

IMPRESSIONS OF PLANNING EDUCATION IN CENTRAL EUROPE

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Enkele persoonlike indrukke van beplanning en die akademie in Sentraal-Europa word aan die hand van onderhoude met kollegas daar in Maart/April 1991 beskryf. Hongarye en Pole word as "tipiese" voorbeelde in terme van sosio-ekonomiese faktore, praktyk, navorsing en die akademie bespreek. Vanaf 1989 het 'n pynlike transformasie plaasgevind waarin beide die individu en instellings groot aanpassings moes

maak. Daar is ook lesse vir 'n veranderende Suid-Afrika en beplanners hier. Ons behoort deur middel van akademiese uitruil en gesamentlike navorsing en projekte direkte kontak met ons kollegas op te bou.

This paper describes some personal impressions of planning and education in Central Europe gleaned from discussions with colleagues during study leave in March/April 1991. By way of illustration and for the sake of

brevity, conditions in Hungary and Poland are singled out as being typical of the region. The paper is divided into sections dealing with the socio-economic background, practice, research and education of planners. While the process of adjustment has been painful since 1989, there are useful lessons for the dynamic situation in South Africa. By means of joint projects and academic exchange both regions could benefit in future.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

In Central European countries planning is seen to be an Anglo-Saxon profession which has to co-ordinate, resolve conflicts and help to make decisions in a democratic society. In countries under authoritarian regimes however, the role of planning was mostly restricted to the technical and aesthetic solutions of decisions which had already been made by bureaucrats. The "general staff" were always planning the previous war, and as a consequence anything planning schools taught referred to past socio-economic realities no longer valid (Polonyi, 1991).

Models applied during the Development Decade in the Third World led to disillusionment and long-lasting trends of declining resources and may now bring similar results in Central Europe, pinned as it is between the Common Market and the East. One finds that Central Europe now has less faith in the future than the former African and Asian colonies had thirty years ago during the Development Decade. It seems easier to reach national unity by overthrowing an oppressive regime than to learn the rules of a working democracy, or to adopt an advisory role for planning.

The revivalisation of the private eco-

nomy has been inspired not only by the Reagan-Bush administration and Thatcherite Britain, but also by the prospects of Europe in 1992. Some socio-economic problems now include the disappearance of public investments and subsidized services, high inflation rates, unemployment, the impoverishment of significant strata of the society and growing stress between the privileged and underprivileged. Since many national boundaries have been opened up the results have been a new kind of unwanted mass-tourism, increasing numbers of illegal migrants, growing crime rates and deteriorating city centres.

In England or France governments offered those properties for sale to the private sector which had been acquired through compulsory purchase at relatively high prices by the earlier socialist governments. In Central Europe nearly all private property was simply taken away by totalitarian regimes, practically without any compensation. Theoretically it would be possible to give back those properties or to compensate their former owners, but how can that ownership pattern be restored two generations later?

In socialist countries when state-owned properties were converted into "limited companies", they became private prop-

erty without any money ever being paid into the Treasury. Thus former party bosses became partners and high ranking executives in joint ventures or multi-national agencies operating in the country. As parliament was not able to separate privatization from compensation, ownership rights are still uncertain, and the real-estate market remains confused. This alone may keep away foreign investors, and it may avoid a new economic colonization by Japan or the US, but it implies that politics will precede economical and social changes and lead towards a Latin-American model with non-democratic tendencies.

Regions on the periphery often follow the fashions created in metropolitan centers and even the aim of Khrushchev's programme was "to catch up with the West". Previous planning practice aimed at providing the whole population with standard housing, health, education and recreation facilities. The models followed were the urbanism of élitist France or the Welfare State of Labour Britain but not Soviet books or plans, contrary to what outsiders believe.

'New' problem groups are emerging in society like the aged, the handicapped, the urban poor and guest workers who need help. Others are a danger to soci-

ety, like drug addicts, criminals and terrorists, but all these are regarded as marginal. In the Third World the urban poor would not be regarded any more as marginal, because they are the majority. In Central Europe, due to the quick changes of values during the transition process, the number of people in the marginal class is growing dangerously. Thus planning policy has both to help the homeless and the poorer strata of society and to reduce the emergence of dangerous behaviour patterns which may lead to severe social conflicts.

