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Planning : Some Lessons for Eastern Europe from France and Western Europe

Conference¹ given in **Krakow, 2001**

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The end of XIXth century and the first half of the XXth were marked in Europe by drastic economic changes :

A) Economic Crises : the Free Market in doubt

European economy was shaken in 1873-1893 by a general depression, the first *Globalization crisis* in history. The development of banking, of modern industry, of new transportation means (railroads, steamers), the swift circulation of information through radio networks, enormous human migrations from the agricultural countryside to new urban agglomerations, all shocked violently European Nations.

After WWI, market economy was violently criticized for the Great Depression (1929-1939). The establishment and the apparent success of state planning in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia seemed to condemn capitalism. Regional planning started in occupied France, under the Vichy government (1940~1944). The Pétain regime wanted to give prominence to high professionals, engineers, economists, etc.. and to protect them from so many democratic interferences they had “suffered” from a despised Parliament (which was dissolved in 1940). After the war, situation in France and most of Western Europe was chaotic, with immense destructions and lack of practically everything. The only goal was to increase production and since raw materials and energy sources were badly in demand, planning seemed the best solution for distributing efficiently the few basic commodities still available.

Planning was then equally advocated by the Right and the Left : the Right wanted to come back as soon as possible to “business as usual” and had been accustomed to war planning ; the Left admired the Soviet 5 years plans. In the United Kingdom, famous planning endeavors included transport reforms with the justly famed Buchanan's Report² and New Towns creation. In France, in 1963, the District³ planned huge modifications in the Paris Metropolitan Region while the DATAR⁴ was created to organize regional planning on a national basis.

1 I am grateful to Marie-France Ciceri for her remarks and her corrections.

2 IC Buchanan (1963) *Traffic in Towns*, HMPO.

3 Le District de Paris, powerful planning structure in charge of the Paris region between 1963 and 1969, under Paul Delouvrier. It built 5 New Towns, most of the rapid transit lines (RER), etc...

4 La DATAR (Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale) a été remplacée en 2013 par le CGET (Commissariat à l'Egalité des Territoires) : www.cgnet.gouv.fr

A main goal of the planners was then to organize rationally resource allocation, mainly by controlling big national companies : either they had been nationalized, like in France, or they were closely controlled by public policies, national banks, social rules, i.e finally by state planners, whose motivation was not only practical but also largely ideological.

B) Agrarian movements :

The explosion of industries, of huge metropolises and the fierce competition from newly developing economies (USA, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, ...) at the end of XIXth century provoked a reaction. A passionate “Return to Land” (*Retour à la terre*⁵), to agriculture, to small villages and to traditional values, fiercely opposed to rural migrations⁶, started before World War I and was reinforced after 1918.

Between the two wars, a strong movement toward agricultural protection, rediscovery of folklore and defiance to big cities, prompted new planning policies⁷. The goal was to insure the development of rural territories against the growth of urban metropolises. In France, planners tried to limit Paris growth⁸, to move Paris activities to smaller towns and to foster local development. With the centralized power of the French State, going back to the kings and to Napoleon, planning was considered by practically everybody as “a burning obligation”.

1 - The 1970's turning point :

After 1973-74, planning took a completely different direction. The huge increase in oil prices after the Yom Kippour war⁹ was an obvious cause, but there were deeper and more interesting reasons. Political and cultural crises all over the western world in 1968 and the following years, the discovery of the ecological dangers of uncontrolled industrial production, the opening of custom barriers with the development of multi-national companies, finally, the success of liberalism with Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and, as a result, *Globalization*. Three basic consequences changed radically the nature of planning.

1.1 – Rightly or wrongly, the Free Market has become the model. Big national companies have now to compete on the world stage or disappear. Their usual strategy, in order to keep their market shares and

5 J Méline (1905) *Le retour à la terre*, Hachette.

6 M Fuss (1914) *Die Landflucht, ihre Ursachen, ihre Wirkungen und ihre Bekämpfung*, Tyrolia, Brixen.

7 Excellent analysis for **Germany** in K Bergmann (1970) *Agrarromantik und Grossstadtfeindschaft*, Anton Hain Vlg, Meisenheim am Glan, Marburger Abhandlungen zur politischen Wissenschaft, Band 20, 405 S. A resume in French is available on <http://www-ohp.univ-paris1.fr>. See also : B Marchand (1999) “Nationalsozialismus und Grossstadtfeindschaft” *Die Alte Stadt*, 1/99, Seiten 39-50. In **Switzerland** : J Salomon (2003) *Representation anti-urbaine et aménagement du territoire en Suisse*, Polytechnique de Lausanne. **More generally** : B Marchand (2009) *Les ennemis de Paris*, PUR, 382 p as well as Salomon J & B Marchand (2010) *Antiurbain*, Presses Romandes, Lausanne. For a global picture, see the **Synopsis** in <http://www-ohp.univ-paris1.fr>

