Making Better Places

The Planning Project in the Twenty-First Century

Patsy Healey

PLANNING·ENVIRONMENT·CITIES

The context in which planning operates has changed dramatically in recent years. Economic processes have become increasingly globalized and new spatial patterns of economic activity have emerged. There have been major changes across the globe, not just changing administrations in various countries but also the sweeping away of old ideologies and the tentative emergence of new ones. A new environmental agenda emerged from the Brundtland Report and the Rio Earth Summit prioritizing the goal of sustainable development. The momentum for this has been maintained by continued action at international, national and local levels.

Cities are today faced with new pressures for economic competitiveness, greater accountability and participation, improved quality of life for citizens and global environmental responsibilities. These pressures are often contradictory and create difficult dilemmas for policy-makers, especially in the context of fiscal austerity. New relationships are developing between the levels of state activity and between public and private sectors as different interests respond to the new conditions.

In these changing circumstances, planners, from many backgrounds, in many different organizations, have come to re-evaluate their work. They have had to engage with actors in government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations in discussions over the role of planning in relation to the environment and cities. The intention of the Planning, Environment, Cities series is to explore the changing nature of planning and contribute to the debate about its future.

The series is primarily aimed at students and practitioners of planning and such related professions as estate management, housing and architecture as well as those in politics, public and social administration, geography and urban studies. It comprises both general texts and books designed to make a more particular contribution, in both cases characterized by: an international approach; extensive use of case studies; and emphasis on contemporary relevance and the application of theory to advance planning practice.

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Preface

This book is about the idea and practice of planning. The planning referred to focuses on developing and improving the places where we live and work. This 'planning', sometimes qualified with the terms 'city', 'urban and regional' or 'spatial', has become widespread around the world, as more and more people live in urban environments and as pressures on other landscapes have become more intense. It responds to people's concerns about improving the conditions of life and about reducing the environmental stress that human activity generates, especially in the crowded conditions of urban living.

Planning activity is often popularly presented as the procedures and practices of 'planning systems', which provide for the making of spatial development plans and make provision for the regulation of private property rights in order to safeguard and promote wider public objectives. Such activity is often criticised for bureaucratic failures and over-ambitious projects. In many parts of the world, planning activity has been drowned out by administrative and political practices that have washed away the motivating purposes for creating such systems.

The purposes of the planning project have always been a subject of critical debate. Most people would agree that the ambition of those promoting planning as an activity is to bring improvements to the qualities of places, with an eye to future opportunities and challenges. Disagreements then arise about what the critical place qualities are, what constitutes an improvement, whose improvement gets to count and how to move from ideas about future possibilities to programmes of action. Such disagreements are not just to be found among specialists in the planning field. They infuse the practice of planning, as all kinds of people get to demand improvements to their localities and dispute proposals put forward. What results then seems to be a matter of politics and legal judgement; that is, of governance. The motivating idea promoted through planning activity sometimes seems to be merely facilitating and mediating such disputation.

One aim of this book is to contribute to extracting the planning project from the narrowing, reductive perspectives with which its

many practices have become associated in the later twentieth century. Grand ideas of city building have become tarnished by a reputation for over-ambition, social injustice and financial disaster. Conceptions of territorial development based on outdated models of how urban settlements are formed and sustained have foundered when outcomes have not been as predicted. Land-use ordering practices intended to safeguard amenities and environmental qualities have instead become a tangle of rules and judgements that have long ago lost any relation to the ends they were meant to serve. A focus on conflict mediation lacks a concern with promoting ideas about how to achieve more liveable and sustainable places.

In this book, I argue that the planning project, as a contribution to the development of places and their qualities, has had and should have a wider focus. I suggest that the motivating idea of planning activity, as it has evolved in recent years, centres on a social project for shaping the development of places and their futures, to promote better and more sustainable conditions for the many and not just the few. The primary focus of the book is on how ideas about liveability and sustainability get transformed into programmes of action, which then have material effects on living conditions and local environments. I explore this interaction through three broad areas of practice: the ongoing management of neighbourhood change, the promotion of major development projects and spatial strategy making. In this way, I present the planning field not merely as an enterprise in imagining futures but as a practice of bringing imagined futures into being. I focus on the achievement of particular kinds of futures: not the monumental landscapes that some kings and dictators have valued, but places that provide opportunity, stimulation and convenience for the everyday life of people who live in, visit and do business in them, and that do so in ways that do not undermine the options for future generations.

