

If Planning is About Anything, What is it About?

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Alongside Clem Tisdell's prodigious scholarship, colleagues appreciate a quality he displays which characterises both economists and natural scientists. He sees the oddities in things – their incongruities, underside, gaps. Perusing the literature on regional and town planning, then, Professor Tisdell would notice articles with titles like the present one [1] and others suggesting uncertainty or Kuhnian paradigmatic instability in the discipline (Kuhn, 1962) [2].

Consequently, the purpose here is to advance the present theoretical debate with a few prospective ideas. In this paper we review the current disquiet, trace its backdrops and contemporary directions, outline an appropriate focus for town planning and then explore its implications.

Disquiet in the discipline

The edifice of planning has been unstable for over 20 years. By the early 1970s, faith in earlier comprehensive planning had waned, along with the deterministic belief that improvements to physical environments could engineer change to benefit either the urban disadvantaged or social behaviour at large. Calls for plural rather than single plans expanded to incorporate citizen participation and empowerment and the idea arose that the activity of planners should be politicised to effect social change. Some academics embraced radical critiques of capitalism circulating in allied disciplines such as sociology. In city hall, however, these ideas were impracticable, producing a gulf between practitioners and theorists. The scope of planning broadened considerably, as both groups pursued their respective concerns. By 1973, one commentator noted that:

the conception of "planning" held both among professional planners and in British society more generally has widened and is likely to go on widening, and ... partly in consequence the issues that will, over the next three decades, be thought of as problems for 'planning' and "planners" will be non-spatial as well as spatial (Willmott, 1973, p. 10).

If planning is everything or, rather, anything ...

More problematically, Wildavsky (1973) argued from the level of national or strategic planning that planners were overwhelmed by the scope of their discipline, absorbed by their environment. Efforts to plan do not equate to actual success in planning since attempts no more represent planning "than the desire to be wise may be called wisdom ... promise must be dignified by performance" (Wildavsky, 1973 p. 129). Definitions of planning characteristically separate goals from achievements or stress intention over accomplishment. Planning becomes a self-protecting hypothesis: as long as planners try to plan, it cannot be falsified. Wildavsky (1973, p. 138) thus asks what, if anything, has planning caused or made happen. "What, in the economist's language, is the value added by planning". That key question will be revisited later.

A later critic, Reade (1983) recommends "cool and careful" analysis of whether there can exist a specific planning approach to public decision making. Does planning produce any outcomes which other social methods (e.g. voting, action of elites) cannot? Reade (1983, pp. 163-68) nominates nine criteria associated with planning. Five are intellectually credible but problematic: four are not intellectually credible. As to the former group, planning implies an explicit, desired outcome: yet either outcomes fail to materialise (*à la* Wildavsky) or policies change so quickly that outcomes cannot be realistically monitored [3]. Planning is oriented to the future, but this is presumptuous in that we cannot know our tastes or those of others in times to come. Planning allegedly makes greater use of

technology and expertise than other decision-making methods, though in the case of elite interaction this claim is dubious. The monitoring of policy is another characteristic of planning but Reade (1983, p. 166) maintains that planning systems, in fact, avoid much monitoring at all. Forecasting, as Wildavsky also pointed out, is epistemologically questionable and not unique to planning.

The other four concepts are that planning takes a comprehensive view, rests on scientific method, is rational, and is essential to the securing of the public interest. These ideas, according to Reade (1983, p. 169) are not credible because they are unclear: they are merely asserted in the planning literature and not explained. Moreover, they are interlinked such that to question one is to challenge the whole. In this way, planning is better described as an ideology than a body of knowledge.

Concerns of the 1990s

In the 1990s the profession has acknowledged these concerns. Robert Beauregard (1990, p. 211) agrees that it has lacked a central paradigm or guiding principle since the demise of the comprehensive plan. John Levy (1992, p. 81) remarks that planning is discussed as a process but its direction is unclear: "this is an age when tactics are dominant and grand strategies and grand visions are much less prominent". Since "planning" now spans kerb design to the greenhouse effect there is plenty of scope for specialisation - but specialists do not always interact. Consensus becomes more difficult. For their part, practising planners are tied to electoral cycles which overshadow the long run. Further, they have been criticised by radical academics, sometimes without practical experience, either for being knowing servants of an unjust capitalist system or not understanding the system's precepts.

Levy's next points get to the nub of the malaise. Planners cut their teeth on central and inner city problems. As the action drifted to the suburbs and the suburbs drifted into exurbia, recourse to design paradigms became increasingly difficult. Anyway, the initiative had shifted from planners to developers who, increasingly, laid out areas, filled in the details and presented packages to public planners for approval. Not everyone liked the results. Kunstler (1993, p. 15) in *The Geography of Nowhere* argues that all places (in America) suffered terribly from the way we chose to arrange things in our postwar world. "The process of destruction is so poorly understood that there are few words even to describe it. Suburbia. Sprawl. Overdevelopment. Conurbation ... Megalopolis ... This process of destruction, and the realm that it spawned, largely *became* our economy" [original italics].

Backdrops to the malaise

Social and economic changes

Until 1960, wartime protagonists had plenty to do in rebuilding their economies and the lives of their citizenry: changes to property and infrastructure almost inevitably signalled "progress" or material improvement to the prevailing disarray. Yet, by the end of the long boom, the West had sufficient wealth to allow more critical appraisal. In 1973, Rittel and Webber noted a questioning of authority in that "few ... modern professionals seem to be immune from the popular attack". Historically, the easy problems of shelter and infrastructure had given way to more stubborn ones: people in an increasingly pluralistic society were demanding equity as well as efficiency (Rittel and Webber, 1973, pp. 155-6)

Yet, even efficiency became problematic given economic events post 1973 - oil price rises, unemployment, stagflation, production relocations overseas in a new international division of labour, fears of resource depletion and despoilation, and so on and on. Whereas the early postwar era had been about national integration, symbolised in the United States interstate freeway system, the later phase witnessed the interlocking of local economies and futures into global capitalism driven by transnational corporatism, an information-communications revolution and deregulation of financial markets. In Western countries even local planning had to consider the big strategic picture which bore down to complicate the smallest practical attempts at consensus. Social compacts about guaranteed wealth creation faltered, while radicals disputed the morality of profits.