8 J-F Gravier (1947) *Paris et le désert français*, Paris ; this book has become a French planner's Bible. For a critical evaluation, see I.Provost (1999) *Paris et le désert français : histoire d'un mythe*, Thèse, Univ d'Evry and B Marchand (2001) “La haine de la ville : Paris et le désert français de J-F Gravier “”, *L'Information géographique*, vol 6, pp 234-253.

9 The price of the barrel jumped from 3 US dollars to 13 then to 20.

their rate of profit, is to increase productivity by firing workers and limiting salaries. Huge companies had been, before, the main levers which state planners could use to implement economic development and regional reforms. They escape largely now the influence of public authorities and design their own strategies.

On the other hand, they cannot count anymore on public help because that would distort competition within the European Common Market. The European Commission controls carefully public subsidies, allows very few of them and forces subsidized companies to refund the money as soon as possible. A good example has been given recently by the conflict between the Commission, on one hand, and on the other, one of the biggest firms in Europe, *Volkswagen* and the Land of Baden-Wurtemberg which wanted to help the company. The European Commission forbade the Land's action.

1.2 - Ecologists began to influence public policies in the 1970's and from now, in most Western Europe, small but influential parties. They have two main goals : fighting pollution to day and ensuring that each generation will leave the environment in better and not worse conditions to its children. In other words, they want to control development in such ways that it does not endanger the future of the planet.

These two new directions have changed the main goal of planning : it is not anymore to increase production but to create jobs and to make development innocuous for the physical environment. National planning has now taken up the role of a regulator, a coordinator of regional strategies, a protector of environmental interests and a defender of jobs. It has largely abandoned his old concern with the organization of production.

1.3 - This change is also motivated by the decreasing power of the national state in all Western Europe. Fiscal charge within the Union seems to have reached a maximum : in France, for instance, some 45 % of the wealth produced nationally goes to the State as taxes, duties, social contributions, etc.. Most people agree this is a limit which should not be overcome.

On the other hand, the national State has been weakened by the growth above and under it of two new levels : the European Union and regional authorities. Directives from the European Commission must be translated into national laws : a large portion of laws voted by a national Parliament in the Union are actually European directives decided at an upper level. At the same time and certainly as a consequence, even very centralized countries like France or Spain have granted increasing powers to regional authorities. In France, they are now in charge of transportation, education, social housing and soon, health system and economic development. In Spain, peripheral regions like the Basque provinces or Catalonia enjoy an autonomy close to quasi independence.

Since the Union is providing global protection, a common Supreme Court to defend independent interests and a common currency, regions do not need the national State so much, nowadays. Of course, decentralization does not make planning disappear, but moves problems to a lower level, closer to populations : planners need, now more than before, to explain propositions, to discuss pros and cons of new projects, to negotiate between opposing interests.

2 - Planning to-day

Planning to-day is quite different from the traditional view built by years of western and socialist planning. Means have changed. Defining incentives to attract activities, negotiating contracts between local authorities, the State and private enterprises, modernizing public equipment in order to foster local development : the modern planner is much less authoritarian today but plays a much more complicated and fascinating role dedicated to facilitation, negotiation, explanation and coordination. Goals also have changed radically. To-day planners try to maintain some equilibrium between territories, while capitalism tends to deepen the gap between rich and well equipped regions on one side, remote and poor territories on the other. There is here, however, dangerous contradictions, difficult to solve and practically never discussed. I would like to put emphasis on them.

Should planners care more about territories or about men ? The question was not important when population was quite evenly distributed but now, since most of the European population live in cities, it cannot be avoided anymore : should public authorities strive to better life conditions where people live, i.e. in urban places, or should they fight for territorial equality, investing in empty regions which migrants are leaving ? In a planning commission, years ago, somebody said that France was fully equipped in fixed telephones. A geographer answered that if, actually, all households had a telephone, there was still huge areas in France where telephone lines were scarce. Somebody asked him if he wanted to locate telephone booths at each kilometer in empty mountains of central France... The anecdote is typical of a devotion, widely shared it seems, more to land than to men. The proportion of urban population in western Europe has increased in the ten last years from 73 % to 80 % : planners will have to take this change into account. With such urban concentration and when public resources are scarce (and they always are), investing in poorly populated territories means refusing necessary investments in urban agglomerations, particularly in their suburbs which are new and usually poorly equipped but where young families live, work, pay taxes but lack public services..

