
Anchor Points for Planning's Identification

This discussion paper was developed by the Strategic Marketing Committee of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. Members of the committee are Cheryl K. Contant, Bruce Ferguson, Deborah Howe, Jerome Kaufman, and Sammis White. Dowell Myers is the committee chair and principal author.

What defines the field of planning? Are there special characteristics that distinguish our research and education from that of other disciplines and professions? What does planning contribute that could not just as well be provided in various other academic departments?

These are not idle questions. Increasingly, university administrators are questioning the allocation of shrinking resources as they search for more efficient administrative structures and attempt to advance their campus's image in the world. Planning academics can no longer assume the security of the status quo; instead, we must define and articulate our special contribution more clearly and vigorously. More than a defensive posture, such assertion might lead to a more expansive role for our programs.

The present paper seeks to stimulate self-reflection within the planning community. How can we represent the special features of planning more effectively? The paper builds upon discussions of ACSP's Strategic Marketing Committee, Executive Committee, and Review and Appraisal Committee, and it may serve as the basis for future discussion. It is part of a continuing dialogue, and comments are welcomed.

Amorphous Diversity in Search of Coherence

Planning is distinguished by its great breadth and diversity. Unfortunately, this strength has been perceived by others as a weakness. The proliferation of specialties, problem areas, and paradigms within planning may create the impression of a highly fragmented and inchoate field. Surely there is a rationale to our present diversity, and it behooves us to articulate a more unified vision for the benefit of central administrators, colleagues in other fields, and inquiring students.

Debates over planning often focus on its topic areas. Planning is about cities, many say. Others ask, what about regions or small towns? Another common assertion is that land use and spatial relations lie at the heart of planning. This is met by a shower of counter claims: geography covers that same

topic area; planning should really focus on social needs, on political economy, on governance, on decision processes, etc. Drawing topical boundaries may be futile: Do we include land use and transportation, but exclude social services and economic development? Should *all* aspects of transportation be included?

More fruitful is an alternative approach to self definition. Rather than draw boundaries that narrow our range and exclude facets of our profession, let us identify key themes cutting across many different specialty areas. Certain generic themes may provide the binding element for our internal diversity while simultaneously distinguishing our field from others. All these themes may not be simultaneously present in any individual planning project, but all work that is "planning" can be distinguished by its reference to selected themes from the common set.

Crosscutting Generic Themes

Generic themes can be identified in the history of planning thought and practice in the latter half of the 20th century. Consider how well each of the following themes may anchor planning's identity:

- 1) A focus on improvement of **human settlements** with:
 - emphasis on understanding cities, suburbs, small places, and regions, including processes of physical development and their changing social and economic characteristics; and
 - emphasis on making places better serve the needs of people, including solving perceived urban problems.
- 2) A focus on **interconnections** among distinct community facets, incorporating:
 - linkages among physical, economic, natural, and social dimensions;
 - linkages among sectors, e.g. transportation and land use, housing and economic development, etc.; and
 - linkages between public and private enterprises.
- 3) A focus on the **future** and pathways of change over time, encompassing:
 - affirmation of community goals and aspirations;
 - forecasting probable or feasible paths;
 - developing plans to achieve desired futures; and
 - understanding historical momentum shaping the present and future.
- 4) A focus on identification of the **diversity of needs** and distributional consequences in human settlements, guided by:
 - concern for public well-being;

- monitoring changing population;
 - targeting needs of all segments in the population; and
 - developing rationales for equitable distribution of community benefits.
- 5) A focus on **open participation** in decision making, including:
- citizen participation;
 - stakeholder representation;
 - negotiation and mutual compromise among competing interests;
 - dispute resolution;
 - communication of technical facts in lay terms; and
 - recognizing value-centrism embedded in analysis and prescription.
- 6) A focus on **linking knowledge and collective action**, recognizing that:
- planning bridges academic knowledge and professional practice;
 - information flows across the bridge both ways, linking the university to the “real world”;
 - planning practice is enhanced by infusion of humanities, social science, and technical knowledge; and
 - academic knowledge is enhanced by confrontation with experience in practice.

