

THE INSTRUMENTS OF PLANNING: Urban Management

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Introduction

Urban management is not an instrument of planning. Plan-making is an instrument of urban management.

Plans are needed from time to time for particular purposes. It is a mistake to conceive of 'planning' as a simple lineal progression from plan to implementation. Further, 'planning' and 'urban management' should not be conceived as competing approaches to urban public policy. The making of plans should be seen as a public policy tool for the achievement of deliberate, and at times, quite limited objectives. Urban managers are not the implementers of plans prepared by professional planners. Rather, professional plan-makers are but some of the urban managers whose civic and infrastructure design skills and strategic understanding are employed at times and on tasks considered necessary in the process of managing an urban area.

Planning does not equal the production of the plan. Planning is thinking ahead before making a decision. Thinking ahead and deciding to leave aspects of the development of a city to market forces can be as valid a decision as deciding to produce a plan and control development according to its precepts.

Professional planners, especially as employees of an independent or semi-independent state planning agency, are not given the function of coordinating everyone else in a government for good reasons. The agency is not structured to be a central agency. Further, the other professionally-based organisations in government do not recognise the planning profession as pre-eminent.

Accordingly, professionally-based planning agencies are given powers limited to development control and some allied functions such as land acquisition for particular purposes. Generally, even the power to control the development of other government agencies is circumscribed.

Public Policy Tasks in Managing Urban Areas

I have gone through some 50 pieces of research on policy questions in the last few years and every instance is marked by an absence of any attempt to define the term...

For the most part, "policy" and "planning" are used in their ordinary language sense and are, therefore, virtually indistinguishable from a strategy, programme, design description, schematic, and guide - and they are often made synonymous with decision, goal, and outcome. [Landau 1973, p. 537]

Dye eschews complex definitions of public policy and suggests that public policy is "whatever governments choose to do or not to do" (Dye 1981, p.1).

Urban policy is but a part of public policy generally. The pretension of urban planning is that, by its 'holistic approach', it is in some special category of public policy activity. As mentioned above, the situation in terms of legal powers is somewhat different. The breadth of the policy interest and the narrowness of the power given to planning agencies has led to ambivalence about the effectiveness of urban planning as it is practised (Kilmartin & Thorns 1978: p. 101).

The public policy tasks in managing urban areas include the following four areas:

Fiscal and Monetary Policy Setting

Economic policy tools influence substantially the structure and nature of cities. One has only to compare the post-war economy in Australia and its dependence on the 'suburbanisation industry', with the policies regarding capital investment adopted by Japan, to appreciate the urban consequences of the use of these policy tools. A recent example is the treatment of

pensioner-owned homes so far as the assets test is concerned, and the absence of capital gains tax on the family home. If these policies were changed, it could be expected that there would be a substantial increase in the demand for small or medium-density housing from the per cent of pensioners who own their own homes.

Other examples of economic policy tools come from the manner in which funds are made available by the Commonwealth to the State; for example, the extent and nature of public housing and the amount of loan funds available for infrastructure development.

Administrative Structures

The structure of public sector organisations affect the nature and sequence of decisions relating to the development of urban areas. Public sector organisations have needs which are reflected in urban development decisions.

A public sector organisation designed to produce low-density allotments for sale will tend to pursue public policy objectives which encourage the production of detached house lots as a means of fulfilling accommodation demands. Other alternatives will tend to be discounted by that organisation. Such a policy bias may be overcome by the existence of other public or private sector organisations with other policy objectives, but where they do not exist, or are subsumed within a single organisation, such strong organisational needs can become powerful determinants of urban policy.

It becomes clear that managers are partisan players in the political processes which arise and give shape to the structuring of relations. Their position and standing in these processes depends on their reputed and demonstrated ability to shape and maintain systems of order to which sufficient and significant groupings within the organisation and wider society can subscribe.

