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Planning in Europe

Urban and Regional Planning in the EEC

Edited by

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Preface

In compiling this book the aim has been to assemble within one volume a review of the systems of town and country planning that operate within the member-states of the European Economic Community, and to link this with an outline of the ways in which the community's institutions and policies relate to the activity of planning. The popularity of overseas study visits for students of town and country planning, geography and other disciplines, and contributions to the academic and professional press, reflect a widespread desire to learn by studying planning practice in other countries. It is hoped that this book will be of value to students, practitioners and officials wanting to gain an understanding of planning elsewhere in Europe.

As a matter of deliberate editorial policy each of the chapters of this book that relates to a specific country is written by an expert contributor native to that country. The contributors were invited to concentrate on the scope and style of planning in their country, rather than provide a detailed account of planning legislation as such; and it was felt that a critical impression of the flavour of planning in each country would be better conveyed by a writer from that country, rather than from an outside observer. The approaches adopted by the contributors varies not only as a result of their own judgement of what aspects of their subject deserve to be brought most prominently to the readers' attention, but also because the extent to which a country's planning system is already internationally known varies considerably. Where suitable further reading is available, this is mentioned.

I should like to record here my thanks to all the contributors for their co-operation and interest in this project, not to mention the remarkable command of English shown by most of them.

Inspiration for this book arose out of my work on the International Affairs Board of the Royal Town Planning Institute, on which I have served since 1977. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Professor Gordon Cherry of the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, University of Birmingham. As president of the Royal Town Planning Institute in 1978-9 he initiated contacts with professional associations of planners in the other EEC countries, and during his presidential year found time to give me direct encouragement to develop ideas in a paper prepared by me in support of this initiative into the form of a book.

I must also acknowledge my debt to the postgraduate and undergraduate students attending my lecture course on comparative planning in the EEC, in the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, whose enthusiasm and response to the course has convinced me of the value of

a book such as this, and in numerous ways influenced my editorial judgement.

I have also benefited greatly from discussions with many academics in Britain and Europe, who in various ways have shaped my ideas. It would be impossible to list everyone but I must make particular mention of the assistance I have received from Dr Uwe Wullkopf and his colleagues at the Institut Wohnen und Umwelt in Darmstadt, who have on two occasions accommodated me when I have made study visits to Germany.

I must record here my gratitude to Anne Hudson, who typed the text with great skill and efficiency, and to Mia Wilkins and Paolo Scattoni for assistance with translation.

Finally, I must pay tribute to the support and encouragement of my wife, and toleration of my children, during the preparation of this book. I am fortunate that they all share in various ways my own fascination for Europe.

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Planning in Europe

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Chapter 1

Introduction

R. H. Williams

In recent years there has been a growing interest in studying the planning systems of other countries, and of comparative studies particularly related to Europe. Perhaps, in the case of Britain, this represents a belated response to entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. By presenting accounts of the planning systems of the member-states it is hoped that a useful starting-point will be provided on which to have such studies. The bulk of this book consists of these accounts. In this chapter the context is set by discussing the rationale underlying the editorial policy pursued here, and the purposes which it is hoped this book will serve.

The order of the chapters devoted to individual countries is inevitably somewhat arbitrary. The original members of the EEC come first, roughly in order of the size of their population (Chapters 2–7). These are followed by the three who joined in 1973, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark (Chapters 8–10), and then comes the chapter on the most recent newcomer to the Community, Greece, who joined on 1 January 1981 (Chapter 11). The two remaining chapters of the book are devoted to the EEC itself and an attempt to draw together some conclusions from the preceding material.

Chapter 12 is an account of the institutions and policies of the European communities which are related to the practice of town and country planning, directly or indirectly. The interpretation of this relationship is, perhaps inevitably, based on a British perception of the role of a local planning authority. Although the EEC exists primarily to achieve economic and political objectives, its initiatives and activities have implications for the practice of planning, and will do so increasingly during the 1980s, as the discussion in Chapter 12 indicates.

It is in the nature of a book such as this, written by a number of authors and spanning a wide range of subject-matter, that many topics are described and ideas introduced which do not lend themselves easily to synthesis and summary in the form of conclusions. Nevertheless, the

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final chapter does attempt to draw the threads together, to some degree, in order to identify some common elements, important distinctions, or points of comparison which may have escaped attention in the accounts of individual countries (Chapter 13). It is not intended or claimed that this will form a thorough comparative analysis of all the planning systems treated here. Rather, it aims to provide a basis on which further work of a comparative nature might be developed.

WHY THE EEC?

