

Editorial Introduction: The Need for Direct, Transparent, and Respectful Transactions Between Planning Participants

The fact that planning, in virtually all its forms, involves transactions is underlined in this collection of six diverse papers. Collectively, the papers deal with transactions between cultures, government agencies, professional disciplines, communities, and implementation agents. Together, the papers affirm the importance of ensuring that communication between stakeholders is direct, transparent, and respectful.

Luna Khirfan and Zahra Jaffer lead off this year's issue of *Canadian Policy and Planning* with an examination of transactions between cultures. Their in-depth case studies focus on the efforts of planners based in Toronto and Vancouver to apply their planning knowledge in Amman and Abu Dhabi, respectively. Drawing on a review of documentation, interviews with stakeholders, as well as participant observations, they conclude that there were mixed results with greater success occurring in Abu Dhabi where the ruling elite exercised firmer control over planning processes, with the result that the ensuing planning interventions corresponded closely with what they were prepared to implement. While both of the consulting teams sought to consult widely, their efforts to engage in participatory planning were limited by government structures and customs. Nonetheless, the authors found that the effectiveness of trans-cultural planning depends on the extent to which planners are prepared to engage in an experimental learning process that involves a two-way exchange of ideas and practices. As Mohammad Qadeer succinctly put it, international and intercultural planning is a bit like a ping-pong game where the participants do their best return the ball to the table despite erratic bounces along the way. Both players need to be actively involved throughout the process. It is not a one-way transfer.

Closer to home, Kim Bergeron and Lucie Levesque examine transactions with respect to active community policies among Ontario government ministries. As many different policies influence the development of communities where residents are encouraged and enabled to maintain active and healthy lifestyles, the authors reviewed a wide array of documents and conducted interviews with officials in a number of different ministries. They conclude

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that, despite very good intentions, inter-ministerial collaboration and co-ordination remain a challenge. This is disappointing given the efforts in the early nineties to promote “Healthy Cities” through the creation of city-wide committees with active links to all relevant government departments, as well as, community representatives. The need for greater effectiveness in promoting active, healthy communities is further underlined by an increasing body of evidence-based research that clearly demonstrates the relationship between urban form and health.

Victoria Kramkowski’s contribution, which focuses on the need to integrate ecological design within innovative planning concepts such as New Urbanism, provides an example of interdisciplinary transactions. She argues that while many of the principles associated with New Urbanism are laudable, greater attention should be given to the biophysical principles and processes that are embedded in ecological design for all projects, regardless of scale. This requires careful attention to human and ecological interactions in urban settings. In her view, the planning fraternity is rooted in the humanities and social sciences and all too often does is not meaningfully informed by the biophysical sciences. She provides specific objectives and strategies that may be applied to bridge these disciplines.

Two papers tackle that the transactions that occur between stakeholders during planning processes. Tanya Christidis and Jane Law focus on a specific and very topical subject; the public’s perception of, and willingness to accept, wind turbines that are proposed for their region. Following a review of the literature concerning wind turbine planning approaches and impacts, including health, the authors conclude that many of the problems with community resistance encountered by proponents are a direct effect of the application of top down policies and decisions. They argue that a collaborative planning approach that engaged local residents would offer residents a sense of personal efficacy in the decision making process and improve opportunities to seek “win-win” solutions with clear local community benefits. These observations are clearly pertinent to other controversial planning issues, such as the placement of cell phone towers.

Raphaelle Aubin and Lisa Bornstein also deal with the transactions that occur between stakeholders during public consultation processes. Their research assesses the effectiveness of an independent consultation body, the Office de la consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM) which was set up by the City of Montreal, in terms of context, process, and outcomes with respect to four specific projects. They conclude that while the OCPM is capable of administering effective consultations that met a high standard, the overall public hearing process remains vague and politicized. The limited mandate given to the OCPM coupled with outside, undocumented consultations that take place

between project sponsors and specific stakeholders undermine the public hearing process. The latter concern raises an important issue that increasingly compromises public consultation in all jurisdictions. While project proponents have become more sensitive to the need to incorporate community concerns into their plans, there is a danger that a “divide and conquer” approach may be used to receive the support of specific groups through agreements that are not subject to public review.

Finally, transactions between implementation agents are explored in Jill Grant and Daniel Scott’s paper concerning “Complete Communities”. Essentially the authors seek to understand why traditional suburban environments continue to be produced despite the efforts of the planning profession to promote compact form, mixed use, higher density, and a range of housing options in suburban environments. Following a review of development trends in Vancouver, Calgary, and Toronto, all of which are experiencing rapid growth, Grant and Scott report on interviews that they conducted with planners, city councilors, and developers. They found that planners favor complete communities, which offer places to live, work, and play as well as good access to public transportation systems. In contrast, developers focus on responding to their perception of consumer preferences, while city councilors hold varied views between these normative and populist perspectives. Further, little attention is given to the inclusion of low-income housing. By redefining concepts such as density as vibrancy and choice; difference as diversity and entertainment; attached housing as convenient, low maintenance and neighborly; planners may have greater success achieving their goals. In any case, planners need to better understand the market dynamics and discourses that influence the decisions made by developers as they assess the preferences of their potential clients.

Clearly, diverse transactions occur between a wide variety of agents during the preparation and execution of plans. The research reported in this issue of CPP suggests that it is critically important to clearly identify and map out the links between agents and examine the nature of the interactions that take place along each link.

This annual publication is a collaborative effort between the Canadian Institute of Planners, the Association of Canadian University Planning Programs, and Canadian Journal of Urban Research. The goal is to provide a scholarly record of planning in Canada that invites reflection by practitioners, academics, and students alike and contributes to the emergence of new approaches that help the profession as a whole meet its central obligation, which is to seek an appropriate balance between social, local economic, and biophysical imperatives.