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AN OVERVIEW OF RATIONAL COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH OF URBAN POLICY MAKING

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ABSTRACT
The ideology which guides the process of policy making in urban planning defines the extent of public participation at different phases and stages. The scientific approach of rational comprehensive panning has remained a popular guideline for development policy making in many countries of developed and developing world. While it was abolished in the developed world owing to public opposition and criticism from other planning schools of thoughts. This paper intends to explore the emergence and contents of this ideology through literature review and the reasons behind its abolishment in the developed world.

KEYWORDS
Rational comprehensive, policy, development, master plan, decision making

INTRODUCTION

Rational comprehensive planning is aninstrumental urban planning ideology formulated in Britain during 1950s to prepare urban development policies. At that time,it not only spread to European countries but also to the developing world especially former European colonies.Although the developed world hasabolished the ideology and replaced it with other mechanisms decades ago, it persistsin thedeveloping world. This paper focuses on the emergence and content of this ideology and discusses why it was rejected in the developed countries.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this paper are as follows:

- To review the nature of rational comprehensive ideology of urban policy plan making
- To discuss the policy making mechanism of the rational approach and it gradual improvement
- To discuss the criticism made on the ideology which became the basis for tis abolishment in developed countries

METHODOLOGY

The discussion included in this paper is a literature review of various publications available on the topic of rational comprehensive policy making. As stated in the introduction, the focus will be on emergence and development of the ideology in developed world. Furthermore, the criticism is also extracted from debate made in the perspective of developed world.

Nature of rational comprehensive approach

Rational comprehensive planning is often considered as the combined model of blueprint and synoptic planning that were introduced in post-industrial era to reimagine cities on principles of hygiene, and regularisation of built environment through imposition of standards (Hall 1992). Fast growth of European cities during the industrial revolution advanced the need to alterthe urban atmosphere as reformists perceived that living environment influence social structures and thus determines human character (Glass 1959). Addressing to then contemporary urban issues, the concept of rational planning emerged to suggest improvement of living environment with the help of land use planning. At that period, writers in urban planning like Lewis Keeble made physical planning as their subject matter and planning played an active role in social and economic affairs. Town and country Planning was defined as ‘physical planning’ as opposite to regional or political planning (Taylor 1998). The plansthat were made took the form of mapsand termed as ‘master plans’. This form of plans stands for blueprint planning which depicted the colourof ink used in map printing machines of that period. Later modification to the ‘planning processes popularised the term ‘synoptic planning’. However,both synoptic

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and blue print planning models had the same ideology and decision-making structure to command the urban physical development and were collectively known as 'rational planning paradigm' (Lane 2005).
Rational model adopted deterministic character assuming that future urban conditions can be precisely predicted with the help of scientific methods and can be controlled with long range policies. The model also assumed that public interest is associated with profession of planning bureaucracies as an ideal to serve (Grant 2005). Along with rational approach thecomprehensiveness allowed the inclusion of all related elements in the area under study to be analysed in the plan making. It also implies to satisfy all interest groups related to the urban policy. The ideology remained as a guiding tool for urban development for few decades. There were gradual changes, but instrumental approach remained at the heart of planning system and physical design as the symbol of urban order.
The following discussion consists of prominent characteristics of rational planning model along with criticism against the approach.The development policies initiated under that ideologyincludedthe preparation ofmaster plans forzoning, land subdivision and urban regeneration.It was a top down and rigid way of preparation and implementation of development policy with insignificantlevel of public participation. Roots of that approach in authoritative decision making and already established disciplines of architecture, civil engineering, and landscaping (Taylor 1998), made it suitable to the elite based governance systems.later there have been slight diversions and modifications in the underlying concepts and sub processes, but the basic focus on physical development did not change.

