

PLANNING, PROGRESS, AND  
SOCIAL VALUES

THE TASK OF PLANNING

Planning is widely presumed to be alien to the moral assumptions of American democracy. Where tolerated it has come to be identified largely with the process of economizing, with what is so often the American approach to life: getting the most for your money. Thus the city planner, whose primary concern is with the practical problems of zoning, the routing of a new cross-town parkway, or the provision of parking space, is also a respected member of his community. Does he not help, after all, to conserve community values? His technical skills stand in the service of property and of the dominant class interests which control it. The planner in large industry or in the military finds himself much in the same position: goals are defined for him in advance; he is to work for the most rational solution. His status, therefore, is that of a high-class technician; and only in this role is he fully accepted by his culture.

Such, as I see it, is the present condition. But is it also the only possible vision? It seems to me that planning can be given a wider perspective, one far more challenging to the imagination. The things that planners do are inevitably oriented to the future: plans, translated into physical facts, shape the environment in which we are compelled to live, which our children

will either accept as part of their social heritage or rebel against or despair of; which will enable us in varying degrees to achieve a sense of permanent value in our lives or will lead us to be haunted by frustration, tension, and anxiety. Whether or not we actually think of these far-flung consequences is of small concern. Planned or unplanned, our actions today will bring into being a future, either meaningful or worthless, which will intrude upon our everyday existence and influence its psychological condition.

A good illustration of this is the hundreds of new suburbs which have been "planned" in recent years with small regard for the future, except in the limited sense of providing needed housing space. There is a terrible sameness about these middle-class communities: rows upon rows of mass-produced houses stare at each other from their tiny green plots, like so many battalions of soldiers. It seems as if a conscious effort had been made to drown in a sea of conformity all that is spontaneous and unique. And the monotony of layout and design has carried over into daily living: residents are bored with their surroundings and with each other. What marvelous opportunities have been lost here for creating an exciting and urbane environment for living!

It would appear, then, that planning cannot be concerned solely with economizing, but must also be engaged in creating the kind of future which we wish to bring into existence. Conceived in its broadest dimensions, "planning" involves the designing of the future of a community over time, thus giving it some rational, meaningful patterns, and the shaping of its history to the extent to which control over environmental factors permits.

To many professional planners such a vision seems largely irrelevant. Enmeshed as they are in day-to-day problem-solving activities, they fail to see the tremendous cumulative impact of seemingly minor decisions on all phases of the community's life. They fail to recognize the great and as yet unrealized opportunities for planning in setting the stage for the emergence of the autonomous, democratic personality. One of the basic, if hidden, assumptions in planning is a belief in the possibility of progress, in the possibility that change may lead towards "improvement," towards an unfolding of the meaning of history in the present world as opposed to spiritual "other-worldliness." The inherent possibilities of such a view are exciting to the imagination. Planning puts within the reach of man the tools for transforming his environment and even himself. It also puts him face to face with questions of ultimate value.

If planning is the means whereby a community of men design the shape

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of their common destiny, it is clear that only the “general interest” of this community should count in making the basic planning decisions since it alone can transcend the special time-bound interests of the present generation. Planning, as a history-making force, is bound to take the long view, to focus its attention on the life and organic growth of the community as a whole, to will, in effect, a sense of its historical continuity.

Yet it is also evident that decisions must be made in the present and that they will affect, perhaps primarily, the range of present interests. The long-run claims of the community can never be entirely apart from the current interests of the individuals and groups which compose it. Nor yet can they be wholly identical. Current interests are transitory; current actions, however, may affect the lives of generations hence. Life in the present gains its significance not only from the past—that body of common historical experiences, beliefs, values, and expectations, but also from the future—that time-binding sense of historical purpose realized wherever a community persists beyond the single lifetime of an individual. The development of meaning in history requires a transmission of values and knowledge so that new values and knowledge can be created out of a common stream of tradition. Some accommodation must therefore be found between the varied interests of the present generation and the still unexpressed interests of future generations. Unity of purpose and variety of expression within that unity is the ultimate goal for which democratic planning should strive.

