An Elaboration on the Process of Urbanization and the Procedure of Strategic Urban Planning with regard to the Appertaining Globalized Policies

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ABSTRACT: Urban planning, by its nature, is essentially concerned with shaping the future. This does not mean, however, that town planners are able to ignore the past. In an older urbanized country such as Britain they have, fairly obviously, to work with physical structures and urban arrangements inherited from the past. What is less obvious though is that the concerns and ideologies of the town planners themselves are also products of the past. Planners carry with them professional assumptions about the need to regulate and order urban space and about the ways in which they should do this. They also work within a planning system that embodies past political assumptions about the institutional location, purpose and instruments of planning policy. And, not least, they have to live with the consequences of past planning decisions, expressed within the fabric of towns and cities. All this is by way of arguing that to understand town planning properly, it is essential to understand how it has developed. This is not to say that planners or indeed society should drive into the future with eyes fixed exclusively on the rear-view mirror. Quite obviously this would be a recipe for disaster, although the analogy aptly reminds us that failing to look behind can also produce disaster, however exhilarating it may be in the short term. Nor is it to say what many planners certainly thought in more pessimistic moments during Thatcherite assaults on their activities, that the past was the only thing they had to look forward to. Clearly, it is always important to appreciate that town planning as a tradition of thought, policy and action has a breadth, depth and diversity that may not be immediately apparent in the way it is practiced today. But however much we might yearn for the Utopian socialism of the early days or the political backing for the strong and socially concerned planning system created in the 1940s, we must also understand the reasons why they were superseded. The present paper constitutes an elaboration on the procedure of strategic urban planning in the light of the emergent innovations in the field.

KEYWORDS: Urban planning, innovations, development, planners, planning policy
1. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is one of the most significant processes that have affected human societies especially since the last century. It is an inter-sectoral phenomenon involving all aspects of human society and economy. Towns and cities perform various functions not only for the space economies they serve but increasingly the importance of some of them extends to the regional and global levels. However, urbanization poses certain challenges if not properly managed. It needs to be stressed that the challenges posed by urbanization would not simply go away without conscious efforts and interventions. The close association between urbanization and socio-economic development requires that every effort must be made to minimize the challenges, and thus enhance or maximize the benefits of the process.

Before it was anything else, town planning was a series of radical reformist ideas about changing and improving the city which began to take shape from about 1890. The basis of these ideas lay in land reform and, increasingly, housing reform, although with other important dimensions in the enhancement of community and the protection of amenity. The actual term ‘town planning’ was coined, almost certainly, in 1905, to give these ideas a distinct identity and coherence. They were advanced further mainly by the relatively small number of reformers and professionals who rallied behind the new flag of the town planning movement.

As the reformist ideas of this new movement were given physical expression in pioneering ventures such as garden cities and suburbs, it acquired a more specifically physical and professional focus. A new professional, design-based repertoire of ideas was assembled, incorporating wider strategic concepts of city extension or comprehensively decentralized ‘social cities’ and detailed ideas of zoning, site layout, etc. Within a few decades many important new ideas were developed and incorporated within this intellectual tradition of town planning. A strategic model for planned metropolitan decentralization and containment was molded out of the more radical notions of the social city. Ideas for urban redevelopment were reinvigorated as the functionalist theories of the modern movement in architecture were extended to entire cities. Before the late 1930s, however, there was usually little immediate prospect of most of these ideas being implemented on a sizeable scale. In fact what was most striking about the process of intellectual innovation over this period was the extent to which it was independent of the rather limited operations of planning policies in practice.

All this began to change significantly as town planning ideas were comprehensively incorporated into official town planning policies from the 1940s. The essential focus of
planning activity now became, as never before, the officially ordered planning system rather than the independent planning movement. Increasingly, and especially after 1960, innovations in planning thought arose more from within the policy process, rather than from the wider town planning movement. The tradition of autonomous intellectual thought and conceptual innovation that had characterized the earlier years now began to atrophy. The wider town planning movement became more concerned with refining and celebrating the contemporary successes of town planning policies (such as the New Towns), rather than with developing new radical models that looked beyond present concerns.

