

# HOW CITIES ARE CHANGING AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF THOSE CHANGES FOR URBAN PLANNING

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Most of the academic writing about the relationship between planning and politics is implicitly local. The organizations, the structures and power relations that are the focus of discussions of planning within a governance perspective are those of nation states and their component regions and local authorities and neighbourhoods. In contrast this paper takes an international view of the politics of planning. Its focus is on international relations of economic and political power as the prime shapers of events. However, these structures are not determinants: institutions influence responses. “Institutions” involve not just organizations, but also attitudes, rules and practices.

From this perspective, the paper argues that there is a need to re-invent urban planning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The re-invention involves explicitly thinking of planning in terms of governance, and implies a focus on skills that have been neglected in the development of professional urban planners.

The paper analyses the recent work of the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP). CAP has become an engaged international advocate for “New Urban Planning”. The author was President of CAP from 2000 until 2006, and then its Secretary-General. The research methods are thus an unconventional mix of critical commentary and participant observer, supplemented by advocacy: the paper is the outcome of a form of action research that uses and explores institutions. The central problem addressed is how to engineer institutional change in respect of urban planning – in Europe and globally.

There is a division in priorities between the richer countries and the poorer countries. The former, with some important exceptions, tend to prioritize the “green agenda” within the idea of sustainable development – i.e. they equate sustainable development with environmental protection. In contrast the poorer countries focus on the need for economic growth to drive an escape from poverty, and so give more emphasis to the “brown agenda” around issues of sanitation, water and shelter. The management of cities is fundamental to reconciling these conflicting perspectives. That is why re-inventing planning is so important.

Globally, towns and cities are growing by around 65M people a year. There are staggering rates of urban growth in Africa and Asia, global regions that are still predominantly rural. There is an urbanization of poverty, with escalation in slum development. However, most urban planners show minimal interest in these trends, because they live and work in the more developed countries where rates of urbanization and slum growth peaked long ago. In fact these two worlds are deeply inter-connected. Connections include climate change, international migration, dependency on the cities as the engines of the economy, a developing “hour-glass” labour market that sees a widening rich-poor gap within urban areas in rich countries too, and increasing insecurity and risk.

In Europe, concerns with global competitiveness and sustainable development are driving change in perceptions of the nature and practice of urban planning. The restrictions of local land use planning traditions are increasingly being challenged. A form of action is developing around integration of policy across different spatial scales to achieve competitiveness and territorial cohesion.

The Commonwealth today is a voluntary association of 53 countries, 2 billion citizens, and 30% of the world’s population. It connects people in all the main global regions, yet it also has a common institutional legacy, not least in terms of planning legislation and planning education. The Commonwealth is not the only institutional option for those seeking to raise awareness of the international connections and importance of urbanization, urban poverty and climate change, and so to re-position planning globally. However it does offer significant potential in relation to these aims. The growth of CAP since 2000 demonstrates that some of that latent institutional potential can be unlocked.

CAP was formed in 1971, and its member organizations were, and continue to be, the professional planning institutes representing town / urban and rural / physical planners (the name varies from country to country). In assessing what CAP has done since 2000, it is important to focus on the rules of the game and the mental models. Like many professional bodies, CAP had been essentially inward-looking, seeking to address the concerns of the professionals, such as how to protect their title in the labour market. From 2000, the change agenda within CAP was explicit, and it was directly connected to the global dimension of planning in relation to rapid urbanization. CAP argued that rapid urbanization requires professional planners to rethink the scope and nature of their practice.

Having built a platform with its members, CAP was able to play a leading role in the 2006 UN-Habitat World Urban Forum, where it was a strong advocate for “re-inventing planning”. Working with other professional planning institutes, CAP set out principles for a New Urban Planning. In summary form these were:

1. *Sustainability*: New Urban Planning is a practical means of integrating the social, economic and environmental components of sustainable human settlements.
2. *Integrated Planning and Budgeting*: New Urban Planning is integrated planning, and to ensure integration, plans need to make effective linkages to private and public budgetary processes. Neither plans by themselves, nor unregulated market processes, can deliver more sustainable settlements.
3. *Planning with Partners*: New Urban Planning is a means of negotiating where and how development happens. It is about planning with all sectors of the community

with a stake in the place – not only governments, but also private sector organisations, voluntary agencies and civil society.

4. *Transparent and Accountable Planning*: New Urban Planning is less an instrument of government, and more a process of good governance, making city development more participatory. Planning must be made accountable to the public, with all activities open to public scrutiny through oversight by mechanisms such as public hearings, integrity pacts, etc.
5. *Subsidiarity*: The subsidiarity principle should be paramount in deciding where roles and responsibilities are lodged. National governments have important roles in setting national urban development policies and fostering national (and international) infrastructure networks that will guide development patterns. However, there needs to be decentralisation, with local governments playing a leading role, and empowerment of community-based organisations on matters that can be determined at neighbourhood level. Integration of policy across scales creates efficiency and effectiveness.
6. *Market Responsiveness*: New Urban Planning understands market demand, particularly in land and property markets, and is aware of the dynamics and potential of the informal sectors. It is responsive, but not reactive.
7. *Access to Land*: A supply of land in safe and accessible locations to meet the needs of all sectors of society, is fundamental to achieving efficient and equitable settlements. Traditional town planning too often under-estimated needs, particularly those of the poor. Consequently the least advantaged sectors of urban society lack security, and often live in hazardous locations. Equitable systems of land ownership and land management need to underpin New Urban Planning. Plans must recognize the reality of existing slums and informal settlements, and the rights of their residents, and foster strategies that facilitate upgrading and/or negotiated relocation.
8. *Appropriate Tools*: Control of development should be strategic, affordable and effective, sensitive to the needs of the poor while conserving essential ecological resources, rather than attempting to micro-manage land use change and small-scale development. Thoroughgoing land use control is probably only affordable in wealthy economies with highly developed legal systems and a plentiful supply of trained professionals, or in situations of especially pressing need, such as areas of high risk from natural disasters.
9. *Pro-poor and Inclusive*: New Urban Planning recognizes diversity and promotes equality. Particular attention needs to be given to those whose voice has often not been heard in conventional public policy-making – e.g. the old, children, those with disabilities, women, ethnic minorities, the homeless, those with low incomes etc. All have an equal right to the city and a right to be consulted, especially about developments that will affect them.
10. *Cultural Variation*: Cultures of governance and the resources that can be invested in governance vary between different countries. Interpretation of the principles of New Urban Planning will inevitably be influenced by such difference: this contrasts with the uniformity imposed by the old master planning model. Outdated legal regimes and traditional bureaucratic cultures, as well as shortages of skilled personnel and of responsive institutions, are barriers to realizing the benefits from the practice of New Urban Planning.

The result was that, to quote the official record of the WUF, the Forum “placed a strong emphasis on planning as a tool for urban development and environmental management, and as a means of preventing future slum growth. This view was accepted not just by government officials and urban planners themselves, but also by civil society groups that wanted planning to be more inclusive, transparent and ethical.” Since 2006 CAP has further extended its work, holding events to promote “re-inventing planning” in different global regions and working with UN-Habitat on issues of gender in urban planning.

The paper concludes that traditional approaches to urban planning have failed the urban poor. In a globalized world the consequences of that failure are no longer local. Institutional resources need to be mobilised, as quickly as possible, to try to make a difference, and re-invent planning so as to steer a path towards more equitable and sustainable settlements.