

BOOK REVIEWS

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Planning for Development in the Third World: A Review Article

Some fifteen years ago, J. Friedmann alerted the policy-makers of the countries with less integrated economies to the fact that “national policy for regional development, settlement policy and planning for inter-regional networks are among the truly vital issues” confronting them, and warned that the issues “must be dealt with from a vantage point that is altogether different from that of traditional city planning”.* While it is true that the warning has not fallen on entirely deaf ears, attempts made in the direction of development planning have fallen far short of expectations. For, on entering the eighties, scholars, planners, and policy-makers in developing countries are still desperately searching for planning paradigms. *Third World Planning Review* is thus a timely contribution to the discussion taking place in these countries on strategies for development planning. The Third World has waited hungrily long enough for a journal devoted to the concerns of “all aspects of town and regional planning in developing countries” (p. 4). The appearance of the TWPR fills an urgent and long felt need by all those concerned with planning. It has relevance not only to the Third World in general but also to the planning problems of Southeast Asia.

Edited in the Department of Civic Design in the University of *Town Planning Review* fame, *TWPR* is intended “to act as a forum for communication between planning practitioners, teachers, research workers and students and for an interested non-specialist readership” (Press Release). Judging by the contributions of the first issue, the Journal promises great potential in achieving the task it sets for itself.

Franklin’s paper on “Physical Planning and the Third World” convincingly spells out the need for planning in developing countries. One could challenge the validity of the author’s assertion that physical (land-use) planning is too often thought of as a highly sophisticated professional activity, with a negative, restricting, controlling nature peculiar to the needs and circumstances of the more highly urbanized industrial countries of the developed world. But the reader could hardly disagree with him that with

*J. Friedmann, “Regional Planning as a Field of Study”, in *Regional Development and Planning: A Reader*, J. Friedmann and W. Alonson (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press), p. 69.

rapid population increase; with tremendous social needs, and large-scale and unplanned rural-urban migration together with too rapid and unbalanced an urban growth and too high a level of unemployment and limited resources, the developing countries "should do everything possible to ensure that development takes place in a planned orderly and effective manner" (p. 9). It may sound superficial, but it nevertheless needs to be emphasized with some force.

Not all leaders in the developing countries, including Southeast Asia, would accept his dictum "to place less emphasis on economic and industrial performance and to pay greater attention to the spatial distribution of development and the realization of social objectives". However, one would find it hard to quarrel with his plea for "an end to the laissez-faire approach to development", or to advocate against "national development plans to be thought of in terms of separate, unrelated, uncoordinated, and frequently competing sectors of development such as agriculture, industry, roads, education, housing and so on" (p. 14).

Touching upon the "relevance" of planning and development skills, techniques, and solutions developed within the more highly urbanized, industrialized countries to Third World needs and conditions, the author strikes what is perhaps an unpalatable, but nevertheless, sobering note: "Leaders from developing countries, often trained overseas, are sometimes unwilling for political prestige or personal reasons to accept techniques, standards and solutions seemingly less sophisticated, grandiose, and costly than those to be found in the Western World" (p. 21). Confronted with glaring examples of planning failures from some of the developing countries, those concerned with development strategies will have to admit, even though grudgingly, that this statement contains much more than a grain of truth.

The problem of the living environment is, among other things, discussed in two "approach" articles. Rapoport's paper ("An Approach to Designing Third World Environment") comprises a preliminary survey of a planning approach aimed at improving development projects in order to meet the real needs of the users or beneficiaries whose environments are affected. For practising designers of the Third World environment, there is rich food for thought in this paper. "Environment quality must be understood and evaluated in its cultural context" (p. 23) is a line of thought bringing together the elements of living environment, planning targets, and the cultural basis of the population subjected to planning. It is a simple maxim, often preached but rarely practised. "Environments are 'good' to the extent that they relate to the way people live, which in turn, relates to psychological, social-cultural and behavioural variables" (p. 24). One often wonders to what extent the planners in the Third World are intellectually tuned to identify and define these variables, under the pressure of the political directives and the spectre

of dollars and cents, of cost-effective analysis.

