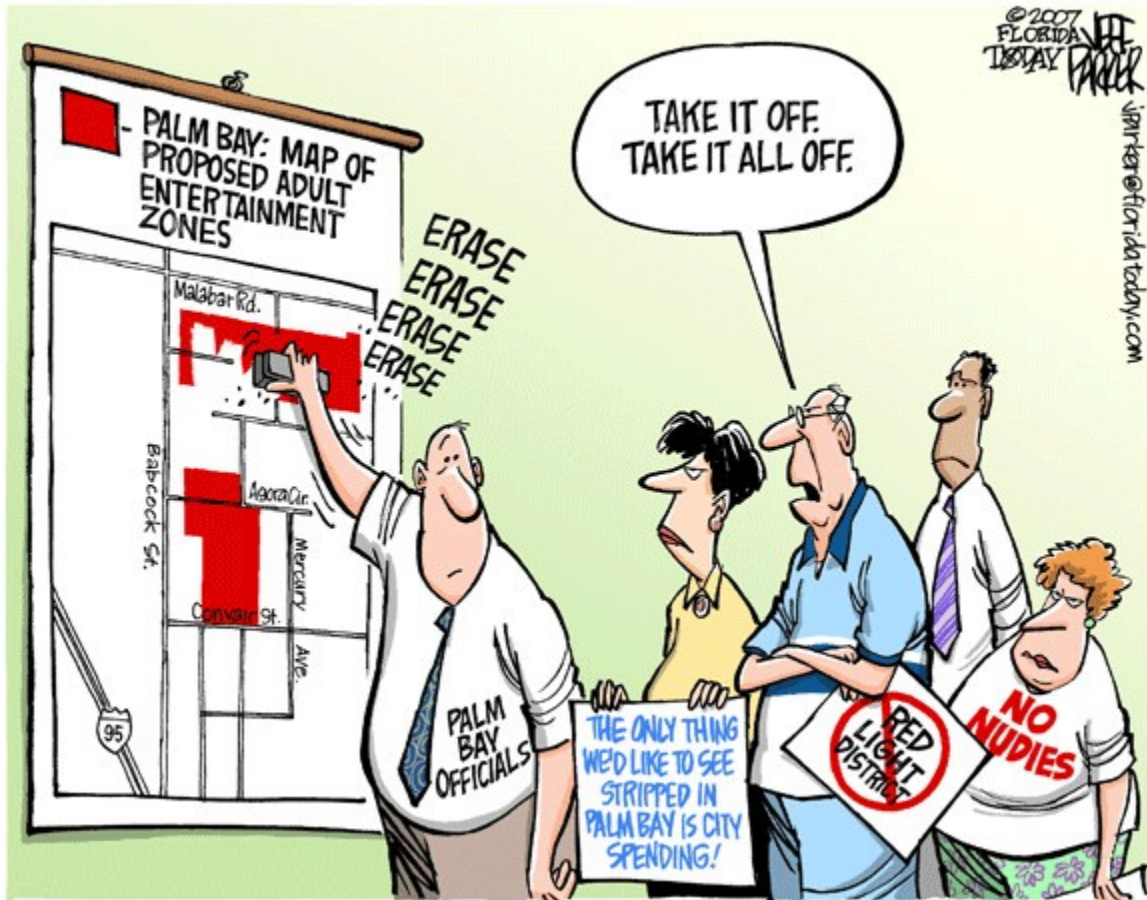


The Role of Planners in Plan Making & Implementation



ERST 604: Advanced Urban, Regional & Resource Planning

Assignment No. 2

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For

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Task One

A. Planning theory has existed for centuries. Despite its longevity, there is not consensus for one preferred or 'mainstream' planning theory (Lawrence, 2000). Lawrence (2000) identifies five theoretical paradigms of planning. They are rationalism, pragmatism, socio-ecological idealism (SEI), political-economic mobilization (PEM) and communication and collaboration (CC). Below, I will discuss each planning theory in the respective order.

Rationalism is the central theme in western thinking following a process of survey, analysis and plan (Lawrence, 2000). In the 1960s the rationalism theory was refined allowing for unpredicted problems to be addressed. The theory allows for interactions among process steps such as foreseeing and feedback. Despite this refinement, rationalism has negative aspects. The theory paradigm can be difficult to implement, it is autocratic and does not utilize the collective and creative opportunities available in planning. The Waitaki Catchment Water Allocation Regional Plan is an example of implementation of the rationalism planning theory paradigm. In addition to resource regional planning, the rationalism theory is applicable beyond the field of planning.

Pragmatism is a normative planning theory based on the premise that knowledge-based experience should guide planning action (Lawrence, 2000). The process involves negotiation and bargaining among multiple competing interests and values. It tends to favor the status quo because agreement is the benchmark of success. Due to this tendency social, political and environmental issues are unaddressed and long-term success is difficult to achieve. On the other hand, the process is generally successful in achieving consensus

on controversial issues because the pragmatism theory is efficient, adaptable, relevant and realistic.

