Towards Collaboration between Planning Practitioners and Academics
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While working continually as a consultant, I have spent the last few years exploring the nature of planning practice in Canada. That exploration has provided me with some useful insight into the views that practitioners have about the profession, planning education and the future of both. It is from this perspective that I have written this brief commentary on the appendix of Leonie Sandercock's new book, Toward Cosmopolis (1998). The appendix, entitled "The Planner Tamed: Preparing Planners for the Twenty-First Century", was prepared with planning educators in mind. Sandercock places her proposals in the context of a modernist practice being challenged by a postmodernist critique. She describes the professional identity of modernist planners as being "a-political, value-neutral, a 'man without qualities' carrying a tool-kit of technical problem-solving skills", and defines her project in terms of the question: "What kinds of knowledge do planners need in a postmodern age in which nothing is certain save uncertainty itself?" (Sandercock 222).

It is my opinion that too many academic writers have undertaken their ongoing analyses of the planning profession while looking down on the world of practice from the closed window of academia. In their reviews of planning and their proposals for a "relevant" profession, academic writers have ignored detailed dialogue with those most affected by their comments: the planning practitioners. But these reviews, carried out too frequently from a single perspective, have not prevented academics from espousing new cures for the profession. That has been the history of modernist critiques — and judging by Sandercock's work, Towards Cosmopolis (1998), it may be the legacy of postmodernist critiques as well.

Sandercock does provide a provocative and useful review of the failure of planning schools to develop a broader set of "knowledges" or "literacies" (technical, analytical, multicultural, ecological, design). But she focuses her blame on "professional institutes [which] dictate the numbers and kinds of
courses planners must take, precisely because these very professional institutes are the gatekeepers of the tight boundaries without which, they fear, there would be no professional (Sandercock 225).

Like most academic reviewers of planning, Sandercock has failed to consult the very people to whom she is directing so much advice: the planning practitioner. What do the professionals think? Does the profession hamstring the teaching of planning, as Sandercock would have us believe — or is the teaching of planning in fact fraught with internal problems?

My recent survey of Canadian planners and research into what practitioners think about the profession, planning theory and education suggests that practitioners are not the only culprits. In fact, they are too often the victims! Victims of an education that has distanced itself from practice, not because the profession has demanded such a distance, but because the academy has too often used exclusionary ways of thinking. Victims because their professional body, CIP, has, in their view, failed to be relevant to practitioners.

My survey of Canadian planners reveals that practitioners want to modify the way they "do business." They agree that their profession runs the risk of becoming irrelevant — majority — especially among those new to the profession — believe that the profession is in a state of crisis. Most planners (in every age group) think that the profession is in a state of crisis because of the political nature of planning, and because planners work in an overly political environment. Planners see themselves as being compromised by the "politics of place." But they do not see a way out.

What about their views on their education? The results are telling. Only 17% of all my surveyed planners think that planning education does a good job preparing planners for practice. Recent graduates in particular believe they have not been prepared properly. Sixty-nine percent of respondents to my survey felt that there was a weak link between the theory and practice of planning, which they believe threatens the well-being of planning practice. Sandrock would have us believe that the problem with education rests in the demands by the profession for a narrow view of relevant education. She is correct in identifying the demand for relevant education, but she has fallen into the modernist trap of blaming the profession itself and the "gatekeeping role" established by professional institutes" (Sandercock 221).

Where are the planning schools of the tight fallen into the modernist trap of the teaching of planning, as practitioners — played a major role nationally — and critical advice: the planning practitioner. Conservation), emerging theories planning, Sandercock has failed Where are the planning schools profession" (Sandercock 225) . established by professional boundaries without which, they blaming the profession itself and Does the profession ham-string issue in which CIP — read planners and research into what literacies — technical, analytical, education suggests that she believes should form the practitioners think about the multi- or cross-cultural, academia has too often used view, Sandercock places blame such distance , but because from practitioners. But, in my experience that planners are the best allies in working toward the realization of Sanderock's "cosmopolis". Sanderock provides a useful starting point for new and meaningful dialogue between the profession and the academy. But this time the dialogue must break the modernist mould in favour of a truly collaborative initiative in which the lessons learned in practice play a more significant role in shaping the content and delivery of planning school curricula.