Another difficult choice will be between **strong development and equal development**. If the word *development* is understood as meaning “creating as much wealth and as many jobs as possible for a given investment”, then planners should direct investments towards regions where productivity is highest. That implies investing in cities and particularly in huge metropolises : the Paris agglomeration has a productivity 35 % higher than the average France, and twice that of many rural regions in the country. But then, what about fighting regional inequality ? Brutal economists would say that investing in depressed regions is a waste, unless salaries are kept quite low. Unfortunately they would be right in many cases. So, which policy should planners choose ?

The fact is that **in all industrialized nations, most of the national wealth (goods and services) is produced in a few huge metropolises**. In France, 9 of the main urban agglomerations produce more than 75 % of the national Added Value : the rest of the territory lives largely from subsidies. This can be observed as well in Japan, in Switzerland or in the USA.

One of planners' chief worries, to-day, is **to maintain jobs in regions** which have been hurt by world competition and the resultant closure of plants by big companies. Economists usually recognize three basic production factors : capital, raw materials and manpower. The two first are moving very fast and cheaply in the modern world. On the other hand, rightly or wrongly, European manpower refuses usually to move to new jobs. One of the main motto in France has been “To live in the country” (where I was born).

Such attitude has two consequences : one of the chief role of to-day's regional planners is to attract jobs in regions where the crisis has destroyed traditional industries. Second consequence : planners must rely mainly on small enterprises, protected by their small size and their local customers from world competition. They are the main sources of job creations. Given the large number of small enterprises, however, planners cannot anymore act directly on them even if the legal system still offered them the opportunity. They must content themselves with offering incentives, good working conditions, useful training, modern equipment like optic fiber network, easy credit, .. avoiding at the same time the pitfalls of public aide : Poland has much suffered of so many foreign companies coming to profit from public subsidies and which disappear two years later, making windfall profits and abandoning a desperate manpower.

The **scale** at which planners work is particularly decisive : the task is not the same at the level of communes, departments or regions in France, for instance. Legal tools, available funds and type of actors change strongly. In this way, the role of planner, far from the uniformity of old soviet-type central planning, is becoming more subtle and complex. A planner in charge of the interests of a small community will not use the same tools and will not aim at the same targets than a planner at the regional level or in a big agglomeration.

Furthermore, at different geographical scales, interests do not only differ, but are often opposed. When the French railroad company, SNCF, decided to build the last leg of its fast train TGV from Lyons to Marseilles, all national newspapers were enthusiastic, showing that the trip Paris-Marseilles, 1000 km, would take only 3 hours and half. But populations in small communes where the new rail line was to be built, protested and demonstrated in the streets because they did not want the nuisance the new line would produce. The TGV was very profitable at the national and regional level, but disastrous at the local level.

France, which relies more than any other country on civil atomic power to produce electricity, has much trouble to find a commune which would accept a burying site for nuclear wastes on its territory. Americans call this contradiction between geographical scales the NIMBY movement (*Not in my back-yard*). A capital task of modern planners is to deal with such contradictions by discussions, negotiations, compensations, subsidies, etc..

One could actually define **planning as the art to shift a problem from a geographical level to another where it will hopefully be easier to solve**. A good example is given by the "busing" controversy in the USA during the 1970 decade. Refusing the strong segregation existing in American cities between rich white communities and poor black ghettos, some people went to the Supreme Court to defend the right of all children to get the same quality in education. The basic solution would have been to act at the neighborhood level, mixing ethnic groups and, consequently, children in schools, but such reform would have gone against all traditions of American society. So, the Court decided that children should be sent by bus from their home to other schools, sometimes at quite long distances : if neighborhoods kept segregated, children would thus be mixed in schoolrooms. The result was an act of justice at the level of a metropolis and a definite advantage for Black families but also an expensive armada of tens of thousands of buses moving children all over American cities and long, bitter, sometimes deadly fights between Whites and Blacks.

