
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Deepak Gopinath is a Lecturer in the School of the Environment at the University of Dundee. He graduated with a degree in Architecture and have since then been pursuing a career in town planning initially in practice and later in academia. His research interests fall within three inter-related, yet distinct strands: governance, sustainable communities and planning education and research.

Paola Gazzola is a Lecturer in the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape at Newcastle University. Her research interests include strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and environmental impact assessment (EIA), urban ecology, and the assessment of evaluation practices within planning processes in differing contexts. Within this context, she has matured significant work experience with cross-national comparative research and learning in the field of environmental planning and management. She is particularly interested in looking at how contextual elements and different attitudes towards the environment can affect the development of effective SEA.

Tony Jackson is a Research Fellow in the School of the Environment at the University of Dundee. Graduating in Economics at Cambridge, he won a Ministry of Overseas Development postgraduate studentship to take an MSc in Agricultural Economics at Reading before taking up a post in Resource Management and Development in the Government of Malawi. Appointed as the initial Stanley Smith Senior Fellow in Political Economy at the University of St. Andrews, he subsequently took a tenured lecturing post there before being appointed as a Senior Lecturer and initial Programme Director of the University of Dundee's accredited environmental management degree, which he set up.

Our second special issue on the theme of planning and sustainability includes contributions from a global mix of case studies, spanning four continents. Each paper addresses a common basic question, by asking in its own way whether sustainability can be an effective guiding principle in shaping the communities being planned for the 21st century. Some planning jurisdictions now impose a statutory duty requiring spatial plans to contribute to sustainable development. This is true, for example, in the planning, etc., (Scotland) Act 2006. Even if they lack such statutory requirements, most planning jurisdictions increasingly recognise that the goal of development can no longer be seen as simply a matter of maximising output. Planners must promote patterns of spatial settlement that deliver sustainable improvements in living standards which are realisable within environmental limits.

The planning profession is keen to encourage this philosophy on a global basis. In 2006, Vancouver hosted a World Planning Congress, which issued a declaration (Vancouver Declaration, 2006) setting out 'a new governance paradigm for managing human settlements'. Inter alia, this is seen as requiring:

- effective local representation and community engagement
- factoring future sustainability into local land use planning and development decisions
- integrating economic, physical and environmental planning on a local and regional basis with financial and market constraints
- making spatial planning fully accountable to the communities it serves
- promoting subsidiarity in decision making, to allow the maximum scope for the formulation and implementation of innovative local area-based development strategies that identified spatial opportunities for synergistic regional planning;
- supporting consensual systems of decision-making which fully acknowledge cultural diversity and the need for community-based institutions that reflect such diversity (Vancouver Declaration, 2006).

The contributors to this issue provide an interim report on global efforts towards these objectives. Buenano offers a stimulating point of departure by examining how we frame planning problems. He recognises that planners sit uneasily in the space between advocates of traditional technical-rationalist approaches, that focus on the instrumental rationality of delivering efficient answers to questions set by those who address the substantive rationality of policy-based value-judgements (Gopinath and Jackson, 2010); and the more radical views of Forester (1988), Healey (1996) and others. These planning theorists ask the profession to question its assumptions and to open up decision-making to a transformative, reflexive process in which the state's decision-makers gain credibility by learning from the communities they serve.

Rittel and Webber (1973) made a seminal contribution to the literature that epitomises these tensions. They coined the phrase 'wicked problems' to describe planning issues that are not capable of being framed as objective tests of equity which lead to optimal solutions. In their critique, they observe that "many now have an image of how an idealised planning system would function...yet we all know such a planning system is unattainable, even as we seek more closely to approximate to it" (*ibid.*, p.159). Following

their contribution, spatial planning could truly claim to have entered a post-modernist phase.

Buenano takes this critique further by teasing out its implications for spatial planners. He considers how such issues should be tackled when attempting to deliver sustainable post-modern solutions to development problems. He concludes by stressing the need for planners to become reflexive, to examine their purposes more critically and to pay special attention to how they frame the problems they seek to address.

This requirement is central to interpreting the meaning of sustainable development. The rest of this issue offers case studies that demonstrate the challenges presented in this respect. Nicchia and Diamantini report on a study of rural development in Mozambique. Recovering from a post-colonial civil war, it has recently discovered a rich resource base. However, as Watkins (2006) recognised in delineating Canadian economic history, the challenge in the early stages of developing such resources is how to shape a sustainable pathway: one which resists a staples-based form of growth that allows most of the gains from development to flow to metropolitan areas.

Nicchia and Diamantini examine the composition of small urban settlements in a rural part of Mozambique, evaluating their capacity to support sustainable forms of development. The history of post-war spatial planning in Western Europe should make us guard against simplistic solutions to the alleviation of poverty (Hall, 1982). This paper demonstrates that traditional systems of livelihood, housing and administration can be compatible with sustainable improvements. It provides support for those who argue that the master plan approach to 'modernisation', entailing wholesale introduction of new forms of housing and administration that allow Greenfield settlements to sweep away existing communities, along with their cultures and their means of sustenance, is both wasteful and unsustainable.

Efforts to support and promote rural development in Africa are crucial as a counter-balance to unsustainable urban growth. The fieldwork reported in this paper puts flesh on the aims spelt out in the Vancouver Declaration to respect local culture and traditions in striving to promote sustainable spatial planning processes. Given the recent emphasis in high-income nations on delivering settlement patterns that offer more sustainable lifestyles, the findings of Nicchia and Diamantini that people living in low-income rural African settlement want to retain subsistence practices alongside modernised living conditions and infrastructure should be welcomed. Above all, these communities should be granted sufficient autonomy to participate in decisions over their future.