The intellectual climate

An equally dynamic intellectual climate can be read in terms of epistemologies, ideologies and

operating paradigms. First, interest renewed in certain epistemologies under which planning operates. The 1960s and 1970s saw a flowering of humanism with its beliefs in the intrinsic worth of all people and their capacity for development and self-fulfilment through education. Concurrently, a greater role for liberalism, which only partly compromised its origins, was evidenced in the extension of the welfare state. The later postwar era has added more epistemologies. From its origins in "women's liberation" in the 1960s, feminism is adding new agendas to contemporary planning (cf. Greed, 1994; Sandercock and Forsyth, 1992). Multiculturalism now addresses the ethnic dimension of pluralism in the open societies of the West. Revisionism developed as the tendency in American historiography in the 1960s and 1970s to rewrite the events of the Cold War and shift the blame onto the United States. By the 1990s, the ownership of history and interpretation of events had become a major public concern: the past was no longer allowed to rest in peace. Finally, relativism has emerged as the view that beliefs and principles, particularly evaluative ones, have no universal or timeless authority but are valid only for the era in which, or the social group or individual by which, they are held (Bullock *et al*, 1988, p. 736).

Unease also reflects development of what can be called ideologies or metaparadigms. Vying for influence are positivism, Marxism and libertarianism, the first eschewing value positions and the last two normative ideologies actively embracing them. The application of the three ideologies in planning is fairly standard and, since they are all well known to current audiences, they will not be elaborated here.

The final backdrops lie in a set of operating paradigms -- rationalism, incrementalism and the postmodern. Rationalism centres around the determination of goals and means from among a host of alternatives. Strategies are formulated and consequences predicted. In the end, alternatives are selected which propose the allegedly most favourable consequences. All this is very proactive, logical and orderly but, as both Wildavsky (1973) and Reade (1983) remarked, might not bear much semblance to reality.

Somewhat less purposive and more reactive is disjointed incrementalism or "muddling through" (Alden and Morgan, 1974, pp. 173-7). Direction is assumed, though little time is wasted chasing ideals or creating schema which will be ignored or overturned in the next policy twist. Some commentators relate this form of decision making to Simon's concept of "bounded rationality" (1955), in which case it does not challenge or supplant rationality but, rather, takes a position on a rational-irrational spectrum. Incrementalism has thus appealed as a more accurate description of what practising planners actually do.

The final operating paradigm is postmodernism. Prompted possibly by Marxist views that the value neutrality of positivism only disguised support for the status quo, academics in the 1980s became sceptical of positivism's claims to causal reasoning. A search began for non-causal perspectives centred on meaning as a basis for planning practice. To Beauregard (1989, p. 389), planners had been striving for orderliness and homogeneity through a technical rationality incompatible with a spatially problematic and flexible form, the articulation of which was increasingly confrontational and concerned with the ephemeral purposes of consumption.

Postmodernists contend that knowledge is transmitted by narratives, of which there can be competing ones at any time. Accordingly there are no master narratives (as in a comprehensive plan): for its part, modernist (rational) planning is potentially authoritarian, subjugating and oppressive. Knowledge is not stable, nor a reliable guide to action as in positivist ideology. Important is "meaning" and the symbolic representations of action and behaviour. Via this hermeneutic approach, the only intellectual basis for master narratives or exclusive insights into proper values and behaviour could be faith or power (Beauregard, 1991 p. 193).

Some have viewed regional and town planning as suspended between modernism (*viz.* positivism, rationality) and postmodernism. To the extent that the ideologies of the latter are new, they cut across political lines. To the extent that they are not wholly formulated, they offer something for everyone - humanists, liberals, feminists, libertarians and so on. Perhaps Kuhnean reasoning about paradigm formulation is distinctly modernist. Should it prevail, it will be necessary for the postmodern to consolidate its claims. As an alternative, a drift into polyphonous disorganisation or anarchy might satisfy some theorists but is unlikely to impress practical taxpayers.

Directions for planning

A framework

Enough appears above to outline the paradigmatic disjunction in contemporary planning. In so far as theory has been underemphasized in the last 20 years, the problem has emerged by neglect. Beauregard (1987, p. 367) validates theory in its capacity to improve practice. He notes that, in early planning, the city was unquestionably the object of attention. Later, there arose a fixation on the process involving the operating paradigms outlined above. It “ignored the nature of the agents who carried out planning and was indifferent to the object of their efforts”. Planning theory, such as it was, became both timeless and aspatial or, as Burchell in 1988 remarked, “the gap between short-run practice and long-term theory is ever increasing and may ultimately threaten any ability to plan with a long view”.

All this is not to say that, in the last 20 years, planning has been without suggestions for change or new directions. Emerging ideas must be categorised in terms of whether they indicate what to do (substantive) or how to do it (procedural) (or both). Of initial use is both a thematic classification and a consideration of the practical environment of the mid-1990s in which proposals are being made.

John Friedmann (1987) arranges planning thought into four traditions which planners can use to determine who they are or the nature of their effort. First, social reformers see the state as the vehicle of social action, which planning attempts to make more effective. Analysis can be used to condition the performance of the economy for reformist ends. Second, policy analysts emphasise decision making as the means of identifying optimal courses of action. Their procedural model is thus rationality and the planner becomes a social engineer serving the existing power base. Third, the school of “social learning” sees planning as changing behaviour through experimentation in an attempt to minimise the contradiction between what people know and how they act. Praxis or experiential learning are the basis of non-hierarchical exchanges between planners and clients. Finally, planning as social mobilisation is a political activity seeking to change the status quo from the inequities of capitalism. Community awareness and action, disengagement, advocacy and co-option of decision making processes are some of the important approaches (cf. Burchell, 1988, p. 5).

The practical environment for new ideas has a number of characteristics which distinguish it from those of former decades. The community will no longer accept “totalising discourses” or significant imposition of top-down authority: plenty of cases show that politicians and agencies proposing such means can be decimated at elections. Additionally, in what might be called the “new pragmatism”, the populace wants tangible, definable action now from representatives and public officials (Meck, 1993, p. 147). The latter, however, are simultaneously losing initiative to developers who typically originate site plans and have the financial capacity to locate and construct whole new precincts or towns (Peiser, 1990). “The planner [becomes] less the maker of plans than the judge of plans and the negotiator of planning compromise” (Levy, 1992, p. 82). Rather than grand visions, this role emphasises flexibility and adaptiveness because, under the imperatives of economic development, the planner knows that stalling will lead to proposals migrating elsewhere. The community, for all its apparent obstreperousness, will not reward constant negation as a *modus operandi*: even if it does not want greenfields growth, it is likely to expect renovation of built environments within the general postwar ethos of “progress”.

