullen, G.* 1961 **The Concise Townscape Dahrendorf,** R. Market and Plan: Two Types of Rationality; in Essays in the Theory of Society.

*Gans, H.J.* 1969 **Planning for People,** not Buildings. Environment and Planning. Vol. 1.

*Goodey, B.* 1979 **Towards a debate on Urban Design;** JCUD, Oxford Polytechnic.

*Lynch, K.* 1979 **Teaching City Design,** JCUD, Oxford Polytechnic

*McDougal, G. et al.* 1981 **Planning Theory Conference** Position Paper, Wheatley.

*Reade, E.J.* 1978 **Identification of 'Planning' as a mode of decision making,** SIP conference.

*Roberts, M.* 1974 **An Introduction to planning techniques,** Hutchison & Co.

*Rosenan, H.* 1959 **The Ideal City** in its Architectural Evolution.

*Wildawsky, A.* 1973 **If Planning is Everything,** Maybe it's Nothing; Policy Sciences 4.