My second aim is to provide an introduction to the planning field, from the above perspective. The book is not a review of all the many ideas in circulation about ways of life, technologies, physical designs and specific management systems that could make a difference to the way we live now. Instead, I focus on how to arrive at which ideas to pursue and how to realise these ideas in ways that make a difference to place qualities and people's experience of them.

I write this book as an 'insider' in the planning field. But my reason for promoting the 'project' of planning is not primarily because I have a background as a planner. Throughout the world in the twenty-first century, political communities will be challenged to

improve the liveability and sustainability of urban environments where more than half the world's population now live. This places considerable demands on the organisation and priorities of governments and governance activities more widely. Despite often deep commitments to improving the quality of life and well-being of citizens, it has not been easy for governments to give adequate policy attention to the quality of the environments in which we live our daily lives. Government activity tended in the twentieth century to 'split up' aspects of ourselves (educating, keeping healthy, getting around, finding work, finding social care and support, and so on) and neglected the challenges we face as we go about all these activities in particular places. Many people are concerned about the qualities of the places where they live. Those concerned with health and well-being are giving increasing attention to the way in which local environments are organised. It is these concerns that provide the ground for greater political attention to place qualities in the coming years. Furthermore, struggles over which qualities and whose concerns about them will be given priority have broader political effects. The capacity of societies to respond to these concerns about place qualities is therefore an important challenge. In the twentieth century, the institutional arenas in which policy systems known as 'town planning', 'urban planning', 'environmental planning' and 'spatial planning' were undertaken provided significant sites for such a politics of place. But as concerns for place qualities widen, such arenas and their practices need to be reconfigured and refreshed within the context of diverse societies, which yet share a commitment to promoting human flourishing in sustainable ways.

I have written this book with several different kinds of reader in mind. One group, naturally, consists of my fellow planners, who have been working in the planning field for some years but would appreciate some refreshment of their understanding of it and the motivations behind it. It is also for students starting out on a career in planning, to provide an idea of the scope, content and values of the field. For both these groups I have tried to take an international perspective, drawing on experiences from many parts of the world. This helps, I believe, to understand our own particular contexts better and to encourage us to be less introverted about our national and local planning systems and cultures. But this book is also for readers in other fields interested in the planning project and prepared to challenge some of the caricatures of the 'planner' and 'planning' to be found in popular discourse and some academic work.

The book conveys a positive attitude and a normative stance. I maintain the positive tone[1] because I believe that promoting more liveable and sustainable places is an important project for the twenty-first century world of highly urbanised societies. It is a project worth struggling for. While well-grounded critique of planning endeavours is always valuable, it is also important to provide examples of experiences where careful planning work has produced substantial benefits for sustainable everyday life. My challenge has been to present these experiences in a way that helps others learn from them, without treating them as easily transferable 'best-practice' recipes. A normative stance – that is, the promotion of a particular set of values – is in my view inherent in the planning project as it has evolved from the mid-twentieth century into the twenty-first. In any case, no study, however 'objective' or 'critical', can avoid some kind of normative stance towards what is being discussed. I believe it is better to be transparent about this, rather than hiding behind some kind of analytical theory or 'external' position. We are all, in one way or another, 'inside' the worlds we are talking about. I therefore write as an advocate for the 'best intentions' of the planning project, and explore what it takes to realise these in different kinds of situations, while recognising the limitations of what is possible and desirable.

Because of the enormous variety of places and institutional contexts in which attempts to manage futures are undertaken, there has been a movement away from the portrayal of principles, protocols and procedures for doing planning work, except at a very general level. Similarly, attempts at capturing and systematising such variety in typologies, while useful for particular purposes, also prove flawed, because so many dimensions of variation produce the dynamics of particular practices. Typologies that select only a few dimensions may easily miss critical reasons for a practice evolving as it does. It is for this reason that the planning field has made much use of the method of 'thick description' of actual cases.[2] I do the same in this book. Using the division into three broad areas of practice (the on-going management of neighbourhood change, the promotion of major projects and spatial strategy making), I present specific examples to illustrate each area. Each case is drawn from several sources and has been checked with those more directly involved than I. These are not offered as a representative sample of planning experience. We rarely know what the 'universe' of planning practices adds up to from which a sample could be taken, and it is not clear what purpose would be served by attempting this.