Recent contributions

Recent planning thought can be appraised against these backdrops. Four contributions are notable. First, Friedmann (1993) argues that a non-Euclidian mode would see planning as professional practice which specifically seeks to connect forms of knowledge with forms of action in the public domain. It would operate in the real time of everyday events rather than in the deeper future. It would also emphasise the local and regional scales so as to corroborate variety and difference, engender meaningful citizen participation and represent the spaces of people’s everyday lives. Non-Euclidian planning would be normative, innovative, political, transactive and based on social learning. A couple of these elements require explanation. In the normative sense, Friedmann (1993, p. 483) argues from a humanist perspective that planning should reflect inclusive democracy, give voice to and integrate the disempowered, prefer quality over quantity, respect sustainability and the natural world and raise

gender issues. As regards social learning (the likely locus of non-Euclidian planning within Friedmann's (1987) classification), the aim would be to adopt open processes which admit mistakes, rely on sound leadership and eschew partisan advantage.

Sagar (1992) answers the question "why plan?" via a combined rationale, fusing the traditional approach of correcting market failure with the capacity to create personal growth and aid in undistorted communication in communities. A rationale, he argues, is necessary in meeting popular criticism of planners, ineducating planning novices and in providing an ideological compass. His interest in growth and communication follows Friedmann (1993) toward humanistic planning. Personal growth proceeds with social integration to increase the problem areas which can be mastered. Growth, as in clinical psychology, is denoted by gains in mutual understanding, acceptance and trust to the benefit of communications. Though personal growth must remain a side-effect of the planning process, it is critically important to social development. Paradoxically, to stress it would not only undermine the credibility of planning (too ethereal an aim) but also preclude the state one is trying to bring about.

Sandercock and Forsyth (1992) reorient planning to a gender agenda. Theory remains male dominated and all but unaware of the importance of gender in practical planning. Reform will emerge through attention to language which is the basis of the sense of reality, order and place in the community. In order to use language more effectively and so make a contribution and have it effected, women require better access to education. Positivist ideologies are similarly exclusionary to knowledge deemed to be other than "objective". By contrast, a feminist epistemology would draw on knowledge gained from talking, listening and intuition. Moreover, knowledge, as a social construction, is political: different kinds must be shared through communication to create meaning. In this regard, women will remain disadvantaged until fully assimilated into the public domain since urban planning has used the divide between public and private to men's advantage. The gender agenda, therefore, has three thrusts: case studies of planning practice and a rewriting of planning history with gender as a category of analysis; an examination of gender in the internal culture of planners; and a gender-conscious reform of planning education.

The final contribution carries the ambitious title "If planning includes too much, maybe it should include more". William Lucy (1994) urges that healthy places nurture healthy people and public policies should sustain both healthy people and places, not one or the other. To these ends, planning theory should overlap more than at present into public administration and policy analysis. At the same time, "physical design shapes the spirit as well as the details of specific places in society" and should be addressed along with environmental sustainability. The connection between people and place is, of course, a traditional one in planning but now bears directly on Kunstler's (1993) laments about the "geography of nowhere". Lucy advocates study of how political power is structured territorially so as to elucidate whether ameliorative public policy is better directed toward people or places. The issues of population mix, patterns and density need renewed attention, as will the postmodern condition of spaces devoid of social meaning. Progress will require architects and landscape designers to have much better social and strategic understanding. Rather than relying on individual aesthetics which reflect introverted values, greater community well being could be achieved from an emphasis on design content incorporating elements such as climatology, hydrology and technology (for physical sustainability) and social function, behavioural interaction and economic viability (for social sustainability). In this way, healthier connections among people and places could be re-established.

A different focus

The above accounts reflect concerns of theoreticians with both substantive and procedural issues, more or less applied. Their diversity shows the uncertainty in planning thought. A common thread, however, is that planning or planning approval resides in the public sector. Thus it is fair, with Wildavsky (1973), to ask what planning actually contributes in value added to society. Since the question has not been convincingly answered by advocacy from outside the discipline, planning must speak for itself.

Planning and wealth

One therefore returns to the present title: what is planning about? Notwithstanding claims about amenity, social justice, equity, the environment and so forth, our contention is that the rationale of

planning is, and always has been, about wealth [4]. This is its core business. While this point was forcefully made by academic Marxists, it was cast normatively rather than positively in that practising planners were seen as supportive of an exploitative system. Fair or beautiful capitalism might not be, but pervasive it is and, for the time being, we have it. So much is said without the normative zeal of either Marxists or libertarians: our alliance is with realists in economics who continue to see the parameters and proclivities of capitalism as the object of enquiry. In Friedmann's (1987) terms, this view adheres to the policy analytic school of planning.

Planning can thus be defined as a microeconomic process of facility and landuse determination in the conversion of environments. It characteristically entails market interventions which arrange and rearrange investments - tangible and intangible, public and private, capital and operating. Wealth underpins all these activities. Planning can deal with wealth in three ways - via its creation, maintenance and destruction. It is axiomatic that if, in net terms, planning actually lowered the wealth in an economy over a longer term, it would have soon been dismantled or rejected by either the powerful and/or the wealthy. Stated differently, countries and regions are now locked in global competition. They do not need either public or private measures which would reduce their long term income or net worth. Nor might they wish to forego, for reasons of its distributional effect, a measure which could increase the overall wealth of the society. To echo an old axiom, without the generation of wealth, opportunities for welfare, a traditional interest of planning will be limited.

In as much as planning is bracketed alongside wealth, the question of its efficiency as a technique emerges. Indeed, planning alone appears neither necessary nor sufficient to general wealth creation. Despite its recent "conversion" to town planning, Houston in Texas represents a city which apparently managed to grow without significant intervention (Feagin, 1990). Though the metropolis might have prospered more, or in different ways, had further planning been effected, one thing is clear: it did not shrink back to a village simply because it had only a very modest formal planning department.