The socio-economical idealism planning theory aims to reintegrate social and environmental substance into the planning process (Lawrence, 2000). In this respect, the theory compensates for issues that rationalism fails to address. SEI emphasizes human potential, environmental sustainability and social guidance. The process allows for continuous and adaptive learning. However, the theory is criticized for lacking specific methods and resolving conflict and inequalities. In planning it is critical to address environmental and social issues. However, the SEI theory is difficult to solely implement in a diverse and economically driven society.

Similar to the basis of SEI, the political-economic mobilization (PEM) planning theory is based in reaction to compensate for the shortcomings with rationalism. It has a bottom-up perspective promoting social, economic and environmental justice. This theory is conducive in mobilizing masses and often utilized by female leaders. It empowers the people through power-sharing. Criticisms of PEM are its tendency to be dogmatic, ideological and simplistic on views of society.

Communications and collaboration (CC) planning theory is the newest theory combining elements from SEI, PEM and pragmatism. CC is a further reaction against planning as a unitary endeavor. The theory involves two overlapping components. The communication component of the ideal speech act combined with a collaborative component focusing on consensus building (Lawrence, 2000). Strong points of the CC theory are its effectiveness to facilitate joint action and transparent decision making. A

criticism of CC is based around shortcomings related to the outcomes because the theory focuses on the process.

All five theories have advantages and disadvantages to their process. Planning theory has evolved with a democratic trend over the past centuries. Over all, theories have changed from a top down perspective to a bottom up perspective with an emphasis in increased community involvement rather than a planner or expert orientation to planning. Currently, these five theories efficiently cover a spectrum of planning issues and politics. As society evolves and new political issues arise, theoretically planning will evolve in order to best suit issues of the future.

B. Planners have a significant role in plan making and implementation of sustainable development. Acknowledging that they work within defined and uncontrollable limitations, such as building codes, surveying, zoning and developers, planners can still heavily influence sustainable development. This claim relates to regional, local, rural and urban planners. Planners can influence and possibly determine how heavily dependant an area is on exploiting natural resources. For example, the Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy (2005) informs the public on the area's current level of natural resource use. Then the Strategy (2005) surveys recipients to determine which level of sustainable development is preferred. In addition to informing and surveying community members, planners can choose to infill an area and make development more dense or more intensive which generally proves to be more sustainable than new development which sprawls away from the city center. Diduck (1999) discusses critical environmental assessment (EA) education as a model to empower planners for a sustainable future.

Professional and technical knowledge is needed by planners to perform these tasks. By applying a combination of the CC and SEI planning theories, planners can create a more sustainable environment. Communicating and collaborating with other city service providers, such as schools, is vital for physical and social connectivity in an area. For example, planners communicate and collaborate with schools to plan the surrounding area to be conducive for non-motorized transportation to and from the school. This example, which utilizes the CC theory for planning, reduces the use of motorized transportation which reduces air pollution and consumption of oil, both of which are finite natural resources. In a professional context, planners need to be flexible to change and have strong communication, leadership and networking skills. They must perform these skills with an underlying basis to achieve sustainable development. The same basis applies in a technical context; planners need to be well educated (not necessary academic) on their issues and aware of environmental engineering research to improve sustainable development of an area.

C. Framework of Interview Questions:

1. What kind of planner are you? What do you do?
2. What is your opinion on the different theoretical approaches to planning?
3. What is your role as a planner in plan making and implementation in the sustainable development context?
4. How do you work to and what are the challenges in making Christchurch a "multi-layered" city?
5. What are your aspirations for planning in the future?

References

Christchurch City Council (2005). *So Many Options... which will you choose?* Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy. Options April 2005.

Diduck, D. (1999). Critical education in resource and environmental management: Learning and empowerment for sustainable future in *Journal of Environmental Management*, Vol. 57(2), pp. 85-97.

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Task Two

I interviewed Sarah Oliver, a planner for the Christchurch City Council (CCC), on Friday, March 17 for an hour at her office in the Christchurch City Council building on Tuam Street. Due to her experience and responsiveness, she was ideal to interview for this assignment

A. *Qualifications:* A bachelor's degree in Commerce Management. A postgraduate diploma in Resource Planning. Certification for registration as a planner for the CCC.

Experience: Six and a half years of planning consultancy for a private planning firm. Five and a half years of local government planning for the CCC. Two and a half of those years were spent with the City Plan Team.

Range of Functions: Project leader, project manager, review writing analysis, preparing groups, map production, consultancy and financial liaison of group budget.

Responsibilities: Delivering an area plan and mentoring group members.

B. Response to the five outlined interview questions in section C of task one:

What kind of planner are you? What do you do?