Instead, the cases are intended as exemplars, to show what work is required to make a significant and sustainable contribution to the quality of daily life for the many. Although the examples are primarily from urban contexts, given that the majority of us now live in urban areas or in places that make use of the facilities and cultural ideas associated with urbanisation, many of the issues raised will have relevance in less urbanised contexts and in the management of complex non-urban environments. Hopefully, the book will prompt readers to draw out such connections.

This raises another tricky problem for any academic writing about the planning field. In organising material, structuring arguments and presenting examples, writers cannot avoid making assumptions and drawing connections among ideas, and between ideas and evidence. The academic disciplines of the social sciences, and of philosophy, encourage reflexivity and debate about alternative perspectives and 'theories' through which assumptions and connections are made. There is a rich tradition of such theory within the planning field (Hillier and Healey 2008). In this book, however, such theory lies in the background, not the foreground, of the text. Where I feel it is helpful, I have provided a brief comment on conceptual debates. Otherwise, I have used a few references or chapter notes to highlight issues where there is particular controversy or emphasis in the realm of conceptual debate, so that interested readers can follow these up or find out more about the positions I take.

The first chapter outlines what I understand as the 'planning project' and its current orientation. I then develop this in relation to understanding how places develop their qualities and meanings for people (Chapter 2), and what is involved in collective action to improve place management and development (Chapter 3). The following chapters present the three broad areas of planning practice identified above. I have divided the first area into two groups. Chapter 4 looks at the activity of shaping changes within neighbourhoods, and Chapter 5 examines the routine work of land-use regulation and of settlement upgrading in a developing-country context. Chapter 6 then focuses on the promotion of major physical development projects aimed at transforming a locale within an urban area. Chapter 7 considers the contribution of place-development strategies. Chapter 8 then turns to what it takes to 'do' planning work, and in particular the contribution of planning expertise. The final chapter reviews the arguments I develop in the book about how place-governance with a planning orientation is achieved, and the

relative significance of context and agency in realising the potential of the project to enhance the liveability and sustainability of places for the many, not just the few. At the end of each chapter, I provide suggestions for further reading. Boxes are used in the text to provide more detail on cases or to summarise particular arguments or approaches to issues.

Acknowledgements

The Planning Project

Places in our lives

We care about the places where we live our lives. We get used to their pathways and pleasures, and learn to navigate their tensions and dark corners. We want freedom to find our own ways, but often agitate for collective action to define some rules, some general constraints to protect what we value and to reduce the tensions that arise as we co-exist with others in shared spaces. There are stories from across the world of people mobilising to improve and protect the qualities of the places they live in, work in and care about. Such struggles are especially intense where many different groups, often with different cultures, values and modes of living, share common resources or, as in urban areas, inhabit the same physical space. In these struggles, we form and re-form our ideas of ourselves and our social worlds, of identity and solidarity, of individual freedoms and social responsibilities.

Three cameos illustrate such stories and struggles. They range from routine conflicts over neighbourhood development in England to struggles over knowledge about environmental pollution in New York and well-meaning initiatives in Nazareth, Israel, which ended tragically.

The first case comes from affluent southern England.[1] Ditchling is a small village of around 2000 people on the Sussex Downs, near the motorway from London to Brighton. Here people who have lived in the village for generations mingle with all kinds of people who have moved there, attracted by the image of village life and the reality of a beautiful downland landscape close to the amenities and social worlds of both London and Brighton (see Figure 1.1). In this respect, it is like very many villages across South East England. All kinds of people co-exist here. There are farmers worried about the future of their activity, followers of hunting defending their sport, and a group of artists and craftspeople, linked to a co-operative craft guild set up by engraver Eric Gill in the early twentieth century.

Figure 1.1   *Ditchling village*

There are retired managers of multinational companies, retired actresses and singers, including Dame Vera Lynn,[2] and people who have refused promotions if this meant they had to leave their village. There are 44 societies of one kind or another, and a local museum that attracts people from all over the world. Local residents put on shows and get involved in fêtes, festivals and morris dancing. There is some overlapping of the networks of all these different people, but also some carefully maintained distances. Not everyone is happy about the hunting and there are considerable reservations about the lifestyle of the engraver, whose work still attracts so much attention.