The activities in which they engage, (i.e. propagating generalised value-rule frameworks) are not mutual in content and in intent. Rather, these activities are oriented towards shapings and/or sustaining the external systems or order and sustaining their own positions both within and external to an organisation. [Degeling & Colebatch 1984, p. 327]

Individuals within organisations tend to behave as the organisation, through its formal and informal structures, requires them to behave. An important policy tool for the management of urban areas is therefore to be found in the restructuring of influential agencies to provide different organisational needs.

Investment Decisions

Obviously decisions regarding the initial investment in infrastructure, as well as policies relating to the operation and maintenance of services, influence both city functions and forms. The public policy influences operating on investment decisions represent a complex set of relationships flowing from fiscal and monetary policies, organisational needs, the technology of budgetary systems, and community demands.

Exercise of Development Control

Governments exercise development control to prohibit certain uses in specified areas. In addition, conditions relating to matters of design or financial contribution to public services may be imposed. The zoning of an area of land for particular uses will not ensure that those uses take place. Development control is essentially a negative and reactive policy tool which depends upon a demand for investment or change of use to occur before the policy tool takes effect. This demand for investment or change will occur as a result of general economic policies and/or by public investment decisions relating to urban infrastructure such as transport or hydraulic services.

When practitioners speak about 'positive planning' rather than 'negative planning' (i.e. development control), they tend to be speaking of influencing the general economic policies and public investment decisions which may give rise to investment. Sometimes, of course, 'positive planning' is seen as the waiving of a development control to provide a land owner with a capital gain and thus turn an unprofitable development (unprofitable because the price paid for the land reflected its zoning at the time of purchase) into one that will return a surplus.

The Role of Plans

Cadastral Maps

Development control requires a plan; that is, it depends on a cadastral map showing areas of land (zones) where different rules apply regarding the nature of development which will be permitted. These rules identify land uses which will be encouraged or prohibited and may describe the design and siting and functional requirements for particular types of development. As development control requires legislation to make it effective, the rules applying to various zones will need to be enforceable. Accordingly, the plan showing the zones will be given statutory recognition in some manner.

Investment decisions by government also involve a plan of some kind to provide the information on which to base decisions regarding the location of services and facilities. This plan will serve two purposes: first, to identify the areas where development is or is not likely to take place, and secondly, to identify cadastrally where the service or facility should be located. These plans do not require statutory force and there is no legal requirement that they be made available to the public.

Strategic Plans

The publication of a plan to advise the public regarding broad policies for the future of urban areas (as against advising land owners of the consequences of those policies for their development rights) does not require the publication of a cadastral map. It is for this reason that the strategic plans which have been published in recent years for metropolitan areas have tended not to be on a cadastral base. The first generation of metropolitan plans, on the other hand, were on a cadastral base. The legislation establishing the planning control system required a statutory metropolitan plan as the basis of the imposition of that control.

A major difficulty with the first generation plans was this confusion of aims – strategic and statutory. The consequence was that, in a number of areas, statutory land use decisions were made far in advance of the need to make them. In the interests of being able to present an overall long-term end-state plan, later policy options were foreclosed by statutory zonings which, for legal, financial or political reasons, could not be later down-zoned.

Subsequent strategic plans have not had to double as statutory plans. If new policy required an alteration to zoning controls, amendments to the existing cadastral zoning plans could be made either on a wholesale or individual basis. In these circumstances, the cadastral plans can be seen as tools of the strategic policy document.

Given that the latter day strategic plans are not required for operation of a development control system (although they may be needed to politically justify changes to the controls), the issue to be considered is the effectiveness of a public strategic planning exercise as a tool of public policy-making for an urban region.

Urban Plan-making as an Example of Rational Comprehensive Policy

The above discussion attempts to place the role of plan-making in the urban policy context. What follows is an analysis of the traditional form of urban plan-making as a public policy technique. It argues that urban plan-making of the traditional kind is an example of the 'rational comprehensive' approach to public policy-making.