Master Planning as urban design

In the post war period, most of the town planners were architects. Therefore, at that time town planning was regarded as an extension of architectural design concerned with the design of whole groups of buildings and spaces (Taylor 1998). Most famous planners in post war Britain, i.e. Patrick Abercrombie, Fredric gibbered and Thomas sharp, all were architects, and task of planning cities was considered as a large-scale urban design exercise (ref). Function of planning was to impose a selected layout design on ground without much consideration of alternatives (Fainstein 2010).
Consideration to aesthetics was one of the important parts of the town planning. New towns' plans were consisting of neighbourhoods all with roughly same size and hierarchy of other functions. Neighbourhoods were considered as distinct entities and their functions were too a derivative of neat designs, without any systematic research on functions of cities, regions, and activities (Taylor 1998). Town planning practice was not based on empirical research and theory, but decisions were made largely based on intuition or simplistic aesthetic conception of urban form, and layout planning to accommodate diversity of social and economic life (Reade 1987).
These early attempts of urban planning aimed for 'good city' but did not give much thought to process and means, rather experts were assumed to take care of public interest (Fainstein 2010). Due to heavy architectural influence on planning, planners of that period thought plan making for towns, regions, and village extensions, as their prime task. As following the architectural plans, these plans too were supposed to be detailed from present situation to some date in future. The development plans made under that approach were maps of land-use in the shape ofblueprintsthat illustrated the intended development in future years as envisaged by the experts with detailed zoning, alignment of roads and location & allocation of land uses (Taylor 1998).
Spatial planning theories which emerged by the end of 19thcentury like linear city by Soria Y Mata, Garden city of Ebenezer Howard and later in 20th century the contemporary city of le Corbusier and were inspired by detailed design approach of planning of that era. Education of town planning was also dominated by this approach. Studio work with architectural tools was the prime subject of planning education (Taylor 1998). This image of city planning was absorbed by generations of young students of planning schools in many countries of the world, with emphasis on physical and land use planning (Friedman 1971). Lewis Keeble, in his book, presented ideas about physical planning on blueprint model (Keeble 1952), but he titled them as theories as according to the prevailing model of physical planning (Taylor 1998)**.** However, these theories and standards about zoning and layout planning are still used as textbooks for planning practices.

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Process approach

In the first part of twentieth century, process approach for plan making started to emerge which attempted to separate planning from the political influence (Fainstein 2010). Patrick Geddes was probably the first to suggest a phased process 'survey-analysis-approach' as a new approach for decision making (Taylor 1998). The plan making was still considered a technical exercise as planning institutions in European countries believed that experts belonging to meritocracy can develop good policies following good procedures (Fainstein 2010). Publication of Karl Mannheim in 1935 provided basis for incorporation of elected representatives to avoid nepotism and patronage and include consultations with political leadership (ibid). Two new planning approaches 'system view of planning' and 'rational process' emerged during 1960s (Taylor 1998). Rational planning dealt planning as a scientific theory and system view introduced planning as a chained process consisting of various directive phases and mechanism of feedback (ref). Those concepts were not clearly distinguished as both provided for planning and control (ibid), but both typically looks at problems from a systems viewpoint, using conceptual or mathematical models relating ends to means, with quantitative analysis to help assessment of problems, resources and solutions (Hudson 1979). Alternatively, this paradigm is also known as synoptic planning.

Banfield (1959), Hudson et al. (1979) and Lane 2005 described different stages, usually four, of synoptic planning process, i) goals formulation, ii) identification alternatives iii) means and ends iv) implementation, whereas Taylor (1998) provided fifth stage of monitoring. In addition to broader elements of the process, there could be several sub-processes under each stage consisting of data collection, system analysis, forecasts, cost-benefit calculation, and simulation (Hudson et al. 1979). Forecasting might include mathematical models, graphic techniques, and judgmental approaches (ibid). Ideally, all possible alternatives for action are interpreted, however, in practice, a simplification must take place (Naes 1994). Generally, in public planning, goals and objectives depict the priorities of the authorities or depending upon their legitimacy (Naes 1994, Hudson et al. 1979). Synoptic planning was considered as according to democratic norms if objectives of the planning were according to a mandate given by the people through a democratic election (Lafferty 1993, Naes 1994). Synoptic planning put emphasize on "ends and means rationality", but process cannot be separated from those who devise the objectives i.e. authorities and rulers (Naes 1994).

System planning continued the basic ideology of authoritative planning, however for the first time, called for the public participation in planning decision making process. There were two main developments regarding participation. One was the institutionalisation of limited role of participation, andthe other was the inclusion of actors from outside the formal policy making arena. However, the scope of participation was limited to comments or objections on the decisions (Hall 1992). It was based on assumption of homogeneous society and planning needs on validity (Lane 2005). Holistic model of assessment of public interest was still valid under synoptic planning (Faludi 1973). At the same period, a parallel research by Arnstein's (1969) presented a 'ladder of participation' which highlighted the importance of public participation in planning decision making. It also provided a model to assess the effectiveness of the participation in a system. In this connection, Lane (2005) argued that despite of new developments, planning practices stuck to unitary public interests and did not result in new opportunities for the public participation.