Juppenlatz's "A Comprehensive Approach to Training for Human Settlements" is a response to Habitat 1976. Agreeing with the President of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) that in developing countries, urban growth, instead of providing the basis for industrial growth and social change, is in fact "spawning a culture of poverty that threatened the economic health of entire nations" (p. 87). The author states that the process of urban involution has begun and "serious thought should be given by the international fraternity and the third world governments to the consequences of its continuance".

With 67 per cent of the Calcutta population, 45 per cent in Bombay, 35 per cent in Manila, 26 per cent in Jakarta, 24 per cent in Seoul, and 23 per cent in Karachi (to cite a few of the big cities in Asia) eking out an existence in slums and squatter settlements, the reader will need little persuasion to be convinced of the grave consequences of the spread of this urban-centred poverty. However, having encountered examples of planned failure brought about by over-ambitious urbanization policies, this reviewer is less convinced that "Urbanization *per se*" can be taken as "one of the prime instruments of the contemporary development process" (p. 87) as asserted by the author. Indeed, with an overwhelmingly majority of the population still striving for a living in rural areas, and the small dent that urban-based development planning has made on the national scene, the planners in developing countries are now seemingly more responsive to the need of contemplating alternative strategies aimed at accelerating rural development.

The problems of slums and quality of the environment are also dealt with in the article by Okoye ("Urban Planning in Nigeria and the Problems of Slums"). The assessment that the human element is predominant in slum causation and "decrepit structures and a poor physical environment are merely the outcome of human actions and ways of life" (p. 79) would find easy acceptance throughout the developing world. "The failure to recognize and give sufficient consideration to human elements in slum development" (p. 79) is not confined merely to Nigeria. It is to be found in Southeast Asia too, and the failure of the "bulldozer approach" in solving slum problems must be widely shared by policy-makers throughout the Third World. Unless the planners are prepared to look sympathetically into the mechanism involved in the genesis and the spread of the squatter settlements within the context of socioeconomic and particularly the human problems (this does not necessarily imply an unqualified approval of the "Slums are for People" viewpoint), the danger of the blanket bulldozer approach as an easy way out will always remain.

The paper by Gosling (on Brasilia) and Okpala ("A Critique of the Application of New Town Concepts in Nigeria") provide an interesting

contrast between two sets of environment in the Third World where Western concepts are applied.

The Brasilia case is a familiar one. Gosling assures us that whether it is taken as a symbol of optimism in a golden future which epitomize the energy and enthusiasm of a young and powerful emerging nation, or as a symbol of megalomania, or a visionary experiment aimed at creating a Federal Capital in the wilderness to open up the vast hinterland of a richly endowed country, the physical feat of Brasilia is in itself "without parallel anywhere in the world" (p. 42). As a planning example, very few countries in the Third World could ever dream of repeating its grand scale. However, planning failures manifested in Brasilia in terms of perception of space may have some relevance for Third World planners. It has been suggested that one experiences "a sense of orientation or significance when viewing Brasilia from without, but penetrating the spaces within the city, the effects of meaning or orientation diminish rapidly and progressively in intensity" (p. 53). This is attributed to the psychological effect caused by the physical environment, a point worth noting by urban planners in the Third World.

The question of whether Brasilia possesses an "urban centre"—another issue of controversy, with ramifications for future urban planning—is also taken up by some critics. It is argued that "if the physical spaces are not organized in any apparent manner, the relationship between the "centrality" of urban activities and appropriate townscape spaces disappears" (p. 53). The failure of some satellite towns, not an uncommon feature in the developing countries, can also be traced to the feeble presence of the "centre", condemned to a precarious existence at the outset—the planning board. If a towering giant like Brasilia still suffers from a sense of dislocation and lack of "urban centrality", satellite town planners in the Third World would do well to remind themselves of the centripetal pull of the central city when they site satellite towns in close proximity to existing centres.

Okpala's paper focuses on a case study in Nigeria to evaluate the application of the new town concept and the concept as a strategy for control of urban growth in the country. The conclusion drawn from his study is clear-cut: for a country at its present stage of urbanization, "a *planned* and rationalized higher density form of city development is what Nigeria needs", and "satellite new towns are too expensive luxuries for Nigeria ..." (p. 68). This twofold conclusion is based presumably on the assumption that "the traditional socio-cultural value system of Nigeria favours high density living" (p. 68) and "high density development can achieve savings in the efficiency of community services, utility networks and transportation systems" (p. 67), and the belief that "satellite new towns create pressures on and stretch various kinds of infrastructure and involve huge costs in additional infrastructure and utilities" (p. 67).

