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Planning: The town planners' perspective

Olanrewaju Samson Olaitan

Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria.

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The concept of planning has been a subject of territorial debates amidst various disciplines and at all conclusions; everyone is a planner in his/her own right. It is against this background of oversimplification that this study attempts to explore the various meaning and scope of planning both from the general percept and town planners' viewpoint. It relates the discus to Nigeria environment where the requisites, roles and challenges of urban planning within this domain were extensively explored. The paper which benefitted from a review of extant literature on the subject matter answer numerous questions inclusive of what it takes to be a town planner and what is expected of town planners.

Key words: Planning, urban and regional planning, town planner, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of planning remains a central theme to different disciplines, individuals and occurrences. This is because at every stage, planning of one form or the other is either single-handedly or repeatedly carried out; its stages can be as complicated as repeatedly done in multifaceted activities. With reference to this, the term planning has received diverse definitional responses from both professionals of different disciplines and individuals of varying capacities (Arimah, 2002). Despite these definitional and conceptual responses, the question of what is planning still suffices in many discussions. This semantic confusion may not be far from planning being the midpoint of abstraction and reality (Falade, 2003; UNDP, 2008).

With the concept of planning generically defined as the first bold step at envisioning and actualizing a predefined

end, every individual is a planner of different activities for different functions (Awake, 2005). Indeed, planning is a continuous activity and in a bid to plan, one plans. The involvement of everyone in planning has aided its mere reduction as well as the absence of rigid definitional lines between the various forms and types of planning. This has left one with the questions like what is planning, who are planners, what do planners do and how does one becomes a planner? These questions will be the objectives of this paper and such will be answered with particular reference to town planning. In a bid to achieve these objectives, this paper explores the various definition of planning and drives it home to urban and regional planning. It finally discusses the prerequisite and roles of town planners without neglecting the various challenges faced by the profession in Nigeria.

E-mail: feel2giv@yahoo.co.uk. Tel: +2347038540456.

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PLANNING: THE MANY MEANING

Planning is a word of numerous interpretations and a profession in many professions. It means different things to different people; hence, its definition varies with scope and school of thought of the user of the word. Planning cut across different forms of life and it is done at every stage of the same. The diversified nature of the concept makes one to conclude that planning is big and complicated. It is an abstraction that has no clearly identifiable meaning except in the context of its usage. Thus, there is event planning, social planning, economic planning and town planning amidst others. While an event planner may view planning as the process of aligning activities and programmes through the use of resources to stage and actualize a desired function, an economic planner will conceptualize planning as the allocation of scarce resources at ones disposal for yielding greatest satisfaction and a social planner will view the same concept as the equitable allocation of resources to achieve a balance and dynamic society (UNFPA, 2004). Indeed, everyone is a planner in his/her own right.

The simplest definition of planning as provided by Wikipedia (2015) is the process of thinking about and organizing the activities required to achieve a desired goal. This definition posits planning as just a cognitive activity like thinking and discussing with less emphasis on the implementation of such plans. This standpoint although has been the confluence of definition of scholars and administrators about planning (Beauregard, 2003). The reduction of planning by the early scholars could have been informed from their economics background which deals solely with the allocation of resources between competing ends. Another viewpoint of this early epoch explains planning to be the utilization of available facts and situations as they are to find a way to solve problems. Generally, planning is a fundamental activity of every man which reflects his will and ability to engage in the shaping of his future and realities. It involves working out, in a broad outline, the things that need to be done and methods for doing them to accomplish a set purpose (Gulick, 1937; Newman, 1958; Ogbazi, 2002). It is inclusive of the ability to predict and predetermine future conditions through control of present actions.

Planning is a rational activity based on utilization of knowledge. This perspective was illustrated by Merriam (1941) in Ogbazi (2002) who defined planning as an organized effort to utilize intelligence in the determination of national policies, the purpose, being allocation and distribution of resources. Planning consists of a systematic, continuous, forward-looking application of the best intelligence available, to programme of common affairs in the public field. Despite the plurality of various definitions, the basic characteristics of the planning of any form include it being futuristic, involving the allocation of scarce resources and time specific. Then relating to

this paper one is left with the onus of conceptualizing town planning.