Thus as events and government actions moved very sharply against the established policy conventions of planning in the 1970s and especially the 1980s, the town planning movement found itself without the autonomous intellectual tradition that would have allowed it to develop alternatives in the manner of earlier generations. Certainly new environmentalist ideas emerged during these years, but not from the town planning movement. Despite welcome attempts to incorporate such ideas within town planning thought, there is no doubt that this new environmental radicalism has to some extent outflanked the older established town planning tradition.

For the first time in history, the majority of people live now in urban areas. The proportion of the world’s population which is urban has been growing rapidly and a larger fraction of the total population lives within cities now that at any previous period in history (United Nations, 2007, Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Census). Over the past two or three decades this urbanization trend has been fastest in developing countries and, as a broad generalization, the faster the rate of economic growth, the more rapid has been the trend towards urbanization of population.

However, defining what is urban has been a difficult task and there is no commonly agreed definition. Each country defines the term urban in its own way and they can refer to cities, towns, villages, conurbations or localities. There are a number of approaches in which criteria are based to determine what an urban area is. An economic approach would be based on administrative units and would define urban areas using a threshold for labor force (economically active population rates) in agriculture (United Nations, 1974). A geographic approach would consider that density is the main indicator of urbanity. In general, this kind of analysis takes population or houses in a territory (not necessary an administrative unit) as a unit of analysis.
Unless definitions of ‘urban’ are comparable, international comparisons of levels or rates of urbanization can be difficult. For instance, using data from the 1991 Census of Population and the only then valid administrative definition of London – the City of London – London’s population was 4.5 million, but if London was defined as the statistical unit used as a ‘region’ by Eurostat – Greater London – then its population was 6.89 million. In the same vein, the population of the administrative city of Paris – City of Paris de Paris - at the same date was 2.152 million. Was Paris the bigger or smaller city? If both were defined in terms of functional criteria – their ‘economic spheres of influence’, then London’s population in 1991 was 12.5 million compared to Paris with 11.4 million.

Urban and regional planning is a notion that encompasses the whole set of social activities aimed at anticipating, representing and regulating the development of an urban or a regional area. It thus articulates intellectual activities of study and prospective, of social and economic forecasting with more concrete activities such as infrastructure programming, land reservation and land use regulation. Planning operates at different scales: neighborhood, city or region. Generally speaking, the smaller the area addressed, the more precise and coercive planning regulations are.

2. URBAN PLANNING POLICIES

Put very simply, town planning ideas become policies at the point at which they are incorporated by government into officially endorsed courses of action. The manner of this incorporation varies, depending on the importance of the original idea. Some policies were so fundamental to town planning that they were written directly into the planning system by central government. For example, elements of land market reform were integral to the whole practice of town planning and became intrinsic policies, embodied in the various compensation and betterment provisions of the Acts. Others, however, represent conscious applications of the planning system to pursue particular ends, for example by encouraging town extension rather than containment, or rehabilitation rather than redevelopment, etc.

Such conscious policies may also reflect the various scales of planning ideas, with strategic policies such as metropolitan decentralization or containment, and more detailed policies, for example zoning or pedestrianization. The adoption of these conscious policies is inevitably a rather more discretionary process, involving more local decisions.
Ideas may have political implications but, while they remain just ideas, this dimension remains fairly passive. Policies, by contrast, are actively political and the course of policy-making in planning cannot therefore be understood without reference to a wider political frame.

The policy seeks to address some of the fundamental problems associated with urban development and management in the country. These include a weak urban economy, land-use disorder and uncontrolled urban sprawl, increasing environmental deterioration, inadequate urban services, urban poverty, slums and squatter settlements, weak urban governance and institutional coordination, delimitation of urban areas of jurisdiction and lack of integrated planning across jurisdictional boundaries, weak rural-urban linkages, limited data and information on urban areas, inadequate urban investment and financing, weak information, education and communication strategy, and weak urban transportation planning and traffic management and a host of other challenges associated with our decentralization program.

