CONCLUSIONS: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Evaluation in Spatial Planning in the Post-postmodern Future

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1.   Introduction

Evaluation in spatial planning, like spatial planning itself, and planning in general, is in transition. Traditionally, evaluation has been an integral part of the rational planning process (Alexander, 1992.a: 74-75, 82-85). But, with the demise of the "classic" rational model as the dominant planning paradigm, what will be the role of evaluation in spatial planning in the future? What can we learn from our discussion about the new kinds of evaluations and evaluation methods that are emerging to replace the systematic and rational evaluations of the past?

Forty years of critiques have undermined the "classic" model of rational decision making which was the foundation paradigm for planning and related "decision sciences". Envisaging its imminent collapse, suggested replacements ranged from versions of bounded rationality such as "satisficing" to situational decision-making: "theory-in-practice" or the "phenomenology of the episode". But, though agreement was widespread that rationality is passè, none of these alternatives superseded it as the dominant normative planning model (Alexander, 1984).

Another alternative, communicative practice[1] has emerged in the last fifteen years to claim the role of the dominant planning paradigm (Beauregard, 1996: 106-109). But this model, too, has its shortcomings, which are, in a way, the mirror image of the the defects of "classic" rationality. The rational model, focusing on the decision and problem solving, is limited to individual deliberation, and ignores the interactive aspect of planning. Communicative action focuses on just what deliberative rationality neglects: consensus through social interaction and communication. But it fails to account for individual decisons and strategic (self-interested) action. In their normative form, both paradigms include simplifying assumptions which are divorced from reality.

These observations suggest that communicative action, with all its answers to the flaws of the rational paradigm, cannot supersede it. Rather than being mutually exclusive, both models are complementary, each reflecting a different aspect of planning in the real world (Alexander, 1996). Indeed, Mandelbaum (1979) asked whether any one paradigm can answer all our normative questions, given the complexity of planning and the value-laden character of most planning problems and

policy issues, and answered that "A Complete General Theory of Planning is Impossible".

But perhaps a contingent framework could provide the comprehensive overview of the real dynamics of planning that no single paradigm can. I have suggested such a framework to integrate four planning models (some of them have been called paradigms) which are prevailing or emergent today. Just as this framework answers the question (asked about planning paradigms): After rationality, what?, we can use it to structure the answers to our question: What will post-rational evaluation be like?

2.   Planning: A "Four-Fold Way"

The contingent framework sees planning as a "four-fold way", integrating four different views of planning: rational planning, communicative practice, coordinative planning, and "frame-setting". This framework reveals that the four planning models are complementary, not conflicting: each model involves different kinds of actors or roles, doing different kinds of planning at different stages or levels in the planning process.

Planning as deliberative: The first is the "classic" rational planning paradigm. This implies a view of planning as a deliberative activity of problem solving, involving rational choice by self-interested individuals, or homogenous social units (organizations, agencies, governments) acting as if they were individuals (Alexander, 1996). The objective of rational planning is for the actor to decide to what ends action should be undertaken, and what course of action would be most effective[2]. This view of planning, of course, embraces quite a wide range of planning models, from "ideal" rationality through various forms of bounded rationality such as satisficing and incrementalism. It also provides the conceptual base for most analytical and planning models and methods in use today, from benefit-cost analysis to strategic games.

Planning as interactive: The new paradigm of communicative practice sees planning as a social interactive process. Planning is not an activity of an individual (as envisaged in the rational model) but happens in the process of their interaction. The focus of this view of planning is communication between the actors (again, individuals or quasi-individuals), which is the subject of positive analysis and normative prescription (e.g. Healey, 1995). Rather than the individual decision, the material of communicative practice is planners' statements (Forester, 1996), the narrative of plans (Mandelbaum, 1991; Healey, 1993), and the rhetoric of planning research and analysis (Throgmorton, 1992). Interactive approaches ranging from facilitation (e.g in transactive planning - Friedmann, 1973, 1994) through conflict resolution, mediation and bargaining are methods reflecting the ideas of communicative practice.

Planning as coordinative: Another view sees planning as anticipatory coordination (March and Simon, 1958; 158-169). From this perspective, planning is not only about