Urban Planning in the 1960's: A Design for Irrelevancy. By Marshall Kaplan. New York: Praeger Publishers. 1973. Pp. xii, 132. $14.00.

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Cover Page Footnote
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Urban planning became quite popular in the 1960s, but seems to have had little success in solving dilemmas of American cities. Marshall Kaplan's *Urban Planning in the 1960s: A Design for Irrelevancy* attempts to offer an explanation. The book is a collection of published and unpublished articles written by the author during the 1960s. These articles deal with both the body of knowledge of urban planning and the channels through which it is presumably implemented. Outstanding among the several themes which emerge from these essays is the inescapable need to examine and evaluate the function of cities and the role of city planners. Kaplan couches his discussions in terms of the past and present foci of the planning field, newer community roles for planners, and his own suggestions concerning policies and programs.

Kaplan views the city as a launching pad for new immigrants who ultimately will join the dominant middle class in suburban America. The author contends that to be effective in its role, the city should act to maintain an open and pluralist society by providing its residents wide choices and opportunities. He also considers urbanization an inevitable process and welcomes it as a force to be shaped to help people. The growth of cities will draw more people into them and logically should attract more resources for the elimination of poverty. He admits, however, that this process has thus failed for new Blacks and poor immigrants.

Given this upgrading function of the city, Kaplan argues that the planner's role is to facilitate it by working to allocate scarce public funds and resources to these poverty groups. This is a difficult task for traditional planners because their intellectual roots lie in physical determinism, separation of physical and social welfare planning, conscious avoidance of politics, elite values, messianism, and belief in the necessity for comprehensive goals, compromise and long range visions. Consequently, planners tend to create very general idealistic plans which are incompatible with political realities and therefore irrelevant. The planning profession is thus relegated to a minor role in the decision making process. To be effective, Kaplan contends, planners should engage in incremental planning charac-

terized by a focus on specific, clearly defined short term problems.[1] Such a practice would render planning more present-oriented and more susceptible to implementation. The necessary effect of incremental planning is that futuristic decisions are deferred to future people, with the obvious benefit that prospective generations will not have to live with our decisions. The suggestion that periodic revisions of a master plan should yield to a systematic use of incremental plans, of which the recent mini-plans are an example,[2] is unmistakeable.

Kaplan discussed experiences in new town planning and development to illustrate some of the planning problems encountered during the 1960s. Planners' visions of utopia, epitomized by the creation of Reston, Virginia and Columbia, Maryland, sprang from the assumption that in such a virgin atmosphere it is possible to start afresh and in a manageable and orderly fashion to apply new techniques and formulas to define and then grasp that elusive goal, the good life, which is forever beyond the reach of the urban dwellers who contend with the crushing weight of past mistakes abounding in our older central cities.

Many of the planned city innovations failed. It became apparent that urban sprawl, which planners sought to arrest, was not necessarily bad, since it effectively left room for future growth. Single ownership of areas did not measure up to the significance which had been ascribed to it as a coordinating factor in development. New towns also did not provide the density of economic infrastructure to consume less land than ordinary suburbs or minimize commutation transportation. Planners came to realize that clustering, which is the concept of building dense residential areas around open space, could have been accomplished through modern zoning techniques. Furthermore, the new town developments featured a mimimum of

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1. For a better discussion of incremental planning, see Lindblom, *The Science of Muddling Through*, 19 P. ADMIN. REV., Spring, 1959, at 79-88. *See also* Ira M. Robinson, *Beyond the Middle-Range Planning Bridge*, J. AM. INSTITUTE OF PLANNERS, Nov. 1965, at 304-12.

2. New York City has adopted such a practice. *See, e.g., Planning Proposals for the Soundview Peninsula; Neighborhood Zoning: A Proposal to Preserve Kingsbridge; Strengthening Hunts Point*. New York Department of City Planning, June, 1974.

low income housing and consequently did little to relocate economic groups. In short, planned communities had no appreciable impact on the status quo.

Attention necessarily reverted to the city, where the struggle over scarce public resources was being fought in political battles from which traditional planners believed themselves aloof. But capital budgets, capital improvement plans, transportation routes, special zoning, etc., were very definitely involved in allocation of scarce resources. While the work of traditional planners was and is still rationalized as in the interest of the general community, the needs of specific groups were only minimally reflected in those plans. In response to this situation, a group of advocate planners emerged to represent poverty groups in the resource allocation process. Advocacy planners became most prominent in the field of housing and redevelopment. The role of the advocacy planner is somewhat analagous to that of a lawyer whose duty it is to represent clients zealously. Like the lawyer, the planner is a professional technician who is appealing to a political process for a desired result. In order to preserve the nature of the client relationship, there must be a safeguard to insure client control. Kaplan, as principal of a planning consulting firm, refers to his own experiences where he entered into a contract with his client group which included provisions for his dismissal on a 24 hour notice.

