

Demise of Planning*

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1. Introduction

In this essay, I will review a number of weaknesses inherent in three major roles that planning has been expected to play. These three roles are societal guidance and steering, aggregation of individual values and social choice, and problem-solving. After brief examination of the weaknesses underlying these three roles of planning, I will analyze the failures, inadequacies and powerlessness of planning and their root causes, arguing for the approaching demise of planning. This is a rather harsh critique of planning profession and practice. However, it is this author's belief that, without this sort of shock treatment, planning practitioners and educators will continue to act as nothing is happening, hastening the demise of planning.

2. Roles of Planning and Weaknesses

1) Societal Guidance and Steering

As we can witness in the arguments of Karl Mannheim,¹⁾ Rexford Tugwell²⁾ and

Amitai Etzioni,³⁾ the first generation of Korean planners also believed in planning as a pursuit of rationality on behalf of a society, full of irrationalities. They expected planning to carry out the function of rational guidance and steering of an irrational society. More planners at the centralized countries, especially developing ones, than those at the decentralized ones, such as U.S. and Britain, emphasized this role of rational guidance and steering of an irrational society.

This has been no exception for Korea. Planning function was institutionalized through five-year economic development plans at the level of vice prime minister, and, in case of spatial planning, large-scale national settlement planning and regional planning were emphasized at the expense of urban planning and urban service delivery. "Heroic" planning was emphasized and accepted, making possible stratospheric rise of heroic planners.

Despite this heroic intention and practice, there existed a number of dangers inherent in this role of planning. First, planning and implementation reflected only the interests and preferences of few ruling-elites, and therefore, there always existed a potential danger of whimsical policy change, influenced by personal taste and preference. Second, many planners mistook societal guidance and steering as social experimentation and engineering. This delusion allowed these planners to produce distorted, inefficient national spatial orga-

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nization by applying untested theories, e.g., growth pole and axis. Maybe growth pole with its backwash and spread effects looked wonderful on a paper, but in reality the policy amplified interregional differentials through the mechanism of cumulative, circular causation and caused irrevocable damage to national development and ultimately to national unity. Even worse, Korean planners may be the only ones on this earth who shamelessly continue to apply techniques of location quotient and shift-share analysis to policy prescription. Third, monopoly of rationality by the few excluded interests, values and preferences of the affected from planning process, and this exclusion in turn resulted in revolts by the affected, best exemplified in phenomena, such as NIMBY, LULU and others. This monopoly might have been legitimized and accepted, based upon validity claims of expertise. Now the affected demand not only their voices to be heard in planning process but also more power to decide their own affairs.

These developments forced the Korean planners to accept a new role of planning--aggregation of individual values and public choice. However, they are not doing it willingly and quietly but kicking and screaming.

2) Aggregation of Individual Values and Social Choice

This year, the Korean government created low-ranking official positions for city planners. Somehow this formalized an end of heroic planning and planners. And planning school faculty members around the country are very happy to see that a burden to find jobs for graduating students is going to be less. However, the real question is not the number of job openings but that of whether planners are prepared to accept this new role of aggregation of individual preferences and social choice, which was forced upon them.

The problematic of individual values

and public choice is not easy one to resolve both in theory and practice. In theory, if we all live in Bentham's world of pain and pleasure principle, it's an easy one.⁴⁾ But Arrow denied this dream long time ago, proving that it is impossible to derive a social choice function from individual preference functions.⁵⁾

Also, in practice, it is almost impossible to resolve this obstacle. First, there is a problem of revealed preference. Identification of individual preferences must precede any policy choice. For, without identifying individual preferences in advance, planners cannot formulate goals and problems and their respective means and solutions. But we can find out individual preferences of the affected only after policy choice is made. Second, individuals don't know much about their preferences and so often individuals hide their preferences if they have to share cost burden (e.g., in case of free ride). You may argue that through opinion survey and research planners can find out what people want and don't want. However, we already know that opinion survey and research is to manipulate individual preferences rather than to identify them. Third, even the institution of voting in a liberal democratic parliamentary system cannot resolve this problematic. In case of low voter participation, it can identify only the spoken minority, leaving the majority unspoken. Maybe only the complete decentralization, such as Tiebout's voting by feet,⁶⁾ can resolve this difficulty. However, transaction costs will be too prohibitive to implement any complete or far-reaching decentralization.

Maybe Tugwell was well intended to overcome this obstacle by replacing a social choice function with planner's rationality. Even if Tugwell's intention was benign, it is difficult to avoid Hayek's criticism of tyrannical tendency inherent in planning,⁷⁾ which is well illustrated in Ashby's law of requisite variety.⁸⁾ For

planners tend to limit the scope of diversity in individual preferences rather than adequately increasing his/her capacity enough to match and handle the diversity.