Some villagers are prepared to mobilise to defend village qualities. The heart of the village has for many years been a formally declared 'conservation area' under English planning legislation. Until recently the village had four pubs. Each had its own clientele and ambience, though some people moved around from pub to pub. However, the owner of one of these, a rather ordinary building with a large garden, saw better prospects in developing the site for housing. Regular drinkers were naturally upset at the prospect of losing their pub, as were the football players, the darts team and the bell ringers, whose regular meeting place it was. Others in the village felt that the loss of one of the pubs meant that the overall assets of the village would be reduced. Some were ideologically troubled and disliked the idea that village assets could be 'stripped' so that private

developers could make money. A few people thought that it might be better to have houses nearby rather than a noisy pub, but on balance, the village 'majority', orchestrated by an action group, was against the development. This view prevailed in the Parish Council.

However, Parish Councils in the English government structure have very limited powers. The key decision-making body is the District Council, which covers a much larger area. And District Councils have only limited powers too. In issues to do with planning they have to follow national guidelines, which have influenced the policies in the local plans that they are required to prepare. These are approved after complex inquiry processes. A planning authority in England has no powers to demand that an enterprise such as a pub be kept open. Its powers relate to whether proposed new development can go ahead. In this case, the Ditchling parish councillor was also the representative of the village on the District Council. The district councillors realised how much opposition there was in the village to the housing proposal, but were unsure how to respond to this, as the local plan had indicated that it would be appropriate to have a housing development on the site in question. And if the developer appealed against the council decision and won, costs would be awarded against the Council, so the Council did not have very much power either. The district planning officers negotiated a reduction in the scale of the scheme, but recommended to the councillors that they should approve it. Neither the local plan nor national planning policy gave them grounds for refusal, and refusal would not only potentially incur costs, but also could undermine the Council's reputation as a capable planning authority.

In this context, the application was approved and the housing development has now been completed. The residents enjoy their new homes. But many villagers remain deeply upset, not just about the loss of their pub but about their inability to make their voice heard. They were horrified that their parish councillor, who had supported the action group's position, actually supported the decision in favour of the housing development at the Planning Committee meeting. How, they asked, can a local council override what a village has voted for? Why are there no rights for villagers to appeal against a planning decision?[3] How can their local councillor be so two-faced? Doesn't this show that the national planning laws are just a 'developer's charter'? Through such everyday encounters with the English planning system, local residents and their equivalents across the country get a real and uncomfortable experience of what democracy means in England today.

The second case is about how local knowledge confronted government specialists. It takes us to New York and a neighbourhood in Brooklyn, opposite the downtown on Manhattan Island (see Figure 1.2). The Greenpoint/Williamsburg neighbourhood, as described by Jason Coburn, 'is one of the most polluted communities in New York City' (Corburn 2005:12). Around 160,000 people, from a variety of backgrounds, live in an area that is less than 1300 hectares (5 square miles) in extent. In 2000, it was calculated that over a third of the population lived in poverty.[4] It was also an area with a concentration of industrial plants and many polluting facilities. Studies in recent years showed that the area had a very high concentration of facilities dealing in hazardous substances. In addition, the area suffered pollution from heavy traffic crossing from Manhattan to Brooklyn. The US Environmental Protection Agency and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection had undertaken studies to identify the health consequences of these hazards. Under pressure from the US environmental justice movement, which campaigned for more attention to the environmental hazards suffered by poorer communities, these public agencies set out to study in more depth the relationship between the hazards and health experiences in the area.

Figure 1.2   *Panorama over Brooklyn*

© Jo St Mart.