The strategy recommended by the author in the realm of urban planning and development is thus a "well-planned physical expansion of existing cities", to avoid "the unnecessarily rapid sprawling development" (p. 69).

This conclusion is perhaps more thought-provoking than convincing. High density living has been made a necessity in many a space-starved situation. Recommending planned and rationalized higher density form of city development as a strategy for urban planning, in keeping with the traditional sociocultural value system in a situation where space does not impose a constraint, is perhaps to be guilty of trading future development for past tradition and present convenience. It would then be oblivious of the fact that the very purpose of planning is to induce changes in the environment. By the same token, fighting shy of satellite towns for reasons of "critical opportunity costs" and savings in "additional infrastructure and utilities" is to reduce a highly disciplined and formalized activity of planning for a better future to a short-term exercise in cost-juggling. From other studies, it does not appear that the prescribed course for Nigeria—physical expansion of existing towns—would be adequate to cope with the pressing problems faced by that country.†

Higdon's "Navrongo's Economic Base: A Cautionary Tale" is a disturbing paper, highlighting the dilemma and the "professional hazards" of the planning teachers and professionals in the Third World. The author relates "a cautionary tale" from the teaching frontier in Ghana. He was on secondment from Newcastle University to teach undergraduate planners at the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. He was conscious of the fact that the greatest problem of education for planning (and for most of the disciplines for that matter) is that almost all the available literature is concerned with Western patterns of activity and is thus divorced from the students' experience. The author therefore devised a project for the students. This was to investigate the workings of the traditional market to complement theoretical economic knowledge and to see if market activity could be harnessed to alleviate environmental squalor (p. 101). This approach,

†A recent study by Ajaegbu, e.g., indicates that vast rural areas in Nigeria are "far away from the *existing* growth-generating urban centres", and "planning in the country should be concerned also with *creating* and *developing* such centres" [emphasis mine], together with their hinterlands (p. 63). Ajaegbu's study also reveals that one of the problems facing the existing post-1900 towns is the degeneration (into slums) of the old native residential areas with a high density of housing and population. "The rate of deterioration of the housing and other amenities", according to the author, "stem from the basic internal character of the towns, as do the overcrowding and slum conditions." (p. 50). Among the pre-1900 towns, some are "parasitic" in nature, while others have been thrown into "confusion" in terms of economic base, functions, and morphology, by the imposition of a new alien structure on the traditional base. The need for urban renewal within the existing towns (as against physical expansion) is as strong as the need for creating new centres. See H.J. Ajaegbu *Urban and Rural Development in Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1976).

reversing the way plan-making was practised in Ghana, was thought to be more practical than the orthodoxy of the Development Plan. The end result of this experiment was, to cut a long story short, the failure of most of the author's seventeen students when their project was assessed by the board of examiners who concluded that much of it was not relevant to planning (p. 109).

The readers are not in possession of the full facts to judge for themselves the rights and wrongs of the issues involved. The story itself, however, raises a disturbing question: should the teacher stick to the orthodoxy of Development Plans, and thus subject the students to learning the predominantly Western concepts and methodology and to produce "instant master plans"? He adds that three students who passed did just that! The Third World has seen so often how planned growth poles have turned into white elephants because of Western-oriented planning which is divorced from the local socio-economic realities. The Third World has also paid heavily for expensive feasibility studies which often recommend elegant models with little practical value in the local setting. It is too easy to seek refuge through the cliché "strike a balance"—yes, but how?

If the papers reviewed above, which, according to the Editorial Notes, serve "to demonstrate the wide range of problems and areas of geographical concern that await examination and demand further exploration" (p. 5), are the herald of the shape of things to come, then the *TWPR* has indeed made a very respectable debut. The Third World including Southeast Asia can be assured that it will be given an opportunity to be a source of positive contributions, which hopefully will also embrace attempts to strike a balance between Western conceptual frameworks and local ground conditions, in the field of human settlement and development planning.

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