The Rational Comprehensive Model

Policies are based on some understanding of cause and effect. Policies involve both goals and the means of attaining them. Goal setting raises a question of values which need to be resolved by 'the community'.

The rational comprehensive model of policy-making involves a series of logical steps (Kellow 1987). These can be summarised as:

1. Identify general goals.
2. Translate goals into objectives which are more specific and can guide action.
3. Rank the objectives in order of priority.
4. Examine alternative courses of action for achieving each given objective, making explicit costs and benefits attached to each.
5. Examine the feasibility of various options, noting the extent to which they add or detract from other values.

6. Choose one option by comparing the expected benefits of each with its probable costs.
7. Implement the chosen course of action.
8. Monitor and evaluate.

This model of policy-making has been criticised by several writers (Simon 1976; Lindblom 1959, 1979). Simon has argued that human beings rarely adopt this decision-making approach; people simply do not have the wits to maximise. Part of the problem is that determining all the potentially favourable and unfavourable consequences of all the feasible courses of actions would require the decision-maker to process so much information that impossible demands would be made on resources and mental capacity. Decision-makers are often under severe pressure of time which precludes careful search and appraisal. Such information as is available may be coloured. Decision-makers, in fact, use a 'bounded rationality'.

The criticisms of the rational comprehensive model can be summarised as relating to three factors:

- resources are inevitably limited
- information reaching the decision maker is often coloured
- time lags often cause information to be out of date by the time it arrives.

Incrementalism Contrasted

The competing model of decision-making, called incrementalism by its first theorist, is also known as the model of successive limited comparison. For Lindblom 'muddling through' is a process to be commended, not condemned. Richardson and Jordon (1979) compare the rational comprehensive model to the incrementalist model (or as they describe it, the successive limited comparison model).

The fundamental underpinning of successive limited comparison (or incrementalism) is that policy-making involves achieving agreement between groups. This is a primary reason for avoiding a preliminary insistence on clarification of values or objectives – the probability of harmony at that stage is low. The emphasis on accommodation between

groups explains why decision-making takes the form of comparison between the pragmatically available alternatives.

Rational Comprehensive Model	Successive Limited Comparison Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarification of values or objectives distinct from and usually prerequisite to impartial analysis of alternative policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Selection of value goals and empirical analysis of the needed action are not distinct from one another but are closely entwined.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policy formulation is therefore approached through a means-end analysis; first, ends are isolated, then means to achieve them are sought.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Since means and ends are not distinct; means-end analysis is often inappropriate or limited.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The test of a good policy is that it can be shown to be the more appropriate means to desired ends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The test of a good policy is typically that various analysts find themselves agreeing on a policy (without their agreeing that it is the most appropriate means to an agreed objective).
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysis is comprehensive; every relevant factor is taken into account.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysis is dramatically limited;<ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) important possible outcomes are neglected;(b) important potential policies are neglected;(c) important affected values are neglected.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Theory is often heavily relied upon.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A succession of comparisons greatly reduces or eliminates reliance on theory.

There is also an economy of effort by limiting variables so that the consideration of options is an intellectually manageable operation. In this sense there is a reference to Simon's 'bounded rationality'. There is economy of effort in looking at the margins, where one reasonably expects

the end-choice will emerge. This is possible because current negotiations move from a position already agreed to by the policy analysts.

With an incremental approach, one only ever expects to achieve goals partially. The whole process is therefore repeated endlessly. Each policy adjustment is regarded as merely an incremental improvement on the past, not the ultimate or best policy. To stop the process at some point and cement policy to that time is to restrict the development of policy.

Incrementalism is a technique for simplifying a complex world and avoiding intractable value conflicts. Its strength is that it explicitly incorporates politics into decision-making, whereas the rational comprehensive model tends to neglect politics. In this sense, incrementalism reflects more accurately the way in which most decision-making.

The issue is whether a model which describes what exists, is also a model which provides decision-makers with what ought to be. Indeed, is incrementalism a procedure which is being advanced, or is it just a realistic analysis of what happens in government policy-making?