Citizen participation also grew out of the 1960s, when the poor began to demand that their needs and desires be incorporated into the planning and political process. Kaplan advocates such participation, asserting that it would muster political support for plans and planning, permit feedback in a pluralist context, and develop community leadership. He develops some excellent criteria for judging the degree of citizen participation in planning, including the early involvement of the community, the capacity of the community to effectively veto a plan, and the availability to the community of the benefits of the plans when they become reality. Although only implicit in his discussion, many planners see this process as threatening because it unveils planning activities to public scrutiny and forces planners to explain their work, thus de-mystifying it.[3]

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3. This is true, by the way, for most if not all professions and bureaucracies which depend upon exclusivity of knowledge for their power, such as doctors and lawyers.

In looking at the role of government, Kaplan found that it influenced development by using legal bribes and strings attached to money, zoning variances and districting. In this manner, government influences development without taking the responsibility away from private interests. Governmental aid of this type often misfired during the 1960s. Successful developers with good land found conditional money unattractive and so federal funds ended up subsidizing less desirable sites. The author contends that technological research, a venture not undertaken by private sources, would have been a better and more productive use of public funds. Another problem is that developers themselves built conventionally to insure future value of their property and profit. Familiar development presents less risk and offers greater marketability. Human aspirations of aiding economically deprived groups are clearly subordinated to self-preservation instincts in such a system.

Kaplan suggests that fewer resources would be wasted if there were more regional authorities and available inventories of existing programs. Inconsistencies of timing, procedures, and funding from different government agencies should also be revised to avoid waste. Statutory and administrative guidelines should be restructured in order not to dilute the intended effectiveness of laws. The author cites as an example the Model Cities legislation, which required citizen participation but called for a plan of action to be drafted before the necessary working relationships and channels could be developed.

Local political strength and monetary distribution and allocation are essential to many of the programs which Kaplan advocates. The author believes that local governments could be strengthened through the use of city halls as distributors of federal funds, thereby creating a local focus for groups and coalitions. He also urges the block grant concept, provided certain federal performance criteria for such general goals as integration and citizen participation are met. Inherent in the block grant concept is the localization of decisionmaking and resource allocation. Another type of program which Kaplan prescribes is direct subsidization of the poor, to be accomplished through a federal takeover of income maintenance and welfare. The author envisions a national redistribution of resources resulting eventually in the termination of the de facto segregation created by, for example, low income housing.

Stylistically as well as substantively, Kaplan book evidences sig-

nificant shortcomings. Since each chapter is an article prepared for a book or journal during the 1960s, the overall effect is one of confusion, repetition and disjunction. Few of his ideas are presented in depth. The book reads like a master plan, whose sketchiness and broadness he rejects. Although several of his ideas are worth pursuing, the manner of presentation sells them short.

Some of his assumptions must be challenged. A city is not a launching pad for in-migrants. Although during the 1960s many people did move to the cities from non-urban areas for socioeconomic benefits, this phenomenon does not define the city's role. Kaplan's view totally ignores the indigeous poor. Nor should other attractions of cities be overshadowed; many people with resources simply enjoy city living.

Some of the programs which Kaplan advanced did not work out as he envisioned. It is questionable whether Model Cities, which was designed to last for only a few years, did in fact achieve any innovative, comprehensive attack on ghetto poverty. Block grants, of which the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 is the most recent example, have not yielded the expected added flexibility under federal funding because the grants frequently have been used to continue past programs which had been funded, and more importantly, designed, categorically.

Kaplan's desire to strengthen existing local bureaucracies and political structures by adding more players strikes blindly at an unperceived enemy. He points to the existence of a class and caste system several times but fails to analyze whether existing social institutions have the capacity to work for all groups or whether their very nature requires exclusion and exploitation. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been poured into Model Cities areas and their population is still relatively deprived. Kaplan's suggestion that more money, technology, and participation are needed in the planning process is a superficial solution to a more complex problem of power. Merely choosing the side of the poor without studying the relationships and interdependencies of all groups vying for the resource pie is counterproductive to the interest of any societal segment. Not until we analyze the areas of the planning system which work against the poor and exploited among as can we work for and with them to fight poverty and exploitation. Finally, because Kaplan does not follow through the logic of his own arguments, he

provides a striking example of why planning has remained ineffective.

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