Distinguished from Other Fields

This set of six generic themes anchor the essence of planning. Work at the very core of the field might include all six themes; however, most planning work is likely to incorporate only three to five of these anchor points at a time, addressing those in greater depth. Work conducted by other disciplines may share some of these individual themes, but none can reproduce our distinct combinations of themes.

Several planning specialty areas share participation from other fields. What distinguishes planning’s contribution, for example, to transportation from that of engineering? Or, what separates the planner’s contribution to urban design from that of the architect? Or, what distinguishes the planner’s contributions to urban problem solving from those of professionals trained in public policy or urban affairs? Still further insight might be gained from considering planning’s potential contribution to a less traditional problem area: How might a planner’s approach to AIDS differ from that of a public health specialist?

As close scrutiny of these examples would likely reveal, planning’s distinctive contribution reflects the six themes posited above. Building on these insights, this suggests a number of broad topic areas where planning has strategic advantages:

- Planning has a relative monopoly on identifying interconnections within community and human settlements.
- Planning is relatively uncontested in the area of community analysis, forecasting, and positing desired futures.
- Planning is also unique where decision making and

diversity of needs intersect with community context and the forging of desired futures.

- Planning makes connections between public and private activities within the community, leading for example to planning’s dominance of several fields, including zoning, land use, and economic development.
- Still other strategic advantages in specific topic areas may be identifiable.
- A final, overall distinction is that the intersection of a community focus with a knowledge-action linkage provides planning a window on *complex relations in a microcosm*, an outstanding learning opportunity.

Articulating the Importance of Planning’s Identity

Recognizing the set of six anchor themes in the field’s identification, how can this information be used to strengthen our field’s image in the eyes of others? Foremost, we must become more self-aware when representing ourselves. Concerns we hold self-evident, with little need for discussion, should be expressly cited, thereby sharpening our emphasis on planning’s unique advantages.

More specific uses of the anchor themes may be:

- a) We can more clearly articulate what planners bring to bear on topic areas that share participation from other fields.
- b) We can collectively emphasize—or simply touch upon—a common set of themes when explaining our field to others (rather than emphasize only its particulars and diversity).
- c) Our written work can identify more consciously its reference to the anchor themes of planning; and, reviewers may look for the articulation of different elements.
- d) Our future work can incorporate components of effort directed toward themes that previously were only latent and underdeveloped.
- e) Our planning curricula can actively build skills in each anchor theme.
- f) University administrators will be interested in how planners can lead their campus’ efforts to solve state and local problems, bringing academic knowledge to bear on problems of importance to the citizenry and elected officials.

These are just a few of the advantages to be gained from a self-conscious articulation of the special qualities of the planning field. The six anchor points for planning’s identification that are posited here may help outsiders to better understand how so many substantive specialties can fit under a common umbrella. Renewed emphasis on the anchor points may also help planners to better appreciate their shared identity within the broader field.

Principal author Dowell Myers is an associate professor at the School of Urban Planning and Development, University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

Notes on planning

Paul Niebanck

Ten years ago, I undertook to observe first-hand what was being taught in our professional schools of planning. I traveled among twelve of the better known programs, attended scores of classes, and conversed with hundreds of students, faculty and administrators.

The variety of what was called planning at the time was at first confusing and off-putting. But, as I gave myself over to the diversity, I began to appreciate the reasons for it and the strength implied in it. Planning varies by the substantive concern being engaged, by the intentions being brought to that concern, and especially by the location of planning in the organization of society. There is a place for predictive planning, with its interest in adaptation and control. That sort of planning is time-tested, and it has particular shape. There are other kinds of planning, however, including what I have come to call prophetic planning, experimental planning, and generative planning. Each of these has its legitimate place.