PLANNING BY TOWN PLANNERS

The advent of town planning in the industrial revolution era features the attraction of different research interests from allied disciplines on the subject matter. These interests have yielded numerous definitions for the term. Policy from different government at different instances and the purpose for which planning was made also factored its definition per time.

Physical planning is concerned with the general pattern of landuse, the character and location of public buildings and structures, the design of streets, the location and development of transits and transportation system and all other physical facilities which are necessary or desirable to promote the economic betterment, comfort, convenience and general welfare (Webster, 1961). It is the art and science of ordering the use of land, character and siting of buildings and communication routes so as to secure the maximum practicable degree of economy, convenience and beauty (Lewis, 1969). It is a physical design of something which already exists or might exist in the future and this sort of plan is a representation, in a geographical or spatial sense, of actual physical structures or elements (Bruton, 1974). Friedman (1964) perceived planning as the primarily way of thinking about social and economic problems. He went further to explain that planning is deeply concerned with the relation of goals to collective decisions and strives for comprehensiveness in policy and program.

Mba (1992) defined planning as a profession that uses the research methods of social sciences for information gathering, analysis and plan preparation. NITP (1993) though synonymous to Lewis (1969) defined planning as the spatial ordering of land use both in the urban and rural settings for the purpose of creating functionally efficient and aesthetically pleasing environment for living, working, circulation and recreation. Ogbazi (2002) defined planning as a future oriented process of developing and implementing policies, designs and programmes of action to meet the needs and goals of our communities and to realize the potentials of the society. Agbola (2005) defined the concept as the direction of development and use of land to serve the economic and the social welfare of communities with respect to convenience, health and amenity. The above definition posits town planning as a central diagnose to plethora of urban problems. Town planning, although not far from the rational application of human cognitive ability which is the orient of general planning, it extends to include all set of methodologies of decision making that identifies goals and ends, determines the means and programmes directed at achieving the ends with the aid of systematic based models. Town planning is an act of shaping and

guiding the physical growth of the towns by creating buildings and environment to meet various needs such as social, cultural, economic and recreational thereby providing equal and balanced healthy platform for both rich and poor to live, work and to play or relax, thus bringing about the social and economic wellbeing for the majority of mankind (Kehinde, 1998). Town planning aims at achieving redistribution of resources and its associated access within all classes of the society.

The dynamism of urban formation has tilted the definition of physical planning from just a predictive activity to both predictive and reactionary. Planning as against the fundamentals of its ancient properties now includes element of citizen participation, stakeholder's involvement, negotiation and political relationship. Town planning is an attempt to formulate the principles that should guide in creating a civilized physical background for human life whose main impetus is thus foreseeing and guiding change (Falade, 2003). It is a mediation of space and making of place. Agbola (2006) defined planning as taking decisions to influence the course of future changes in a settlement and/or in a region for the maximum benefits of those people residing there. He described it further as an art and science of both space allocation (allocating adequate space for each of the various activities to be performed in the area) and location (evolving a landuse pattern which makes all human activities in the area functionally related). They revealed meaningful planning as a general approach to decision making, future oriented exercise, an activity with many alternatives and the choice of one alternative among several others. All these facts depend on the past experience, the present situation, anticipated future and the resources (human and materials) available at the time of implementation. Jelili (2014) defined planning as the multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary objectives, multi-interest and ever adjustable approach to influencing the physical and socio-economic growth of urban and regional systems. He viewed it further as all processes of predetermining, shaping and encouraging a well-coordinated urban socio-economic and physical growth in a sustainable manner. In all, an activity becomes urban planning when it is resource allocating, people inclusive, controls the trend and quantum of all manners of growth and development to achieve sustainability, future oriented, space and time defined. Hence, conceptualizing urban planning is more descriptive than definitional.

Having defined planning, the concept of what town planners do suffice, this will enable the distinction of boundary between planning and other allied professional the question then is what do planners do?

