

Urban planning has a long history - at least 4,000 years - and deeply-rooted traditions, of which perhaps the strongest is reliance on the use of physical forms and processes to influence or direct social activities. Generally speaking, urban planners have taken society more or less for granted, and their work is mostly designed to cope with the physical concomitants of social structure and social interaction. The Roman emperor Claudius diagnosed hunger and thirst as threats to political stability, so he built aqueducts and improved transport services to enable the importation of wheat from Egypt in the winter.

In its extreme form, urban planning is subject to 'architectural determinism'. Haussmann razed slum areas on the assumption that these were 'nests' of revolution, and built boulevards to prevent revolutionary gatherings. Policies of slum clearance and urban renewal are still influenced by similar assumptions. Social policy generally lags behind social change, and governments consequently look for rapid solutions to make good the lag. Consequently, they are receptive to schemes which promise 'breakthroughs'. In modern industrial society, both the speed of change and the apparent power of technology to achieve these 'breakthroughs' have greatly increased. In the short term, this had the effect of encouraging an emphasis on physical planning and the massive use of advanced technology. In the longer term, social problems have proved resistant to physical solutions, whose limitations are under growing criticism as they become more apparent. Social change has become even faster and more perplexing; one result is a loss of confidence in the relevance of specialized knowledge and traditional forms of expertise, concurrently with an emphasis on generalized forms of 'sociological' explanation and generalized 'managerial' skills.

In this situation, traditional urban planning methods are at a disadvantage. A profession based on engineering and architecture must find some difficulty in adapting itself to a state of affairs where the 'social' approach is being promoted as an alternative to the 'physical' approach. Another important influence on the situation is the extension of central government planning functions, which (at least in principle) go far beyond the traditional bounds of physical planning. Urban planning, as its name implies, is associated with localized changes, generally of an incremental character. Contemporary planning issues like the establishment of 'new towns' and 'growth centres', or the large-scale restructuring of transport and communications, are a different matter involving a range of economic, social and political decisions which may have national and international implications.

The character of planning groups has changed under these pressures. Governments have greatly enlarged their establishments in these fields, and are also sponsoring quasi-official units, generally located at universities. Private planning firms are moving into multi-disciplinary activities, deriving their business not only from traditional town-planning contracts but also from much more broadly (and loosely) defined projects concerned with both 'planning' and 'forecasting'.

There appear to be at least four areas of development open to a firm based on urban planning (short of moving into areas such as management consultancy, economic forecasting, or social

welfare), if it is to adjust to a situation where definitions are changing and traditional approaches are increasingly less acceptable. These are : social forecasting; technology assessment; environmental impact statements; and social impact statements.

Social forecasting. Most planning activities are limited to a time horizon of no more than five years. Beyond this, speculative forecasting takes over. The usual criteria of specialized knowledge are less important than the ability (real or apparent) to postulate relationships between a variety of social processes and draw policy conclusions from them. Whatever the difficulties and absurdities involved in forecasting, the demand for it is ubiquitous. In policy areas such as housing, transport, communications, energy, land use, natural resources, and leisure, forecasts are constantly being made either directly or by implication.

Technology assessment. Since the term was first used in the U.S. in 1966 by a Congressional committee, it has gained wide currency and is well on the way to becoming an established function of government. A standard definition, used by the Library of Congress, describes it as 'taking a purposeful look at the consequences of technological change. It includes the primary cost/benefit balance of short term localized market-place economics, but particularly goes beyond these to identify affected parties and unanticipated impacts in as broad and long range a fashion as is possible'.

Technological change may be expected to continue, and to form an important part of society's response to established needs and new problems. The growth of new industries, the continuance of existing ones, and the application of new technologies to the provision of services like transport, communications, and energy supply, is likely to be influenced increasingly by the results of technology assessment.

