Lincoln Planning Review, 8 (1-2) (2017) 58-63

Planning approaches that provide an alternative to modern planning: A critical assessment

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1. INTRODUCTION

The realm of planning has undergone many transformations in the last century, with successive 'turns' evolving to address the weaknesses of previous approaches. Whilst 'modern planning' dominated the post-war era, the 'communicative turn' of the 1970s – 1980s challenged the rational foundations of planning, and the apparent 'neutrality' of planners. Similarly, 'collaborative planning' has rejected the notion of privileged knowledge, instead turning to consultation and transdisciplinary approaches. The emphasis on process has led to concerns that the substance (or the outputs of planning) has been neglected. 'Spatial planning' is an example of a recent approach that attempts to unite procedural and substantial elements. The tensions between these three approaches often results in them being employed independently of one another. However, the planning models discussed in this paper do not represent distinct paradigms. Modern planning, collaborative planning and spatial planning define issues using different approaches, which influences their ability to provide comprehensive, sustainable solutions. Utilising a single approach to planning is insufficient to develop a sustainable solution to complex and uncertain planning issues. Rather, in this paper I argue that an integrated approach is needed to produce economically efficient, socially and culturally diverse, and environmentally sensitive solutions.

2. MODERN PLANNING

The inception of modern planning is credited to Le Corbusier, who developed his *City of Three* Million in 1922 (Deckker, 2000). It arose as an orderly response to 'scrawny' planning as, historically, cities evolved in a piecemeal fashion to satisfy individual interests (Adams, 1922, p. 157). Le Corbusier attempted to combat this by providing high-density living, green belts and efficient transport systems, to ensure the economic and cultural functions of the city were carried out effectively (Deckker, 2000). Although modern planning principles were upheld as the key to re-building and economically advancing cities post-war, the dominance of this planning approach was short-lived. Modern planning disregarded the historical context of a city, instead focussing on constructing an efficient 'machine'. Efficiency became the key indicator of success, which allowed plans to be compared between cities and nations (Irving, 1993).

Although this form of planning has been heavily criticised as lacking consideration for human scale (Schubert, 2014), the strengths of the modernist movement continue to be incorporated in contemporary planning projects. Modern planning offers a rational, technical approach to urban development, which appeals to those who desire an unambiguous city plan that supports social and economic efficiency. By associating the planning profession with a rational decision-making model, any planning decisions that are made are validated as being objective and 'true' (Irving, 1993). As modernity evolved out

of the era of mass-industrialisation, its focus on the efficient operation of cities and their systems was familiar and alluring. It also provided a common language in the planning industry, which can be regarded as being ultimately responsible for its rapid global adoption, and the reluctance of contemporary planners to abandon the approach.

Modern planning, in its purist post-war form, was a short-lived and controversial 'success'. By the early 1960s, the focus on efficient development and standardisation was seen to meet objective 'standards of living' but did not necessarily promote subjective 'quality of life'. Whilst significant improvements in sanitation and transportation were achieved, the implications of this planning approach for the identity of places and people was disastrous (Natrasony & Alexander, n.d.). 'Expert' technical knowledge often overrode community preferences and led to the development of plans and policies that failed to consider the values of the society they were regulating. In essence, modern planning attempted to solve the issues arising from industrialisation using the same mechanistic means with which industrial cities were created. Thus, although it provided efficient solutions to overcrowding and other societal ills, modern planning's disregard for the human scale created as many, if not more, problems as it solved.

3. COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

Every planning issue is multi-faceted, which requires decisions to be holistic, flexible and accommodating of different perspectives. Collaborative planning[1] recognises that the act of allocating and managing (a fundamental component of planning) is inherently political and, thus, cannot be solved by creating a single authority to manage resources on an integrated basis (Memon & Weber, 2008). This notion contrasts with modern planning's drive for standardisation. By distinguishing planning as a political activity, it follows that planning necessarily concerns the 'public'.