3. URBAN STRATEGIC PLANNING IN THE LIGHT OF GLOBALIZATION

The world population is rapidly becoming urbanized as the rural population gravitates towards cities. “The world is witnessing unprecedented urban explosion. The urban population has more than quadrupled since 1950 amounting to 3.2 billion in 2005 and should reach 5 billion people in 2030 (about 60% of the World population).” [1] This change in the distribution of the world’s population presents new challenges for cities, especially in terms of planning. Urbanization is now a crucial issue for local and national economies. Uncontrolled urban growth has generated serious environmental problems, increasing social segmentation and poverty. This accelerated growth poses new challenges to national and local authorities, especially in the field of the promotion of social inclusion. These problems, coupled with a lack of land-use plans, have pushed to the limit the capacity of cities to provide services such as transportation, energy, education, health care and security.

Cities present different characteristics in different areas of the world. They are densely populated in Asia and the Middle-East, sprawling in Latin-America and combine both rural and urban aspects in Africa. “Cities occupy just 2% of the world’s surface but at the same time half of the world’s population that consumes up to three quarters of natural resources (UNEP, 2008).” [2] Despite their differences, cities share the same need for strategic planning in order to foster sustainable development. In fact, cities form the pivot of future global development.
Many of the problems faced by cities such as rural-urban migration cannot be solved within cities alone. The population living in rural areas must also be taken into account. We need new ways of thinking about the interrelation between rural and urban areas, especially with respect to planning issues. Today, from a strategic planning perspective, we realize that urban centers are not only focal points for their own economic growth but also service centers for surrounding areas.

The relationship between urban centers and surrounding areas is one of interdependence rather than competition or struggle. In most countries, rural areas have been excluded from the planning process even though cities depend on surrounding areas for natural resources. Although this fact has been recognized, the value of rural areas as a natural environment which contributes to bettering the quality of life of a territory has not always been appreciated. Moreover, the role of rural areas in local, regional and global economies is of utmost importance since productive and natural rural areas are necessary for achieving sustainable development. In order to create an interconnected, unified territory, planners must take into account the interdependence of rural areas and urban hubs. These considerations force us to re-think the role of cities in global planning processes.

Globalization presupposes the creation of a unique global area of interdependencies which constitutes the basis of a new global economy and culture. “Cities as well as metropolitan regions constitute areas of globalization and are connected to communication networks, logistical systems, transportation systems and information systems that enable us to articulate local and global areas.” [3] One major phenomena stemming from the globalization process is the creation of regional and international decision-making bodies in the form of supra-national associations.

One of the most important aspects of this new global organization is that it requires a new system of actors at both the local and global levels. Globalization leads to the reorganization of pre-existing territories, a new division of international and interregional labor, and a new geography of development which includes regions of both winners and losers. The advantages of globalization are technological, commercial and financial “windows of opportunities” for a qualitative jump towards a new dynamic of growth. The drawbacks of globalization are marginalization, subordination, environmental crisis and/or fragmentation of former territorial unity. The balance between advantages and drawbacks for different regions depends firstly on their pre-existing characteristics and degrees of development; and secondly, on the capacities and strategies of the system of local actors to help overcome these drawbacks. In this context,
more efficient policies should be adopted by local governments for distributing the economic benefits resulting from globalization in an effort to create more equitable and cohesive societies.

The world system structure is arranged according to the global capitalism. This structure has a core, (developed countries), where production processes are advanced requiring massive concentration of capital and the highest level of skills; and a periphery (developing countries) that lacks capital, technologies, market power, wealth, and a bunch of the other vital valuables of production. Cities stand now as core on both internal and international levels. They are the centers of civilization, labor creation and international financial exchanges [4].

The present development dynamic requires the creation of modern and competitive cities capable of connecting global actors and economies [5]. Global economic system has shifted from one of protected or closed national economies, to open, liberalization and competition one.