The decision to confine the choice of countries included here to those that are members of the EEC was taken not simply because this represented a convenient limitation, although of course it is necessary to have some criteria of selection for purely practical reasons. More importantly, it was decided to concentrate attention on the members of the EEC, because they are in supra-national association and have certain characteristics in common. All have democratic forms of government and a mixed economy, and all have adopted legislation providing for some form of regulation of development and land-use planning. Furthermore, in joining the three European Communities, that is, the European Economic Community (EEC), the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and Euratom, all the member-states agree to adopt certain common policies and rules in addition to their own national policies and legislation. In a number of respects these common policies and rules have a bearing on the practice of planning and the concerns of local planning authorities.

Many of the Commission's policies are directed towards establishing conditions of fair competition; stimulating trade within the Community; overcoming disparities in economic performance between different regions of the Community; and improving the transport infrastructure, especially where this might assist in the movement of goods between member-states. The Commission is also anxious to protect the environment – reflecting the growing popular and political pressure in this direction in Europe – and is making progress towards the adoption of measures designed to protect environmental quality and ensuring that no major variations exist in the degree of control over development for reasons of environmental protection. These measures will relate directly to the widely varied systems of planning that have been established by member-states over the years.

A further way in which the EEC may have an influence on planning is by means of measures which affect the planners themselves. Freedom for people to seek employment and practice their profession is a principle embodied in the Treaty of Rome. There are a number of planners working outside their own country, or who have clients from

other countries, but the numbers involved are not great. In a subject such as planning where so much of the style of professional practice is determined by political and cultural factors, it is not sufficient to possess a basic body of purely technical knowledge, or knowledge of the appropriate language, in order to work elsewhere.

Whether or not any Community-wide interest group representing the planning profession as a whole becomes established in addition to the existing committee looking after the interests of planners in private practice, planners throughout the EEC will have to respond to Community initiatives when initial consultations are taking place, and implement whatever measures are adopted. Since any such measures are likely, at least when first proposed, to fit into one country's planning and legal systems more neatly than another's, it follows that the reaction of planners and others affected is likely to be influenced by the degree to which a proposal is complementary to their own system of planning. An understanding of the background influences which operate in European planning systems, and the role of the Commission, are valuable prerequisites for constructive criticism of any Commission proposal, and increase the likelihood that any proposals eventually adopted will be in acceptable and useful form.

EVOLUTION OF PLANNING SYSTEMS AND COMPARATIVE STUDY

The countries of Western Europe have all, in the postwar era, experienced a high degree of urbanisation. Some, like the UK, have been highly urbanised for a relatively long time, while others such as Italy and Greece have experienced this phenomenon much more recently. Nevertheless, it is generally true that urbanisation and industrialisation is typical of the EEC. Associated with this have been increases in personal wealth and car ownership rates, higher expectations regarding housing quality and a movement of population away from employment in agriculture towards industrial or service occupations. It is not the task of this book to describe in detail the trends in urban development or regional differentiation that have taken place in Europe in recent years, but rather to note that these processes have all had the effect of increasing the competing pressures on the land. Pressures to house the growing urban population, often at decreasing densities as more people aspire to individual dwellings; pressures to accommodate industry or offices, often for reasons of scale, possible hazard, or environmental effects, on sites removed from residential areas; and pressures to develop transport networks to link these separated land uses, allowing the exploitation of private motor transport as well as the advantages of mass public transport, and providing for national and international

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movement of people and goods, have all followed from the urbanisation and industrialisation of Europe.

These pressures on land have been so considerable in the postwar period that all the countries considered here have deemed it necessary to establish some effective procedure to channel these pressures and resolve conflicts between competing land uses. Each country has, therefore, enacted legislation at some time establishing the principle that public authorities should be empowered to monitor and control development and prepared plans which indicate the forms in which acceptable development might take place. Legislation conferring powers of this nature has first appeared at different times in different countries, spanning the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. These differences reflect differing political attitudes to the acceptability of such powers, which may be regarded as infringing individual rights to enjoy private property, and varying perceptions of the value of planning. They do not necessarily correlate with differing rates of urbanisation or pressure on the land.

The fascination of taking an international view of planning – particularly in the context of the developed nations of Western Europe – lies in the great variety to be found within the town and country planning systems that have been established in response to the common experience of urbanisation, industrialisation and associated pressures on land. This variety is apparent both in the systems of planning and their associated legal procedures, and in the policies and priorities that are pursued. Much can be learned from studying these differences, and the consequent patterns of land use and development in the countries concerned. It is neither easy nor sensible to attempt to say which system of planning as a whole is better than any other, and this is certainly not the intention here. Although, in general terms, the objectives of town and country planning in different countries may be similar, they are not by any means identical, and whatever is appropriate to one country is not necessarily appropriate to another.

