



Editorials

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EDITORIALS

Future Priorities for PPR

With this issue, PPR in effect completes the first stage of its development. It first saw the light of day in 1986. In that first issue the theme uniting the main articles was that of examining in a critical way how town planning had been affected by, and responded to, seven years of Thatcherism. In many ways, the concerns of that issue encapsulated the purpose and spirit of the publication. PPR was born out of a feeling that town planning was under threat, that planners were being asked to operate in quite news way, but that a firm basis of research and idea to evaluate these new directions (and possibly challenge them and present convincing alternatives) was not in place. PPR was therefore conceived as a way of helping to create a practically relevant, critical, research edge for practice. It was to be accessible without being superficial; critical, but in a way that was positive and supportive of practice.

Without doubt the needs which first prompted PPR are still very much with us. There is still an urgent job to be done in forging the carefully researched ideas that planners need if they are to respond in intelligent and progressive ways to the pressures of market ideology, industrial decline, and regional and social division. PPR, both as a publication and as a network of people in education, research, and practice, has contributed to this task. But, in the light of two years' experience, it is evident that there is still room for improvement.

The first major step forward was taken by the editorial team during 1988, with the decision to put the publication and distribution of the journal into the hands of Pion. This has had the important benefit of allowing the editorial team to concentrate on editorial issues. The second step takes effect after this issue, with the move to three publications a year (Spring, Summer, and Autumn). This should help in making the journal more responsive to current events, and in building up a stronger link between the journal and its readers.

Other ideas are also in the pipeline, including the possibility of holding annual conferences with the general purpose of bringing readers together, assessing how practice is changing, and considering current research priorities. Ways of improving PPR's role as a noticeboard of research-under-way are also being followed up.

With the weight of administration now lifted, it has been possible to give more detailed thought to an agenda of issues for future publications and seminars. Specific themes for the next two issues are already planned: race and planning (vol. 4, no. 1), and rural resources (vol. 4, no. 2). In addition to these, three further topics are to be given priority: the housing land/housing production debate; the quality of the new built environments that are being created; and changes in the organisation of town planning work (including the privatisation of planning functions). In the case of each of these topics, information from readers about research under way will be warmly received. As to whether the right priorities have been selected, the pages of PPR are open to all readers to put forward their views, either as letters in the Feedback section, or as longer pieces. ■

Ron Griffiths

Reflections on Europe: the 1988 AESOP Congress

Everyone is talking about 1992. However most of the discussion is highly speculative — it would be valuable to know more about the actual thinking in Brussels at the moment. How is planning viewed at the European scale? The Association of European Schools of Planning at its 2nd Annual Congress in Dortmund in November was fortunate in having a speaker from the European Commission in the form of Gunter Schneider, Director of the Directorate for Environment. It was clear from his presentation that 'green' issues are a significant part of the Commission's activity. This has been the case for some time, spurred on by controversies and national policies that detrimentally affect neighbouring countries, including problems of nuclear waste, toxic dumping, agricultural practices, and pollution of the sea.

Gunter Schneider explained how the longstanding concern of the Commission was now entering a new phase with an emphasis on the integration of environmental programmes into other programmes such as the economic and social ones. However, whereas the environmental programme has been at the forefront of the Commission's work for some time, its interest in spatial planning as such was just beginning. Up to now, spatial planning has been considered a matter of local concern and therefore not within the remit of the EEC. This attitude is changing. The impact of major projects like the Channel Tunnel and high-speed trains, and shifts such as an ageing northern population, demands for leisure and tourism or the importance of pleasant living conditions in deciding on economic location — all these have spatial implications of European significance. Taken together with the concern for increased integration of policies we can expect spatial planning to be firmly on the Commission agenda in the coming years. There will be a strong message coming across that such planning is essential for the future quality of life and also for the longer term sustainability of economic development. Mrs Thatcher seems to have turned green recently, she will now actually have to implement some of the rhetoric. Planning education and research will also have to respond and place greater importance on environmental aspects. Maybe we have the basis here for a resurrection of the planning system. Is this why the Prime Minister seems so scared of moves towards greater integration of European social policies?

Another issue which the Dortmund conference brought sharply into focus was the effects of the 1991 Directive concerning the movement of professionals between member states. At present, considerable encouragement exists to promote the movement of planning staff and students through the EC ERASMUS programme. Within this, planning schools in two or more member states have been able to exchange students. The ERASMUS programme funds this exchange whilst underpinning the other necessary activities, such as discussions between staff and language development, ERASMUS has also provided funds for AESOP to promote exchange within the EC, although AESOP itself extends to the whole of Europe (including the East). Thus there is now a growing breed of young professional planners who have some direct experience of working within other European systems.

However, the effects of the 1991 Directive will be far more substantial. Subject to locally determined tests of language and law, European nationals who have full membership of their own professional institutes will be entitled to take the equivalent designation in any other EC member state. The application of 'tests' which seem to prevent entry will be outlawed by the Commission. Thus from 1991, if you wish you will be able to practice in France, Italy, Spain, or Denmark, whilst planners in those countries will be able to practice in the UK.

Once the fears of 'flooding the job market' have passed, this interchange should provide a stimulating injection into UK planning. Although different conditions prevail, not least variance in political priorities, comparison in approaches to meeting similar problems should lead to a variety of new solutions. In time this will be backed with the 1992 changes, some of which are already in place. It is now possible, for

example, to finance a mortgage for a domestic property from any EC member state. Given the current clear relationship between mortgage funding and the housing market, it is only a short step to consider that this change could have a fundamental bearing on housing types and funding packages for potential occupiers. Further, European companies will bring their approaches to urban renewal or leisure provision — the Dutch have already demonstrated their approach — whilst our own retailers will expect to expand within essentially underdeveloped retail sections in some of the member states.

Thus the seeds of the united European state have been planted. How will planning practice be affected by this federally integrated Europe? ■

Janice Morphet
Andy Thornley



CONFERENCE
RURAL RESOURCE PLANNING
Department of Town and Regional Planning

University of Dundee

29/30 March 1989

Planning Practice and Research (in association with Dundee University Centre for Continuing Education) is holding its first event in Scotland on the topical theme of rural resource planning. While the emphasis will be placed mainly on experiences and examples from the Scottish context, contributions highlighting policy and practice in other parts of the UK, and indeed elsewhere, will also be included. The overall aim will be to evaluate carefully and critically problems and policies, with a view to informing and improving future planning practice in this field.

The conference will be arranged around four matters of concern:

- alternative rural land uses
- forestry expansion
- paying for conservation
- rural economic development

For further details please contact: Dr Tony Gore or Alan Pollock, Department of Town and Regional Planning, University of Dundee, Dundee DD4 4HN, Scotland.