

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED:

The Road Ahead

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It's time now for a reflective look at our history and who we have become. I suppose the central question is, how, given the enormous diversity and range of the Urban Planning Program, we manage to stay together. Why don't we just fly apart into a hundred fragments? The question poses itself, because what we can observe is precisely the opposite: a tremendous effort, in this period of the Professional Schools Restructuring Initiative, to cling to our collective (if always provisional) identity. There must be something that is

holding us together despite the centrifugal tendencies inherent in our diversity and difference.

Part of the answer, of course, is our institutional history. To be ranked among the top three planning schools in the country, as countless letters from our academic peers have said, is no small achievement. We must be doing something right. But what is it?

In part, I think the answer is found in

Harvey Perloff's call for a radical openness and a willingness to engage in institutional learning. Our program today is not what it was in the early seventies. Our ideas about planning itself have undergone a sea change. In his exemplary study of planning education, Raul Bruno Garcia speaks about the current "crisis" of planning—a crisis of paradigms—which, at the intellectual level, he sees as a result of the infinite regress of postmodern deconstructivism. His answer to this crisis is borrowed from the philosopher Richard Rorty's pragmatic turn where "questions of language, epistemology and metaphysics are transformed into questions of practical judgment, politics, and institutional reconstruction. From an obsession with words and texts from which there seems to be no escape, we are redirected towards a concern with actions and their consequences in the real world, and with the details of the social institutions which mediate their consideration, selection, and implementation" (Garcia, 1993:33). Put in these terms, we have of course always been there with "a concern with actions and their consequences in the real world" and with "the details of social institutions." We have skirted the postmodern abyss by engaging in a progressive practice of planning.

Garcia's road map, citing Rorty's "practical judgment, politics, and institutional reconstruction," leaves us with the question of whether and what extent these can be taught as a common foundation for planning. In a recent article, I highlight five

principles of what I call "non-Euclidean" planning. They are really not very different from Rorty's and Garcia's three points. Planning, I say, should be normative, innovative, political, transactive, and based on social learning (Friedmann, 1993:482-85). Normative planning is politically engaged planning on behalf of positive, socially constructive values. Innovative planning has to do with ways that existing institutions can be reshaped to allow the social values for which we stand—such as social justice, such as affirmative action on behalf of disadvantaged groups in the society—to be realized in practice. Political planning concerns the questions of power and strategies of implementation that should become part of planners' everyday vocabulary. Transactive planning is a planning based on what John Forester calls (following Habermas) communicative action and which I call dialogue, and which is always a face-to-face process in which planners engage others processes that are ultimately grounded personal relations of trust. Finally, planning as social learning takes place in situations that are structured to minimize hierarchy, and encourage radical openness to other perspectives, other possibilities of being in the world.

I have come to believe that these five modes of planning are what we try seriously to practice at GSAUP. We are currently battling to save this way of being in the world as a program dedicated to the education of young planners and to research in our field.

Note, if you will, that I have not tried to provide yet another definition of “what is planning,” as though we could somehow succeed in bounding our field. The field described by the five terms of “non-Euclidean” planning is a dynamic, perpetually evolving field that is defined by its progressive practice. There can be no better guide to the future that lies ahead.

Garcia, Raul Bruno. 1993. *Changing Paradigms of Professional Practice, Education, and Research in Academe: A History of Planning Education in the United States*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

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