TOWN PLANNERS AND THEIR ROLES

Town planning (generally used for both urban and rural planning) is a profession that offers a wide range of

opportunities for people with many talents and aspirations. Planners work to ensure that cities have what they need to grow and prosper including places where people can live and would want to be. The name of the profession, "Town Planning," is straightforward and descriptive. Urban planners plan for the future of urban areas while they also plan for their rural counterparts. But this literal description of the work of a Town planner only scratches the surface of the role of urban planners. Town Planning as a modern profession is a relatively small but growing field. In 2006, Department of Labour reported 34,000 jobs held by Urban and regional planners (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2009). U.S News (2009) rated urban and regional planning as one of the best career. Fifteen percent increase in planning jobs between 2006 and 2016 is faster than average for all occupations (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2009). Town planners may either work at local government areas, state government and federal government level and at different parastatals. However, physical planners being a culmination of different planning specialists ranging from regional planners, rural planners and physical planners are efficient in handling of diverse environmental problems. With the extent of advancement in urban planning knowledge, there are hybrid planners which have been taught the basis of all segments of planning. These are products of most planning schools in Nigeria whose example includes Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Oyo State. In general, the following elucidates what planner does.

Allocation of residences

Planners estimate the number of households to be housed in the coming years and recommend where, within the community land, should be set aside for homes to be built. In the process, planners work with communities to determine the proportion of homes that will be single-family houses, duplexes, or multi-family housing and the proportion that will be targeted for home ownership versus rental. Planners also work on policies affecting the price of housing in a community, to ensure that low-income and moderate-income residents (like store clerks, restaurant staff, nursing assistants, and teachers) have comfortable and affordable housing available to them.

Determination of economic flow

In addition to working to identify the best places within a community for locating factories, shopping areas, and offices, planners also work to attract jobs to communities. Economic development planners study the local economy to identify needs and create programs to fill those needs. For example, planners work with employers and local

educational institutions to make sure that the students receive training in the skills required by local industries or by the industries that the community would like to locate there.

Transportation facilities (Roads, Rail, Airports, and Seaports)

Planners study transportation systems to determine when additional transportation facilities are needed, where they should be built, and the mix of transportation options that should be available. Planners collect and analyze information to find out whether the growth and prosperity of a region is hampered because the transportation network does not provide sufficient access to some locations in the community or because congestion is creating excessive delays in getting from one place to another. Planners know that industry needs an efficient transportation system for moving raw materials in and manufactured products out. While the number of cars per person has steadily increased since the nineteenth century, planners work to create a balanced transportation system in which residents can choose to live in areas that are designed to make biking, walking, and transit (buses, light rail, and commuter rail) more successful.

Sanitation and waste management

Planners work with civil engineers to ensure that basic urban infrastructure, sewer and water, will be available as a community grows. How a community grows can have a dramatic effect on the cost of providing sewer and water services. For example, laying out a neighborhood with large lots served by sewer and water requires more spending on pipes and requires more maintenance by the city in the future. Planners work with communities to understand the effects of land use decisions on the cost of providing sewer and water services and to modify land use policies as needed. Planners also work with hydrogeologists and civil engineers to develop plans for the sustainable use of sources of drinking water, to ensure that the supply of water will remain sufficient in the future.

Community development

Some planners focus on community organizing and community development, seeking to increase social justice, reduce poverty, and “build vital and thriving under-resourced communities” (National Congress for Community Economic Development, 2009). Most planners working on community development work in areas with high levels of poverty and low levels of

education, employment, and income, whether in central city neighborhoods, suburbs, or rural areas. They provide assistance to small businesses, bring resources to the community for improving the quality of affordable housing, and develop programs for increasing the skills and job readiness of residents.

Energy provision

Planners have always worked with energy utilities to predict future energy demands and to locate sites for new energy facilities, such as power plants, natural gas pipelines, or petroleum storage areas. Today, increasingly, planners are at the forefront in identifying ways in which communities can reduce their energy needs and plan for the future of renewable energy.