However, local people were suspicious of this kind of approach. They felt that the 'scientific knowledge' with which such agencies worked might miss their own experience of life 'on the street'. They struggled to get their knowledge recognised by the environmental health scientists. In various ways, they organised community knowledge around different issues. Corburn explores their work in relation to water pollution and local fishing to supplement family diets, the high rates of asthma experienced in the area, the high incidence of lead poisoning among children, and the risks arising from local air pollution. He highlights the way in which local knowledge could indicate cultural practices and fine-grained variations from street to street, which scientists dealing in abstracted data sets could easily miss. Yet, although there were many struggles and suspicions between the trained environmental scientists and community members, in the end what was achieved was a way of joining 'local insights with professional techniques' (Corburn 2005:3). Corburn calls this 'street science' and shows how such a science can both inform decision making about improving health conditions in the area and focus scientific enquiry in new ways. He argues that communities are full of 'experts' in knowledge about the flow of daily life in their areas. What they often lack, especially in poor, ethnically mixed communities, is 'voice', the capacity to make their concerns heard in the wider world that controls the location and regulation of the activities and facilities that cause their problems. Corburn argues that, in the Greenpoint/Williamsburg case, getting heard was the result of several factors: building coalitions among different groups within the neighbourhood who were worried about different aspects of the environment; linking community activism with the wider environmental justice movement; the presence of 'intermediaries' who acted as 'boundary spanners'; connecting community knowledge with professionals in various agencies; and attention to short-term actions that could really make a difference and that residents could recognise.

The third case, from the town of Nazareth in Israel, illustrates how a well-meaning planning initiative can generate disturbing conflicts. It is told by Yosef Jabareen (2006). At the end of the twentieth century around 70,000 people lived there, all of Palestinian background, of whom 67 per cent were Muslim Arabs and 33 per cent Christian Arabs. They had suffered in the mid-twentieth century as a result of the displacement and resettlement produced as the State of Israel was formed. Both groups lost land in this process. Since then, the town's conditions and development had been largely

neglected by the Israeli national government. It was left to local initiatives to mobilise improvement activity, but in a situation of limited resources. Living conditions were difficult, but the different groups lived peaceably together and the town was a major international tourist destination.

In the early 1990s, the national government adopted a more positive attitude to the town's development needs. The Mayor of Nazareth was at this time a government member. The ambition of the government, and the Mayor, was to enhance the peace process generally between Israelis and Palestinians, then full of promise, and to improve conditions in the neglected city of Nazareth. This led to an initiative that became the Nazareth 2000 Plan. Nazareth was to be a key location for the 2000 millennium celebrations. The focus was on tourism as a generator of economic benefits – 'a unique cultural-tourist destination for international tourism' (Jabareen 2006:309). The plan included several valuable development projects across the city, with a significant budget allocation. One of these projects was for a new plaza, designed by an Israeli government architect, to create a good view of the town's main monument, the Church of the Annunciation. However, Muslim groups argued that the land had been dedicated to the nearby mosque (see Figure 1.3). It therefore belonged to the Muslim religious community and could not be developed for other purposes.

> On the eve of Easter Sunday, the night between 3 and 4 April 1999, unexpected clashes erupted … between thousands of (the town's) Christian and Muslim residents. These clashes, which shocked the Palestinian minority in Israel, were the first in modern history between these religious groups who had lived together peacefully in the city for hundreds of years. (Jabareen 2006:305)

The source of the tension was the plan for the new plaza. The promoters of the plan had hoped to host a visit from the Pope as part of the millennium celebrations. But Muslims in the city wanted to build a mosque next to the Church of the Annunciation.

> As a response to the city plan, hundreds of Muslims constructed a large tent at the site of the planned plaza, built the foundations for a new mosque, and initiated a sit-in protest that lasted for four years. Following intensive international interventions (by such leaders as President Bush, the Pope, and President Putin) asking

Figure 1.3   *Nazareth: plaza, mosque and church,*
with the mosque in the foreground and Church of the
Annunciation in the background

Source: Yosef Jabareen

for the destruction of the tent and the foundations of the mosque,
the Government of Israel, deploying thousands of soldiers,
destroyed the tent and the beginnings of the mosque in April 2003
… This event, which began as a plaza plan for a small site in
Nazareth, mushroomed beyond that, causing political, social, and
cultural urban crises in the city. Above all, it triggered religious
conflict in Nazareth … Astonishingly, the Central Plaza Plan,
which simply designates a small piece of land for public use …
succeeded in tearing [a] long-sustained social fabric and creating
new social and political risks in Nazareth. (Jabareen 2006:305–6)

By January 2006 the plaza was complete, but was not opened until
a few years later (see Figure 1.4). There are many different views in
Nazareth about who was responsible for this sad outcome, but all
agree that the security of their place of dwelling is worse than it was
and they feel divided and fearful in a way that was not present
before. 'Today, Nazareth is a city of veils and crucifixes,' said an

Figure 1.4   *Nazareth's new plaza in 2009*

Source: Yosef Jabareen

interviewee. 'Planning served as a conflict producer' (Jabareen 2006:317).