### CENTRAL ISSUES: AGREEMENT AND INNOVATION

Substantial popular agreement on the aims of intended action is found wherever there is planning in a democracy. It is largely for this reason that planning has been interpreted so narrowly in this country—except possibly during that strange period of national flowering, the American New Deal. It is largely for this reason, too, that planning is allowed much broader direction over public life in England, the Scandinavian countries, Israel, and India, to cite some well-known instances from within the “free world.” A state of national emergency, when there seemed to be an instinctive “pulling together” of individual wills, when the life of the community itself seemed to be threatened, brought large-scale planning into being in each instance. Yet only outside the United States does it seem able to survive beyond the period of emergency. Why? Because planning on the European continent and to a lesser extent in Asia has come to rest on a sense of national unity which is grounded in a common and treasured cultural heritage. The United States, by contrast, is known as the country

where the only tradition is to have no tradition, and, lacking tradition, the country also lacks one of the essential means towards agreement. Since planning, however, will be implemented, it seems to me, only in those areas of national life where agreement about the general direction of change can be obtained and where the conflict of contending and special interests is at a minimum, the problem of how to broaden the base of agreement emerges as one of its central issues.

Planning for society involves broadly two responsibilities. The first is to discover the means towards the fulfillment of existing wants and aspirations in the population of a community, which involves as well a method for arriving at agreement about the aims to be pursued. The second responsibility is to provide for a way to channel into the current of public life creative social values which have not yet been widely accepted.

The first responsibility—oriented clearly towards the immediate future—resolves into the question of how the area of agreement may be extended among men, how many special interests may be accommodated to each other and to the continuing interest of the whole.

In any community certain interests are always dominant. They express the values and concerns of powerful elites or classes which largely determine the shape of the political and economic life of the community. Aligned against these, however, are the emergent interests of social groups which rise from the substrata of society to challenge the prevailing values of the group in power. On still a third level may be distinguished those latent interests which are present among the politically unorganized masses but which remain largely unexpressed for want of an organized means of communication. The urban white-collar worker and the primitive peasant alike fall within the great reservoir of humanity whose interests are still to be heard.

Within each of these categories, dominant, emergent, and latent, the interests felt or expressed may be specific—for instance, greater leisure; or generalized—for instance, improved living standards. The more specific the value, the greater will be the possibility for conflict with opposing interests. Conversely, as values become more generalized the chances for wider agreement are enhanced: yet, at the same time, the more generalized the value the more will it lack in significant content. Everyone can be for freedom and brotherhood but the most violent crimes in history have been committed under the banner of these glorious symbols.

Planning, as an organized social activity, must inevitably be carried out within the framework of the dominant interests of politically and culturally

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powerful groups. Still, it is true that planning must also take account of latent and emergent interests if the whole community is to be served. In fact, it is only by recognizing the existence of these “lesser” interests that the dominant groups may remain substantially in power.

Planning is thrust into the very center of the political struggle. Its task is to bring the opposing and as yet unrecognized interests of the community into accommodation with each other. This role precludes any possibility on the part of planners to remain as mere technicians. True, it is not for them to take sides in political controversy: their service is to the interest of the whole. But this is a positive, and not a neutral, role. It imposes on planners the duty to help define what is the public interest in any situation and to safeguard it from attacks by those who follow special pursuits. Their duty is also to work for agreement in the community on the direction of progress to be made.

The search for agreement will provide for only one of the preconditions for making planning decisions. There remains the all-important question: agreement on what? Immediately, this is less of a problem, since values become defined by present interests: they need only to be brought into accommodation with each other. But beyond the immediate lies an as yet uncharted future. The second task therefore which confronts the planner is to direct new values into the broad stream of planning decisions, values which lead to the design of a new future. This is all the more important as decisions about the long-run must of necessity affect any current decisions and hence introduce a new factor into the process of creating agreement on action.