LEVELS OF TOWN PLANNING

Various levels of planning have been identified in the existing literature from different perspectives. But in the context of Urban and Regional Planning, the following are the notable levels of planning especially in Nigeria.

International planning

It is the planning efforts among countries and such countries may share common boundaries or lie in the same ecological zone. They may pool their assets together and agree to solve problems that go beyond national boundaries such as smuggling, illegal migration, attack from terrorists and armed robberies (Adedipe, 2002). International planning becomes imperative when there is a shared goal (example, tackling boko-haram within the West African region). Also, countries may agree to design development plan for activities spanning more than one country e.g transportation plan for trans-West African coastal highway. For instance, Trans – African pipeline expected to link Morocco and Nigeria. Other plan of this sort include ECOWAS commission strategic plan; ECOWAS community development plan.

National planning

This is the highest level of planning in Nigeria that addresses the nation’s social, economic and physical interests and demands. It is directly involved in guiding the allocation of resources (industries, social institutions, public funds and utilities e.t.c.) to states or regions in order to achieve rational population re-distribution, balanced development, national integration and stable political atmosphere. However, the success of any national planning depends on its ability to formulate goals

that reflect the aspirations of the people and achieve the articulated goals more successfully than unplanned activity (Adedipe 2002). The Nigeria Urban and Regional Planning Decree No 88 of 1992 in its section 1 and 2 provided for national planning capacities and its administrative requirement.

Regional planning

This is expected to be the second level of planning in Nigeria. Planning for separate regions within a nation is described as regional planning. A large sized country of the continental dimension is bound to have many regions with varying differences such as climatic and resources. Other variable that abounds in regions includes living patterns, desires and problems. Therefore, regional planning is concerned with the utilization and distribution of the resources to meet the needs and aspirations of the people within the region. It serves as the best means of meeting regional aspirations, exploiting regional resources and promoting the implementation of national plans if they are correctly fitted into them among several others (Adedipe, 2002). The tone of regional planning in Nigeria has been reduced due to the exit of administrative regions in the year 1967; this has made state planning more evident whereas tribal, resources, and developmental characteristics and demands may cross the border of a state leaving planning at such capacities nearly impossible. Meanwhile, insurgency in the North East and the need for revitalization of the Niger Delta region of the country has led to recent advent of regional planning to address issues relating to such regions.

State planning

This is the third level of planning in a Nigeria. This has thrived in the recent years because states are seemingly perceived as an administrative (political) region. However, within a state, differences exist in terms of natural resources endowment, level of development and complexity of problems. Therefore, state planning demands allocation of resources within the state, channeling of public investment funds, distributing and redistribution of industries, public utilities and social amenities to the various local government areas or identifiable homogenous regions within the state for balance development.

Metropolitan and local planning

It is the last level planning in Federated states. Likewise, it is a process of preparing and implementing consistent plan that will guide the development of Local Areas within

the State. However, since Local Areas within the State varies (e.g. resources, cultures, traditions, development and problems), therefore local planning will focused on the utilization of local resources to meet the desires of the people. This level of planning will also ensures orderliness of various land uses in both urban and rural communities so as to curb incompatible land uses and arbitrary development (Adedipe, 2002). The establishment of city/metropolitan developments in different states has aided the metropolitan planning in the country as their urban peculiarity may not be adequately catered for in state plans.

PLANNING PRACTICE

There is no doubt that Planning as a discipline has different definitions from various schools of thought but the main motive is that it helps in solving the future problems. The problems are in different forms such as traffic congestion, slum shanty towns and inadequate housing among several others. In this regard, Town Planner as a professional has to equip himself/herself with various techniques to cope with these problems as well as forecast and plan for the future development (Aluko, 2004). However, the recognition of the needs to plan our environment with appropriate laws led to the emergence of Urban and Regional Planning Profession and subsequently to professional body such as NITP.

Planning practice can be seen as a social and political process with many actors representing different interests participating in a refined division of labour. Some of the actors are town planners, architects, builders, surveyors, engineers, economists and lawyers. Planning practice sometimes is used extremely loosely to describe virtually any pattern of decision making which is not reflection of either market forces or political demand (Sandercock and Forsyth, 1992). Planning practice is therefore an evolving process which makes use of concepts, laws and models already in existence (Aluko, 2004).

