SUSTAINABLE URBAN PLANNING: MODELS AND INSTITUTIONS

Susan Batty

The Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, United Kingdom

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Summary

In Europe, modern land use planning systems were formed in a post-war era of political consensus and economic optimism. The challenge for the emerging planning institutions was one of reconstruction, constraining the worst excesses of urban sprawl but without restricting economic growth. Half a century later, the major challenge for planning is seen as sustainable development: improving our quality of life (by ensuring economic progress) whilst ensuring everyone has equal access to environmental resources. In fact, sustainable development has done little to change the traditional tensions of planning - between social equality, economic efficiency and amenity, but the institutional need to strengthen public participation and ensure social inclusiveness has now become one of

the most important functions of mature contemporary planning systems. Much of the land use planning profession now sees itself as working on participation rather than technical matters: providing a forum for public discussion about land use and environmental futures, with planners acting more as mediators than experts.

However, there are significant barriers to the redesign of planning institutions to achieve sustainable development, in terms of both economic and social objectives. These barriers are shown to include problems in the development of civil society; a lack of consensus on what can and should be achieved by community programs such as Local Agenda 21 (developed as a result of the Rio Earth Summit); and a lack of incentives for people to participate in such programs.

As political attitudes to development have moved towards a modernization of the relationship between government, business and civil society, land use planning institutions in Europe have also moved slowly towards the model of *ecological modernization.* This model has been characterized as a free-market system enabled by the state and implementing development and urban regeneration through partnerships between public and private sectors of society (Blowers 2000). The planner's role within this model is to 'facilitate economic processes while making them environmentally benign' (Davoudi 2001, p. 90). The opposing *deep green* view argues that society's values on the environment and the economy must change if we are to ensure a sustainable future. Under this view, the planner 'defends the environment against risks associated with economic processes' (Davoudi 2001, p. 90).

The choice of decision-making methods illustrates another division of opinion. Approaches can be divided into *formal methods* and *deliberative methods.* Formal methods are characterized by cost-benefit approaches which translate environmental preferences into the monetary values relevant to policy choice. On the other hand, deliberative methods argue that the process of reaching decisions should be socially inclusive and should be reached through negotiation and discussion. Finally, the chapter explores sustainable objectives and indicators as expressed by governments, the planning profession, and local communities.

1. Introduction: Land Use Planning Systems and Institutions

Urban land use planning in the developed world has grown up with the constant assumption of the march of progress, and modern planning systems have developed in periods of economic growth and to counteract urban sprawl. As many begin to question our ability to sustain this continued improvement in our global and local quality of life, the concept of sustainable development articulates a need for constraints and sets up a warning that the world may not be able to sustain such expectations without careful planning. It can be argued then that the idea of sustainable development, in this sense of *maintaining the historical progress in the quality of life*, has always been an inextricable, if sometimes implicit, objective of land use planning, and institutions have developed to satisfy such expectations.

The second defining principle of sustainable development, which may be interpreted as *the equitable distribution of environmental resources*, is arguably harder to trace as an

enduring and broadly held goal in the creation of planning institutions throughout the world. If we take Britain as an example, we see that a major force in the development of the British planning institutions of the late 1940's was the existence of regional land use and economic inequalities. The post-war and post-colonial period in Britain brought the decline of the British world hegemony and major structural changes in the economy and the land use pattern of the country. This resulted in regional disparities as economic strength moved southwards away from the older industrial areas of the north. Whilst the post-war comprehensive land use planning system offered models of social utopia and spatial equity, it is clear that the system was firmly focused on constraining the inefficiencies of growth, rather than on the positive objective of encouraging the equitable distribution of growth potential. This is not intended to deny the existence of regional economic policies of tax incentives, subsidies and infrastructure provision at the time. However, whatever the overall regional and local policy and the utopian and positive vision of planning in the post-war years, the land use planning systems that were set up were primarily negative and regulatory.

Land use planning systems almost universally include a development plan (which may include a hierarchy of plans at different territorial scales), and a development control system. The very terminology of the two elements of a planning system identifies the contradiction at the heart of planning institutions: a contradiction between visionary egalitarian goals and passive regulatory implementation. In a liberal democracy, a development plan has little value on its own, except as a visionary statement. When combined with a system of land use control it provides a basis for coordinating individual development decisions to fulfill collective goals.

The majority of planning systems in Europe and the United States use a system of *land use zoning*, basically this system identifies, in advance, what development is acceptable within specified areas or zones. This gives developers and land owners the right to develop in specified ways. The British system is more *discretionary* and requires all development (apart from certain exempt classes) to be given explicit permission from the local planning authority. Both of these development control systems have the institutional capacity to constrain development and ensure planning for environmental and resource use priorities. The British use of Green Belts, New Town programs in Europe and the United States, the Dutch ABC system and the British sequential test which channel development into appropriate brownfield sites, have all been aimed at limiting the unfettered spread of urban growth. In most countries, wildlife and rare plant habitats, valuable ecosystems and high quality agricultural land are valued sufficiently to warrant special designations and controls such as in the British use of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSI). So, given the political will, in developed countries, the institutional capacity for environmental protection and development constraint is mature and well tested.

However, from the perspective of *equitable resource distribution*, there are two obvious omissions in such an institutional framework, namely:

- *An undisputed framework to guide or ensure the timely and equitable implementation of the plan* – in other words although planners are universally provided with a formal means of regulating development, they often have

limited formal powers of development initiation and enforcement. In the developed world, these planning procedures for development and regeneration are increasingly based on negotiation and collaboration or on competition for funding. Clearly, equity cannot be competitive or partial and depends on comprehensive implementation and clear standards. The debate about the nature of an appropriate model for achieving sustainable development sets the prevailing political model - the model of collaboration between an enabling state and a free market (ecological modernization) - against a deeper green argument for social and institutional change.

▪ *A clear articulation of the basis for equitable access and equitable use of environmental resources* - in other words the bases (whether economic or social) on which the institution should identify the public good. The opposing positions in this debate favor either the use of *expert estimates of individual preferences* (interpreted in monetary terms) or the use of sets of *sustainability 'indicators'* (interpreted in a variety of metrics, and generated by community negotiation and social learning). The difference between these two is sometimes referred to as 'willingness to pay' or 'willingness to say'.

Virtually every planning document and policy now explicitly identifies the achievement of sustainable development as a goal, and most planning organizations or agencies producing new mission statements will now routinely include *planning for sustainable development* as an important institutional function. However, institutional solutions to the two concerns given above are controversial. This chapter will review these debates.

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