I also began to see common features, a pattern of traits that characterizes planning wherever it is found. I have reported five of them as follows: consciousness; comprehensiveness; collaboration; civility; and a commitment to change (*JAPA* 1988). Each of these is palpably present in the activity called planning. Where all five are operational, and in balance, planning is at its influential best.

The essay, "Anchor Points for Planning's Identification," is a confirmation of what I witnessed in my travels among the planning schools. It affirms the breadth and diversity of the planning field, and it identifies themes that are at the center of planning. The terms used in the essay are different from mine: consequences; interconnections; participation; open participation; improvement. But the traits are essentially the same. The integrity of planning was evident when I did my own work, and it is evident now.

There is more, however. Planning is defined by its integrity, or, in the words used in "Anchors," by how it distinguishes itself from other fields. But, in my understanding, the larger integrity of planning is defined by how it distinguishes itself in relation to other fields. I refer, as examples, to the two most prominent other public vocations, management and politics. Planning shares with management a common concern for outcomes, and planning infuses management with a committed understanding of the democratic principle. Planning shares with politics a concern for public involvement, and it provides politics with a sense of the public good that can be served. The common concern of management and politics with raw power is reciprocated by the concern of planning for bringing people together in common cause. None of these three fields of activity can do the job alone, nor should they try. They need each other, as

synergistic elements in a self-sustaining and self-inventing system.

And there is still more. The emergent era is vastly different from the era we are departing. The differences can be seen most clearly in the comparative degrees of complexity, competition, dynamism, and unpredictability. Each of these has become intensified beyond what would have been conceivable, or tolerable, a few decades ago. The irony, and the opportunity for our field, is that these conditions are precisely where planning thrives. Complexity, appropriately viewed, leads to sophisticated and constructive engagement. Similarly, competition leads to cooperation. Dynamism provides the energy for goal-achievement. And unpredictability opens the door to creative new approaches, even to radical changes in cultural habits. In other words, planning is right for this era, and it should not hesitate to claim its worth.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of the distinguishing traits of planning, and its strategic place in things, is in the educational sector. In its quest for relevance, education is yielding to the principles of planning. While continuing to honor the established disciplines and professions, higher education especially is increasingly interested in cultivating its students' critical and ethical faculties, cultivating in them a concern for things larger than themselves, and teaching them to work together across divisions and towards constructive ends. These are the hallmarks of planning. The fact that the educational enterprise has come to value them signifies the opportunity that is available to our field at this time.

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Paul Niebanck is a visiting professor of urban studies and planning at Portland State University in Oregon and at the University of Washington, Seattle.

Comments from a Survivor

Marie Howland

The ACSP Strategic Marketing Committee has made an important contribution in defining the scope and distinctive role of planning. As Chair of a planning school that was threatened with elimination in the early 1990s, I know first hand the urgency of being able to articulate planning's unique contributions to academia and professional education. Our successful efforts to survive included using planning faculty and professional planners to educate the campus administration and leadership about our graduates' and department's contributions to the state and the prestige of the university.

During the debate over our closure, faculty from some of the main-line disciplines contended that they already do what we do and often do it better. In their view, their econometric,

mathematical, and other theoretical models are more sophisticated, therefore superior. Our survival depended on honing a self definition that distinguished us from other socially oriented units on campus. We used many of the points outlined in *Anchor Points for Planning's Identification*. As a result of this experience and debate, I add to item six, a focus on linking knowledge and collective action. Planners recognize that the most cost effective or best technical solutions are often not politically implementable. Therefore, a planner knows how to balance good technical solutions with political realities.

Whereas, an economist's solution maximizes cost effectiveness and efficiency and an engineer's solution maximizes performance, planners know how to fine tune the best solutions to accommodate contending interest groups. Learning how to implement policies and projects is a theoretical contribution to knowledge by planning academics, and an understanding of how to navigate competing interests sufficient to implement policies and projects is integral to the education of planners.