The task of bringing new values to bear on planning is clearly a function of the creative imagination. Two operations may be involved: the creation of new wants in the life of the community—that is, to oppose to the “poverty of aspirations” a vision of new values; and the refinement of more generalized values by creative invention. We might think of the role of an architect with the creative genius of a Corbusier, a Wright, or a Gropius who enriches the layman’s vocabulary of building forms by demonstrating as yet unheard-of possibilities of design. Or we might consider the architect who has been given the job of preparing the plans for a new hospital of specific dimension and must now apply his talents to giving his plans specific, individualized form and arrangement. In the one case, new values are being introduced; in the second, an existing but generalized value is given concrete content and meaning. It is the creative vision of the future which endows history with some enduring purpose. Planning may

be rational decision-making; it is also design. It may well be that the accommodation of current interests will be facilitated to the extent to which a common vision of the future inspires a majority of men within a community.

#### ENDS AND MEANS IN PLANNING

Planning is a job for technicians who suggest alternative ways for arriving at given objectives. So, at least, runs a very popular theory, popular especially with planners. But is it also a true theory, or is it contradicted by either fact or logic? Is it possible to establish a clear and unambiguous dichotomy of ends (values) and means (technique)? Common sense, as well as consensus among a majority of social philosophers, argues strongly against such a view. Every "means" is also an instrumental end towards some more ultimate objective; every "means" is a causal factor setting off a chain of consequences in many different directions, some leading directly to the end in view, some affecting other areas of human concern.

The truly ultimate objectives in any community are always few in number. Dahl and Lindblom in their recent study of *Politics, Economics, and Welfare* (New York, Harper, 1953), list only seven "basic ends of social action": freedom, rationality, democracy, subjective equality, security, progress, and appropriate inclusion. One may quarrel with their list; it is unlikely that any alternative would produce a substantially greater number of the more "ultimate" aims in a community. But even here, the so-called basic ends of action are closely associated with what are normally called "means." Freedom, rationality, and democracy are attained in the doing of certain things in certain ways: they are coterminous with action. If I take a hike in the woods, I do it not primarily because I want to get to a certain place at a certain time, but because I enjoy hiking: ends and means become fused in my action. And so it is with democracy or freedom or rationality. The process itself becomes something we value for its own sake. The rigid ends-means schema of action cannot therefore be sustained on philosophical grounds, and it becomes dangerous to attempt this in planning practice.

Still, if I do not wish to draw too sharp a separation between ends and means, some conceptual distinction between them may nonetheless be of some use. People do hold values which they want to maximize, and they will consider alternative means for doing so. The basic ends of social action are the stuff that holds a community together, that determines its purpose and its way of life, that gives it a sense of continuity over time and a living historical present. The job of planning is to strive for agreement about the

nature of ends to be pursued as a basis for action. Since there is usually agreement about the ultimate ends, instrumental values must be worked out in the short-run where they can be given more specific meaning.

Many instrumental values confront the planner in his community. These values have become identified with the immediate interests of different pressure groups and organizations. But is the planner, who is concerned not only with short-run but also with the long-run effects of action, obliged to accept these values as setting the practical direction and the limits to planned action? I propose to argue that the planner must in no case consider the universe of social action completely delimited. On the contrary, planning may involve the definition, clarification, and even the creation of new values. In this respect, planning transcends technical knowledge and enters into the realm of the active imagination.

#### THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW VALUES

There are three ways in which new values may be introduced into planning. First, new "ultimate" values may have to be formulated. Second, a given general objective may have to be clarified, detailed, and spelled out into a "path" of action, involving a multiplicity of as yet undetermined instrumental ends. Finally, new short-run objectives may have to be established where planning comes face to face with what I have called the "poverty of aspirations."

The general interest of a community is composed of both the immediate interests of the living, politically vocal population and the as-yet-unexpressed interests of future generations. Planning, therefore, embodies the principle that the present has a responsibility towards the future. The balance between the short- and long-run interests is a precarious one. Liberal democratic societies tend to be biased in favor of the living present. Socialistic communities tend to lean more in the direction of the future. In either system, however, the preservation of the community as a vital, healthy organism is one of the primary objectives of planning.

But the purpose of planning cannot be left so vaguely defined. Time and again, planners come to face the question of the desirable objectives for a community, objectives which will reach beyond the lifetime of any single generation. The problem is complicated by the fact that the planner must be concerned not only with single, isolated objectives but also with the pattern of life embodied in them. It is not sufficient to establish an objective which, let us say, may provide for so many square feet of shelter space per person. It is necessary to go beyond this and ask penetrating questions

about the types of communities in which this shelter space will be provided. Where will these communities be located in relation to already existing cities? How large should they be? Will they be high-density or low-density developments? According to what physical pattern shall they be modelled? Should they be one-class communities or should they encourage the mingling of different social groups? These questions could be extended almost indefinitely. Their purpose is to call to mind a total picture of the long-run future in its major structural components towards which the community should aim.

