The Time Dimension in Regulatory Planning

Abstract

Planning theory deals with normative issues and tries to differentiate between what ‘is’ in reality and what is desired. One of the objectives of planning theory is to guide the planning practice in finding practical solutions to problems experienced in the field. There is, however, a gap between planning theory and practice that stems from a theoretical disconnect associated with real time issues faced by planners. The lack of a unified theory that reconciles time issues endogenous to planning with exogenous pressures imposed by the environment induces practitioners to comply with immediate, short term needs often at the cost of long range planning. Such reactive planning threatens to undermine the hierarchical structure where regulative long range planning policy guides and direct shorter range plans for implementation. We propose a unified theory that takes into account the various measures of time in planning and provides a suitable solution to conflicting objectives under a variety of planning environments.

1. Introduction

In our analysis of the time dimension in regulatory planning, we consider three basic measures of the expression of time in planning: the *range of plans*, the *frequency of plan initiation* or *updating*, and *duration of the planning process*. The need to update plans stems from failure of the rational comprehensive paradigm and broad recognition that a single plan cannot adequately address the needs of dynamically changing cities and regions. Therefore, in the time between a plan’s initiation and up to the moment of its expiration there is a need for updating[[1]](#footnote-1) (Meyerson, 1973; Rondenelli, 1975; Webber, 1978; Chapin and Kaiser, 1979; Arnold and So, 1979; Blowers, 1980). But when must plans be updated? What is the right frequency and by what criteria should update timing be determined?

‘Planning’ is often viewed as a single phenomenon, while in reality there are different planning objectives for the variety of planned environments. The range of plans – short, middle, and long – delineates the appointed time for implementation and is significant in determining the frequency of plan initiation, meant primarily to gain control over the development process. This approach views planning not as a single phenomenon but rather as a process that is both constant and continuous in the sense that it attempts to react to constant changes taking place in the environment, as well as coordinate between plans at each level of the planning hierarchy. Yet, while planning looks into the future and dictates the range of plans and the frequency of plan initiation, duration of the planning process takes place along a particular time continuum and is generally excluded from models that suggest criteria to determine the frequency of plan initiation.

Current theory falls short of providing operative tools for planners and policy decision makers to coordinate between conflicting objectives of maintaining an up-to-date planning system that includes long and middle range plans, while meeting the immediate, short range needs of the planned environment. A strong theoretical foundation that allows for the continuous and concurrent quality of planning is critical in order to establish policy that can support the system and increase coordination between planning objectives. Such a structure will enhance effectiveness of the planning product.

The article is structured as follows: In part 2 we consider the basic measures of time in planning. We discuss the variables that influence these expressions of time and assess their impact on the planning system. In part 3 we introduce “planning as process” by considering the interrelationships and interdependence between the various time dimensions, and evaluate current theory in light of the degree to which it meets the practical needs dictated by the continuous and concurrent quality of planning. In part 4 we present a structural analysis of the interrelationship between time dimensions. First we consider the relationship between variables endogenous to planning and formally introduce the dynamic character of the environment into our model, as an exogenous variable that directly impacts planning practice. We show that an integrative model is able to close the gap between meeting long range planning objectives and immediate needs of the planned environment. We close the paper with concluding remarks and policy recommendations that strongly link normative theory with planning practice.

1. When plans are long range the issue of initiation relates to updating a previous plan. For short and range plans initiation usually refers to the initiation of new plans. The difference between plan updating and new plan initiation is a direct result of the specific planning circumstance. We use ‘initiation’ to refer to both types of planning. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)