

THE PEOPLE IN THE TRANSPORT EQUATION

Pauline Froschauer

On 4 March 2015, I attended the 4th Urban Conference organised by the SA Cities Network, where planning was a key focus of our discussions. I always enjoy listening to the interesting insights Minister Pravin Gordhan provides in his talks. As one of the keynote speakers at the SACN Urban Conference, he raised the term 'praxis' - one which I haven't used much since my days at Wits University in the 1980s. Simply put, praxis is the gap between theory and practice. One might say, between planning and implementation.

In the transport field a popular expression is that 'we know how to plan, but we fall down on implementation.' But is this necessarily true? What if we fall down on the planning, which in turn makes it almost inevitable that we fail to implement? And if we are lacking in our planning, why is this? Could it be that we do not pay sufficient attention to the people in the transport equation?

The seminal 1961 book by Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, was an indictment of modern urban planning and the 'bulldoze-and-build' tactics of supposed city 'renewal'. She saw city neighbourhoods being destroyed in the name of renewal or 'gentrification'. In the late '60s, Reyner Banham described the "art of planning" as a "giant waste-bin of sumptuously forgotten paper projects", going on to say "one feels it could even do harm".

By the '70s and '80s the discipline of planning had come under such sustained attack that many of the academic planning programmes at tertiary institutions were jettisoned altogether. Architect, Rem Koolhaas, wrote that "the built is now fundamentally suspect. The unbuilt is green, ecological, popular."

Town planner and historian, Sir Peter Hall, said of city and town planning in Britain that from a high point in the 1960s, "planning fell into a long downward spiral ... It appears to have lost the capacity to plan good urban places ..." United States urban historian, Thomas Campanella, reflected a similar sentiment: "young scholars and practitioners (perceive) planning (as) a diffuse and ineffective field ... largely unsuccessful over the last half century ... (at) bringing about more just, sustainable, healthful, efficient and beautiful cities and regions."

The profession of planning had reached a low point. The received wisdom of 20th century planning or 'non-planning' was simply no longer valid as the world was changing. But by the end of the millennium, the growing awareness of the consequences of climate change led to the reassertion of the case for planning and an understanding of both the limitations of 'non-planning' and the dangers

of a complete lack of planning. So we have come full circle, from intensive planning, to almost no planning at all, back to planning. But how should we be approaching urban and transport planning now?

In the summary of his 2013 article on *The New Transport Planning Paradigm*, Todd Litman says “Demographic and economic trends, and new community concerns, are changing the way practitioners define transportation problems and evaluate potential solutions.” We need to redefine the problem; expand the range of solutions we are prepared to consider; and expand the range of objectives and impacts to include aspects such as consumer savings, environmental protection and improvements in public health. To achieve this we need to locate transport planning firmly within the urban (or rural) planning environment as a whole.

We need to develop a productive middle-ground in planning. The city of Medellín in Columbia has been cited as one of the best examples of this approach. In the past decade, the city effected the *Commitment of all the Citizens* plan empowering collaboration between multiple, and even opposing constituents and developing ‘model projects’ that could be quickly realised to restore confidence in public planning. Medellín is now one of the most interesting cities to visit to experience the impact on communities of the expanded Metro (underground), Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and the acclaimed cable car network.

Lack of political will and institutional capacity, separation of expertise and vested interests continue to be cited as hurdles – not only for transport planning, but for urban planning as a whole. But Gordon Pirie, in a chapter of *Africa’s Urban Revolution* concludes that “the flaw (in African urban transport) is one of imagination, not technology and not organisation... a revolution in ideas about transport will (provoke) policy that ... nourishes and capitalises on Africa’s urban revolution”.

Our South African integrated transport planning guidelines stipulate the methods to be used for the collection of data for ‘Current Public Transport Records’ and ‘Transport Registers’. But so entrenched have these terms and methods become that little consideration is given to alternative ethnographic approaches such as participating in and observing transport as experienced by people, We seem to prefer top-down ‘guidelines’ rather than using our own imaginations.

As far back as the 1940s, the economist Hayek contrasted the centralized and ‘planned order’ of socialist states with what he called the ‘spontaneous order’ of free-market economies. The alternative argued by Hayek was that since each individual has the advantage of their own experiences and information, decisions should either be left to individuals or made with their active co-operation. Whether or not we agree with Hayek’s economics, his concept of individual co-operation and decision-making does resonate with an increasingly important focus on the people using the transport.

In *The Planning Game* (2013), Alexander Garvin says, "... players (in the planning game)...may include community groups, civic organizations, elected and appointed public officials, bankers, lawyers, architects, engineers, dreamers, ... (activists), developers, privately owned businesses... cultural institutions, etc. Most of these participants do not call themselves, or even think of themselves, as planners. *But they are.*"

Successful planning in the early 21st century needs to place people and their social, economic and ecological requirements at the root of the transport equation.

This opinion piece has been partly taken from the paper "Integrated Transport Planning Developments: The Planning Paradigm" presented by Pauline Froschauer on 5 March 2015 at the SA Bus Operators' Conference in Pretoria.

Further Reading

Anthony Fontenot, *Notes Towards a History of Non-Planning*, January 2015.

<https://placesjournal.org/article/notes-toward-a-history-of-non-planning/#.VOZSXwOJAll.twitter>

Alexander Garvin, *The Planning Game*, WW Norton & Company, 2013

Friedrich A. von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents*, ed. Bruce Caldwell, University of Chicago Press, [1944], 2007.

Friedrich A. von Hayek, *The Use of Knowledge in Society*, *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 35, No. 4, September 1945.

Gordon Pirie, *Transport Pressures in Urban Africa: Practices, Policies, Perspectives*, *Africa's Urban Revolution*, ed. Susan Parnell & Edgar Pieterse, UCT Press, 2014.

Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage Books Edition, [1961], 1992.

Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, New York, The Penguin Press, 1990.

Todd Litman, *The New Transport Planning Paradigm*, Victoria Transport Policy Institute for the ITE Journal, 6 May 2013.