References:

1 For my doctoral dissertation I compiled a detailed survey of members of CIP and a comprehensive literature review of planning theory. The survey included 15 pages of questions, took approximately 1.5 hours to complete, and was answered by 115 respondents who were selected using a stratified random sampling of CIP Full and Provisional members. The dissertation is entitled "Identifying A More Appropriate Role for the Canadian Planning Profession", Faculty of Graduate Studies, UBC, 1988. A preliminary analysis of the results was reported in my July 1986 Plan Canada article, "Managing the Pulse of Canadian Planners: A Snapshot of the Profession". In 1986 I wrote an article for Plan Canada entitled "Planning Education: The Needs of Practitioners". In addition, I have taught planning studies for the past twenty years, in Landscape Architecture programs and planning schools.

2 It is not to say that some academics do not have a good grasp of the problems facing the profession. But, in my experience such an understanding is the exception rather than the rule. When it does happen, it tends to be on an isolated special contract, not in the day-to-day, get-your-hands-dirty planning that many practitioners face. (See also Halls 1988:540).

3 It is interesting to note that it is often the academic writers who have cited critical practitioners for lack of discourse with those most affected by the practitioners’ world.

4 Sanderock's article in this edition of Plan Canada draws in large part on her appendix in Towards Cosmopolitan, but also has new material developed with an audience of practitioners in mind. The common ground lies in the conclusion, where Sanderock suggests a focus on planning as an ethical inquiry and practice, and where she poses certain "most basic questions of value" that practitioners and academics might tackle together. However, I believe that we may have wandered down her critique of the planning profession in the current article. Managing her message to fit her audience is unfair to my own, and does not provide practitioners (unless they read the Appendices) with some of the ideas she presents, most of which still convey a mentality based on "their" (academics) and "us" (practitioners).

5 It was the planning schools that insisted design considerations from planning teaching, and reduced or eliminated interdisciplinary studios. Twenty-six percent of respondents to my survey thought CIP should be more relevant to its surroundings. They were interviewed to get a sense of the problems of the profession by academics (except in the work of former) has been the distinct lack of recognition that planning is fragile with politics, much of which is out of the control of planners.

8 The following percentages of surveyed planners identified the following areas as those that made their training relevant:

- Skill areas: interdisciplinary approach 69%, writing skills 53%, analytical methods 52%, presentation skills 49%, communication skills 45%, law content 26%, design skills 49%.
- Knowledge areas: planning theory 55%, planning theory 49%, inclusion of disciplines 42%, teaching methods - mix of core and optional courses 55%, general approach 42%, applied studies 36%.

They also identified areas that made their training somewhat or not very relevant (in order of importance):
- Skill areas: lacked office practice, lacked coordination skills, lack law content, lacked design skills.
- Knowledge areas: lacked planning methods, lacked policy development, lacked emerging thought.
- Teaching methods: lacked applied studies.
- To get an overview in planning job, one usually must develop technical competency as a prominent part of our "passionate citizen" persona. While Sanderock is correct in calling for increased focus upon planning as an ethical inquiry and practice, most planners generally need to be blind before they can do their "good work." Most will have trouble getting hired if they lack marketable skills, which are current (and kept current by the potential threat of being replaced by the next crop of planners entering the market). As a planner moves through the profession, technical competency may be shunted out of place by other needs/dills, such as communication, community involvement processes, project management, etc. The key is to strike a balance between technical competency and the passionate citizen’s other literacies.

10 It is interesting to note that I have spent the vast majority of my time in academic outside of planning school curricula, where I found a narrow view of teaching methods and lack of interest in interdisciplinary, design and applied studio teaching methods. For instance, I spent ten years teaching professional practice and regional planning studies in a graduate Landscape Architecture program, where I did encounter an interest in interdisciplinary studio and design teaching.

11 These three processes are: Urbanization Processes, Regional and Inter-regional Economic Growth and Change Processes, City-Building Processes, Cultural Differentiation and Change; the Transformation of Nature; and Urban and Regional Empowerment.