In the UK, regional development has had so-called "policy on" and "policy off" periods, thereby permitting analysis of the efficacy of intervention (Armstrong and Taylor, 1985). By contrast, town planning, once institutionalised, is unlikely ever to be removed since too many interests are at stake - particularly those of the bureaucracy and community pressure groups. Thus, although the idea might be quite rational, the prospect seems remote of Houston seeking the best of both worlds by moving into and out of planning for varying future periods. As Wildavsky (1973) remarked, evaluation in planning (scientific or otherwise) always seems precluded.

Other macro and microeconomic activities, both private and public, create wealth and so it can be difficult to filter the contribution of town planning. Events in socioeconomic space occur simultaneously and reality is no laboratory in which individual effects can easily be isolated. This is the first of two reasons for which observers might have difficulty in determining the efficiency of a planning system. The other is that, if planning in the past had any unitary aims, they were unlikely to focus on wealth, which has effectively been disparaged within the discipline.

While planning might not actually diminish wealth, it might neither create nor maintain it as readily as other interventions. In general, one could argue that the opportunity arises for planning to create wealth during facility placement or landuse change; otherwise, it could maintain wealth by preserving existing landuse regulations or zoning patterns. Equally, planning can destroy wealth. When conditions are changed, parties can be deleteriously affected. When conditions remain the same, new ideas for wealth creation can be blocked. Thus, whether planning is actually proposing anything or not, its mere existence will be influencing the generation of wealth in a community and its subsequent distribution.

Clearly, to run a planning department, even if it does nothing but administer the status quo, is not cost-free. Yet such "operating" costs can be assumed trivial alongside the direct or indirect financial outcomes or the opportunity costs of planning. Wildavsky (1973, pp. 149-50) argues that planning:

- might be a substitute for action;
- uses important human resources, both direct and indirect;
- tends to lead to spending by way of professional self-justification;
- seeks the large and loud over the small and quiet;
- might prefer the big model of dubious veracity;
- can create imaginary future situations or problems;

- may introduce uneconomical, individual biases (e.g. excessive standards);
- can become an escape from insurmountable problems of the day.

Outcome effects will still characterise a planning system in neutral *gear*, one seemingly doing nothing. They can be greater from a planning system which undergoes or promotes regular change. It will inevitably throw up winners and losers in its own version of Schumpeter's process of "creative destruction" (1943). Schumpeter, of course, used this term to refer to the effects of technological change. Its application is appropriate in that planning, as a means to an end, is a technology - a way of doing things (Macdonald, 1983, p. 331). Planning is thus a vehicle of the capitalist system for destroying superannuated assets, presumably for the greater community good.

At this point, identities can be introduced which illustrate the relationship of planning and wealth. First, it could be rational to plan when the costs (negative benefits) of not planning are both obvious and large. These costs are imputed since they remain hypothetical until the non-planned project is actually completed: Thus:

$$\text{Plan if: } I_{cnp} > (I_{cp} + A_{cp}) \quad (1)$$

where:

I_{cnp} = imputed costs of not planning;
 I_{cp} = imputed costs of planning;
 A_{cp} = accounting or real financial costs of planning.

Such a condition obviously applies in simple, single-project, structural planning involving infrastructure investment: building a dock, pipeline or transport route without planning would clearly be irrational and expensive.

Second, a positive effect of planning is indicated when it confers greater benefits than costs so as to increase existing social wealth (utility). Re-using elements in the above identity:

$$\text{If } (I_{bs} + T_{bs}) > (I_{cp} + A_{cp}) \text{ then } U_a > U_b \quad (2)$$

where:

I_{bs} = intangible benefits to society (e.g. "amenity");
 T_{bs} = tangible benefits to society;
 U = utility (social wealth) in periods a after and b before planning.

From this juncture arise a number of theoretical endeavours which could help resolve the current malaise of the discipline. One would be to enumerate and quantify the intangible or imputed benefits and costs and to determine their weight in specific applications. Sagar (1992), above, places great importance on an intangible benefit of planning, namely "personal growth". Planners might consider the measurement of intangibles too difficult or rubbery, a bit positivist or not very postmodern. However, this issue has been routinely addressed in recent years in disciplines such as Clem Tisdell's environmental economics (e.g. Smith, 1996; Sugden and Williams, 1978, pp. 148-67). It is thus strange to see planning, in which much store is placed on intangible benefits, not making greater effort to quantify and promote them.

Another consideration is the time value of money. Discounted cash flow analysis is a usual basis of benefit-cost determination but calculations normally assume a unitary social discount rate in relating the short to the long term. Planning - what Little work appears to have been undertaken in planning with the concept or is it about? application of variable discount rates which might more accurately reflect:

- (1) estimations of future conditions (e.g. inflation, interest rates etc.);

- (2) community preferences *vis à vis* the short and long term;
- (3) the reality of electoral cycles; and
- (4) variations in the measurement of tangibles and intangibles.

By such reasoning, it could be possible initially to disaggregate elements within the benefit and cost streams and measure them differentially (i.e. weighting) with respect to discount rates before eventually aggregating them for a final evaluation (cf. Geltner and Mei,1995).

Distributing wealth

Who gets any wealth created by planning? It can be created via two situations. First, a public initiative involving change is taken, such as a landuse rezoning, the designation of an area or placement of infrastructure. It can have direct and indirect, private and public benefits and costs, potentially representing a large number of wealth outcomes as illustrated in Table I. The second possibility is that, under existing planning, a party takes action which also results in wealth outcomes (Table II). An example could be the opening of a large retail store on land already zoned for the purpose (i.e. a permitted use not involving public sector change).

Clearly, the chief problem in Table I is weighing the value of direct or indirect benefits and costs, given that both tangibles and intangibles could be involved. Table II employs a technicality of being able to identify “other” private parties spatially or operationally close to the initiative as opposed to the more removed and diffuse “general public”. The sense is that the “other” parties would receive direct benefits or costs while the public would receive indirect effects. More generally, though, there are theoretical conditions in both matrices which indicate the achievement of benefit at no cost (beyond that of operating the planning system which, for present purposes, could be considered trivial).