This reasoning may become clearer in the current predicament of pre-industrial countries. Most of these have embraced planning as a way to work more rationally towards the future. The problems of these countries are immense and immediately pressing. Solutions cannot be postponed. But if industrialization is seen as the major means for ending widespread poverty, it is also realized that this process must end by transforming and sometimes destroying the sanctioned patterns of traditional community life. Hence, an urgent attempt is made to escape the heavy social costs that industrialization brought in its wake in the Western world, and to evolve new cultural patterns which, while technically advanced, will yet express the older traditions of the society which bore the technical revolution upwards on the shoulders of its genius. The utopian view of the future must be made relevant to the present, and current decisions should be guided by it.

The second place where new values may be introduced in planning is found where only general values are given, leaving the detailed working out of these values to the discretion of the planners. This is a more usual case than the first. For example, Congress established the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1933 to perform certain functions in regard to comprehensive water resource development in the region. But it was a series of important administrative decisions which eventually shaped the agency into what it is today and which determined its specific objectives and its methods of operation. Similar problems are encountered by every planning agency. Up to a point, specifications (instrumental ends) may be logically deduced from the expressed will of the legislature or from what is loosely termed "the intent of Congress." This is an important part of planning procedure. Frequently, however, politicians do not wish to commit themselves, and the guidelines provided the administrator and his planning staff will remain vague and imprecise. It is at this point that the planners must substitute their vision for the vision of the legislators.



Finally, then, we come to the problem connected with what I have labelled the "poverty of aspirations." The radical democrat, to be sure, may emphatically deny the existence of this problem. If the people want bread, he will declare, give them bread. If, by the same logic, they want circuses, give them circuses. What the people want is the supreme law and is declared out-of-bounds. *Cave canem*.

Still, it seems to me, the issue must be faced. If people "want" to eat their polished rice (and, incidentally, suffer from beri-beri), should planning then aim at giving them more polished rice? If people "want" to live in tumble-down shacks or in the folksy neighborhood slums of a metropolis, should planning desist from redevelopment? The reader may want to add examples of his own.

Nor is this a problem peculiar to the underprivileged classes of a community. Generally, we aspire to only those things with which we are familiar. Our wants are determined by environment and experience. The world may be a hamlet or the universe. However, the adventurous types are few who will venture out of the magic circle of the known into the exotic. Habits are annoyingly habit-forming and for most of us the vision of the world is exceedingly narrow.

It would seem, therefore, that the planner cannot light-heartedly "accept" popular values as given, without endeavoring to broaden the vision of the community. His own values are more catholic than the values of the people—or they should be. He is possessed of a higher imagination—or he should be. His position in the decision-making system of a community is so strategic that it imposes upon him a great responsibility to cultivate and refine his aesthetic and social sensibilities and to work out for himself a mature philosophy of life which will provide him with the necessary tools for social criticism and invention. Human wants are indeed variable. And the planner belongs by virtue of his position to that small group of men which has responsibility for moulding and shaping the public's mind. In this he is like the architect who has somewhat similar responsibilities towards his client, a client who professes to know nothing about architecture but who "knows what he likes." The architect's job is in part to teach his client something about the magnificent possibilities of architecture, so that there may at least be reason behind his choice. The planner, like the architect, wants to extend the range of experience of those for whom he is working so that choice may come to rest on knowledge rather than on ignorance.

## THE DYNAMICS OF BUREAUCRATIC PLANNING

The previous considerations about the role of planners in guiding progress pose a rather perplexing question. Planning is to be carried out within the context of bureaucracy. But how far can planners working in a bureaucracy act as conscious innovators? Can they, in practice, incorporate a utopian view of the future into planning?

It may be fair to say that most planners have a bit of the reformer in them. They are, as individuals, in one way or another dissatisfied with the world as it is and would like to refashion it into something more resembling their own vision of the good life. If this sounds slightly naïve, so, perhaps, are most of our dreams.

