

'proposals' for Leeds or the other towns studied and there really is no excuse for intelligent people referring to 'the cost of Buchanan'. The whole point of Buchanan's 'law' is to show that given fixed environmental standards, the amount of traffic you can accept depends roughly on how much you can spend on modifying existing arrangements. It is therefore perfectly consistent with the report to argue for less investment on networks, provided one accepts that there must be less traffic. In the main, MacEwan's remarks were confined to the piecemeal and wholesale demolition of Self's misinterpretations.

Disparaging and romantic

A general discussion followed in which Crowther's Regional Development Agencies, the Fulham study, and the present Government were referred to disparagingly and the Buchanan report was said to be by one speaker, 'romantic' and by another, 'a means whereby inaction will now be justified by some authorities'. But the meeting concluded on a more positive note with a plea for the necessary resources and administrative changes to be quickly made available. Otherwise, as MacEwan put it, the report may be 'killed by kindness'.

BARTLETT SOCIETY

Psychology and living space

In a paper entitled 'Psychology and living space' at the Bartlett Society on 25 February, Dr Terence Lee questioned the new town concept of neighbourhoods of 10,000 to 20,000 people and described a survey he has made among families in different parts of Cambridge to find out what they considered to be their neighbourhood. In this survey he found that the neighbourhood boundaries given by each family varied enormously, but that the majority had a limited concept of less than 100 acres. Surprisingly, this area did not vary between those living in high density central districts and those living in low density suburbs. He also found that the number of friends a family had did not increase with density but did increase with the size of the family's neighbourhood scheme.

This scheme he described as the area of 'perceived wholeness' and he put forward the hypothesis of a hierarchy of schemata—body, room, home, street, neighbourhood and town schemata. In Cambridge he found that neighbourhood schemata varied according to social class, length of residence, age and place of work but had certain common characteristics owing to the local physical features in each district and the fact that we all have common physical and mental characteristics.

Social psychologists could help planners, said Terence Lee, by discovering the regularities that seem to exist between the spatial models we each assembled in our minds.

In the discussion afterwards, Terence Lee's use of housewives as subjects for his survey

was questioned. This is, of course, a common feature of many social surveys and with higher car ownership and more women going out to work it is possible that the results we are getting now will change rapidly during the coming years.

Residential propinquity

After describing his own study of Cambridge, Dr Lee went on to discuss the effects of residential propinquity. How close we live to others affects the chances we have to make friends and affects the pattern of friendship. He quoted one American survey made in an area with a high car ownership ratio where it was found that, even in this mobile community, 76 per cent of marriages took place between people living within twenty blocks of each other. However, friendship is only one aspect of behaviour affected by propinquity. Others such as the formation of opinions and social adjustment are equally, if not more, important. In Devon a survey has recently been carried out on the effects of closing local village schools and moving children each day to a larger central school. It was found that behaviour deteriorated as the length of journey increased. This could not be explained by physical tiredness because those children who walked were better adjusted than those who travelled by bus. One explanation seemed to be that the home and school schemata were related to each other in different ways according to the means of transport. For instance, the school bus drove away, severing all links between home and school whereas the child who walked had a route that he himself was free to use.

Terence Lee sees these studies as being important to planners when decisions on the location of community facilities are being made: for example, in a new town, whether there should be one large compact town centre or a dispersed series of smaller centres.

Discovering why

At a less contentious level he described a very interesting study he was asked to make into the reasons why a new car park in a town centre was not being used. His initial conclusion pointed to the tortuous route that had to be used from the car park to the shops. The distance was no greater than from other car parks but the route was less obvious. He checked this by a laboratory experiment in which he asked different people to estimate the comparative lengths of straight and crooked lines. The results of this experiment showed that the estimated length of lines increased markedly in relation to the number of angles and therefore appeared to confirm his initial hypothesis.

This piece of detailed work is a very good illustration of the contribution a psychologist can make to the work of the planner. While Terence Lee's study of neighbourhood spatial schemata is interesting, it does not seem to be sufficiently fundamental, or detailed, to act as a basis for planning. We are more interested nowadays in people's activities than their opinions about the

spatial boundaries of their present neighbourhoods. Studies by psychologists of parking, shopping, pedestrian and recreational behaviour, to mention only a few, are more likely to produce useful material for planners, particularly if these studies are carried out jointly with planners with a scale of priorities related to critical design decisions.

JOHN NOBLE

BUILDING CENTRE FORUM

Plastics in building

Most research and development in the plastics industry is done independently by a host of individual firms. It has been suggested that there would be greater efficiency if resources were pooled and research were done by a joint body (perhaps comparable with the Cement and Concrete Association) which would also give information and guidance on use of plastics.

Following a meeting at the RIBA the British Plastics Federation recently set up a working party to investigate this proposal. This was the background to the Building Centre Forum 5 on 12 February—'Plastics in building—can development work be co-ordinated?'—when H. L. Froome-Lewis argued for such a body and suggested some opportunities for plastics in building.

D. S. Mahon said there was ignorance and misunderstanding on the part of both the plastics and building industries. Eighteen per cent of all plastics was used in building, but plastics could not be a substitute for all other building materials: the cheapest polymer (pvc) cost 1s a lb while cement cost about 3d. Furthermore all plastics—with a few extravagant, experimental exceptions—were combustible, and were likely to remain so. He believed joint research was possible on only a few aspects.

Most of the relevant comments in the discussion which followed were against a central body. It was said that information, research, testing and development were all being done and information was not difficult to find.

The general tenor of the discussion suggested mutual frustration. More clear and concise information on plastics is wanted by the building industry and positive statements of needs are required by the plastics industry.

Flights of fancy

Also at the Building Centre was an exhibition, 'Space structures and plastic housing research', a final thesis by two students of Hammersmith College of Art and Building. It provoked one contributor to the forum to refer to 'these flights of fancy'. The students' project was for a linear town stretching from Kent northwards across the Thames to Essex; it contrived to use the now fashionable reinforced shell structure (BR trackside hut variety) with the also fashionable space frame, by placing plastic shell buildings on vast space decks between supporting towers, high above the existing land.

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