The nature of global competition progressively changed its nature from labor intensity in 1960s to capital intensity in 1970s, technology in 1980s and information in 1990s [6]. Badcok [7] argues that, the cross-border mergers and acquisitions characterized by global and integration of international finance with global investment and markets in services (banking, insurance, hyper-mobility), financial markets globally linked and working around the clock, with action at a distance in real time remain one of the hallmarks of globalization. Globalization affects the fate of cities abound. It facilitates the rise of mega-cities which are powerful enough to challenge the nation-state (transactions are mainly made between corporations) and to determinate its fate in terms of development. Cities became privileged and powerful world economic dynamic leaders. They concentrate population, centralize entirely important economic activities and contribute significantly to the global GDP growth. They generate more than 80 percent of global GDP today. Only 600 urban centers, with a fifth of the world’s population, generate 60 percent of GDP” [8].

4. STRATEGIC URBAN PLANNING PROCEDURE

Urban strategic planning is a specific instrument of management which encourages citizen participation in local policy decisions. The partnerships which emerge from urban strategic planning are especially created for designing and managing sustainable projects for the city.
But these processes of citizen involvement are not spontaneous: it is the local government which is primarily responsible for fostering opportunities for civil society organization participation.

Furthermore, the process of participation must include actors with a strong technical orientation who have the capacity for dealing with the needs and requirements of society. This kind of public-private partnerships requires clearly established rules so that collective and individual benefits are produced which in turn strengthen the actors’ motivation for continuing to participate in a project.

Urban strategic planning allows local governments to enlist the participation of social actors, to achieve consensus about policies and projects and to encourage partnerships aimed at proposing, implementing and evaluating projects. Urban strategic planning is only possible, however, if the government is willing to share the power and respect the decisions which emerge from the process of negotiation. There are three basic sources of input: political decisions and the know-how of both professionals and social actors.

During the stages of a strategic plan (Diagnosis, Planning, Strategic Management, Monitoring and Evaluation) social and political actors work together using a specific methodology. In the Strategic Management stage of the plan, the actors define their own responsibilities in the projects and design monitoring systems such as Urban Indicators Systems. Depending on the changes in the social context, the agenda is adapted to suit different conditions or circumstances.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCESS OF URBAN PLANNING: FOR AND AGAINST

Public participation can be defined in a number of ways that reflect the specific objectives of an organization or a project. In a broad sense, public participation can be defined as “taking part in the processes of formulation, passage and implementation of public policies with actions aimed at influencing decisions made by public representatives”. [9]

Public participation is identified in two broad areas: participation as a means and participation as an end. However, these are by no means mutually exclusive. Participation as a means aims at more effective implementation of programs and projects through active citizen involvement in project implementation through labor and/or financial or in-kind contributions.

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Participation as an end implies that citizens come up with ideas, take part in the decision-making process, assume responsibility and finally arrive at self-management.

An urban strategic planning process provides for both types of participation. On the one hand, citizens are invited to air their opinions in the decision–making process through participation in consultations, consensus building and self-management in project implementation and management, all of which feature elements of participation as an end. On the other hand, readiness to commit human, material and financial resources for the implementation of some priority projects, and thus participate in some kind of partnership, shows participation as a means to an end.

None of these forms is better or more important than the other. They are like two sides of the same coin, the coin being public involvement.

One of the reasons why local governments are increasingly more open to public participation is their recognition of local potential offered by non-governmental institutions, business community, and civil society in general and other city stakeholders as a means to a better and more efficient preparation and implementation of development projects. However, there are arguments both for and against the promotion of public participation in urban planning and the management of development initiatives. They can be summarized in the following way:

5.1. ARGUMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION

Public participation helps in identifying projects and activities that are relevant to the community’s needs and priorities, including the needs of the ethnic groups, women and other marginalized groups, e.g. the disabled. Some of the most obvious benefits of public participation include:

• Increasing the cost efficiency of activities or projects by involving local resources and skills;
• Increasing the effectiveness of such activities and projects by ensuring that they are based on awareness and understanding of local problems and will therefore better respond to local needs;
• Building local capacities and developing citizens’ abilities to negotiate and manage projects;
• Better targeting of benefits to those who need them. This is done through the identification of key stakeholders who will be most affected by the activities;
• Securing the sustainability of activities and projects as beneficiaries assume ownership of these;
• Improving equality between men and women by facilitating equal access to opportunities for them to play a substantive part in the activities and projects;
• Developing a sense of “ownership” among stakeholders;
• Developing tolerance and cooperation among ethnic groups.