It is from cases such as these that the ideas and practices associated with planning activity get their justifications and meanings. The focus of this broad field of ideas and practices is on deliberate, collective attempts to improve place qualities, as a contribution to the management and development of places. In this respect, it is part of the governance infrastructure that contributes to the physical shaping of locales within an urban area (see Chapter 3). However, it is about much more than this physical shaping and ordering. Planning ideas and planning activity both express, and contribute to, the way people understand and feel about places. They may come to affect and express people's sense of identity as well as their material conditions.

The politics of place

Stories such as those recounted above, which can be repeated from across the globe, have often been treated as somehow 'local'

phenomena, below the radar of the great themes of national and international politics and the power play of ideologies and political movements. Yet these apparently local experiences do not only have local effects, and small conflicts can grow into bigger struggles. Even small encounters with planning activity can provide important experiences of the governance institutions in a society, of their strengths and, especially, their failings. When a place-related issue confronts them – a proposed new building, or the expansion of a traffic-generating hospital or school, or a proposal for a new motor-way route or airport expansion – people recall and revise their views of what they think about the political arrangements in their society as well as about the particular issue in hand. They learn about what they value, who has the same views as them and who seems to have a different view. They are reminded that they have to co-exist with others. They discover how all kinds of issues interrelate, clash and get tangled up when they come together in particular places. The institutional sites or arenas where 'planning' and local development issues are discussed and where conflicts are arbitrated may then become places where citizens learn about politics. People become aware of how their concerns inter-relate not only with those of their neighbours, but with those of people elsewhere whose concerns are raised in the discussion.

In Europe in the twentieth century, formal governments were not well equipped to deal with this place-centred politics. Some countries were very centralised, making it difficult to grasp citizens' concerns about their living environments. The dominant focus, as politics shifted into more democratic forms, was to provide for people's needs. But the way these needs were thought about was shaped by the class struggles of industrialisation, especially the demand for better conditions for the working classes. These important struggles set the masses in opposition to elites in the search for a more just distribution of resources and less exploitative working conditions. The aim of the welfare states that developed in Western Europe and North America in the second part of the twentieth century was to create welfare by an economic project of full employment through industrial expansion and a social project of better housing, health and education for all. As more and more people came to live in urban environments, the challenge of managing the collective daily life of both people and firms became ever more significant. It is in this context that the ideas and actions associated with the planning field commanded the attention of political leaders. During the twentieth century, the project of improving place

qualities moved from the advocacy and experimentation of activists into a significant activity of formal governments. 'Planning systems' were created to regulate how land was used and developed, and how space and place qualities could be provided to serve economic and sociocultural purposes (Sutcliffe 1981, Ward 2002).

This planning project, as it developed in the first part of that century, was advocated both as a means of achieving wider access to economic opportunities and as a way of developing places in which work opportunities, housing provision and social welfare facilities for all could be situated. In the post-World War II period in Europe, planning as city building and rebuilding was a major element in the effort to revive social and economic conditions after the 1930s economic depression and the damage done by wartime bombing. In the US, the planning project was given a different emphasis, focusing on regional development and the promotion of more rational, scientifically informed public administration, both more democratic and more efficient than the patronage politics that grew up in a governance context in which local administrations had considerable autonomy (Friedmann 1973, 1987). However, in both contexts, experts and elite politicians articulated policies on behalf of citizens, who tended to be considered as largely undifferentiated masses with similar wants and needs. As the American sociologist Herbert Gans remarked, planners tended to plan for people like themselves (Gans 1969). Planning systems and development projects were thus rolled out across national territories with little attention to local variety. How such systems then worked out depended on the wider political and administrative context. In decentralised government systems, such as the US, the institutions and instruments made available by planning legislation might release local energies to pursue citizens' concerns about place qualities in inclusive ways, sensitive to different conditions and experiences. But equally, these same institutions and instruments could also be captured by particular interests. Commentators in the later twentieth century argued that governance elites dominated by business coalitions ruled most urban areas in the US (Fainstein and Fainstein 1986, Logan and Molotch 1987). In highly centralised systems, the development of local place management capacity might be ignored in the drive for wider goals such as economic growth (as in Japan, see Chapter 4). Or local management might be shaped to conform to national perceptions of what the planning project should achieve (as in England, see the South Tyneside case in Chapter 5).