3) Problem-Solving

If you reveal your profession as a planner to anyone on the street, I am sure that they will be mad at you, fuming and screaming "Why can't you do anything about this traffic jam, housing shortage and high rent, choking air quality and poisoning tap water, and etc.?" You are expected to solve these ills. Otherwise the legitimacy of planning profession is being undermined.

If you accept this role of problem-solving (actually you do not have a choice but to accept the role), you give up a traditional function of setting up future goals and selecting and implementing the best means to achieve them. And time horizon of a planner is moved to present from future. Now you are playing a game of catch-up with present rather than being one-step ahead of present. You do not have a luxury of exercising your rationality any more. Rationality is allowed only in a time of stagnant or leisurely change. In addition, if you are obsessed with solving present problems, you are losing a sight of future direction that you should take into consideration in policy-making. This in turn results in a criticism--"Why can't you look one step ahead?" Simply, you are trapped and there is no way out.

In addition, the definition of 'problem' itself is problematic, inviting more troubles for planners. 'Problem' can be defined as a discrepancy between one's ideal and his/her perception of reality. Therefore, definition of a problem changes, depending upon whom you are asking, and, as a result, there can be a number of definitions of a problem. Not only one's ideal is derived from, but also his/her perception of reality is affected by, his/her value system. One's value system differs from

others', depending upon his/her position in a society. Now, instead of a single definition of a problem and its solution, there exist multiple definitions and solutions for a problem.

Planners must choose which version of a problem to solve. This eventually will favor a certain group or class at the expense of others. And Korean planners are really ill prepared to accept this politically charged, demanding role. In addition, it seems that, as this role of problem-solving is being emphasized, the problematic of individual values and collective choice appears more difficult to resolve.

Upon reviewing the weaknesses and difficulties inherent in different roles of planning, it is no surprise to hear numerous complaints and criticisms about inadequacy, failure and powerlessness of planning--"Why have planners failed to do anything?", "Why can't planners do anything right?", ... Now, let's examine some root causes of these inadequacies, failures and powerlessness.⁹⁾

3. Inadequacy, Failure and Powerlessness of Planning

"There have been a number famous planners, but not a single decent plan, in Korea." Maybe economic, political and social conditions in 1960s, 70s and 80s required heroic and famous planners, and, because of their heroic efforts, it was possible for urban and regional planning to be accepted as a legitimate function of the state and as a justifiable academic field in many universities. However, despite their benign intentions, heroic efforts and far-surpassing abilities, they still cannot escape many criticisms of failures, inadequacies and powerlessness of planning they pitched feverishly.

1) Inadequacy of Planning

First, this criticism of inadequacy points out that we are not good at planning at

all, lacking professional expertise, much needed information, financial means, and supporting institutions. Solution to this problem is a simple one, that is, expanding information pool and financial resources, raising professional standards, and building and upgrading institutions. Second, this criticism also points out that planners required to pursue objectivity and value-neutrality are inevitably insensitive to people's daily needs. Answer to this sort of criticism is to decentralize planning functions, ultimately opening up planning process to citizen participation. Third, this criticism also directs our attention to the planned by showing that planning has been successful in promoting the interests of the strong rather than those of the weak and the have-not's. To fend off this criticism, it is argued that planners should institute advocacy planning and support and protect grass-roots movements.

In summary, this kind of criticisms have made us to focus our attention to the question of how to raise efficiency and effectiveness of planning process. However, planners have reacted negatively to these criticisms and suggested solutions. Their reactions have been: (1) increased informational load would cause a bottleneck in planning process, thus lowering the efficiency of planning process; and (2) opening-up and decentralization of planning process would result in the control of planning process by unimportant, unessential and local interests, therefore introducing irrational elements into rational planning process. Basically planners argue that suggested solutions are against what they have been striving for.

However, upon a careful examination, we can easily sort out that increasingly common phenomena, such as NIMBY and LULU, are expressions of desperate attempts to open up planning process by those whose interests are excluded from, or rarely reflected in, planning process. These phenomena represent a revolt

against the role of planning as societal guidance and steerig and the monopoly of planning rationality by the few, i.e., heroic planners.