That planners are at heart reformers is true, I think, despite the disheartening evidence to the contrary. The annual papers presented at planning conventions generally make rather dull reading: for the most part, they deal with practical everyday problems in a practical everyday way. This is not meant as a criticism. Planning is, after all, a practical activity. But it does suggest that once the planner assumes an official position in a planning organization, he is overwhelmed by the pressure of current problems which cry out for a speedy solution. Traffic circulation, parking, changing residential and industrial patterns, schools, airports—the list could be easily extended. These problems leave little time for reflection. Only a few short-range alternatives can be examined. Solutions are often improvised because any solution is thought to be better than none. Thus, planning becomes easily identified with problem solving. And the next election looms larger in the planner's mind than the long-range future of his community.

It may be useful, however, in speaking of the matter-of-factness of planning, to draw a line between the full-time professional planner and the person who engages in planning only as a part-time vocation. It is the part-time planner who, coming perhaps from the university or from private practice, is the source of most of the new concepts and ideas in planning. He is the person who has both the leisure and the independence of means to think creatively about the future, to dream of new patterns and new values, and to communicate his ideas to the planning profession. A few names chosen at random will be suggestive: Geddes, Mumford, Abercrombie, Gutkind, Stein, Corbusier, Wright, Mannheim, A. E. Morgan, Tugwell. These men belong to the fraternity of innovators. The contrast between the professional and non-professional planner is so striking, in fact, that it forces us to probe more deeply into the reasons for this difference. Orig-

nally, we may presume, many of the professionals were idealists, too. What happened to their idealism when they became involved in an administrative structure? The sociology of planning has still to be written, but a few incomplete observations may be in order. A number of things will become clearer if we trace the life-history of a planning organization.

During the early stages of a planning agency we usually encounter an air of spirited enthusiasm, of experiment and innovation. Imaginative, creative people are recruited into the ranks of the organization. Its newness appeals to them, for it holds the promise of receptiveness to new ideas. The grooves are not yet cut. Purposes are still fluid, waiting to be shaped.

Soon, however, the period of the "honeymoon" draws to a close. The early experiments will have frightened the more staid members of the community, who see in the agency a threat to established values. The Philistines among them will force the agency into a tactical retreat. Desirous of justifying its existence, it will attempt to appear conservative itself. The agency's functions will come to be reinterpreted in the light of public hostility, and this reinterpretation will rapidly move from the verbal level into the very structure of the organization itself, influencing its activities and its choice among alternatives. Some alternatives may in effect become taboo. Daring new schemes, once the life blood of the organization, will be discouraged from the very inception for fear of arousing antagonism. And before long, the initial group of imaginative planners will drift away, into private practice, into the universities, or into some other scheme about to be launched.

In time, the agency will become less and less flexible. It will have developed an ideology, drawn from its own experience and buttressed by the need to defend its experience in public. This ideology will tend to persist even in the face of radically altered external conditions. Deviations from it will become more unthinkable as the ideology becomes entrenched and ever more refined. Self-preservation will become the primary aim and security will be found in the past record of success in overcoming public resistance. Once a particular method has been successfully applied, it is likely to be repeated even under different circumstances: experiment is a dangerous gamble.

As the agency develops its own traditions and habits of procedure, a tight network of internal and personal relationships becomes built up. Since this network may be disturbed by any innovations, it establishes an automatic mechanism of defense against them. Moreover, the agency will

come to look to certain "outside" interests for political support. To keep this support, it must try not to alienate its friends by pursuing a course that might run counter to their interests. In brief, the agency will become less capable of dreaming big dreams, of exploring new solutions, and of influencing the wants of people in the community where the "poverty of aspirations" limits the horizon of expectations.

The conservatism of an established planning agency has still deeper roots, however. Its origin goes back to the basic approach of planning itself. Planners, especially professional planners, strive to be scientific in their outlook, in their methods and procedures. Indeed, planning is often grouped with engineering or medicine as an "applied" science. It prefers, therefore, to deal with the "known" or "tangible" elements in a situation. Intangibles, i.e., those elements which are difficult to quantify or express in precise, operational language, are pushed into the background of the planner's consciousness.

