

The Human Values of City Planning

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ABSTRACT

Values have been defined as "conceptions of the desirable, influencing behavior." This article places the value issue into the context of city planning. An argument supporting the connection between values and city planning as a behavioral output is set forth and a study in progress seeking to quantify the relationship is described.

No man-created reality is the consequence of random events. Our institutions, the configurations of our economic and political systems, the character of our social lives all are contrived. Planning, in its broadest sense, is a unique quality of a species capable of changing its environment to suit itself and adapting its behavior in turn to the changes wrought. And planning as a conscious effort is as old as the species. What differs through human history is the quality of planning—its locus, its time horizon, its implications on organization; the status, power, and influence of the planner; the extent to which a plan is accepted or rejected by those affected through its implementation.

Implicit in the process of planning is its goal—a normative statement of a desirable end condition. The goal is perforce a valued state, a good thing (at least to someone) and justifiable only in those terms. The plan set to realize the desired goal would seem value-free. A "rational" man would set out the feasible alternative action plans concomitant with his resources, assess their respective costs; and proceed to prosecute the least costly plan. But clearly, this man cannot function freely wherever tradition, politics, or plural interests have a bearing on what is feasible. For example, the leaders

of a state may wish to ease the burden of self-support on the elderly citizens. A plan for geraticide would solve the problem: the elderly would have no worries left. But this plan would be generally unacceptable to today's Americans (although it was to certain tribes of Plains Indians of aboriginal America). Plans as well as goals are value-loaded, and the plans set forth by whatever agency reflect the values of those who participate in creating them.

Urban planning is an activity as old as the urb. This small fact is a fundamental intellectual underpinning which justifies that profession. The value dimension to urban planning is as old as the plans themselves. That the street layout of ancient Miletus, an Ionian Town of the of the 6th Century B.C., looks about the same as modern midtown Manhattan, might suggest that the same planning rationale guided those who platted the property. But Hippodamus of Miletus was creating in two dimensions later Pythagorean notions of universal perfection. He must have reasoned that Milesians, by living in a theorem, would become as elegant, perfect and exalted as the rectilinearity which guided their steps.

New York's Commission members of 1807 were more mundane in their expectations. The criteria for platting the future growth of the city were speed and economic efficacy. The potential for speculative real-estate trading riches is enhanced by convenient parceling in the first place, and the Commission's plan reflected to perfection the calculating avarice of its members and backers. The process and the quality of living in Manhattan could not have entered Gouverneur Morris' mind as the Commission plan emerged.

The similarities between the two plans are remarkable. But there are subtle differences: the greater proportion of East-West to North-South streets in the Manhattan plan reflected a normative prescription for the perpetuation of the economic dependence of the city on her girdling rivers. Easy access from New York City to the wharfs of Brooklyn and Hoboken was more important than from Pearl Street to the bucolic Harlem. Miletus' major axes converged on her central market and temple precinct—the normative locus of human activity in that city at that time.

Values are often defined as conceptions of the desirable, influencing behavior. Values are therefore normative in effect. They are, when articulated, statements of the way things *should* be. When urban planning is given over to some agency (technico-philosophical as Hippodamus; lay opportunist, as the 1807 Commission; or rational-professional, as today's city-planning consultant) the plans put forth are also normative—a statement of the way cities *should* be. The plan also embodies the planners notion of what the *purpose* of the city should be. This is clear, for example, in Christian Reuter's instructions in the 1765 plan for the

congregation town of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Reuter designed the town explicitly to foster the close-knit social matrix which characterized communal living in the early Moravian settlements.

Thus human values, imbedded in the individual personalities of planning influentials are ultimately expressed in the city plans they put forth.

No planner is, however, entirely autonomous in his actions. There are constraints on his efforts. The predilections of his patron, the requirements of statute law, the pressures of politics and plural interests all serve to trammel the planning prescription. The planner's perception of the importance of these restrictions may be affected by his values. For example, the legitimacy of the village plan of New York's eighteenth-century Harlem was ignored by the 1807 Commissioners in platting Manhattan Island. The law was on the side of New York City when village officials brought suit against the planners who overlaid the grid on the then-existing streets of Harlem. Other values might have permitted Harlem's identity to stand, as was the identity of the village of Greenwich.

We are engaged in a study, supported by the Center for Urban Environmental Studies, whose purpose is to prove the existence of differences in the individual values of city planners, and to relate these differences to differences in planning prescriptions. We are also interested in seeing whether and to what extent constraints on planning activity are perceived as more or less important in their impact by planners holding different values.