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS OF A TOWN PLANNER

A town planner in Nigeria and the context of this paper is one that has acquired both academic and professional knowledge as well as certification respectively from accredited institutions and Town Planners Registration Council hence bounded by a common seal and its obligations. Town Planner Registration Council as charged by Decree no. 3 of 1988 now CAP 431 Law of Federal Republic of Nigeria is then saddled with the responsibility of furthering defining the terms of becoming a town planner from time to time. This paper will examine thoroughly both academic and professional requirements of a town planner. It must be of note, that the latter is

dependent on the former hence academic requirements is fundamental to gaining professional access.

The academic requirement of a town planner in Nigeria is coined around university education, polytechnic education and institute examinations. A First Degree university education in Urban and Regional Planning or Higher National Diploma automatically qualifies one as prospective candidate for professional examination once the tutelage period (post-graduation) of 2 years has been met and one has been registered as a full member of Nigeria Institute of Town Planners (NITP). However, to caption graduates from allied disciplines like architecture, estate management, surveying and civil engineering among others a three-part qualifying examination organized by the examination committee of both NITP and TOPREC on Planning Education is required.

“Secondary school graduates who must have passed Mathematics, English, Geography and two other subjects are admitted having credits in at least five subjects including English and Mathematics, Geography and two other subjects are admitted to the stage 1 of the preliminary stage. With this arrangement it takes a minimum of nine years to get qualified as a graduate member of the Nigerian Institute of Town Planners. Graduates in allied fields are admitted into stage two of the final part. On the other hand, graduates with Masters Degree or Ph.D. are admitted into stage three of the final part (professional stage). After qualifying, they are then admitted into Graduate Membership cadre. Two years after, they move on to Corporate Membership of the Nigeria Institute of Town Planners (MNITP). Such a member now qualifies for the Town Planners Registration Council Examination to be certified fully as a Chartered Town Planner or Registered Town Planner (RTP)” (Adeleye, 2008).

This arrangement though reflects the interest of the professional forebears in the advancement of planning education in the country but it has in recent times posed more of professional challenges than benefits. No doubt, town planning in the world over has emerged as the marriage of different disciplines possible because of the multifaceted and usually complicated nature of the problems it is set to address. This marriage is reflected in the admission of graduates of allied disciplines into the profession. However, Oyesiku (1998) has observed that recent graduates of urban planning in different schools are hybrids of these professional variants having gotten sound knowledge in its entire composite (e.g. geography, sociology and architecture among others). It is observable that opening of door for all variants of allied professionals through postgraduate diplomas and advanced studies in town planning proliferate the profession as this is not fetchable in these allied professions. For instance, it is observable that graduate from first degree architecture or other allied profession

having done Masters in Urban and Regional Planning and the two years tutelage period will be qualified for Town Planners Registration Council Examination, thereby, becoming a town planner; this results in less understanding of the fundamentals of Urban planning which is the nitty-gritty of planning itself. It is unfortunate that this is not fetchable in other allied professions like architecture, estate management and quantity surveying among others. It is however, advisable that graduates of these professions should be made to seek admission into 200 level First Degree of Urban and Regional Planning in Nigerian Universities or Higher National Diploma of polytechnics before proceeding for advance studies.

CHALLENGES OF TOWN PLANNING IN NIGERIA

Town planning in Nigeria is though in its formative stage but has witnessed series of transformation and developments in the past 50 years. These includes but not limited to governments recognition and establishment of departments that that are urban planning based; Implementation and usage of various planning mechanisms in different government capacities; establishment of institute and council; and advancement of planning education among others. These are direct products of governmental policy, societal acceptance and trust as well as relentless service of planning professionals. It is in response that societal awareness of the profession is increasing while tertiary institution offering the course is growing (it is now offered in private universities).