Moreover, planning must be based on prevision, on a prediction of trends and of the consequences of possible action. Yet predictions are seldom very successful in the long-run, especially in complex situations. And this encourages a tendency in planning to emphasize the short-run, leaving the long-range future to the philosophers, the "prophets" of a sort. Their charismatic vision was itself a cause in its fulfillment.

For obvious reasons, the professional planner cannot indulge in prophecy. As a "scientist" he approves of incrementalism, of a slow and to his mind "certain" process of experiment, verification, and consolidation of proved experience. This, in contrast to prophecy, which leaps from stage to stage, unbound by scientific prejudices about verifiable knowledge. Where people follow prophets, however, planning falls by the wayside. The planners themselves will move on the periphery of a society in rapid change. To the prophets, the planners will appear as the most impractical of men.

This truly is an unexpected twist: on the one hand, planning is denounced as being far too radical; on the other hand, it is condemned as being far too timid, as lacking that vision of the future which alone propels a society forward. The possibilities for creative invention within a planning bureaucracy are limited and circumscribed. Whatever creativeness may be brought to bear on problems of planning will largely hinge on the degree to which non-professional planners and men of vision can inspire planning thought from the outside.

PLANNING AS SOCIAL PROCESS

Throughout this discussion, I have been speaking as if planning were a job only for those who are specifically called "planners." The impression left by this approach, however, is misleading. For planning as an organized social activity cannot be separated from the totality of life in a community into a neat, labelled compartment. There will, of course, be planners. But if planning is to perform a vital role in directing a community's evolution towards progress, it must function within a favorable environment. Planning theory must deal with these environmental factors as much as it must deal with the more formal structure of social decision-making. To be really successful, planning must become a way of life, a way of feeling, thinking, and acting on all levels of the social process. In this it would resemble democracy, which is not simply a mechanism for social choice, but also a process which secures individuals certain social and political rights and, in return, imposes certain social and political obligations. Just as democracy flourishes in an environment which stresses social equality, the free circulation of ideas, and mutual tolerance of differing values, so planning stands in need of an environment in which there is constant search for agreement on action, in which the long-run future sets the framework for resolving value conflicts in the present, and in which the creative imagination is given free play for enlarging the horizon of values in the development of a community towards a significant historical future. New patterns of living should be the result of conscious, deliberate creation, based on collective agreement within the community, and not only on drift—on the unanticipated and often unintended consequences of fragmented social action.

The full development of a planning environment will require more than the actions of a single planning agency, more even than the actions of the government as a whole. Surely, planners must be aware of the different roads to agreement, of the workings of the political process, of ideology and its pitfalls, of the concept of a dynamic tradition, of the role of the small, face-to-face group in decision-making, and of the extension of knowledge. But they can contribute in only limited ways towards making these roads more passable. The search for agreement becomes the responsibility of everyone in a community, and each will be able to contribute according to his abilities and range of influence.

Likewise, planners should be aware of the need for innovation on all levels of social experience, and in particular of the need for introducing new values into the stream of planning decisions. But again, the possibilities for creative thinking in formal planning are quite limited, and ways

must be found to encourage inventive thinking on all planes of a community's life.

In the broadest sense, a planning community is a community where thought at the level of planning becomes almost second nature to everyone. It remains a pluralistic community in that it allows full freedom of expression and the pursuit of individual goals within the framework permitted by the continuing interest of the whole. The individual does not subordinate his inalienable right to the "pursuit of happiness" to the more pervasive demands of the community. Indeed, the community is only a rich treasury, the sum total of its individual and varied lives. But in a planning community the individual also comes to realize that the pursuit of his own happiness is possible only where he willingly assumes some responsibility for the welfare of all the members of the community and for its continuing historical reality. A planning community implies the co-responsibility of all for ever realizing the good of all. It rejects the notion that the common good will automatically flow from the uncoordinated and socially irresponsible actions of individuals.

Antagonistic cooperation, as some social scientists would have us believe, can never be the basis of a healthy social life. The ethical foundation of a planning community lies rather in an affirmation of that highest Christian principle: I am my brother's keeper.