ROLE OF THE PLANNER

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Introduction

Planning decisions are taken at various levels of specificity—by persons all of whom are not planners by profession or intent. The transportation engineer, development board, city planner, politician and countless others in some way strongly influence planning. The planner himself may simply facilitate the actions of the others in making 'planning decisions'. It is not possible to describe the methods of a single homogeneous group of persons or professionals and say 'this is how planners operate' or 'this is the role of the planner'. What then is the role of the planner in a decision making process ? Perhaps a single answer would have been possible in the past. Today the scope of planning has extended far beyond the 'deterministic' role planning was expected to play. The concept that people's lives are shaped by their physical surroundings alone is no longer tenable (Gans). There is no physical planning per se -- variables apparently distant to physical planning

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have to be reckoned with. The broad system approach which seeks to deal with causes of problems has replaced 'physical determinism'. Conceptual shifts presage change in the planner's role. This is not the whole truth. The roles planners play are as diverse as the settings they operate in. The planner's role in an one-to-one client-consultant relationship is different from that of a planner in government employment. A comprehensive, all inclusive list of planners' roles is perhaps not possible.

Planner, the Technician

Whether planning is 'decisions which lead to a more desirable future', (Terry Moore) or 'the technological analysis of means to specific ends' (Lisa Peattie), the underlying assumption is the concern for people. The AIP Code asserts it clearly, 'A planner serves the public interest primarily'. But in real world situations 'public interest' is an abstract notion subject to dubious interpretation. Absence of consensus, conflicts of values and interests of individuals and groups confuse and complicate the concept. Where such is the case it is only proper to let the people decide on their interests. Davidoff and Riener put it succinctly :

> ...... we maintain that neither the planner's technical competence
> nor his wisdom entitle him to ascribe or dictate values to his
> immediate or ultimate clients. ...... Public decision making should
> reflect only the will of the various elements.

No matter who actually draws the plans, owns the land or finds the money, the people are the ultimate beneficiary or victim of planning actions. It is for the planners to advise and help the citizens perceive the technicalities and implications of different issues and solutions. Techniques and resources of the planners are to be used to analyse problems, devise alternatives or evaluate actions but the decisions rest on the citizens or their representatives.

In this sense the role of the planner is reduced to that of a technician.

Planner, the Broker

Traditional theories of planning suggest the role of technician as being sufficient and appropriate for effective planning. This, however, is a conceptual over-simplification. Planning cannot be effective unless tied to political power. Planner, the technician, can be effective in a 'cohesive' community with strong leadership working towards coherent goals. But in a 'competitive' community with multiple leaderships and conflicting goals or in a 'fragmented' community without recognised goals or leadership, technical planning alone cannot provide political sanctions to make plans effective. The goal of effective planning imposes on the planner a series of roles that require increasingly heterogeneous skills as the political integration of the community decreases.

In a 'competitive' community two or more strong groups vie for influence and resources to further their conflicting objectives. Decisions on non-controversial issues are routine but controversial issues—unless a group has stake in them — are avoided for fear of conflict.

The planner can no longer function as mere technician limited to information processing and administrative roles. The planner must seek out issues of common interests, encourage bargaining, specify alternatives and negotiate solutions. Consequently, the planner has to " translate his professional skill and knowledge into tools that would direct the flow of choices towards (desired) outcomes ". (Rabinovitz 1979). The role of the planner in a 'competitive' community is anologous to that of a broker.

Planner, the Mobilizer

The 'fragmented' community is characterized by the absence of clear goals or leadership. The system is too weak to support actions and is noted for its inability to act on anything. Persuasion of the dominant group as in a 'cohesive' community or the knitting together of existing groups, as in a 'competitive' community, is not possible in a 'fragmented' system. The role of a planner in such a diffuse and open-ended system is complex and difficult. It is for the planner to initiate programmes, block actions contrary to planning principles and inact programmes in the face of opposition. The planner must mobilize those who might have interest across a broad spectrum and co-ordinate them, form alliances and muster resources for generating energy to support change. The role of the planner in a 'fragmented' system is that of a mobilizer, seeking and mobilizing support for plans or actions to which the planner himself is committed.

Planner, the Educator

While an outline of all possible roles of the planner is virtually impossible, the range examined here brings out the 'core' functions required in almost all systems of decision making. The technician-planner advises elected or appointed officials. As broker and mobilizer, the planner reaches out to attract the attention of the interests likely to support his aim. The broker-planner establishes a position from which to mediate, while the mobilizer-planner takes a stride further. The mobilizer stirs the community into alliances for action. Inherent in all these roles—technician, broker and mobilizer— is that of the educator. The importance of education or explaining plans to immediate or ultimate clients is well established. Baron Hausmann's 'an act well explained, is an act sanctioned' is echoed by John Dyckman :

> The importance of explaining has long been recognised in city
> planning, for the tradition of city planning as public persuasion
> was well-established by early consultants and continues in the
> advisory function of public agencies, as well. This is the significance
> of plans that stir men's blood.

Planners seek ways of helping clients or some of them to come to terms and work towards an approach to a common future. Planners enhance the citizens' or their representatives' competence to deal with their situation, articulate their own values and interests, invent their own solutions and follow them through to implementation.

It is the planner's responsibility to liberate, inform and empower the client to deal more aptly with itself (John Friedmann). The planner's role is common with the educator who seeks to reduce the dependence of the clients on the professionals.

Conclusion

The situational variables of community systems are too numerous for an exhaustive account of possible roles. Barring a few 'core' roles—technician and educator—the roles planners play are contingent on the nature of the systems in which they operate. Performance of these 'core' functions do not grant political sanctions to formulated plans. In the words of Herbert Gans, 'city planner is no longer a non-political formulator of long range ideals'. Discovering grounds for coalition, negotiating solutions, maintaining and manipulating alliances into actions require tasks, skills and deligence demanded of politicians. Loathesome, as it may be to professionals, the demands of effective planning and professionalism as taught in schools, are contradictory. Professionalism based on 'high principles' is an ideal, having little relevance to reality. Stephen Bailey's comment captures the spirit :

...... 'politics' and 'self-seeking' are frequently synonyms. But self-seeking' and 'high principles' are antonyms. Only the naive would suggest that there is no self-seeking in the (profession). But professions cannot exist without public support. If a profession wishes to gain support, it surrounds itself with words and symbols which elecit public favour. That it feels constraint to do so is one of the moral wonders of the universe.

Effective planning dictates on the planner roles that are clearly political. Planner, the technician, the broker, or the mobilizer — are roles where the line between politics and profession is non-existent. Expecting actions on plans without political sanctions is dreaming the impossible. Apolitical plans are destined to collect dust or affect minor changes.

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