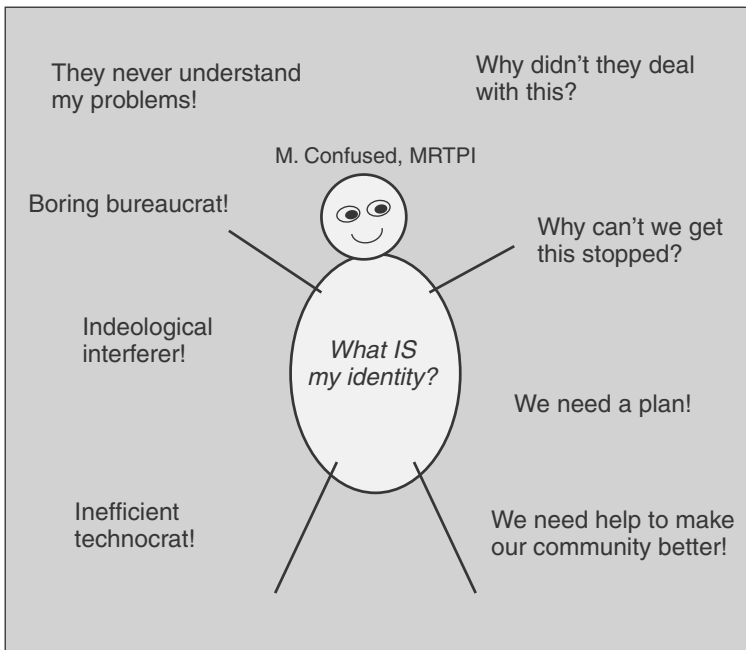However, the general idea of planning as a welfare project

articulated by technical experts faced other challenges when translated into government institutions and procedures. People increasingly questioned the capacity of elites and experts to articulate their concerns. Pressure groups, social movements and lobby groups demanded a greater say in policy-making processes. The diversity of people's experiences, aspirations and social worlds became increasingly evident, as civil rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s challenged systemic injustices, not only of class, but gender, race, ethnic and religious background, and physical ability. From the 1960s, the environmental costs of economic growth and resource exploitation became ever more obvious, leading to fundamental shifts in thinking about the relations and responsibilities of humans to the natural environment. While scientific knowledge was a key resource in this environmental movement, it also opened up such knowledge in ways that allowed people to see that science itself was full of contested concepts and uncertain conclusions, as residents in Greenpoint/Williamsburg argued. So neither scientific knowledge nor political representatives could be trusted to know enough, and especially to know enough about particular conditions in specific places. A wider approach to the intelligence needed to inform place-governance practices was needed.

In any case, the behaviour of those involved in politics and public administration, as reported in the media, seemed to suggest that politicians, their advisers and their officials were as likely to be corruptly pursuing their own interests or those of their favoured cronies as to be committed to the concerns of the citizens they were supposed to represent. Instead of responsible representatives of citizens' concerns, politicians were increasingly perceived as a discrete class, buttressed by self-interested officials and lobby groups, distanced from people's everyday lives. These shifts in thinking about government, politicians and governance capacity, now widely spread across the globe, have reduced citizens' interest in engaging with nation-state politics. Nevertheless, this does not mean that citizens and businesses are not interested in place qualities. Concerns about pollution and congestion, about rights to define which place qualities to promote, about the quality of streets and public spaces, and about access to physical and social facilities and infrastructures, become increasingly important once minimum basic needs for food and shelter are met. And people do not merely want a certain quantity of these place qualities. They want them arranged in such a way that they are accessible to them – physically, socially and in economic terms. Struggles over the quality of place management

and development may lead to previously disenfranchised or disaffected citizens re-engaging with political life. In doing so, they may help to transform the qualities of the governance culture of their political community.