In circumstances (however rare) of a Paretian improvement, does the distribution of wealth actually matter (cf. Smith, 1977, p. 54; Tisdell, 1982, pp. 413-14)? Many planners would argue affirmatively since, traditionally, the discipline has seen its effect on wealth distribution as regressive. But are these views from the days when, in global stakes, the West was (number) one? If the income of Western countries is adjusted for inflation (real GDP), population growth (real GDP per capita) and, finally, the normal depreciation of social assets, some economies appear far less prospective. Nations today are less isolated than before and few consider themselves sufficiently wealthy knowingly to dilute their competitive advantage or reject benefits simply because, domestically, their rich might get richer. At a much lower level, local politicians understand the situation quite clearly. Economic development, if not conducted to “beggar thy neighbour”, is at least “dog eat dog” and practical planners are expected to facilitate and pitch once a prospective project is in the wind (Feagin, 1990, p. 269).

Table I. Outcomes pursuant to a public planning change

		Benefits		Costs			
Private (individual) ^a		Public (general) ^a				Public (general)	
Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Direct ^b	Indirect ^b	Direct	Indirect
X							
X	X						
X	X	X					
X	X	X	X	X			
X	X	X	X	X	X		
							X
Etc. through all combinations until zero benefit cells are subscribed							

Notes

^a positive externalities

^b negative externalities

Table II. Outcomes from a private initiative under an existing planning system

Private benefits		Public benefits ^a	Private costs ^b	
Initiator	Others ^a		Initiator	
X				
X	X			
X	X	X		
X	X	X	X	

Etc. etc. through all combinations until zero benefit cells are subscribed

Notes^a positive externalities^b negative externalities

The more cogent consideration involves benefits and costs, the domain of practical equity. Planning has generally addressed mixed outcomes by attention to planning gain and systems of betterment and compensation, the latter normally applying only after a public initiative (i.e. within Table I above). The microeconomic backdrop is the Kaldor-Hicks compensation principle (or neo-Paretian criterion) which asserts that, if a policy change results in some people being made better and some worse off, and if the gains of the former are sufficiently large to compensate the losers and still leave something over, the change is deemed an improvement. Further elaboration is offered in the Skitovsky double criterion (George and Shorey, 1978, pp. 61-2; van den Doel and van Velthoven, 1993, pp. 32-3). Justification for statutory planning in circumstances of mixed benefits and costs is that it provides some predictability and transparency and, for those negatively impacted, can be much cheaper than common law remedies. Still, the economic problem remains of pairing a private benefit against a public cost, a tangible against an intangible, these conditions vice versa, the relative effect of gains and losses against initial wealth endowments and so on.

Though the problems are fundamental, they remain unresolved in postwar planning literature and one wonders about the will for a theoretical resolution which can be generally applied in practice. Here a number of angles can be examined[5]. In its treatment of investment, a planning system could manipulate such objects of desire as money, status or power, all of which are normally in short supply. The degree to which the system delivers equity could be read in its usefulness in removing or reducing conflict over such resources among would-be consumers. From the postmodernists one appreciates that there is no such thing as absolute justice: it varies cross culturally and over time. Theories of social justice fall between those who favour the market as arbiter and those who prefer public interventions. For its part, a planning system could be weighted in either direction.

Market theorists cover the New Right, libertarians, economic rationalists, “dries” and some of the more traditional liberals. In planning, they might advocate “market planning”, a new persuasion of the 1990s (Banerjee, 1993; Richardson and Gordon, 1993). The broad theme is that social welfare, justice and equity are maximised by the pursuit of individual gain. Entitlement or desert theory, for instance, states that individuals should reap the rewards of effort and the disbenefits of inappropriate behaviour, preferably as would occur before the introduction of public initiatives such as tax and welfare systems. Reward is generally for achievement (hopefully legitimate) rather than effort, and initial advantage is not to be offset. A planning system run under such lines would probably eschew interests in betterment and compensation or concepts of planning gain. Even assuming that social stability was maintained in a situation of uneven and perhaps widening distribution, the question remains open of whether aggregate wealth could be technically maximised.

A second prescription is classical utilitarianism, derived from Hume, Mill and Bentham, which argues that society is rightly ordered when major institutions are arranged so as to achieve the greatest net balance of utility summed over all individuals. This social good, maximal utility, should be achieved independently of issues of its distribution among members of a society. Even if this view can be countenanced, problems arise in measuring individual utilities which operationally invalidate many of the claims of this school (see also Oxley, 1975, p. 500). Resourcists argue that since tastes are so hard

to measure, it is better to focus on how much everyone is allocated and let people do with resources what they wish. The counter is that there are significant differences in abilities to use resources and so people might not achieve the same utility from a given allocation.

On the side of intervention, three main themes deserve attention:

- (1) Rawls' (1971) view of justice as fairness;
- (2) egalitarianism; and
- (3) the situation of equity in practice.

First, Rawls argues that a just outcome depends on a fair process and, in planning, supporters of rationality have often argued that it promotes a system of allocation which is at least transparent and predictable. Fair processes can hardly proceed in states of initial advantage and thus Rawls introduces measures to square up the baseline before allocations occur [6]. A good deal of reasoning later comes the proposition that inequalities can remain in a just distribution which has occurred as a result of a fair process. Indeed, justice can be achieved when the lot of the most disadvantaged is improved somewhat, irrespective of whether an uneven share of the gain went to those who already had a disproportionately large amount. Such a view can be interestingly contrasted with Paretian positions.

As distinct from Rawls, egalitarians argue that people ought not to suffer disadvantage from events over which they have no control. Such disadvantage creates a case for compensation, as frequently proffered within planning. Once compensation is admitted, egalitarians might stumble over how it is to be distributed, given that people present with differing initial endowments.

The practical approaches to equity revolve around equality of opportunity and outcome, the first being the more prominent. A moderate view of Miller (1993, p. 200) is that social equality consists of a range of outcomes subject to the understandings that:

- differential rewards accrue to people on the basis of real differences in effort and ability;
- no one's standard of living should fall below a prescribed minimum;
- the range of inequality should not be so great as to engender class divisions.

Given the postmodern critique of totalising and unitary solutions, not all societies in which planning is practised will want, or be able, to adopt such a script even if it should represent some kind of social justice. The planner Sean McConnell (1981, p. 190-1) raises the issue of whether systems should dispense some (generally accepted) formula of social justice or instead be responsive to the community's demands. He adopts the former as the greater virtue, though others would disagree and, in fact, planning systems have been conducted under both auspices. His statement of principle follows Rawls, namely that planning decisions should be made for the greatest benefit of the least advantaged in physical, mental, economic, social, political or environmental terms. There are, however, three provisos.