5.2. ARGUMENTS AGAINST PARTICIPATION

Public participation costs time and money, as it is essentially a process with no guaranteed positive impact upon the result. Participation can considerably increase the cost of a project or activity, and therefore a fine balance must be found with the benefits of involving the public. Public participation can also have negative aspects and be seen as:

• A waste of time and efforts in a situation when basic needs are obvious;
• A destabilizing force, in the sense that public participation can affect power relations and generate conflict, and thus bring new leaders who seek to share power;
• A means of shifting the burden of service provision and ensuring equal access by local governments onto citizens.

Although there are many different definitions of public participation, the majority of donor organizations and an increasing number of local governments perceive public involvement as an indispensable element of democracy and civil society. Although some will argue against involving the public in urban decision-making processes, arguments in favor of this approach outweigh any potential constraints such as extra time and cost. Experience shows that at the end of the day, public participation increases project efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

To counter the arguments against public participation, it is important to be sure exactly what benefits it would bring and what could be some unforeseen consequences of its implementation. It is also important to ensure that efforts to promote participatory development are undertaken after careful assessment and understanding of the political and cultural context in which participation is to occur. Public participation does not take place in a vacuum and both its development and progress will be influenced by a variety of factors stemming from the general
environment. A reasonable amount of time should be devoted at the beginning of any participatory project to identify and analyze the factors that could influence the process.

6. TOWARDS CONCLUSION

Planning is an extremely ambiguous and difficult word to define. Planners of all kinds think that they know what it means; it refers to the work they do. The difficulty is that they do all sorts of different things, and so they mean different things by the word; planning seems to be all things to all people. A central goal of urban policy and planning is to improve the living conditions and wellbeing of city dwellers. Nevertheless, many people experience a declining quality of life and this is intimately connected with environmental, spatial and socio-economic conditions. Many cities, for example, are experiencing a high incidence of pollution and stress related illnesses linked to poor industrial and transport planning, poor housing quality, underemployment and poverty. Access to basic services and community support is being undermined by changes in the spatial structure of settlements, especially increased dependence on car transport and land-use segregation. Urban and regional planning has a critical role to play in improving people’s and cities’ wellbeing, quality of life and futures. Urban planning and, resultant development, are multi-faceted processes involving the combined activities of many institutions or actors. For the same to happen there is need for clarity of the roles and responsibilities of the different spheres of government, the private sector and civil society organizations. Extant literature on urban development is considerable in both developed and developing countries. The theoretical and empirical nature of these studies is of different strands. However, there is a consensus on the influence of economic policies, principles and technology on urban development of cities in various regions of the world.

Furthermore, decisions made through the planning process, whether in a strategic context or on individual applications for permission, have an important bearing on the quality of our country’s environment, social and economic interactions and our capacity to build an economy which supports our people.

Noting the discussions and arguments made, the present paper provided some recommendations as far as the sensitive and significant procedure of the urban planning is concerned:
Regulation is needed within each planning system to respond to all kinds of concerns of citizens and cities, while preventing disordered, uncontrolled, to everywhere, densely populated, etc. development.

Planning should not always seek to balance the benefits of development against costs to the living. Planners should try to find new solutions that can achieve spatial, social, cultural, administrative and economic goals.

Planning approaches should seek to be guided by objectives. Strategic national and regional planning bodies should define sustainability and livability targets and broad spatial strategies.

City plans should describe the intended states of all dimensions of city and society. They should include indicators of these to measure both the extent of the problems and the level of success in dealing with them.

A consistent planning scheme for urban and rural areas must be developed in the coming years to ensure that more sustainable, livable and continuous approaches are applied in the face of economic and cultural globalization.

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