Oliver's title is Policy Planner. She analyses policies and develops new ones. She works in the strategic and planning group within the Christchurch City Council. They conduct research to find out whether the city should infill (dense more intense development) or expand (convert land use from rural to urban, i.e. sprawl) new development. Once they determine which of those two kinds of development is going to occur in the proposed area, it is her job to strategically plan for the area. Currently she is working on a strategic plan to

expand development in the 'greater Christchurch' area south west of the city, beyond Horby.

What is your opinion on the different theoretical approaches to planning (referring to the article by Lawrence in 2000)?

Oliver was unaware of theoretical planning approaches so I referred her to the article by Lawrence entitled, *Planning theories and environmental impact assessment* (2000). She flipped through the article and skimmed over the five different theories until she had an idea of what they were about. According to her practice, "in the 'real world' all of the theories merge together and cannot be boxed in as the author has done in this article" (Oliver, 2008). If she had to choose one theory, she most often follows the rational planning framework "because it is good in the real world" (Oliver, 2008). In reality, after familiarizing herself with the article, she practices all of the theories on a daily basis but just did not know or realize that she was doing so. The acronym KISS (keep it simple stupid) is her own personal planning theory, which she applies to everything she does. She works in a diverse team because "planners have to operate in teams and the KISS principle makes work efficient yet at the same time successful" (Oliver, 2008). Oliver had a negative attitude towards "academic planners" (Oliver, 2008). She had little interest or respect for the academic area of planning because it is not applicable or very difficult to implement in the 'real world'. She used Lawrence's (2000) theoretical approaches to planning as an example to support her opinion.

What is your role as a planner in plan making and implementation in the sustainable development context? What is the professional and technical knowledge you need to have to do this?

Oliver aspires to plan development “that is resilient to change” (2008). Currently that relates to planning communities that facilitate non-motorized transportation. Due to the constantly increasing price of petrol, the high expense infrastructure (such as roads) cost cities and the increasing value of time; roads have become an economic drain on cities and quality of life. The price of petrol is making motorized transportation too expensive and people do not want to sit in traffic, wasting time, in order to use motorized transportation. Oliver practices what she preaches by planning around the City’s public bus system, bike and foot paths when strategizing new development. She feels that developers find the cheapest way to do something because they simply want to turn a profit. This often results in a lower quality of life for residents and it is her job to set policies which require developers to design livable areas.

Oliver’s response to the second part of this question is to “go beyond the rules of planning. Rules are only one way to do something. Look to other ways” (2008). She uses plans and policies as a guide but they are never her only consideration in strategic planning. She thinks creativity and thinking beyond the rules is the most valuable knowledge a planner can have.

How do you work to and what are the challenges in making Christchurch a "multi-layered" city?

Oliver strongly believes that “you can never please the public” (2008). Despite this fact, it is important to consult with as many people as possible. Planners have to find peoples’ voices who don’t feel they have a say. In New Zealand, Oliver explains how it is common to have a ‘squeaky wheel’ in public participation of planning. The ‘squeaky wheel’ is often members of the middle class. Oliver makes a specific effort to involve immigrants who don’t feel like they have a say in planning because they are not originally from New Zealand. They select community representatives from minority cultural groups and maintain a strong relationship with them so they have a liaison in the planning process. Sometimes this means that we compensate them for being involved, such as paying them for their time, as is the case with the Maori representative. Oliver stresses the importance of consultation in a plan because it helps the council understand what residents want.

What are your aspirations for planning in the future?

A goal of Oliver’s is to increase involvement of different entities in the planning process. For example, with the plan she is working on now, they have collaborated with the Ministry of Education because they are planning to build a new school in the area. Therefore, she has made it a priority for the plan to be conducive to non-motorized transportation within a certain radius of the school to eliminate the need for people who live close to drive to the school.

Another aspiration is for planners to use broad strategic plans and objectives because many cases can transpire and planners can learn from one another. Case studies are extremely valuable in planning. There is no need to ‘re-invent the wheel’. It is critical

for planners to link between strategic planning and application. If the plan or policy is inapplicable then it is not serving any purpose.

C. The overall finding I obtained from the interview is that planning is a very complex process. Oliver re-iterated this point multiple times through out the interview. Due to my lack of experience and education in the planning field, I wrongfully assumed planning a new development meant planners started with a clean slate and anything was possible! Oliver corrected me by explaining that policies and legislation previously set in place determines what planners can do. Planners have much less flexibility in their work then I imagined. In addition to rules, the plan has to be well connected to the existing development. This interview was extremely insightful and successful from my perspective. I would like to be able to re-interview a planner at the end of the semester when I have learned more about the field of planning. I felt rather clueless while preparing and during this interview. As a planning amateur, I enjoyed the experience and learned a lot about planning from Sarah Oliver, an experienced and well respected professional planner of Christchurch City Council.

References

Lawrence, D.P. (2000). Planning theories and environmental impact assessment.

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Oliver, S. (2008). Personal Communication. 7 March, 2008. Christchurch, New Zealand.