First, Rawls' "saving principle" is invoked, meaning that any resource which will be of benefit in the future is, within reason, protected. Second, any person's liberty is restricted only for the sake of the liberty of others. Third, any future distribution or redistribution of spatial resources, facilities, service or opportunities is made equally, with the exception that an unequal distribution or availability is to the benefit of the least advantaged in regard to their future opportunities.

Despite their succinctness and the emphasis attributed (as the very last words of his book), McConnell's prescriptions appear to have attracted little comment in the planning literature. Perhaps they are regarded as self-evident. Yet, allied fields such as industrial and technology policy and regional development have had lively debate about the effect of public interventions on wealth distribution in terms of "picking winners" and "backing losers". Some commentators have concluded that, for the public sector, either focus is too hard and risky, in which case direct subventions to private organisations are unwise. There is no recent parallel debate in planning. Having identified this lacuna, we will pass on with the observation that it would be surprising if libertarians and market planners could wholly accommodate McConnell's views.

Programming wealth

What is now possible, though, is to restate a rationale for regional and town planning in terms of the generation and distribution of wealth. Since planning is a means to an end, economic heuristics can be appropriate. By such reasoning, the objective of a planning system should be at least to achieve net positive community wealth in both the flow (income) and stock (asset) modes of calculation via the evaluation of competing planning measures. The most prospective course would maximise returns or benefits relative to costs. They could then be subject to distribution provisos which reflect social preferences.

First, the general aim is written:

$$\text{Maximise } U = U_i + U_a$$

where:

U_i = a community's annual income stream = $(Ibs + Tbs) - (Icp + Acp)$ from equation (1) above;

U_a = the difference in value of a stock of assets at time periods t_1 and t_0 .

Any maximisation process is, of course, subject to a set of constraints, particularly regarding the community's annual income stream. An example is the available land stock. The context is thus one of mathematical programming. Consequently, the above function might be expressed as:

$$\text{Maximise } U = U_i + U_a \text{ subject to } C_1, C_2, \dots, C_m$$

where:

$C_{1,2,\dots,m}$ relate to resource constraints.

Though a detailed specification of such a general optimisation process is extremely complex, potentially involving problems with intangibles, a vast array of constraints, non-linear relationships and so forth, the general thrust or rationale of planning emerges clearly from the structure and notation above.

In fact, attempts have been made to construct such detailed statements. Herbert and Stevens (1960) and Schlager (1965) were oriented mainly toward development forecasting than a theory of planning. A more notable example is that of Ben-Shahar *et al.* (1969), cited here for demonstration, which proposes a formulation explicitly concerned with the optimal allocation of land such that social welfare be maximised subject to a set of constraints. The approach uses linear programming which is the most readily solvable mathematical programming. It involves an objective function to be maximised consisting of present values of the sum of demand prices for housing bundles and the sum of demand prices of structures accommodating employment activities. From this quantity, the present values of total construction costs of dwelling units, employment structures, demolition costs of dwelling units and employment structures, the total variable cost of transportation activity and the total cost of transportation capacity are subtracted. Constraints require that:

- every household be accommodated in each period;
- a defined growth pattern for each socio-economic group is achieved;
- land requirements by residential and employment uses do not exceed available land; and
- the capacity of the transportation system is not exceeded.

A number of balances in each period are also mandated:

- housing stock;
- the stock of employment structures;
- residential oriented employment demands;
- work force employment;
- work trips;
- non-work trips for residential uses; and
- non-work trips for employment uses.

The solution maximises the present value of a welfare function and outputs the distribution of households of each socio-economic group in each period and in each subarea by type of dwelling unit and the distribution of employment structures in each period in each subarea by type, in addition to a range of other information such as work trip and non-work trip distributions.

The work of Ben-Shahar *et al.* illustrates the complexity of the task of defining planning as the optimisation of an objective function. The focus is efficiency as distinct from equity and the process does not include distributional constraints which can be considered part of a view of planning as a wealth maximisation process.

Inclusion of distributional constraints might be expressed as:

Maximise $U = U_i + U_a$ subject to $C_{1, 2, \dots, m}$ and $D_{1, 2, \dots, n}$

where:

$D_{1, 2, \dots, n}$ represent distributional constraints as among community groups, the advantaged and disadvantaged and so on.

Theoretical utilitarians have long faced the problem that maximisation under market forces produces externalities. Externalities will likely defeat the object of the exercise in what Oxley (1975, p. 500) has termed the fallacy of Benthamite additive philosophy. Again, planning should look to environmental economics where practical advances in the last two decades have been made with weighting and multidimensional scaling techniques, strategic stakeholder analyses and variants of cost benefit analysis. In planning as in neoclassical economics, maximisation is likely to remain a theoretical condition: the practical requirement of at least a net positive wealth outcome would owe more to the view pioneered by Alchian (1950) that any economic enterprise was, in the first instance, about survival not maximisation.

With planning measures selected to optimise the generation of community wealth, distributional issues can be considered via conditions derived from Tables I and II and the foregoing discussion. Invoking the general notion of a planning balance sheet (Alexander, 1978), several examples can be imagined in which, unless notated, U represents both income and asset wealth [7].

- (1) *Mixed benefits distributed via the market alone* (e.g. libertarian, utilitarian approaches):
Max U (no distributional constraints).
- (2) *Paretian improvement* (e.g. theoretical examples in Table I, all benefit, no cost):
Max U_i subject to D_1 (change makes no one worse off in t_1 compared with t_0);
Max U_a subject to D_2 (disregarding normal depreciation, change makes no one's assets less valuable in t than t_0).
- (3) *Safety net solutions for disadvantaged* (e.g. Miller, 1993, above):
Max U subject to D_3 (minimum absolute wealth for disadvantaged); subject to D_4 (wealth differential of advantaged and disadvantaged remains within specified relative range).
- (4) *Greater relative benefit to the disadvantaged* (e.g. essentially McConnell's (1981) position):
Max U subject to D_5 (net benefits accruing to disadvantaged are greater in relation to their asset stock than net benefits accruing to advantaged).
- (5) *Weighting formula example*:
Max U_i subject to D_6 (twice the relative benefit to disadvantaged compared with advantaged in relation to existing asset stocks).
- (6) *Absolute benefit only to disadvantaged*:
Max $U_i =$ subject to D_7 (all absolute benefit accrues only to disadvantaged).
- (7) *No absolute disbenefit to disadvantaged*:
Max U_i subject to D_8 (market distribution of benefits but zero cost to disadvantaged).