In a society where one third of the population falls under the poverty limit like Poland or Hungary almost anything is possible. An optimistic view may assume that people can tolerate unemployment and the decline of their living standard as long as they can accommodate the new situation. It is much more difficult to prepare scenarios which depend on outside factors. It is uncertain whether Central Europe will be allowed to integrate into a Pan-European structure or face the protectionist policies of Western Europe. Further uncertainties include the possible disintegration of the Soviet Union or the balkanization of Central Europe. For example, the Yugoslav or Russian crises are dangerously near to Hungary and Poland, and planning strategies have to be developed for a future full of uncertainties, whereas the past was rigid and certain.

1 HUNGARY

1.1 Practice

In Hungary big state organizations used to monopolize all the important design and planning activities, so that most of the expertise was concentrated in mammoth offices specializing in the planning of public, residential, commercial or industrial uses and new towns. Since the licence or permission to practice was given by these highly specialized institutions private practice was confined to small-scale jobs performed as a form of "moonlighting".

Until recently planning was performed at two institutions only, one of which conducted studies and prepared planning proposals for Budapest, while the other concentrated on the rest of the country. It was always easy to organize a task force of experts from among architects, geographers, sociologists,



economists, engineers, ecologist and agricultural specialists, who were concentrated at these two institutions. But, since the over-centralized system is changing now this "automatic teamwork" will certainly disappear and one wonders what will replace it.

Protection of the environment was kept in the background and badly financed in the former regime because of political pressure as well as the vested interest of industrial lobbies. Now a new system has been proposed to combine the protection of the natural and the man-made environment in one ministry.

In most Central European countries inflation is currently running at over 30% per annum. The splendid cityscapes of Budapest or Pecs are seemingly deteriorating, little is done to solve the acute shortage of housing, infrastructural services are generally low by western standards and are deteriorating further due to lack of maintenance. Foreign investors only show interest in the fields of banking, services, catering, the media, land and property.

Planners have to face uncertainties

concerning land and property due to "missing" legislative decisions as well as competitive negotiations, and many kinds of complicated juries and committee meetings. Administrative units have multiplied. For example, greater Budapest is divided into 22 autonomous districts and the agglomeration of the capital consists of a further 44 authorities. Mechanisms to deal with problems at regional scale (water quality, environmental protection, transportation and sewage) have not yet developed and the consent of various authorities has to be obtained. One has to be aware not only of conservation areas, the protection of historical buildings or environmental issues, but also of achieving the best financial agreement. If a project passes all these barriers one has to face the capacity of the local building industry to take part, given its usual poor quality and low performance.

1.2 Research

The most prestigious society for promoting government sponsored research in Hungary is the Academy of Science (MTA), founded in 1825 for cultivating literature, art and science. In the past,

research money was channeled through the National Commission of Technological Development with its rather bureaucratic procedures and with its results being rarely measured. Research on planning related topics was conducted by the Institute for Urban Planning and Research (VATI), which was in the process of change when visited by the author in March 1991. Hungarian planning and research have achieved impressive results under difficult circumstances. For example:

- (a) The Commission for *Preservation of Historical Monuments and Sites* planned the reconstruction of the Castle District, which was devastated during the siege of Budapest in 1944-45.
- (b) A series of studies in *urban sociology*, strongly criticized the official development policy of constructing prefab, high rise housing estates.
- (c) The *environmental planners and ecologists* contributed spectacularly to the fall of the regime with their protests against controversial hydroelectric and industrial plants, and
- (d) Useful surveys and investigations were carried out during 40 years by the state-owned mammoth offices, for example the *data-bank* of the Metropolitan Engineering Services should be preserved.

1.3 Education

Hungary has never had separate formal planning education. The Faculty of Architecture at the Technical University is organized on Swiss or German models and has changed less over the last four decades than most West European or American schools. Its courses focus mainly on technical competence and lead to a single and final degree in Architecture (Dip. Ing. Arch.) requiring five years of study. Though the heavy lecture load and engineering requirements limit the time students can spend in planning studios and on specialized research, this dual qualification makes the graduate equally suitable for jobs in the field of architectural design, construction, town and country planning and the preservation of historical monuments. The TU organizes post-graduate courses for further qualifications like urbanism and conservation. The Masters' School is orga-

nized by the TU and offers a broad-scale course in the fields of theory, administration, economics and sociology.