Despite these, the Nigeria situation of the profession needs extensive evaluation especially at the sight of the dynamic diversity of the country and its associated socio-economic realities as well as responses, increasing number of town planners and seemingly limited opportunities for the same. These in the generic culminates into the weakness of the profession but this paper will at the end propose ways of transforming these perceived weakness into strength and opportunities. These challenges will be discussed under two broad sections.

Government's policy

The success of any professional engagement is dependent on the content of its government policy statement. The fullness of planning profession in the country has not been blown. This is evident in the neglect of planners in the development of National Development plans (which has been criticized as usually economic), while it must be noted that these plans cannot be divorced form physical planning because economic and other anticipated development takes place within the fabric of settlement (either urban or rural). Another critical

aspect of this is the departmentalization of public offices especially at the federal level, where ministry of physical planning and urban development has been scrapped (especially in this federal government led dispensation). This in itself will affect the development and monitoring of physical developments at national level. Communities superficially grows heterogeneously and independently even within states and federal bounds without cognizance to the spillover effects on neighbouring settlements and the national outlook possibly due to absence of coordinated plans (even if such plans exists). Nigeria as a country is without National Physical Development Plan while nearly all states are without physical development plans. However, in states where it is in existence, it obsolete and needs review. It is in response to these that urban blight, leap frog developments, migration of all sort and socio- economic imbalance are increasingly evident in the country thereby placing the profession on the bad light of the populace.

Institutional compliance and recognition

This is a very disturbing challenge of the profession in the country. Job usurping especially from allied professionals and establishments non-compliance with rule of engagement is a big deal to tackle for planning professionals. Planning jobs are usually given out to non-town planners but graduates of allied professionals. Vacancy announcement made in various institutions especially for the post of Director of Physical Planning is a testimony along this lane. Whereas, Nigeria Urban and Regional Planning Act CAP 431 Law of the Federal Republic in its part 1 subsection 6(3) clearly provided that an executive director should be a registered town planner with a minimum of fifteen years of professional practice. This situation is worsened as some planning based ministries and departments have non town planners as directors, special advisers and commissioner. Though, one must commend the efforts of the professional body (NITP) and TOPREC in ensuring that this attitude is corrected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the two broad identified problems affecting town planning in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proffered.

- (1) Government should reinstate ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development as this will aid effective planning in the country.
- (2) National Physical Development Plan for the country should be formulated as this will channel physical development growth pattern for the country which can be filtered to different states.
- (3) National Development Planning should be inclusive of

town planners. This elevates national development plans to be more than just economic tool but a development mechanism as every indicators of development will be included.

(4) Community planning should be encouraged through establishment of planning offices in different communities once its population is more than 2000 people. This which will aid the realization of rural planning can be achieved through the involvement of traditional leaders and other leaders within such communities.

(5) Nigeria Institute of Town Planners alongside Town Planner Registration Council should increase its advocacy for engagement of strictly town planners for town planning jobs through writing of letters to various state governments, different ministries, departments and agencies, several higher institutions as well as making wide awareness through print media among others.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed extensively what constitutes planning. Looking at various definitions, it can be deduced that no single definition can adequately define what planning is because of its multifaceted nature. The approach to it depends on the interest and focus of the user of the word. Generally, planning takes the effort of simplifying the actions involved in the implementation of anticipations and aspirations of any task at hand with respect to time. Although it is imperative to simplify problems before executing solutions on them but the impetus of any successful plan is planning. It keeps the work on motion, elicits men to action and further plans to specific targets as desired. It is impossible to achieve a successful plan by trier and error.

The global perspective of town planning evolution in both developed and developing countries show that it (Town Planning) arose out of challenge to intervene in the social and economic problems in order to create cities of lasting beauty, health and convenience. This implies that recognition of the needs to plan environment with appropriate laws led to the emergence of Urban and Regional Planning Profession, subsequently, to formation of professional body and regulatory council. While this paper has comfortably delineated town planning from general planning, it is imperative to observe that definition of planning as an activity will continue to vary across space, time and situation. Then, at every instance, it is necessary to ask, what is planning?

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflicts of interests.

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