

Towards a new professional profile and new understanding of urban and regional planning

This study has its origin in discussions of a two-day workshop on „The role of urban and regional planning in the age of the Zwischenstadt“ held in Switzerland on April 8./9. 2005. It brought us to the idea to continue this discussion on another level. So some of the aspects in this paper are picked out of this discussion.

Problem

The role of the planner is today nearly unknown in general public, even there is an indifference about his role and tasks. The image of the planning profession is quite negative nowadays some other parts: On the one hand economy criticises that planning is a quite inflexible system, it inhibits more than it enables, that economical activities are hindered by the planning system, instead of getting incentives for spatial development. On the other hand the environmentalists criticize that planning is about to act for the interests of the economy, that the environment has a weak advocate, and no influence on planning, especially when it deals beyond restriction of damage. And the environmental sector itself fights against the negative image as a hinderer. We asked ourselves: what is the reason for this negative image and what is the role of the planner today?

1. Reasons for the negative image of the planner and the indifference about planning

The reasons for the negative image is to be found in the work of the planner: He is not the main actor in the planning process but coordinates different interests. He prepares the set of rights of land use, he administrates and develops space. He ranks the needs of economy, ecology and society for the use of land according to the given values by following rights. By looking for the most important he can not consider all partly opposite aspects in the same way at the same time. Planning is not the advocate of one specific discipline but the advocate of a long term sustainable use of space by society.

The appraisal of planning generally happens in the background. The product, the appraised result, respectively the success of spatial planning are rarely communicated to the public. At the same time there is no awareness of the value of space in the general public analog to the environmental awareness that has been initiated by environmental organisations. Do we need initiatives for planning?

2. In what planning system do planners act?

In literature there is no generally valid definition and no uniform understanding of what planning means: It reaches from planning, steering, developing, to acting and deciding (Claus Selle, 2005). The operational system of planning has its origin in the middle of last century and is based on the thought that social and economic needs can be planned. In this sense urban and regional planning was conceived as a scientific modern discipline. It was aligned to arrange and distribute growth with sovereign acts. The planning system carries the thoughts of growth in its roots. The operational system was clearly defined with planning instruments, the procedures and the different authority levels. Today, we deal however with different clients in politics, administration and economy and therefore with different planning tasks as well. This affects our current activity substantially. However, nowadays the diverse tasks of it is not only the socio-political requirement to consider, but to coordinate several unequal interests. The range of planning tasks today has strongly increased, and only a part of it is in the framework of the conventional ones. The planning system that was based on the system of sovereign planning tasks of is therefore only of limited function for these new situations. The institutional entities do not correspond anymore to the interdependencies of the lebensraum. Because of this the planners position became unclear, although the

commission by law is clearly formulated. Has he now become a process designer, visionary or coordinator?

3. What are the important developments in the context of planning?

Let's have a look at the most important challenges of planning today, by considering the developments in the context with most influence.

Creative economies

In the past years the creative milieus and the creative economy the more and more has been explored. The creative economy in general creates innovative working places with high value for economy. It is an important factor of the structural change towards a knowledge based economy. The foundation for a creative economy is a high specialized, open tolerant public, financial power, orientation to the service sector, high internationality and quality of life (Held et al., 2005). The creative economy is part of a net of creative institutions, businesses and individuals of a knowledge based economy that initiates and implements technologic, economic, social and cultural innovations. With its network of organisations, the creative economy is important for the development of urban economies, for example. It is a base for impulses of innovation and therefore for the development of society in general.

Privatization and deregulation

The state transfers the more and more responsibility and tasks to the private sector among also for financial reasons. Thus the private sector attains a greater social importance. It is foreseeable that cooperation between private and public actors (public private partnership) will increase. The complexity will increase as well, since several parties, which co-operate, but decide however independent of each other with different goals must be considered. The planning interests are thereby in the spread of preserving public interests and alignment with economical interests.

Location competitions

globalization and internationalization strengthen the location competition of the regions for inhabitants and working places. The dynamism of reallocation is characterised by economic and social competition. The regions compete not only for inhabitants and working places but also for financial support for infrastructure and funds. This affects particularly shrinking and remote regions.

Increasing environmental damage and consumption of resources

The consumption of resources, the urban sprawl and the environmental damage are increasing, while the availability of land is decreasing. Increasing environmental damage of air, ground and water and increasing risks because of the global warming and technical catastrophes have strengthened the ecological awareness of society. The principles of sustainable development is present and in a broad discussion by all social-political levels, even if there is no regulation about it.

Demographic trends

Due to the population shrinking, a consistent increasing number of cities is confronted with the challenge of revitalization of places, meanwhile land use per capita increases at the same time. Demographic shrinking is one of the important challenges of future planning in European countries.

Mobility and network

Technical innovation and infrastructure provides more mobility. Shuttling and large-scale flows of goods and production are increasing. The interdependencies of actions, the complexity and actors have increased. The effects go far beyond borders of administrative entities.

