Piecing Together Planning Priorities

Planners around the globe are eagerly anticipating the World Urban Forum in Vancouver in 2006. Marking the thirtieth anniversary of the Habitat conference, it will be a time to reflect on the contributions that planning has made, and to examine priorities now facing the profession and the constituencies with whom it works. The Association of Canadian University Planning Programs, the Canadian Institute of Planners and the Institute of Urban Studies of the University of Winnipeg support the Forum with the publication of this second annual issue of Canadian Planning and Policy - Aménagement et politique au Canada. The call for papers was issued with the intention of fostering discussion of the Forum themes: the secure city, capacity building, the learning city, the liveable city and the uncertain city. The papers included in this journal constitute the results.

It turns out that the call for papers led to a call for action: the work presented here speaks from the view that planning is at a crucial stage, and urges the adoption of a variety of programmatic measures. The context is set through Jeanne Wolfe's thoughtful obituary of Harold Spence-Sales, founding director of the planning school at McGill. Reflection on his significant career links back to the burgeoning growth of planning in the period following World War 2, bringing to mind images of purposeful optimism in a profession - in a nation - marshalling energies towards provision of living environments and services for a population undergoing unprecedented expansion and urbanization.

In hindsight, the sense of direction and unified action characteristic of planning in the early post-war period hindered awareness of social differences. It obscured the view of society in Canada, and in many economically advanced nations, as a tapestry of many diverse pieces, to invoke the imagery conveyed by Kristina Nordstrom in her cover design. The rich and textured nature of society was repressed in planning thinking by the predominant assumptions of sameness and homogeneity, expressed in terminology such as the 'common good' and 'public interest.' Many planners, taking guidance from this view of social coherence, saw their role as one of defining the public interest in relation to every planning issue and giving it expression in plans for social action.

The work grouped in the section Diversity and Difference in Planning explores just how problematic these conceptualizations can be. The papers come from Toronto, one of the most multicultural cities in the world, and while in a sense they relate to that particular setting, readers will find that the critical

analyses and the recommendations fit well with experiences elsewhere. Goonewardena, Rankin and Weinstock draw on contemporary social criticism to conceptualise diversity in Canada and to situate planning in that complex context. They then focus on planning education, reporting on efforts to diversify planning schools in Ontario, and recommending actions for the Canadian Institute of Planners, the Association of Canadian University Planning Programs and individual planning schools. Rahder and Milgrom share some of these concerns and critically examine how contemporary planning theory has begun to make space for social differences in planning processes. They argue, however, that communicative action, an approach that has gained some credibility as an emergent paradigm over recent years, does not sufficiently provide for inter-cultural relations; and they argue for planners to embrace notions of redistributive justice. Their paper also provides recommendations for the reform of planning education. The final piece in the Difference and Diversity section is an invited comment by Beth Moore Milroy, who gives support to the overall concerns of the papers and provides useful context. She does this by taking us through replies to several ostensibly innocuous questions, honing in on such key themes as role, substance and consequence; and by elaborating concepts of equity and justice that can move planning forward.

The next two papers illustrate how much difference and diversity really do matter by drawing our attention to contemporary issues of social polarization. Murray's piece traces recent shifts in federal policy. Social programs elaborated in the period of post-war optimism emphasised that protection from risks of unemployment, ill health and many other dislocations in industrialised society is a collective concern. The recent policy shifts consolidate a denial of the systematic basis of needs for these services and designate people who are marginalised through their exclusion from mainstream social and economic life as vulnerable populations, to be cared for by local communities, and as threats to the social order. The piece by Grant, Greene and Maxwell describes experiences in Canada with gated communities as an emerging living arrangement, and underscores the lack of policy in relation to this residential form. Many issues require that planners give attention to gated enclaves, including privatization of urban facilities, connectivity of the urban fabric and social cohesion. The final paper is a research note in which Fraser and Mabee investigate the transfer of ecological theory to the assessment of vulnerability in urban systems.

To fashion coherence in public policy in face of diversity and difference requires careful rearrangement of planning priorities. The work represented in

this journal is offered to further the debate. In closing, it remains to express thanks to the Canadian Journal of Urban Research as the host publication, the three organizations supporting the project, and the many anonymous referees from planning schools and related disciplines across the country. Special thanks go to Michelle Swanson and Jino Distasio of the Institute of Urban Studies.

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