Historically, the planning profession has relied on the technical knowledge of experts, however it is becoming evident that local knowledge also has value. Collaborative planning engenders mutual understanding between stakeholders, which gives rise to innovative solutions (Kim, 2010). Traditionally, planning was carried out by experts, which narrowed the scope of planning projects and decisions. By involving public, private and community entities, planners expose themselves to a variety of knowledge types. This advances the 'soft' infrastructure of society and builds the social capital that is necessary for lasting relationships (Healey, 1997). Another advantage of collaborative planning is that minority and community groups are given a position in planning and political debates. Collaborative planning is a mutual learning exercise, which pursues the acceptance of participants' worldviews via the discussion of individual perspectives, so a mutual advantageous consensus can be reached. However, as a greater number of people are involved, it is likely that the paradigmatic power imbalance between stakeholders will increase (Kim, 2010). This will lead to larger trade-offs being proposed, which are likely to adversely affect those with insufficient planning literacy disproportionately.

Despite the apparent advantages, collaborative planning is prone to unwieldiness and can be resource hungry. A principal weakness is the potential for it to become a tokenistic exercise, which means that although stakeholders are consulted, they have no power to determine what is included in the planning document (Arnstein, 1969). This is where the dichotomy between theory and practice lies. Many governments, including New Zealand, now require consultation as a part of the policy development process, however few actively encourage collaborative planning. It is arguable whether governments who boast of collaborative practices are operating as a facilitator of planning, or

[1] Collaborative *planning* differs from collaborative *governance,* as it involves the State working with stakeholders, while reserving the supreme decision-making authority for itself. Alternatively, collaborative governance seeks to devolve power from the State and allocate it to hybrid organisations (Rich & Stoker, 2014).

maintaining their role as the controller (Kim, 2010). In addition, it is not apparent who decides which community groups are considered to be affected in an effective collaborative planning situation. The lack of spatial and temporal definition around affected parties leaves collaborative planning lacking as an effective planning approach.

4. SPATIAL PLANNING

There is a great deal of debate as to what spatial planning is and how it should be done. Generally, spatial planning is used to provide guidance in 'situations that are characterised by uncertainty and conflict around spatial development, where there needs to be mutual learning' (Faludi, 2000, p. 304). Consequently, this planning approach might be applied in land-use decisions that are driven by specific (if contested) values, such as 'sustainable development' (Larsson, 2006). The realm of spatial planning could be seen to *formalise* the systemic approach to planning, rather than relying on an individual planner's education and integrity.

The spatial planning model provides principles to guide planners in a wider contemplation of planning problems and solutions. Firstly, effective spatial planning requires the vertical (between different stakeholders) and horizontal (between governmental sectors) integration of knowledge (FAO, 2015). Plans are no longer restricted to regulating land use, but also the social, economic, environmental and cultural interactions that occur as subsidiaries to land use. Secondly, the provisions developed in the context of spatial planning are based on the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality (FAO, 2015). These processes involve decentralising spatial planning to the levels of society at which it is most relevant, and defining the balance between rule implementation and enforcement (FAO, 2015). Finally, the practice of spatial planning is required to have foresight and dialogue, allowing all stakeholders to be a part of discussions on the future use of land and distribution of activities (FAO, 2015).

By applying these principles, spatial planning attempts to balance the modern (substance focussed) and collaborative (process focussed) approaches to planning. Spatial planning has a focus on place-qualities and the spatial impact of development via the use of strategic frameworks for local authorities (Albrechts, 2004). These frameworks support the rescaling of agendas and policies, which encourages the different hierarchical levels of government to coordinate their work and resources (Albrechts, 2004). In addition, communication between governmental departments encourages dialogue between planners and decision-makers, which enhances the understanding between these two roles. The spatial planning process remains rational and logical – reducing the potential for collaboration to become unwieldy. Strong spatial and temporal boundaries are offered when deciding who should participate, which is a key difference from the collaborative planning process. Spatial planning boasts flexibility and awareness of future changes to the built, natural and social environments, however the methods of management of this change are omitted from discussion (Eggenberger & Partidário, 2000). This is, perhaps, why the methods of spatial planning are reminiscent of modern planning, as planners revert to the familiar structure.

5. CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

A fundamental element of problem-solving is problem-defining. Modern planning, collaborative planning and spatial planning define planning issues using different approaches, which influences the comprehensiveness of their solutions. Modern planning approaches problem solving autocratically, as planners are responsible for issue identification, definition and resolution. To a certain extent, spatial planning is similar to modern planning, as planning issues are identified by the authorities. However, these two models differ in that spatial planning requires that consultation with stakeholders takes place to increase the diversity of perspectives in the problem-solving process. Although this is admirable, a sustainable, widely accepted solution is likely to remain elusive because the prescribed issue may fail to

incorporate the values and world views of all stakeholders. Collaborative planning seeks to combat these issues by involving affected parties in the problem-identification phase of policy development, as well as the problem-solving phase.