Another capital effect of scale is the changing nature of relationships. Geographers, usually very interested in rural life, have made popular the Christaller's model for locating settlements¹⁰. All the urban pyramid, from villages up to the big metropolis, is supposedly based on hinterlands, territories spanned by a city's commerces, where an urban center sells and buys goods. This strange urban model, developed during the late 1920's in rural Baviera, considers rural activities as the very basis for urban life. There is, however a fracture at a certain level, which has not been precisely defined, but which may happen, apparently, when an agglomeration has more than 500 000 inhabitants : meaningful relationships are not with the hinterland, i.e. the surrounding country anymore. The big city works within a network of other cities of similar size, often located at a very long distance. Paris is much more concerned by what is happening in New-York, London, Osaka or Los Angeles, than by events in a small French town. Lyons works more with Torino than with small towns at the periphery of its region.

So, planners working at a low level and in a metropolis will share few common concerns and few methods. The first will have to care about rural development, local investments, rural exodus. In the big city, planners will deal with social and ethnic segregation, transportation extension, business relationships across the world. Both work actually in conditions which have practically nothing in common with the old tasks which occupied planners in the 1960's, when the problem was to choose the location of the next steel mill.

To~day, in Western developed countries, four persons out of five live in cities. High densities, traffic jams, high cost of housing, pollution are the most acute problems. They have lead to the development in each country of a body of laws, the Urban Planning Code, which is taking every year more importance. As population leave the countryside, urban planning becomes increasingly more important than regional planning.

3- The case of Eastern European countries :

It would be preposterous to pretend to define here priorities and to devise methods for planners in the Eastern part of Europe : local specialists know much better. The ignorant eye of a foreigner may, however, remark points which a good specialist, too much accustomed to see them, might leave aside. Let us try, at the risk of appearing a bit ludicrous, to underline four problems which seem crucial :

3.1 - Building a good legal framework and a strong banking system : a Westerner is always surprised to hear people from the East complaining about the lack of capital and investments and looking desperately for subsidies. In fact, several thousands billions dollars move across the world everyday on a phone call in search of a good place to get invested. The difficulty is not finding the money but assuring investors a good profit, a safe framework for their capital and clear rules to observe.

3.2 - Getting rid of the huge industrial concerns from the past era : these industrial plants of enormous size are not profitable anymore and keep rotting now, with their old and inefficient equipment and their pollution-related processes. Unfortunately, they have attracted tens of thousands of workers who need help to turn to more modern and more profitable industries. The West has known already the

¹⁰ W Christaller (1966) *Central Places in Southern Germany*, Prentice-Hall. See also : B J Berry (1967) *Geography of Market Centers and Retail Distribution*, Prentice-Hall.

challenge : France had to scrap almost completely its huge steel industry in Lorraine and to close down its coal mines. They produced 50 millions tons of coal in the 1950's, 3 millions last year and nothing in 2004 : the last one is just being closed down.

3.3 - Forecasting and organizing the huge flows of manpower which will, sooner or later, leave the countryside for the cities. The so-called *rural exodus* has been often considered as a disastrous phenomenon by conservative politicians and geographers. It is, however, a most normal and favorable phenomenon : instead of surviving poorly on agricultural activities with an excessive and under-employed manpower, a low productivity and very low salaries, this manpower would produce much more wealth in the city, ensuring to a nation and to themselves a much higher standard of living. To day, in France, only 3.5 % of the active population work in agriculture and produce only 2.4 % of the national Added Value. Such proportion of farmers is probably still too high and keeps decreasing by years.

The migrations, however, will create enormous problems to which planners should already prepare themselves. First, a need for housing, which can be met only with a complete system of cheap credit in banks, helped and controlled by the State. Second, the necessity to train an agricultural population, unadapted to industry and services, to modern urban activities. To change a young farmer into a bank clerk or a computer programmer can be done, but requires a fantastic effort on the part of the nation.

3.4 - Protecting the environment is not only a moral duty but also the condition of strong economic development. It contributes also to open new profitable markets. In the West, planners try and fight three main polluters : farmers because they use an excess of pesticide and fertilizers and destroy for centuries the water tables ; industries which pollute the air, the soils and the water ; automobile traffic which sends too much CO² and dust in the air. In other words, as they will develop, Eastern countries will tend to increase pollution dangerously. They will also need more energy, with the danger of relying too much on imported oil. There is here a big challenge.

In a way, Eastern nations of Europe, if they have suffered a lot in the past, have also the chance to begin a new modern development as they know the dangers they might run into and look with a critical eye to the solutions which have been used by western nations. Many errors have been made already. Coming a bit later might be a good way to avoid some of them. It is not frequent, however, to see men using others' experience.