With the value of hindsight, it's important to educate campus officials about planning's special characteristics before there is a budget crises. We have found that a good way to do this is through active faculty and student involvement in finding solutions to problems facing local communities. Our action research in the City of Baltimore and in Palmer Park and Langley Park in Prince George's county not only gives the administration a tangible example of the university's service to the tax-paying citizens of the state, but illustrates in concrete terms planning education's and city planners' unique contributions to society. Our community involvement shows clearly the themes outlined by "Anchor Points for Planning's Identification," including involvement with human settlements, interconnections between the various disciplines, a focus on a desired future, the balancing and negotiation of diverse needs, the creation of open participation, and linking knowledge and collective action.

Marie Howland is the director of the urban studies and planning program at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Anchor Points: A Critical Commentary

Seymour J. Mandelbaum

The committee has produced a very sophisticated draft that does great things for planning theory as the core of our identity as planning academics. It may, therefore, seem ungracious to complain but that is my role as reviewer of this draft.

Suppose you had started with an image of three groups:

Group 1. Once we represent phenomena as a "planning process," we can designate the participants in that process as

"planners." Of course, there are lots of such folks and very few of them think of themselves as professional planners or as planners at all. That doesn't mean, however, that those folks are not appropriately the objects of our attention when we are trying to understand how complex systems manage to create and choose from a behavioral repertoire: e.g., to assign land to activities by creating a market or a regulatory bureaucracy disciplined by professional design standards.

Group 2. We are particularly interested in the set of persons who represent themselves as professional planners in practice. This group is quite varied in its work practices, in its placement in planning processes—e.g., some are bureaucratic regulators and others creative dreamers—in its relations to clients and to communal disciplines. While in the American usage, city planning is often associated with sub-state politics, our interest in being connected encourages us to see—and study—practitioners who work for national and transnational institutions and who are concerned with phenomena that are only dimly related to the physical form of settlements.

Group 3. Finally, we distinguish a set of persons who prepare novices for the worlds of professional planning and who—in the American model—simultaneously are engaged in the critical study of planning, planners, and practitioners.

There is a great deal of overlap between these three groups. If you, nevertheless, allow me that initial division, you may also agree that the creation of your text is driven by the differentiation of Groups 2 and 3 and by the dilemmas created by the identification of Group 3—us—both with the professional practitioners (Group 2) and with the critical study of planning and planners (Group 1). The committee approaches this troubling (and deeply valued) differentiation and the dilemmas by a sophisticated rhetorical strategy: "Anchor Points" virtually ignores planning and planners (Group 1), and markets Group 3 by constructing an idealized representation of Group 2 under the rubric of "planning." (The work of many ACSP members is full of examples of real practitioners who have violated the committee's anchor points.)

If I were a provost (God forbid) I would quickly discern that device and ask, instead, about a quite different set of concerns:

a) Is Group 2 important in the processes that shape the loosely bounded set of institutions and arrangements signalled in American usage by the terms "city and regional planning?" Does Group 3's engagement with Group 2 inhibit its contribution to our collective understanding of planning? Should I turn my urban studies program into a planning program or vice versa? Should I assign planning as a phenomena to all of the disciplines that already are interested in it without signalling it out any more than I create a department of alienation, exploitation, happiness, etc.

b) How does Group 3—generally and within institutions—juggle the demands of socialization into a set of professional practices and its commitment to critical inquiry within an epistemic community? What about the emotional

claims of its identification with Group 2 and its more general intellectual interest in planning? In what ways and at what temporal scale should Group 3's performance be assessed by its impact on Groups 2 and 3? If I adopt that standard for the planning professorate, must I develop a comparable standard for economists, anthropologists, etc.?

c) What's different about an epistemic community centered upon the assessment of alternative futures and the ways of achieving them? What are the disciplines of such a community? (Alas, there are no facts about the future!) How do those disciplines differ from the disciplines of communities centered on the construction of both ideographic and nomothetic statements about the past? How do and how should those epistemic communities relate to one another?

