KEY ELEMENTS FOR AN “EFFECTIVE” STRATEGIC PLANNING

LOUIS ALBRECHTS

ULI WORKSHOP: FINANCING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION

POZNAŃ: SEPTEMBER 12-13 2016
OUTLINE

• Problems/Challenges

• Critical features for a ‘successful’ Strategic Planning
BE CLEAR ABOUT PROBLEMS/ CHALLENGES

We need to be clear about the developments, challenges and opportunities that affect our cities and regions directly or indirectly: the growing complexity (the rise of new technologies (e-commerce), changes in production processes, the crisis of representative democracy, diversity, the globalization of culture and the economy, safety), the financial crisis and the subsequent economic crisis, persistently uneven development, the problems of fragmentation, the ageing of the population, and the increasing interest (at all scales, from local to global) in environmental issues (global warming…). I witness a quest for better coordination (both horizontal and vertical), a re-emphasis on the need for long-term thinking and the aim to return to a more realistic and effective method.
CONSEQUENCES?

Governments, planners, citizens have to be aware that a number of planning concepts (compact cities, livable cities, creative cities, multi-cultural cities, fair cities, just cities, sustainable cities, smart cities, learning regions) cannot be achieved solely through physical hard planning. Moreover, governments are being called upon to respond to new demands. This may/will imply the abandonment of bureaucratic approaches and the involvement of knowledge, skills and resources that are external to the traditional administrative apparatus. These developments and challenges urge governments to adopt a more entrepreneurial style of planning in order to enhance city and regional competitiveness they also serve to expand the agenda.
LIMITS OF STATUTORY PLANNING INSTRUMENTS

Master plans and land-use plans, seem to be ineffective because their focus is often on maintaining the existing social/spatial order rather than challenging and transforming it. They are designed for situations of stability, certainty and reasonable clarity of problems to be addressed, traits that are lacking in contemporary cities. In this way, they fail to capture the dynamics and tensions of relations coexisting in particular places.
CRITICAL FEATURES WHICH MAY UNDERPIN ‘SUCCESSFUL’ STRATEGIC PLANNING

I want to stress that strategic planning does not work on its own. It needs change agents to take the approach and deploy it (strong mayor, a vice-mayor, a minister, a planning director...). Moreover, as an academic with experience in practice I want to challenge the ever-ready acceptance of policy makers of fashionable general solutions circulating in globalized policy discourses.

I see critical features as conditions, or ingredients, to be aimed for, although I realize they can never be fully achieved.

I organize them into five relevant dimensions: (1) context, (2) visioning, (3) space-time geographies, (4) content, and (5) legitimacy.
Four-track approach as frame

- Context of place
- Policy questions and issues involved
- Long-term vision
- Long-term & short-term actions
- Contact with stakeholders
- Basic process with citizens
- Value rationality
- Strategic rationality
- Communicative rationality
- Instrumental rationality

Tracks:
- Track 1
- Track 2
- Track 3
- Track 4
The capacity of a strategic spatial planning system to deliver the desired outcomes demands a contextual understanding (economic, social, cultural, ecological…) of power dynamics and material interests, of (leading) discourses and the constraints of a more-of-the-same/business-as-usual attitude. A crucial element in this respect is the way in which people/actors are excluded or included in strategic planning processes and the way the relationship between people/actors—technologies of government, norms of self-rule—are organized. As illustrated with the four track approach I am in favor of, involving the main actors in the whole process (see Loos-en Gohelle in Nord-Pas de Calais).
Envisioning enables actors to open up the scope of possibilities. This will raise uncertainties for those involved in the process. Envisioning does not claim to eliminate uncertainty through the making of predictions; rather, it seeks to work as well as possible within a context of uncertainty. Envisioning requests that politicians, planning practitioners, social, economic, ecological, cultural actors and citizens think beyond the customary job descriptions, conventional knowledge, and traditional government structures in order to address the problems in new ways and to accept that the past is not a blueprint for how to go forward. It requires a change to the status quo, a change of planning cultures, of governance cultures. It requires an ability/willingness to cope with action, movement, emergence, relationship, and creative experimentation.
It is impossible to understand ‘the city’, ‘the city-region’ and ‘the region’ in terms of a one-dimensional hierarchy of scales. In a strategic planning process it is important to think in terms of shifting relations between issues/actors/scales rather than seeing each actor/issue/scale level in isolation. This requires an awareness of divergent understandings.
A focus on spatial territorial relations allows for a more effective way of integrating different agendas (economic, environmental, cultural, social, mobility and policy agendas). As these agendas have a variable reach, they also carry a potential for a ‘rescaling’ of issue agendas down from the global, continental, national, or regional, and up from the municipal scale. Places become both the text and context of new debates about fundamental socio-spatial relations, about thinking without frontiers, providing new kinds of practices and narratives about belonging to and being involved in the construction of a place and in society at large.
SELECTIVITY

Much of the strategic planning process, which is inherently political in nature, lies in making tough decisions about what is most important for the purpose of producing just, fair, structural but also feasible responses to problems, challenges, aspirations, and potential. Thus, strategic planning involves choice, valuation, judgement, and decisions that relate to envisioned agreed-upon ends and to the selection of the most appropriate means (link with budget), not in a purely instrumental sense, for coping with and implementing such ends.
STRATEGIC PLANNING IS ACTION- OR PROJECT-ORIENTED

Strategic spatial planning relates to the pattern of purposes, policy statements, frames, plans, programs, actions (short-, medium- and long-term), decisions and resource allocation (the budget) that define what a policy is in practice, what it does, and why and how it does it – from the point of view of the various affected publics (who benefits and who pays). This stresses the need to find effective connections right from the beginning, between political authorities and implementation actors: planning officers, individual citizens, community organizations, private corporations, developers and public departments. Short-term results are needed to build the credibility needed to sustain efforts over the long haul and to help test visions against concrete conditions. For me a strategic planning process should not maximize short-term results at the expense of the future. It means that strategic planning implies moving from episodic to continuous change.
OUTPUT

Strategic planning produces quite a different picture from traditional planning in terms of:

*Products*: strategic plans/policies, frames, strategies versus master plans or land-use plans. Strategic planning produces visions to frame problems, challenges, and short-term actions within a revised democratic tradition.

*Type of planning*: providing frameworks and justification for specific actions and means for implementation versus technical or legal regulation geared at promising legal certainty for landowners, investors and developers.

*Type of governance*: government-led versus a government-led but co-productive forms of governance. These include all relevant actors.
LEGITIMACY

In some places, strategic planning is inside the planning system but outside the legal system. Owing to their (mainly) non-statutory status, one must be aware that questions will be raised about the kind of legitimacy of strategic planning processes. Legitimacy is not only a procedural problem (who decides), but also a substantive problem, the link between strategic planning and statutory planning. This requires a clear policy about the link between strategic spatial planning and the statutory planning system and the budget.