

# URBAN GOVERNANCE PLANNING

Did you know that 49 percent of the world's cities have established environmental plans for sustainable development?

Jay Moor



## Strategic Urban Development Planning - Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Urban management problems in the city of Dar es Salaam required an approach that was stakeholder-driven, focused on both the environment and development, and coordinated across sectors and agencies. The city agreed to introduce an environmental planning and management approach. A 'Strategic Urban Development Planning' framework (SUDP) was an integral outcome of the project, involving an environmental profile, community consultations and negotiations among issue-based working groups. The SUDP has generated concrete outputs - most notably strategies, action plans and capital-investment projects - as well as an inter-agency and cross-sectoral mechanism for coordinating city management.

## The Symbiosis of Politics and Planning

If politics is the art of 'Who gets what?', budgets are the outcome, and plans the legitimizing instruments. When politics is highly centralized, plans tend to express vested interests - often interests in real estate and construction. City planning in such circumstances has favoured large engineering projects, boulevard enhancements, housing estates and infrastructure. Among other things, these all move public funds into particular sectors of the economy where employment may be

generated, services provided for favoured constituents, and political decisions made highly visible. The budget is one of the most effective and jealously guarded tools that a politician has, and capital planning can be one of the least transparent governance processes at any level.

As politics has, in recent decades, become more inclusive, representative and democratic, so has planning, especially at the local level. Because of the interdependent relationships between the planner and politician, the planning profession has also changed, often leading the way to new and varied forms of planning designed to respond to structural adjustments in the political scene. In the 1960's, city planners in developed countries became aware that ethnic, racial and class unrest was threatening the stability of the urban political economy, and they introduced the concept of social planning, even becoming 'advocacy' or 'equity' planners when politicians were too slow to react to citizens' neglected needs. These planners may take particular issue with decisions that favour certain groups, usually the privileged, over others, usually the poor, and act to provide their services directly to community groups in neglected parts of the city. Over time, mainstream city planning has adopted many of the methods and objectives of advocacy planning to bring a broader range of citizens into the decision-making process. In the 1970s, planning responded to the new political priorities resulting from environmental concerns, with an 'ecological systems approach' that compares a location's carrying capacity to the potential impacts from various types of development.

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Most cities know in advance the amount of transfer they will receive from higher levels





## Participatory Planning: An Indicator of Democratization

One of the clearest indicators that politics around the world is becoming more inclusive and democratic is the changing approach to the planning function. Within a few years, planning went from a purely physical approach to one that places equal importance on *economic*, *social* and *environmental* issues. In both developed and developing countries, this reflects a shift toward political equity that leaves politicians to face the classic problem of trade-offs among these three domains, each of which can become an ideological world view with its own staunch advocates. Decision-making at the local level does not become easier with democratization. Thus, one of the most useful functions of planning in any city is the intelligence function - providing assessments of social, economic and environmental trends - and providing advice on what choices to make in order to achieve multiple, and sometimes conflicting goals.

From this political 'tri-lemma' has also emerged the current trend toward participatory forms of governance. After letting planners try out techniques like modeling and sub-optimization, to place the full range of citizens' concerns in proper perspective, many city politicians realized that they still could not address their constituents' needs or resolve thorny issues in a politically satisfactory way. Many NGOs, CBOs and civil society organizations have not waited for an invitation. Their already-active involvement in pressing social and environmental issues has been a strong factor in the development of participatory planning.

Of all the prime functions of local government - planning, programming, budgeting and monitoring - planning was the first to throw its doors open to direct public involvement. One of the reasons is that full democratization is a step-by-step process, and legitimizing the priorities upon which budgets would be built (and elections won) is the most important first step. From holding simple public hearings on isolated issues, city planning is evolving to engage whole populations in 'visioning' exercises that identify the full range of issues facing a city, helping articulate what it is that people want for their city in the future, and assigning priorities to possible actions, investments and institutional changes.

## Participatory governance

Opening up the programme design and budgeting processes came next. Considerable progress has been made in the former through techniques like participatory management by objectives, and some promising demonstrations of participatory budgeting have been achieved, especially in Brazil. Feedback functions, long neglected by governments, have taken on a populist flavour with citizen report cards, pioneered in Bangalore, India, action research and other grassroots monitoring instruments promoted through NGOs to provide elected officials with a citizen's view of how well they are doing their job. This all becomes grist for the next round of planning. It was feared, however, that the urban commons - heritage sites, parks and natural areas held in trust for future generations - have no voice in a participatory process designed to elicit priorities among current residents. However, experience shows that, when encouraged to voice their values, people will often reject short-term and selfish choices in favour of the longer-term public interest.

## Planning wears many hats

Today, the many labels attached to city planning reflect the variety of political contexts and key urban issues. As such, they reveal a much more informed and responsible approach to local governance around the world. The City Development Strategy of the newly formed Cities Alliance is a form of planning that targets institutional improvements that will specifically help the urban poor, now considered the prime constituent group of the international community. Local Agenda 21 programmes - urban plans with an environmental focus - are being developed and implemented in communities around the world. Whether economic, social, environmental or institutional in orientation, urban planning is alive.

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## Participatory Urban Governance, Province of Guimaras, the Philippines

With funding from the Canadian International Development Agency, the Provincial Government of Guimaras embarked on a community-based, multi-stakeholder planning and decision-making process aimed at strengthening municipal practices in sustainable development. With more than 5,000 stakeholders involved, including national government agencies, local authorities, the private sector and civil society organizations, strategic plans at all levels of local government have been reviewed and improved.

### Ian McHarg

In 1969, Ian McHarg, a professor of landscape architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, introduced ecological concepts into the planning profession with his book, *Design With Nature*. His path-breaking ideas on how to match development to the intrinsic suitability of the natural environment have influenced thousands of city and regional plans, from the USA to Yugoslavia, from Nigeria to South Korea. McHarg's method, in which planners itemize every level of detail about a place - and then take these into account when developing - is the basis for computer-run geographic information systems (GIS), an essential tool in urban planning today. McHarg insisted that the ecological method could be applied to a city, neighbourhood, community institution or even a family, by judging them against their impact on the health of their environment - natural and cultural. In a recent informal Internet survey of planners around the world, he was voted the world's greatest living planner. On 5 March 2001, Ian McHarg died at the age of 80.