Nevertheless, many planning problems are shared by more than one country, and the study of different techniques, procedures, or policies that are brought to bear on particular problems, and their rationale and outcome, is a natural subject of interest to any planner displaying academic curiosity. There is, of course, much more to the comparative study of planning systems than this. The most basic and obvious justification for studying other planning systems is the hope of improving practice in one's own country. This might be achieved by learning lessons from the experience of adopting specific measures in other countries, or by identifying ideas, techniques, or procedures that might usefully be adapted and applied to one's own country. Such transfer is a highly complex business, however, as is apparent when one considers the implications of seeking such a transfer.

There is often a degree of public dissatisfaction with the outcome of

planning policies, which in turn stimulates planners to seek improvements. At the same time, there is the problem that one cannot run experiments repeatedly, as in the case of a laboratory-based science, in order to test whether the desired effect is achieved by a new policy before applying it to the community at large. At best, planners may have only one or two opportunities to put a new idea into practice. Evaluation of an innovation is frequently based on limited experience before it is either generally adopted or abandoned. The study of experience elsewhere, observing how similar problems are tackled with different policies, is a valuable method of broadening the base of experience and evaluating ideas that might form the basis of a planning innovation in one's own country. Therefore, many cross-national comparative planning studies have as their objective – explicitly or implicitly – the exploration of the possibility of transfer of policy. A good example of a study with this explicit objective is the Trinational Inner Cities Project, conducted jointly by the University of Reading and research institutes in West Berlin and Washington, DC, in 1978–9.¹

The practice of town and country planning in any country is conditioned to a great extent by the cultural, governmental, legal and constitutional circumstances of that country, and to disentangle these in order to transfer ideas from one country to another beyond a superficial level is a highly complex business. It is possible to learn something of planning in other countries by observation, or sightseeing, but appreciation of what is observed is likely to remain fairly superficial unless the observer has an understanding of the processes by which particular solutions are achieved, the agencies involved and the political influences on them. Without this background understanding, successful transfer of ideas in many aspects of planning is not likely to be possible.

For example, simple observation of city-centre pedestrianisation in German cities may be, and has been, sufficient stimulus to assist British planners to develop similar ideas in Britain, but it is not possible to form any useful conclusions about potential transfer value of German ideas on gradual renewal of older housing areas without a detailed understanding of the agencies and institutions involved. In order to study this and many other issues for the purpose of comparative analysis and consideration of the possibility of transfer it is necessary to keep the complexities within manageable limits. One way of achieving this is to limit such detailed studies to bilateral comparisons.

Some indication of the complexity of comparative assessment of transfer value of this and many other similar examples will be apparent from reading the various contributions in this book. Although comparative analysis of the depth necessary is clearly beyond the scope of this book, it is hoped that lines of inquiry which might prove fruitful will become apparent to the reader.

While the potential to learn from the experience of others remains the

most tangible objective of comparative studies, experience also suggests that one of the greatest benefits to be obtained from pursuing such studies lies not so much in the knowledge gained of other systems as in the opportunity it presents for critical appraisal of one's own system. It is very easy to become so familiar with the approach to certain problems or the procedures adopted in one's own country that it is difficult to conceive of alternative approaches. Study of other systems tends to raise thought-provoking questions about aspects of planning which might otherwise be taken for granted. For instance, in Britain decisions regarding the control of development are taken on the basis of a certain degree of discretion and are not predetermined by allocations that may appear on a development plan. This degree of discretion does not always exist elsewhere. Does this offer Britain valuable flexibility allowing local authorities to respond to priorities prevailing at the time of decision, or does it introduce a degree of uncertainty that is inhibiting to developers? In many countries the mandatory level of development plan is some form of local plan, whereas in Britain it is the structure plan. Why should this be so? These and many other questions could be posed, once one moves outside the confines of one national system of planning.

EDITORIAL POLICY

The countries we consider display not only a very wide variety of planning systems, but also a wide variety of perceptions of the nature and scope of planning, and the range of issues to which planning can legitimately address itself. As a matter of deliberate policy it was decided to give expression to this variety, and to attempt to convey to the reader a sense of the style, scope and practice of planning in each country, and not simply define the legal provisions. Ultimately, of course, the only way in which one can appreciate another planning system in this way is by informal contact with the practitioners in each country. However, this is often not possible. In order to provide a convenient, if limited, substitute for direct contact contributions were invited from experts native to the countries concerned. All are familiar not only with the system of planning in their own country, but also the problems involved in presenting an account to an audience from other countries.

Each contributor was given a common brief, but was allowed considerable latitude to make his own selection of the main themes worthy of emphasis. The main general requirement was to discuss the scope and style of planning practice, the principal issues facing planning authorities, and the procedures and policies adopted in response. In addition, they were invited to discuss the agencies responsible for planning, the technical expertise normally called upon by them, the role of professional planners and politicians within the planning process,