Environmental impact statements. The requirement for E.I.S. is now government policy in Canberra and may be expected to become universal. Government agencies and private contractors will very soon be entering into arrangements with consultants to provide E.I.S. This will clearly require a multi-disciplinary approach, especially as the definition of the environment contained in the federal Act is all-embracing.

Social impact statements. The need for such statements, which is not yet policy in any country, is implicit in the demands for technology assessment and environmental impact statements. Whatever the language used to describe E.I.S., they are likely to be oriented towards the physical environment (if only because the term 'environment' lies in the domain of biologists, architects and engineers). It will become evident that the physical environment cannot be considered in isolation from the 'social environment', but this consideration requires the development of a sufficiently broad-based approach, including particular attention to the political and administrative consequences of social and technological change.

The development of these activities would, of course, entail the recruitment of suitable staff, which will not be easy. Also, it is not possible to predict what their relative importance will be in the immediate future. However, there is little doubt that social planning activities will continue to grow, and that the four aspects outlined above will be important phases of this process.

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MELTON-SUNBURY PLANNING SCHEME

Social Needs. The development of a new town means the movement of a large number of people from other places to the new location. Generally speaking, this kind of movement entails a predominance of family groups at an early stage of the family cycle. Hence new towns usually have a demographic profile which is 'bottom-heavy' and generates large demands for services related to young children. An analysis of social needs should therefore give special attention to such services, as they are likely to constitute an attractive feature in influencing decisions to move to the new town. At the same time, the presence of a large population of young children also means a large population of young mothers, whose demands point to a rather different set of facilities and services, including shopping, transport, and the opportunity to undertake employment and social participation.

Families, however, stretch across more than two generations, and movement to a new town may be blocked by reluctance to break family ties. The classic inquiries of the Institute of Community Studies demonstrated that physical movement to new towns and suburbs did not break family ties and that the incidence of visits between old and new districts was high. Jean Martin's investigations in Adelaide show a similar pattern. The opportunity to move three generations instead of two may be another attractive feature, which entails suitable housing provision and other facilities.

If population growth is based on the influx of a large number of family groups, it is likely to generate the following social demands:

Education. Immediate provision of pre-school and infants' education, building up within 5-10 years to primary and secondary schooling. As 50 per cent of school-age children are likely to complete four years of secondary education, the provision of facilities should involve a phased program towards this level. To economize on resources, the physical facilities should be planned on an integrated basis which permits expansion as successive age cohorts move through the system, and which also provides for community use of school facilities. Education beyond four years of secondary school should be planned as a further stage, not necessarily integrated in the same way.

Health. The presence of a large number of young children underlines the need for community health centres where a variety of services can be provided. If a substantial number of older people also forms part of the population, the case for early provision would be strengthened. Health centres should be built on the assumption that expansion will be possible.

Housing. Young families typically demand 'house and garden' accommodation, but social needs and economical use of land and resources indicate the value of open space which is available for collective use. Again, a significant older population points to the need for flat-type housing, which should be placed so as to minimize isolation.

Administrative services. Development of a new community will be assisted by appropriate planning of government administrative services - national, state and local. From the public point of view, physical proximity of government offices is usually desirable, and building plans should be co-ordinated to this end. A government centre should also provide a reception service where inquiries about the new community can be rapidly dealt with and assistance given with settlement problems.

Recreation, welfare and cultural facilities. These are, typically, a mixture of public and private activity, and no planning scheme can by itself guarantee a high level of private activity. Nevertheless, public provision can do much to provide stimuli for private activity through voluntary associations. An obvious possibility is the provision of some kind of community centre, perhaps in association with a public library, situated conveniently close to a business centre.

The above comments are based on the assumption that a predominant factor in the growth of the Melton-Sunbury area will be the movement of families. Employment opportunities, housing and other factors will obviously affect this assumption. When the probable demographic profile has been established, it will be possible to make more detailed estimates of the relation between need and provision, and to construct a table of priorities, based partly on experience elsewhere and partly on information gained through public involvement.

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