In order to address complex issues, planning processes must be clear and directive to avoid ambiguity and unnecessary resource use. This is a weakness of collaborative planning, as it strives to involve and consult all the stakeholders that are involved in a planning project. Conversely, modern planning adopts the rational-comprehensive mode of decision making, which provides a succinct formula of problem identification, decision making, assessing alternatives, implementation and evaluation. As an answer to these contrasting approaches, spatial planning employs a structured, targeted approach to collaboration. Affected stakeholder groups are spatially and temporarily defined, which streamlines the collaboration process. Dispersing the modern template with collaborative practices allows the spatial approach to take into account social factors while still striving for the most efficient outcome.

A prominent complication with planning is the inability of many plans to be scaled up or down from their original implementation level. The magnitude of a plan or policy's impact is likely to change depending on the scale it is viewed from. For example, two more street lamps illuminating a park may enhance the security for a neighbourhood, however this would likely be considered insignificant when viewed at the national scale. It is similarly difficult to scale-down to ensure national-scale policies are effective at the local level. This is where collaborative planning and modern planning falter. Standardisation in modern planning enables large-scale plans to be drafted, as it ensures consistency in vision and application (Gunn, 2010). However, modernism fails to consider the human scale in planning exercises, which is what collaborative approaches attempts to amend. Effective collaboration is not viable at the national-scale, as there are too many diverse stakeholder groups that would need to be involved. It is, however, effective at the local-

	Modern Planning	Collaborative Planning	Spatial Planning
Strengths	Efficient Unambiguous Accepted Effective at macro scale Provides standard template	Effective at micro scale Rejects prioritisation of knowledge Transdisciplinary Involves participants in problem identification	Structured Multi-faceted, transdisciplinary Able to be rescaled
Weaknesses	Insufficient consideration of human factor Technocratic Difficult to rescale	Ambiguous Can be unwieldy Difficult to rescale	Poorly defined Ambiguous Unclear methodology
Approach	Rational, technocratic, prescriptive	Inclusive, participatory, transdisciplinary	Transdisciplinary, prescriptive
Role of Planner	Expert	Facilitator	Expert
Problem Definition	Planners/Technical experts/Authorities	Planners and stakeholders	Planners/Technical experts/Authorities
Problem Resolution	Planning/Technical experts	Planners and stakeholders	Planners and stakeholders
Most effective scale	Macro (national, regional)	Micro (territorial authorities, community groups, iwi)	Can be scaled up and down

Table 1: Key differences between the three planning approaches

scale, as community groups can be consulted on place-specific issues. The balance between these two aspects is crucial to achieve, as this will determine whether target standards are met, and whether the appropriate people are consulted on matters. Spatial planning considers temporal and spatial scales, while pursuing inclusive decisions on future land use and development (FAO, 2015). This approach transcends the hierarchical levels of government and society, enabling the rescaling of plans and policies. The coordination between government departments facilitates spatial planning at the national-scale, while dialogue between stakeholders supports it at the local-scale.

Table 1 summarises the key differences between modern planning, collaborative planning and spatial planning, using the conclusions reached in the critical assessment.

6. CONCLUSION

Planning issues are complex, and require multifaceted solutions. Often a planning model is disregarded in favour of another that appears to provide a solution to the weaknesses of the initial model. However, as is discussed above, this is not as successful as it seems. Each planning approach offers a key strength to form an efficient, inclusive and adaptable planning process. Similarly, the weaknesses of each approach are compensated for by the strengths of the others. An integrated approach to planning that involves the problem-solving techniques of collaborative planning, the structured process of modern planning, and the ability to be rescaled that is present in spatial planning, will produce sustainable, timely solutions to complex issues. These approaches are not paradigms in their own right, as is demonstrated by the principles and aims that are common between them. Thus, it is possible to amalgamate the strengths of the above models to discover a planning approach that results in economically efficient, socially and culturally diverse, and environmentally sensitive outcomes.

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