The planning "division" seems to have a well travelled leadership, knowledgeable about international perspectives in education and professional practice and it also enjoys a favourable student-staff ratio. As salaries in the academic world are extremely low, working morale is low and there is a need to have more than one job. The age profile of the staff is also a severe problem while their voting power on the university senate makes it difficult for real reform proposals to be accepted. For example, the formation of a separate planning school is desired but not yet forthcoming (Vidor, 1991).

International contacts have grown gradually and since 1983 the staff have organized international workshops and seminars for students and recent graduates. For example in 1989 there was a summer course on the problems of environmental exploitation in the Danube valley. For the last seven years all the courses in planning are also available in English ... South African universities please note. There are also various joint exchange programmes with schools in the UK, Austria, France, USA, Japan and Korea, and new opportunities for all kinds of joint programmes multiply quickly e.g. the Erasmus Programme of the Common Market. However, the staff have identified the need to introduce more practical training and mid-career professional courses at the local level.

The mobility of planning students has increased gradually in the last decade and many of the best students have the opportunity to go abroad. While there is normally nothing wrong with the "brain drain", in the present transition period student mobility may raise questions. There are about twenty good planning students graduating in a year and if these go abroad, the profession in Hungary may face new problems.

2. POLAND

2.1 Practice

In Poland the organization and functioning of physical planning was the result of regulations characteristic of a centralised system which functioned between 1950 and 1989. It contained two independent sub-systems of physi-

cal and socio-economic planning, and these were reflected in the organization of planning offices. Some left-overs of economic planning survive at the central and provincial levels but these are no longer valid. The basic elements of the system were planning bureaus operating in all major centres, with grassroots planning being quite dormant.

In 1989 stopgap measures were introduced to adjust the left-overs to new arrangements for self-government at the local level, and the following should be borne in mind:

- (a) Simultaneous institutional reform of planning is necessary as well as legislation and new education systems.
- (b) The attitudes of the public at large and the ruling elites towards reform should be taken into account.
- (c) The socio-economic crisis also adds to difficulties in the path of planning reform.

Under the former system planning offices and bureaus were the only planning units producing master plans but they have now lost their exclusivity. Today plans may be initiated by other institutions including private ones and groups of experts or various competing units. Because of the absence of legal regulations, archaic planning methods, and varying professional expertise of individual units, the quality of planning may show a downward tendency.

In theory the model of national development planning offered the opportunity to arrive at correct comprehensive solutions. In practice there were no modifications to the model and no open discussions by urban planners on how the efficacy of planning could be improved. Economic planning set the tone for many years, when socio-economic plans provided guidelines for physical planners whose job it was to implement the given programme physically. The hierarchical system provided that the guidelines from higher-level plans were binding on lower levels.

At the lowest level there was the "diktat" of the building contractor (usually a construction co-operative) intervening between the plan and its implementation. Large consortia were in a position to dictate to planners which specific buildings should be put up (using

prefabricated technology) and the results can be seen in dreary, uniform housing estates.

During the post-war reconstruction period the social standing of urban planners was very high and was related to the country's reconstruction effort. Gradually, fewer and fewer plans were implemented according to prior arrangements. Decisions were frequently made outside of the planning process and were prompted by short-term political considerations. The position of the architect-planner both in terms of income and social status has now been downgraded.

Housing shortages were the reason why the plans for housing districts and estates were implemented without infrastructure. Mass housing units were built without shops, schools, clinics or cinemas. Also, ill-advised decisions on the siting of industrial plants caused degradation of the natural environment. Such a crisis of confidence in planning coincided with the economic crisis, dwindling resources and shrinking commissions. Kowalewski (1991) describes the typical Polish urban planner as "a frustrated engineer a specialist of low social and financial standing, largely advanced in years, devoid of ideas, and no longer believing that anything could ever take a turn for the better".

2.2 Research

Research in urban planning and community development is done in many Polish institutes, to mention several:

- * The Polish Academy of Science, Institute of Geography and Physical Management.
- * The Institute of Physical Planning and Municipal Economy.
- * The Institute of Construction Organisation, renamed Housing Institute.

The Committee of National Physical Management at the Polish Academy of Science often carries out special research or draws up papers bearing on national physical planning policies. Studies of the natural environment and measures needed to counteract the threats to it, are also carried out by several research institutions including: Environmental Protection, Environmental Engineering, Meteorology and Water Management, Surveying and

Cartography and the State Geographical Institute. A Committee called "Man and Environment" at the Polish Academy of Science, prepares opinions and draws up reports on issues pertaining to environmental policies.