In such a context, the nature of planning institutions and practices, and their relation to all kinds of other arenas where place politics are acted out, become more than merely local matters. They begin to shape the overall way in which government and politics are done. They become institutional sites where national priorities, such as promoting economic development or providing more housing, bump up against other concerns about place qualities, such as infrastructure provision, environmental quality and sustainable development principles. They create arenas where international companies and global pressure groups may confront local residents in clashes over development proposals. As the weekly journal *The Economist* has remarked, 'Britain's inefficient planning rules … [are] a subject that raises passions like few others' (*Economist*, 9 Dec 2006:36). This recognises the intensity of the conflicts that can arise among the

Figure 1.5   *The ambiguous position of planners*

They never understand my problems!

Why didn't they deal with this?

M. Confused, MRTPI

Boring bureaucrat!

Why can't we get this stopped?

Indeological interferer!

What IS my identity?

We need a plan!

Inefficient technocrat!

We need help to make our community better!

many different people who have a stake in what happens in a place, the 'stakeholders' in place qualities. In such situations, the arenas and institutions created by governments to undertake 'planning' activity are judged both as a hope and a problem. If only we had good planning, some people think, conflicts would become less intense. If only we could get rid of 'planning constraints', these conflicts could be bypassed. Planning activity and those who do planning work are caught in the centre of this ambiguous attitude (see Figure 1.5).

I argue in this book that the politics of place cannot be bypassed. More than half of us now live in urban areas of one kind of another, and have a stake in working out how to combine our own opportunities for flourishing[5] with those of others with whom we co-exist. As thinking creatures always interacting with the rest of the natural world, and with pasts and futures, we also cannot avoid being concerned about how the way we live now may compromise future conditions for life, for ourselves and for others. It therefore matters in the twenty-first century how we, as social beings in political communities, approach the challenges of place management and development.

The evolving planning project

What does it mean to approach place-governance with a planning orientation? Answers to this question evolved significantly through the twentieth century. An enduring concept embedded in the idea of planning is the belief that it is worth acting now to try to bring into being some aspiration for the future. A planning way of approaching place-governance therefore emphasises some aspirations about future place qualities. But what qualities and whose aspirations get to count?

A century ago, as urbanisation proceeded apace in rapidly industrialising countries, the planning project was promoted for several reasons (UN-Habitat 2009). For some, the ambition was to display the power of leaders and their commitment to 'modernising' their cities. There are still leaders today whose ambitions have created the skyscraper displays of Pudong in Shanghai or Dubai in the Gulf States. Such 'grand projects' have been as much about display and beautification as about providing space for urban activities. Another motivation for taking up the planning project was to manage the process of urban expansion. In developed countries in the early to

mid-twentieth century, and increasingly now in the urban mega-lopolises of the developing world, national and municipal governments have sought to control urban expansion by regulating how land is used and developed. Major concerns in attempts to regulate urban expansion centred throughout the twentieth century on relating land development to infrastructure provision, and protecting areas where people live from polluting industries. The mechanism of 'zoning' land for particular uses arose from these concerns. Such concerns remain an important idea in the planning project today, emphasising the value of the convenience and operating efficiency of urban areas. A third motivation for the planning project was to make a contribution to redressing the social inequalities that have been a persistent feature of urban life. While the emphasis on beautification seemed to pander to the aspirations of affluent elites, efficiency and convenience were valued by the expanding urban middle classes. But poorer citizens and marginalised minority groups have faced hard struggles to get a foothold from which to satisfy basic needs and access to urban opportunities. Many of those promoting the planning project a century ago were motivated by finding ways to improve housing and living conditions for the poorest. Concern for justice in the way in which urban opportunities are distributed remains an important idea within the planning project.

A century ago, the planning project was conceived primarily in terms of its role in improving the physical fabric of cities. It was closely linked to concepts of the progressive 'modernising' of cities, though there were struggles over whether this modernisation should reflect the ambitions of elites or the aspirations of ordinary city dwellers. However, as the century wore on, much more attention was given to the social and economic dimensions of the way in which places change and develop. Advocates of the planning project became concerned with how local economies developed and how places experiencing economic hardship could be helped by development initiatives. This in turn encouraged more attention to understanding social and economic dynamics, especially through systematic social scientific analysis. Understood in this way, the planning project could be associated with bringing knowledge to bear on public policy choices (Friedmann 1987). But this still left open the question of what and whose knowledge got to count, the issue that preoccupied the residents in Greenpoint/Williamsburg. For many, it seemed once again that it was the knowledge of elites that counted, a distant 'them', far from the worlds of 'us'. This perception came to exist even in states formally committed to