Planners in Africa can learn from the experience of their counterparts in high-income jurisdictions. Our next two papers demonstrate how planners in these jurisdictions are attempting to make development more sustainable. Hopkins traces the discourse on sustainability that has accompanied the mining boom in Western Australia, and considers how this has modified the way in which Perth, its dominant settlement, has chosen to address the problem of urban sprawl. For residents of this immense state, with its own small population far from other centres, debates on sustainability can seem at times somewhat other-worldly: Perth has been the setting for a number of doomsday survival novels.

Her paper examines the concept of 'sustainable cities' and relates this to the policy initiatives adopted for Perth. As the literature testifies, some of these initiatives, such as its path-breaking multi-mode public transport systems, have attracted global attention. Hopkins suggests that widespread approval of the concept of sustainability has allowed strategies which promote the intensification of settlement patterns to move from the

political arena into accepted practice. This has given planners a more certain platform on which to devise and implement the processes required to this end. This counts as a major achievement in Australia. Successive commonwealth governments in Canberra have become embroiled in efforts to address climate change, frustrating attempts to implement more sustainable practices at this level.

Hopkins explores some of the claims of Forester (1988) and Healey (1996) with respect to collaborative forms of environmental governance, and in doing so throws further light on the practical utility of the objectives of the Vancouver Declaration. She asks whether the whole exercise in Western Australia has simply legitimised traditional planning policies, and allowed them to gain greater acceptance amongst local constituencies: in its own right this would be an important achievement for planners. Her paper demonstrates the capacity to ground applied research within a rigorous theoretical framework. It charts the route followed in Western Australia to adopt a more sustainable form of urban settlement patterns, introducing its Network City concept as a means of collaborative planning.

Although substantial in terms of its own population, the challenges facing Western Australia in pursuing a sustainable cities concept are dwarfed by those confronting the USA. Trillo examines the way in which the smart growth movement has promoted a more sustainable form of spatial planning in southern California. She focuses on efforts to establish a regional tier of environmental governance, with the creation of the San Diego Association of Government (SANDAG).

The effectiveness of US spatial planning has been constrained by the unwillingness of its federal government to intrude on what is regarded as a states-rights area of responsibility. Lazarus (2009, p.1164) observes that "land use controls are the federal government's 'third rail' because of the related spectre of federal interference with state and local land use planning". Although the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act paved the way for federal mandates across the USA on environmental standards, land use has remained the preserve of individual municipalities and other corporate bodies operate at state level, reflecting the almost sacrosanct status of land ownership enshrined in the US constitution. This disjuncture between spatial and environmental governance shows up in its starkest form with regard to climate change initiatives. Here the vacuum left by federal legislative inactivity has been filled by numerous voluntary initiatives led by US municipalities.

Some of these initiatives can be traced to attempts to provide a more strategic form of regional planning at state level. Notable in this respect are the efforts of Oregon and southern California, with Portland in the former and San Diego in the latter offering templates. Trillo's fieldwork explores the achievements of SANDAG as a means of realising the objectives of the smart growth movement amongst US planners. This version of a sustainable cities paradigm in essence seeks to re-humanise urban form and encourage more intensive forms of urban activity at the expense of suburban sprawl. Her research leads Trillo to conclude that incentives-based approaches to sustainable development require some regulatory reinforcement.

Finally, Halsall's paper focuses on policies designed to assist urban communities on the decline. It looks at a town, Oldham, which formed part of the Lancashire textile industry in England during the industrial revolution. It is now a multi-ethnic community seeking a sustainable means of developing its resources in the post-industrial age. His point of departure is the civil disturbances that occurred in 2001 in the Greater Manchester area. This is a timely offering, given the recurrence of inner city disturbances

in many English cities a decade later. The suburbanisation of parts of USA, along with a surge in gated communities, has been seen as a reaction to similar events across the Atlantic. Is Britain about to replicate the US model in this respect or can planners find more sustainable solutions?

As Halsall notes, Oldham served as a test bed for the introduction of the concept of 'community cohesion' in Britain. However, this was not a bottom-up approach delivered with the support of local community groups and local authorities. Instead, it formed central government's response to what Whitehall perceived as social ills stemming from local failures to promote sustainable livelihoods and living conditions. Rather than physical regeneration and the decanting of communities – the standard British planning responses in the immediate post-war years to pockets of social deprivation – central government policy-makers attempted to promote greater local resilience. As with many such top-down approaches, their efforts overlooked some of the precepts of the Vancouver Declaration emphasising the need for local engagement, creating local resistance especially amongst ethnic minorities.

Halsall suggest that most of the ingredients of the package of community cohesion measures were simply recycled from existing planning policies focused on multi-culturalism and social capital. As such, the new approach lacked a rigorous theoretical framework, leaving researchers with little in the way of benchmarks against which to measure subsequent progress. Urban regeneration programmes are replete with such problems, frustrating attempts to evaluate their effectiveness. As one evaluator of such initiatives observes of British efforts in this respect:

“Numerous interlocking initiatives inserted into areas of multiple social and economic deprivation bring added complexity to the evaluation process. Each initiative typically has multiple objectives in which both the clarity of purpose and priority are poorly codified and elaborated... Isolating the mechanism by which the 'new' initiative(s) works and the outputs (even outcomes) derived solely from this initiative (or in combination with others) creates problems for programme evaluation.” [Hull, (2008), pp.185–186].

We hope this special issue demonstrates the range of skills which planners bring to bear on the theme of sustainability. Because they are forced to address 'wicked' problems, planners confront topics which many other development professions can often either avoid or (as in the case of economists) simply assume away. Value-judgements and hard choices are the essence of sustainable decision-making. If problems were simple and solutions easy to find, sustainability itself would be an empty concept. These papers reveal that it is instead an exciting challenge which can bring the best out of the planning profession.

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