2) Structural Limitations

In essence, there exists a gap between planner's mandate to improve cityscape and people's way of life and actual function planners carry out. Planning function is actually decided, and imposed upon planners, structurally by the system. Planning is said to carry out two major functions of the state, namely accumulation (or exploitation) and welfare (or reproduction) functions, and major function planning push forward will be decided in the terrain of class struggle. According to David Harvey,¹⁰⁾ Manuel Castells¹¹⁾ and others, planners carry out mainly system reproduction function by easing accumulation of surplus and circulation of capital for the capital regardless of whatever planner's mandate is.

Planners cannot go on forever, reciting a slogan that planners must take a side of the labour, the have-not's and the weak. In order to pursue goals of redistribution and structural change, planners must do something about limitations imposed on planning function by the system. Planners cannot continue to accept and condone planning process, with much of the interests of the labour, the weak and the have-not's excluded, which has been structurally imposed upon planners. Those structurally excluded from planning process must be reinstated into planning process. But how? How can planners overcome this system's structural limitation?

3) Powerless-ness of Planning

Planners' policy decisions are actually controlled and made by non-planners, such as politicians, entrepreneurs and policy-makers at higher levels of government. Some mid-level managers at construction companies or real estate development

companies have more influence on cityscape and people's way of life than city planners. In addition, cityscape and people's way of life are influenced more strongly by sectoral policies and even more by changes in world system.

For example, mounted efforts of Pusan's transportation planners to solve traffic problem have been dwarfed by the central government's tax policies. Income tax deduction on car insurance premium payments has been allowed, therefore encouraging private ownership and use of an automobile. Indirectly the Korean government has been subsidizing car ownership and use, benefiting the owners and ultimately automobile and tire manufacturers and insurance companies. Transportation planners can solve congestion problem if and only if they limit private ownership and use of an automobile, and that requires an elimination of income tax deduction on car insurance premium payments.

For another example, Pusan's economy has been stagnant mainly due to its declining textile and shoe industries. Local planners' effort to resuscitate Pusan's stagnant economy has been nullified in large part by changing currents in world economic system. Informalization of labour processes has attracted textile and garment industries back to North America, and profit-motivated decisions of Reebok, Nike and Addidas have caused these companies to look for low-cost manufacturers in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, China and other developing countries.

This criticism illustrates that planners do not and cannot control the factors and decisions that really affect the planners' domain. Facing changes and decisions that affect planners' world and domain, they remain powerless.

4. Concluding Remarks

Facing these criticisms and weaknesses, most of Korean planners and planning educators take an attitude of business as usual. I don't see any hope for planning profession. There does not exist any attempt to amend current situation in terms of planning practice and planning education. There has not been a single study to follow up on graduates with a planning degree and to accommodate changing planning practice and practical requirements by adapting planning curriculum. Why do you bother?

Some of planners and planning educators are very corrupt, regarding the profession as a way to personal enrichment. Therefore, there is no reason to break the existing corrupt tie among government officials, planners and planning educators. Why do you rock the boat? Their most common reply is that outside work and contact is necessary for a closure of the gap between theory and practice. But we all know very well that their intentions are not that honorable.

Even among non-corrupt planning educators there exists factional in-fighting. These factions are so-called domestic Ph.D.'s and foreign (especially US) Ph.D.'s. Judging from my experience with these two camps, Korean trained educators tend to emphasize theoretical aspects of planning, looking down upon empirical analysis, while foreign trained educators emphasize empirical analysis, testing hypothesis and building up a system of theories. If you ask domestically trained Ph.D.'s about their fields of specialization, most of them will answer either regional planning or planning theory. Almost none of them will answer urban planning or urban economics, which relies heavily on empirical analysis. The most common complaint I heard from foreign Ph.D.'s is "These MA and Ph.D. candidates misunderstand empirical analysis as some sort

of questionnaire survey or exercise of statistical techniques”, and from domestic Ph.D.’s, “These foreign Ph.D.’s don’t and can’t see big pictures, concentrating only on minute details.”

Finally, for some cultural reasons, serious discussions among planners and planning educators are almost impossible. If someone with authority or someone older than you presents his argument or theory, no one can dispute or question its validity since he/she takes your questioning and dispute as personal insults. In this environment, no matter how valid it may be, you cannot question current planning practice and planning education. I do not doubt that someone will take this essay as an insult and invalid attack to planning profession and even worse to himself/herself. It is no wonder that demise of planning is around corner.

Very first planning program was established at the Dong-A University thirty years ago, and thirty years are plenty of time for the profession to mature. Some of the signs of maturity are self-doubt, self-reflection and self-critique. We must question and critically examine our profession, practice and education. Otherwise we will not survive to see tomorrow. Current attitude of business as usual among planners and educators only warrants the demise of planning.

Endnotes

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