Considering the complexity of modern city planning, our approach is highly abstract. We are measuring the values only of professional city planners. The values of politicians, clergymen, affected citizens and other groups who input to the planning process have not been considered. The test we are using provides a score on each of six value dimensions or orientations: theoretical, economic, aesthetic, social, political, and religious. The resulting score is a "value profile," showing the salience of one or several value orientations in his personality.¹ Our preliminary results indicate a profession whose members, not surprisingly, may be generally described as being salient in "aesthetic" and in "social" values. A grouping occurs on the "political" and "economic" dimensions as well. This finding suggests a source of the technocrat *vs.* advocate conflict in the planning profession today.

Values are conceptions of the desirable, *influencing behavior*. Since city plans are (constrained) behavioral responses of planners to the city planning problem, we should be able to see different solutions to a particular planning problem depending on differences in the value salience of the planner solving the problem. Our respondents were asked to solve a trivial

planning problem—to choose from a list of retail establishments (identified by type and floor space as, e.g., “barbershop . . . 450 square feet”) those which they think should serve the needs of residents of a briefly described hypothetical urban renewal project in a central city location. We reasoned that the effect of values on a planning prescription at the macroscopic level as, for example, an entire city, would be discernable on the microscopic level as well as, for example, planned local trade for planned residential communities. We expect to find differences in planning values reflected in the differences in kinds of stores, their number and size, and gross commercial floor space prescribed by planners showing salience in one or another value dimension. Our respondents are also asked to sketch where they would locate the commercial space relative to the residential space on the site. The placement may either be “peripheral” or “centralized” as determined by content analysis of the sketches. We expect to find differences in spatial arrangements dependent on the value orientations of the planners.

Preliminary findings support our hypotheses. We see a consistent difference in the planning prescriptions of “social” vs. “economic” respondents. Planners showing salience on social values prescribe a larger number of stores (and gross commercial space) than planners high on economic values. “Social” planners tend to centralize the stores relative to the residential space and “economic” planners tend to place the commercial space peripherally to the housing. These differences are statistically significant on the social-economic poles. The relationship between values and plans are less sharply drawn on the other value dimensions.

Finally, we asked our respondents to indicate what would be the relative importance of “real life” constraints on the realization of their ideal plan for commercial space as it had been put forth in their problem solution. The constraints (there are twelve of them) include such statements as “zoning regulations” and “commercial establishments as places of social interaction.” The respondent is asked to indicate their impact on his planning prescription by characterizing them on a scale from “very important” to “very unimportant.” We expect to find differences in perceptions of the importance of these constraints depending on the value orientations of the respondent planners.

Our early analysis indicates that *some* constraints are perceived in their importance differentially by values. The dichotomy between economic and social values continued to hold through this portion of the study, especially on constraints loaded with social import. For example, “social” planners deemed “commercial establishments as places of social interaction” significantly more important in its impact on planning prescriptions than “economic” planners.

This research exercise is meant to explore the assertion that planning is not value-free. We hope the results will reinforce the intuitive validity of this point of view, and encourage deeper explorations into the value issue on a more scientific basis. We hope also that the issue of "rationality" in the planning process will become a legitimate area on which to focus research effort.

We would like to comment briefly on this last point. "Rational" behavior is behavior consistent with the optimization of some objective function. The queen of the social sciences—economics—has dominated the discussion of rational behavior since Adam Smith. With its limited assumptions about "human nature" (human psychology), economics has posited the profit function as the objective function of merit. Atomistic man, faced with alternative plans of action toward the goal of his ultimate well-being (wealth), behaves rationally if, and only if, the plan chosen maximizes his rewards (profits). Later refinements have introduced the risk and time components into the rational plan-of-action calculus. Even so, the behavior of the altruist, aesthete, poet, guru, and hippie are incomprehensible in the context of economic rationality. Yet these people exist. But what is the objective function towards whose maximization they strive; a social function, an aesthetic function?

The city planning prescription of a "social" man may be importantly different from that of an "economic" man. Each prescription is entirely rational if it is consistent with the maximization of a profit function in the latter case, or of a social function in the former. What is required for coherent and conflict-free city planning is some generalized agreement on precisely what is to be "maximized." This will force a confrontation with the human value premises which underlay the specification of every goal and the generation and choice of every plan-of-action. We hope our studies will help to illumine this vital connection, at a time when the value issue has become one of the most important of our times.

REFERENCES

1. The basis of the values test is found in Spranger, Eduard. *Types of Men*. Trans. Paul J. W. Pigors. Max Niemeyer Verlag, Halle, 1928. Spranger discusses the value dimensions in detail. The test we are using is the popular Allport, Vernon, Lindzey "Study of Values," Third Edition, 1960.