As you may suspect, if I ran the zoo the propositions in your draft would persuade me—particularly if I had a proprietary interest in the concept of “community.” (The final bullet would clue me that something was amiss.) Less personally, I would be unpersuaded because I couldn't distinguish between claims for Group 2 and Group 3.

The list (a to f) shows the stress in the rhetorical strategy. Having identified planning with an idealized representation of Group 2, “Anchor Points” suddenly shifts to the obligation of Group 3 authors or of ACSP as a collective unit. It speaks of “can”—as if there were a specious limit that you have removed—rather than “should” (with a warrant). It adopts the language of problem-solving when many of those “problems” are viewed as cherished social configurations that are not amenable to “academic knowledge”—the committee's term.

Seymour J. Mandelbaum is a professor in the city and regional planning program at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

The Planners' Century

Judith E. Innes

Planning has the potential in the 21st century to be a leader among professions with public interest missions. For this to happen, however, both practicing planners and the academy must have courage and imagination. We must build on what we do best and systematically reinvent our field for the post-modern era. What we do best is make connections—among interests, public agencies, and professions and disciplines; between public and private sectors; and ultimately between government and the public. In the pursuit of the ideal of comprehensiveness, we have been interdisciplinary. Through studios and workshops we have helped students to see that, while we have tools for analysis, each situation is distinctive and each problem is an opportunity. We teach our students to think for themselves and develop skills at defining inchoate problems, communicating with many audiences, and

synthesizing complex plans and strategies designed to deal with a whole community, neighborhood, or city. We teach them to focus on the future and to work constantly with others to achieve change. Our finest graduates combine idealism with pragmatism and openmindedness with both creativity and the ability to get things done. Our graduates adapt quickly to new conditions and opportunities as Glasmeier and Kahn (1989) recognized when they found that 38 percent of planning graduates were employed in jobs that largely did not even exist ten years earlier. Many planning graduates today are at the center of the most innovative developments in our cities and regions and at the forefront of efforts to create new institutions for public decision making.

The world of the late 20th century is characterized by fragmented power; distrust of government and experts; multiple, seemingly incommensurable discourses; and a new tribalism, where groups celebrate their differences. All over the world, new processes and new institutions are being invented to deal more effectively with the future. Technological change and globalization of economies require professionals who can both see the big picture and creatively respond to a rapidly changing context. Under these conditions collaborative, communicative planning is proliferating in its applications. This “post-modern” planning involves making connections among ideas and among people; setting in motion joint learning; coordinating among interests and players; building social, intellectual and political capital; and finding new ways to work on the most challenging tasks. This kind of planning, when it is done well, builds its own support and changes the world. Post-modern planning confronts the challenge of continuous change, not by creating blueprints or rigid regulatory regimes, but by trying to influence its direction and preparing to meet uncertainty.

We, as a profession, must be far more intentional about preparing our students for the 21st century and helping them to build on the unique capabilities of this field. The modernist vision of practice—that is, “rational” planning with its emphasis on quantitative analysis, neutral expertise, and the provision of answers for decision makers—has never been planners' greatest comparative strength. Engineers, public policy analysts, and economists have always done these tasks better and believed in them more. Planners, while they also have these analytic skills, use them far less often than their communicative abilities, as every survey of practicing planners has shown. Despite the exhortations of the last thirty years of modernist thought, planners have never fully bought into the rational model. Nor have they viewed themselves as neutral experts. Only a minority of the planners, for example those that Howe (1994) interviewed, saw their role as primarily technical. Planners, who are typically between the public and the bureaucracy, need capabilities of boundary spanning, mediating, learning, and inventing.