Changes of topology of space

Today definitions of areas and regions are often not clear and criteria for identification are often missing. The borders of institutional entities usually do not correspond anymore with the networked living spaces and economic areas. Spatial phenomena such as the so-called "Zwischenstadt" were not planned and are until now not enough researched.

4. Consequences on the activity of planning

Coordination between different interests

With the privatisation of public tasks and public private partnerships for development tasks, the project oriented organisation forms are increasing. They need specific project organisations which are dissolved with their fulfilment. For these processes there is no clearly defined procedure, nor given pre-defined competencies or an agreement over principles of acting. With these tasks co-operation beyond administrative entities is necessary as well. The planner has the task of coordination and process design. His/her activity has changed thus not only concerning the concrete setting of tasks, but also relatively to the specific planning process conditions and the relations among the different actors.

Variety of the planning processes

Even in numerous conventional planning tasks the aspect of the integration of diverse interests, the broad support for planning also steps into the foreground. This may also guarantee, that the planning projects correspond to the needs of economy and people. So the task for the planner thereby remains not only the conventional spatial planning, but the developing and accompanying appropriate processes.

From planning to developing

Apart from the known tasks of land use planning and the mediation of different interests, more and more the planner has in an increasingly intensified competition of the Lebensraum to solve development tasks. Such as location developments and regional planning also belong to. Sovereign planning tasks steps into the background ever more. Lets take the formation of creative environments as an example of the mentioned development tasks: Creative environments prefer diversity in the social and cultural and spatial sense and some specific circumstances such as flexible and payable premises. This may not be planned in the classical sense, but the planner can foresee these circumstances and areas, which support the integration of this group in the environs. The planners part concerns to preserve or create appropriate areas for the creative economy.

Complexity of planning tasks

These unconventional tasks the more and more require integration of not only spatial aspects but also economical and social aspects. Isolated viewpoints do not meet the planning goals. The planner as key figure therefore must bring along a broad basic knowledge, together with good political expert knowledge. He is generalist and specialist in one. As generalist he manages the complexity of the spatial development. And as a specialist he fulfils selected tasks.

5. Where does need for action for the new role exists?

Planning processes with diverse participants and complex problems are obviously increasing. The planner appears frequently in the role of process designer and coordinator - with the goal to balance out different interests. Obviously, his principles are often not strong enough compared to the other actors. Clarifying his principles of action (- or even professional ethics?-) the planner could be much supportive for his planning mission.

The planner appears more often as one among many other participants in planning processes. He is usually responsible for the completion of a process, but has hardly decision

authority. Thus the planners mission it difficult to implement. Therefore he should claim for more decision power in coordination with a political authorisation.

The planner should support the change of basic conditions also. With the increase of an economical optic and participants in spatially relevant tasks, it becomes obvious that the conceived sovereign planning systems is not sufficient any more for this context. The parol for more flexibility in planning comes ever more frequently – therefore the examination of the conventional system becomes necessary. There should be examined incentive systems also, which help to steer private and economic interests in favor of the spatial goals.

Finally, similarly to the awareness of environment problems, an awareness for urban and regional problems should grow in society. For embody planning problems as an important socio-political task in society. Not seldom successes in urban and regional development are told to be a political success. But a failure often is the fault of planning. Success in urban and regional development should be communicated thereby more effectively in the public - besides a critical discussion of failures or problems-, in order to maintain a positive image of the planner.

6. How should the planner act today and in the future?

Here are some of the parols of the discussion about the future role of the planner in the mentioned conference:

- The planner has to be administrator as well as visionary.
- The planner has to be more activist than coordinator.
- There is a movement from spatial planning matters towards coordination of interests and lately back again to the planning matters as well.

In general we hope that the discussion of these questions will be continued in our profession. Here are the inputs from our part:

Less administrator, more visionary and activist: There are a lot of plans that regulates and orders the land use. Now the spatial planner should move more towards planning contents. As today he deals the more and more with developing the lebensraum, than regulating the needs for society. Such as for instance with planning areas for the creative economy. It requires the capability to develop visions for the spatial development on long terms. Visions that should be concretized through quantitative and especially qualitative aims and based on principles of sustainable development. The implementation of aims has to be monitored and evaluated.

The planner needs more than ever skills for process design, managing and steering. According to the new tasks he has to think of new strategies for the implementation and new forms of cooperation with different actors to reach the aims. Therefore he has to clear his principles and his aims. A successful integration of economical, societal and environmental interests could lead to more economic growth and at the same time to the preservation of the environment. Such as most valuable real estates in Switzerland are located in scenic areas, for example in St. Moritz and the right waterside of the lake of Zurich.

Coordination and interaction of planning matters: The spatial planner should preserve and develop the value of the environs in general for the future generations. The interactions between economy, society and spatial development have to be examined more, regarding the future, and to be understood. Spatial planners should discuss together with experts of economy about spatial development: Is the economy as well responsible for spatial planning and development beyond microeconomic and economic aspects?

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