Wealth: some implications

Our principal interest is underlining the viability of wealth creation to counter the lack of rationale in contemporary planning. We are less concerned to argue any distributional outcome, since different ones are appropriate for different circumstances and the debate on equity in planning needs far greater extension than possible here. The intent now is to explore two facets of the focus on wealth: first, in terms of how such a focus can be developed; and, second, in the efficacy of the redistributive aims of planning practice.

A rationale for planning

A number of planners are well placed to assist the discipline in its current straits. Luke *et al.* (1988), Levy (1990) and Blakely (1994) follow a most prospective approach, that of facilitating economic development. All these editions and attendant papers usefully blend academic and practical insights so as to offer some ideas and guidance for practitioners in city hall. They also merge the requirements of planning with those of development, a nexus frequently overlooked in recent writing. Extension of this work is indicated in two directions.

The first is “upward” toward a broader philosophy. Although the economic development literature is accumulating, its practicality appears to have clouded the major opportunity it offers to restate a relationship of planning and wealth. Authors propose a range of solutions to “changed circumstances” without propounding an overall rationale which might counter some others presently circulating in the discipline. Their general theme is a “bottom up”, grassroots approach in which communities realise that the largesse of government cannot go on forever and so take direct action to assist themselves. The focus is on small to medium enterprise. Supply side issues such as human resource development and the role of tertiary education institutions are closely examined.

In general, the economic development literature is strategic but local in scope. Its aims are thus to do with issues such as unemployment, business start-ups and so on. It has not characteristically addressed the bigger picture of how wealth is defined in a community or nation, why it should be a goal, what it means, and how all forms of regional and town planning can assist in its creation.

At the local level, then, the precepts of “economic development” school might sit easily with the market planning explained by Richardson and Gordon (1993) and Banerjee (1993), but run counter to some traditional notions in planning (Blakely, 1994, p. 51). Apart from the lack of attention to broader issues of wealth, the reasons this school might thus far have avoided criticism lie in its strategic rather than structural interest, the apparent absence of any direct challenge to orthodoxies of physical planning and its defensible practicality.

For all this, Levy (1990) makes a welcome diversion into development planning and financing, while Blakely (1994) devotes one chapter to physical planning issues. In the second extension “downwards”, this strand could go much further to show how statutory and structural measures could facilitate planning by promoting outcomes characterised more by benefit than cost (as per Table I). There are, of course, difficulties. Such a move would challenge existing regulatory systems in structural planning. Moreover, academia often regards the compilation of inventories of initiatives from the field (successful or otherwise) as too mundane or idiographic to merit attention. This is why economic development practitioners have recently been active in pioneering their own meetings, newsgroups and journals. Their moves are precisely what is needed.

One could go still further “down” to suggest that interests in wealth generation and economic development (at whatever level) will not make much progress until some other topics are addressed. The general thesis here is that a society with a poorly developed philosophy of design (in the most general sense -- art works, products and packaging, industrial technology etc.) is unlikely to be strong in applying such principles to the built environment. Poorly conceived and executed built environments are unlikely in these times of global competition to be attractive to investment (cf. Kunstler, 1993). What is needed, therefore, is an integrating approach which admits accumulation of wealth as a valid endeavour through economic development and supports it by the pursuit of excellence from the basic levels of design upwards through the levels of planning. This view is undoubtedly deterministic in the sense that it claims that the physical environment could influence economic development. Yet, this is a far less

heroic assumption than the traditional idea in planning of the physical environment as conditioning social behaviour. Moreover, the economic determinism has long been corroborated by sympathetic movements in property values.

The efficacy of redistribution

The practices of betterment and compensation engage direct links between planning measures and outcomes affecting landowners. Likewise, developer contributions might be seen as a form of “user pays” which free the public purse. Yet, as one moves up the economic and spatial scale, cause and effect appear less linked. The efficacy of using an overall planning system as a vehicle of redistribution must be questioned, notwithstanding the orthodoxy it commands in the literature.

As an example, in respect of the conventional focus on the inner urban disadvantaged, it is reasonable to ask whether their situation arose directly from planning decisions, or perhaps an absence of planning. Either way, it could be reasonable to use the planning system to redress it. Strategically, though, the efficiency of redistributive planning needs examination in relation to other economic alternatives. This view might appear rather “dry” but it is fair in light of scarce public funds. Moreover, it could appear less dry if one argued from an egalitarian resourcist viewpoint that the disadvantaged could be made better off in ways more direct than receipt of additional town planning services. By this reasoning, which follows Dworkin (1981, p. 189), the disadvantaged might prefer cash-in-hand or other solutions which would empower them to improve their situation themselves [81 rather than have elements of it adjusted by planners who probably lead a different lifestyle in another part of the city.

This inner urban case is essentially *ex post*: the situation was always there, possibly deteriorating over the years. Some grew up in it while others, voluntarily or otherwise, moved in. Yet, what of *ex ante* situations, for example on newly developing urban peripheries where it is often argued that residents lack services? In this case, a number of observations pertain. The first would be to define and redefine services in terms of market or non-market pricing and real or contrived demand. From that juncture, the second issue is whether town planning is solely about service provision or whether other of its components (e.g. design and maintenance) might contribute equally to lifestyle satisfaction. Finally, the point emerges as to whether, at the margin, present planning efforts actually contribute to (or fail to erase) disadvantage, all other factors notwithstanding.

These are broad and timeless questions for another day. They lie on the interface of planning and economics, a route infrequently travelled. Such issues, however, are most adequately analysed via a focus on wealth creation and distribution as key rationales of town planning. It offers glimpses towards, and maybe better prospects of achieving, a vision long held in the discipline, that of a general theory or philosophy.

Conclusions: toward a general theory?

Invoking neoclassical economics and its fellow travellers, rationality and positivism, this paper has paused to consider opportunities lost in planning in the last 20 years. The recent worries of authors like Beauregard (1990) and Levy (1992) have been answered in a rush of visions and directions. Frequently papers have emphasised solution before problem analysis, and few go far to address the fundamental questions posed by Wildavsky (1973) and Reade (1983). The best that can be said is that, given the range of epistemologies, ideologies and paradigms, there is plenty to discuss.