This raises the distinction between 'policy analysis', which relates principally to an understanding of methods for evaluating alternative 'policy proposals', and 'policy theory', which attempts to explain why certain alternatives are chosen and others are not. Policy analysis taking place in ignorance of questions of power and influence (as tends to be the case with the rational comprehensive approach) is not likely to provide advice that is very useful to politicians.

Incrementalism: A Critique

Incrementalism has been criticised as a defence of the *status quo* and for providing the means whereby powerful groups within society can protect their interests. Lindblom defended objections to incrementalism (1979) by arguing that incrementalism need not be slow-moving and conservative; a rapid sequence of small changes may result in a more drastic alteration of the *status quo* than one major change. This is especially so as incremental steps "do not stir up the great antagonism and paralyzing schisms as do proposals for more drastic change" (1979, p. 52).

It has also been suggested that an incremental approach constrains decision-makers where the results of past policies are undesirable and risks need to be taken in a comprehensive and radically new departure. Proceeding by incremental steps therefore may be an appropriate response for some problems but a totally inadequate one for others. On the other hand, the rational-comprehensive model does seem to require the impossible. What is needed is to discover how rational and how comprehensive the policy analysis should be in any particular case. What is needed is a policy about policy-making and an ability to select a process which fits the problem to be solved.

In urban policy-making, what is needed is a policy about the role of plans in the solution to the particular issues of the time.

Plan-making

Strategic plan-making can be seen as a form of policy-making which fits the rational comprehensive model of decision-making. Values and objectives play an important role, analysis is intentionally comprehensive ('holistic') and it is ideally carried out by experts operating at arms length from and in advance of the activities of the politicians and urban managers (or implementers).

It is argued below that the traditional urban plan-making exercise suffers from the same difficulties as any other rational comprehensive approach to decision-making.

Value Clarification

Clarification of values and objectives at metropolitan scale is impossible other than at the most general level. Recourse must be made to such misleading and artificial constructs as 'the community' to avoid the difficulty, or even the impossibility, of resolving the conflicts of values and objectives between the individuals, groups and organisations which, in fact, constitute society. These generalising constraints enable the plan-making activity to be presented as non-political or 'professional'.

Means and Ends

Means and ends also are difficult to disentangle. This is especially so given the means/ends confusions inherent in the structures of public sector

organisations. In State and local governments, for the most part, public sector organisations have been structured so that they have a majority of senior positions on the production side and not the demand side. Decision-making techniques supporting solutions which result continue to provide the productive means of an agency will tend to be favoured over procedures which concentrate on identifying demands which may be satisfied by a variety of means, including those beyond the scope of the agency (Mant 1981). In these circumstances, the particular means supplied by the agency will be assumed to be the most appropriate ones for producing an end which, far from being isolated at the outset of the process, will be generated to justify the continuation of that production.

Overload

Even if the competing values could be identified adequately and ends could be agreed to before consideration of means was commenced, comprehensive analysis of every relevant factor is beyond the capacity of even computer-assisted systems. A number of factors have to be ignored and in this process some theory is introduced to assist. However, theory in metropolitan planning exercises tends to be applied not to deal with the comprehensive analysis of every relevant factor, but to dispose of a number of factors and make more manageable the manipulation of data. In reality, comprehensive rationality is bounded by the capacity of decision-makers to manipulate the variables. The selection of theories or standards to limit the extent of the rationality tends to be *a priori* justified with recourse to the professional standing of 'the Planners'.

Coloured Information

In addition to the limited resources available to carry out a rational comprehensive metropolitan planning exercise, information reaching the planner is often coloured. Reference has been made above to the consequences for the means/ends debate of the organisational structure of many public service agencies. The political agenda of these organisations and their Ministers and supporters (Degeling & Colebatch 1984) may not permit the distribution of information which seriously calls into question the continued existence of programmes of the agency.