To move forward, those of us in the academy must embrace and develop new intellectual frameworks more suited

to the post-modern context than the rational, top down planning and the constrained analytic tools that have often been offered to students as a primary method. As we do so we will find that planning is better able to adapt to change than many other fields. The new world view will no longer be grounded in the rational deductive and mechanical cause-and-effect framework of the Newtonian universe, but in the concepts of nonlinear dynamic systems, complexity, networks, and distributed intelligence that are emerging from physics, biology, and computer science. These ideas show us a universe that is self-organizing and evolutionary and one in which efforts of prediction or command and control are futile. From this perspective, planners are well ahead of the curve. They have always known the world was complex and that everything was interconnected, and they have always found ways to work in teams to find more nuanced strategies. Planners have in their quiet ways resisted the simplistic, reductionist thinking that has led to so many failures of public policy. Now they can make a virtue of their abilities to work in multiple ways with multiple players and publics. The 21st century can be the planners' century if we make it so.

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Judith E. Innes is a professor with the department of city and regional planning at the University of California, Berkeley.

The Central Sixth Theme: Linking Knowledge and Collective Action

Amy Helling and David Sawicki

Of all the themes that the Strategic Marketing Committee identifies as binding the field and profession together, as well as helping to distinguish it from others, none is more important than the last: the commitment to linking knowledge and collective action. Students encountering planning for the first time learn that, unlike the other social sciences they may have studied, planning is prescriptive rather than descriptive. Rather than standing on the sidelines, we hope planners act and spur others to act. This is an attractive prospect to just the kind of people we all hope will join the profession—pragmatic idealists. But “breaking gridlock” is not enough by itself. Planning is not politics or community organizing. Even planners who criticize the rational paradigm would agree that a plan that failed to consider alternative approaches was deeply flawed. And taking no action is often the best course. So planners' bias in favor of action distinguishes us from those

who seek only to understand, and whose disciplinary culture says nothing about acting on this knowledge. It may more accurately be stated as a bias in favor of relevance. (Focusing on settlements may lead us somewhat astray by suggesting that the places, and not their inhabitants, are our primary concern.)

Our long-standing commitment to using and improving decision-making processes, based on both knowledge and on the values of those with a stake in the outcome, is proof that planning is different from the other social sciences. It is also different from other professions, which may link knowledge to action but almost never to collective action. Although some planners spend more time assembling knowledge than they do fostering collective action, and the opposite is also true, all believe in the importance of the linkage.

Linking knowledge and collective action is more active and takes on heavier professional responsibility than merely “affirming community goals.” It says that planners strive to share relevant knowledge in the interest of improving decisions about the future. Individual values are important, but if values change with deeper understanding, that is not something to regret. Similarly, planners are not limited to “forecasting probable or feasible paths.” A plan is more than a forecast, which economists and demographers can produce as well.

Defining this theme also helps us identify activities that may be called planning, but that don't really merit the name. We think of: participatory processes that bring people together without the information they need to see alternatives and choose among them; technical recommendations that set policy for huge capital investments without consulting the people who will pay for them; designs whose benefits are asserted, but not demonstrated; proposals whose alternatives were never considered; regulation that becomes an end in itself; cookie-cutter applications in spite of unique economic, cultural or environmental factors; data collection and provision without a clear purpose; solutions that reinvent the wheel in state and local governments across the nation.

When these things are called planning, they give planning a bad name. This is a message to give young planners who have not heard it, old planners who have forgotten it, those of us who overlook it under the pressure of work, and citizens who rely on planning, but have no way to evaluate it unless we tell them what they deserve.

We agree completely with the first five themes: that planners (1) focus on improving people's environments (instead of human settlements), (2) take a comprehensive view, (3) have a future orientation, (4) concern themselves with equity, and (5) believe in participatory decision-making. But we will argue first and foremost for planners to portray themselves as, and concern themselves with, linking knowledge and collective action.

Amy Helling is an assistant professor at the School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University.

David Sawicki is a professor of city planning and public policy at Georgia Institute of Technology.