In probing the postmodern, identifying ever-worthier ends, or potential recipients of attention, some contemporary commentators overlook the accountability requirements of an essentially public enterprise. Planning is an applied discipline and its practical pursuit involves various operating costs and financial outcomes. The majority of its academicians might therefore be expected to deal in matters which bear some relevance to contemporary realities. As far as practical planning is concerned, there could be an anticipation at least that it post a net social benefit en route to the ultimate objective of community wealth optimisation. If this net condition does not occur, constituents or those paying for planning systems might well dispute their value added, allege government for government's sake, dispute that professionals know best, or challenge Sagar's (1992) idea that it is, in fact, the intangible social conditioning (or engineering) of planning which is important.

In the 1970s, a general theory of planning was effectively set aside, first in a rehearsal of the

difficulties by Rittel and Webber (1973) followed by a thoroughgoing denunciation by Mandelbaum (1979). Later the postmodern sounded the death knell to meta-theorising by highlighting, *inter alia*, the ambiguities, contradictions, otherness and polyvocalities of the current environment. Yet, of all the social sciences, the postmodern appears to have cut the least ice in economics, a discipline which finds itself ascendant in practical and policy arenas. At the moment the jury is out. Its likely findings are that postmodernism could serve to explicate some existing power relations and social conditions, as long as it can use a commonly agreed and understood language and avoid solipsism, which seems ever present given its precepts. On the other hand, a postmodern positing of multi-rationalities is unlikely to *escape* the ultimate constraint of the need for survival in a situation of scarce resources, in which distinct and unitary rationalities might take over. This is perhaps why its precepts have not been widely adopted in economics.

There is, of course, the counter possibility of increasing social fragmentation which could so complicate the empirical reality as to render general theorising futile. This is, in fact, a prospective thesis of the postmodern. On one hand, there is the issue of whether communities or nations require any semblance of a consensus in order to be called a community or nation. One questions the viability of a common "rationality" and hence rational analysis in the absence of some consensus. Maybe if consensus is impossible, the only course is dissolution, as occurred in the Soviet Union and is mooted in Canada. On the other hand, as illustrated in the play *Dead White Males* by noted Australian David Williamson, it could be that "human nature" overarches the peculiarities of a social order to enforce some generalities.

To the extent that societies or communities opt for mixed economies with a leaning to capitalism, analysis of wealth and wealth relations will remain relevant and might form a basis for more general theorising. It could also underpin evaluation of the four "recent contributions" presented here and others besides. Progress will be made when the "policy analytic" view is recognised that planning is more a means to an end than an end in itself (cf. Feldt, 1988, pp. 46-7). Secular ends will always remain expansive and means limited. The numerous permutations of Tables I and II above suggest that the theoretical task is great, even though, focused on wealth, the rationale is constrained and well understood. Under such an aegis, regional and town planning could be seen as so closely allied with economics as to form a branch of it. Hereby a well developed and relevant body of work could be on hand (see, *inter alia*, Ball (1992)). Yet, planning over the last 25 years has hardly hastened to incorporate developments in economics (cf. Oxley, 1975). Theorising has shown little interest in a prospective counterpoise, namely a philosophy of development. Maybe this will emerge given the amount of planning work which is now actually undertaken in major development firms. Unlike speculators and small enterprises, such companies are big enough and have sufficient experience to be able effectively to weigh up the costs and benefits of design alternatives. Often this reflective process advantages the community, in terms of an improved built environment as urged by Lucy (1994).

This paper has thrown no more than an unpolished oar against a tide of confusion in current planning literature. The need is to evaluate which of the epistemologies, ideologies, operating paradigms or, finally, traditions as outlined by Friedmann (1987) actually clarify the purpose of planning. Those which do not should be disregarded lest scarce public resources and intellectual effort be devoted to following blind alleys.

To broaden the ideas outlined here, our recommendations would include a revision of works of environmental and social economists such as Clem Tisdell in Australia and Herman Daly in the United States as offering far better prospects for the development of planning than groping for truths in a fast changing environment [9]. The whole question of wealth creation needs revisiting both theoretically and practically: it has merely been raised and inadequately defined here. To handle this matter, the questions of efficiency and equity in a built environment context and follow-on issues, planning students could often benefit from greater exposure to economics.

It is not so much the point as to whether previous planning or its literature has been used by authors for their own ends: such practice occurs to a greater or lesser degree in any social discipline. The question is, rather, whether the chosen ends took sufficient account of prevailing community dispositions and aspirations. Not simply because of the onset of an era of economic rationalism but also by its own devices, planning has a credibility problem to be addressed and practitioners presently draw little aid from the parts of the academy. Given the occupational constraints in city hall, it is the role of the academician to address politicians and inform practitioners in a language they can understand. In

our estimation, drawn more from consultancy than academic enterprise, the starting place is talk of the market. One way or another, that is what planning in the real world is about.

Notes

1. See Wildavsky (1973); Reade (1983); Lucy (1994). For further examples of disquiet see Alexander (1984, 1988); Beauregard (1989, 1991); Burchell (1988); Levy (1992); Mandelbaum (1979); Manor and Scheffer (1977); and Meck (1993). This list is not exhaustive.
2. See Manor and Sheffer (1977); Alexander (1984, 1988).
3. Feldt (1988, p. 44) puts forward the alternative view that outcomes of planning take so long (five to 20 years) to materialise that "feedback and corrective actions" become difficult.
4. Oxley (1975) appears to recognise this point. Note interesting criticisms of Ratcliffe (1974), found on p. 503 of his article. Our position is that without wealth as a fundamental there can be little welfare. Wealth is thus the seminal object of analysis.
5. Henceforth in this subsection, we acknowledge the work contained in a doctoral thesis in preparation by Norman Elvidge of our Department.
6. In planning, this intervention has been interpreted as a challenge to existing property rights or the unacceptability of the distribution of factor ownership (Oxley 1975, p. 501, 503).
7. This exposition of alternatives might be compared with the positions outlined by Tisdell (1982, pp. 415-16).
8. This possibility assumes, with Rittel and Webber (1973, pp. 161-2) that the disadvantaged in a particular locality actually perceive themselves as disadvantaged. A cash-in-hand approach raises the prospect that those who perceive a problem might be enabled to move away from the area, which socially could be a cheaper solution.
9. The economic repercussions of physical planning and urban design form another whole arena of debate which will be addressed in a different forum, along with the possibility of a philosophy of development as an adjunct to a general theory of planning.

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