During the last decade ecological issues have figured prominently when raised by opposition intellectuals and scholars. On the other hand the communist government was also ready to sponsor and organise ecological research so as to avoid accusations of ignoring vital national problems. For the government it was less expensive and easier to finance the research than to support concrete projects seeking to mend the state of the environment.

Until recently, research work was centrally planned and sponsored directly by the state and the time horizon was set in five-year periods to correspond with the five-year plans of socio-economic development. Everything was divided into either central or departmental categories: with the central programme concentrating on basic research and development, and departmental programmes linked to practical use. For example, the Institute of Physical Planning and Municipal Economy co-ordinated a Programme entitled "Upgrading of Municipal Economy Functioning" and a departmental programme entitled "Local Physical Planning".

In addition, the state was the principal sponsor and end-user, appointing special institutions to apply research results. The users did not signal their needs at all because it was the scientists who sought to impose their research on imaginary end-users. In the last decade the slogan was "practical applicability of research". However, the economic crisis has been responsible for the lack of funds for putting new techniques into use, resulting in growing frustration and disaffection on the part of researchers.

In future however practical applicability of research will cease to be the prime criterion when evaluating its usefulness and funding. Instead, the solution of genuine scientific problems will be a salient objective of research. If the users choose to employ the results of such research, they will have to formulate their precise needs and subsequently meet the cost. Hopefully,

under the market economy both sides will find research to be a paying proposition; frustrated and underpaid Polish researchers are pinning their hopes on this.

2.3 Education

Technical Universities are found in Poland's major cities like Warsaw, Cracow and Gdansk. The training of urban or physical planners proceeds outside the mainstream as there are no specialist departments. Professional qualifications are acquired through long years of practice, often combined with various post-graduate or specialist courses. The education options are as follows:

- * certain university departments of Architecture offer specialised urban planning courses;
- * certain university schools run physical planning post-graduate courses, e.g. the Warsaw Technical University.
- * physical planning is also taught at departments of geography, and in several economic and agricultural schools, e.g. at the Warsaw Agricultural University, Department of Landscape Architecture.

For many years the planning profession has been discussing whether the planner should be trained through a bachelor's course of study or by way of a second-degree or post-graduate specialization. No consensus either way has yet been reached, which coincides with opinion in South Africa.

Today, the situation of physical planning in Poland entails entirely novel problems in the field of personnel training. The profession is on the decline, and the result may be waning student interest. Lack of funds may cause post-graduate courses to be phased out, and all this is happening when a new economic and political situation calls for both, a new programme to train future urban and physical planners and for a special programme to retrain planners already in the profession. Such courses must include legal and economic questions, negotiating skills and modern planning techniques. All of this sounds very familiar to a South African educator.

3 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

3.1 Prior to the democratic revolution

scientific activities in Central Europe were financed from state appropriations without linkage to planning practice. In the old situation science was an end in itself, but now market principles are being introduced for application to research and planning activities.

- 3.2 During extensive negotiation with the bureaucracy the process of investment and preparation was very slow. The actual users of the towns and buildings under construction were excluded from the planning process and their interests were indirectly represented by an official. At present there is a serious shortage of "seed money" for new projects, but foreign investments by countries such as Germany, Japan or the USA raise new fears of "economic colonialism".
- 3.3 With the arrival of the market economy and the reduction in investments however, state institutions are beginning to disintegrate. There is a process underway of converting some of these institutions into private ones, and changing the relationship between the planner, the developer and the investor. At present all the laws dealing with the planning process are being changed, e.g. laws on ownership, land and privatization.
- 3.4 During communist rule universities were subordinated to party interference and intervention both in the choice of teachers and in the instruction system - based on authoritarian principles. The system of education for planners is now under full reconstruction, but there are painful personal and institutional adjustments in this

process. Is this our "rationalisation" in disguise?

When we remove misleading political labels like Communism, Socialism or Capitalism, then there are lessons to be learned from the revolution in Central Europe. Indeed the similarities with a changing South Africa are too close for complacency. The challenges for planners here are: firstly to keep in contact with the latest developments and secondly, to forge links with our colleagues in Central Europe by means of academic exchange, joint research projects and even planning consortia.

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