Kent (1964) providesan understanding of underlying reasoning and objectification of comprehensive planning approach. According to him, it covered the whole city with all essential physical elements and their relationship with other physical and nonphysical, local,and regional factors that affect the growth of the city. Black revolution, model city legislation, quality of life, and environmental concerns emerging in 1960s extended the scope of comprehensive planning to include social and economic purposes too (Friedmann 1971). As per fundamentals of the ideology, it was required to consider demographic and economic forecasts and anticipated technology change. Though the plan was not supposed to take the form of a prediction, its prescription was expected to be in the possible range of outcomes. It was idealised as part intentionand part feasible future. Comprehensive plans were notto embody decisions butwere made as tool for democratic discourse. Precise actions and implementation steps were planned not be decided until the anticipated time will becloser, and the public and policy makers could have ample communication, education, and reflection in the light of concerns embodied in the plan. (Kent 1964 cited in Innes 1998). The plan was required to explain its reasoning, identifying the context of facts and judgements from which it was developed. Knowledge about the interrelationship of socioeconomic issues and physical development was intuitive and speculative. Explicitness was essential so that the elected officials can make an informed final judgment (ibid). A plan expressed value judgments, standards and principles that had not depended on scientific bases (e.g., the concept of separating

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industrial from residential districts). (ibid). The need to be comprehensive made plans to create balance between national and local policies (Friedman 1971).

Criticism on Comprehensive Planning approaches

Rational comprehensive planning faced extensive criticism for its rigid approach, relying on incomplete information, suffering lack of participation, and incorporating unrealistic distribution.

The goal of synoptic planning was to order the city on rational predictions made by experts which can determine future characteristic of society and the city. It was characterized by the belief that an optimum solution to a societal problem can be found. The fact that the "optimum" alternative is best for some, but not for all, was often neglected. Objectives claiming to be in the *interest of the public* may be controversial political questions (Friedman, 1973;Rittel and Webber, 1973). Rationalism and utilitarian philosophy were the basis of synoptic planning, and in the absence of full rationality, limited rationality was accepted (Banfield 1959, Naes 1994). Lindblom (1959) thought comprehensiveness and rationality both impractical and undesirable. Instead of making long time decision based on extensive studies he proposed incremental planning as the effective way to deliver planning services.On the other hand, rational plans were required to be madebased on existing data and predictions for next fifteen to twenty years, taking all aspects within a geographical area i.e., physical, social, economic, and environmental to find optimum solutions. It neglected the fact that optimum alternatives for societal problems could be best for some not for all (Naes 1994). Optimistic way of thinking embodied in rational model may not be able to make correct predictions about the future resources and unwanted side effects (Balbo 1993, Naes 1994). Post-war conceptualisation of public interest implemented through urban renewal and public housing projects and subsequent failure proved that static policies cannot address dynamic values (Grant 2005).

Synoptic planning assume planners can bring change and determine the future growth, therefore encouraged a technocratic planning role. The approach undermined the knowledge possessed by local inhabitants (Naes 1994). If the synoptic model ideally assumed that both local and global concerns are to be addressed, planners often tend to lack knowledge about special, local conditions (Orrskog, 1993), and consequently the whole metropolis can be visualized only through abstract representation (Friedmann 1971). Important information about local environmental qualities thereby run the risk of being left outside the planning process. Different social interests, values, and perceptions, which may lead to conflict, are formed in the context of time and space, and can only be resolved by participation, negotiations, and bargaining (Fiedmann1971). Social planning problems are complex and wicked in nature that cannot be described or optimally solved (ibid). In fact, those ideals were the legacy of nineteenth century reformers for whom social conditions were straightforward interactions. They assumed their recipes of environmental reform had universal validity and need no systematic inquiry (Glass 1959).

Comprehensive planning expected planners to plan with local to global concerns in view, whereas, planners often lack knowledge about local conditions (Orrskog 1993, Fainstein 2010). In later period, historical deconstructions of the period revealed the biases of technocratic professionals and their business supporters, showing that insulated decision making, and allegedly meritocratic selection procedures favoured upper- and middle-class interests (Fainstein 2010). Goals of planning set through comprehensiveness tended not to provide for evaluation of alternatives which put objection on the planners claim of understanding social interest (Altshuler 1965). Altshuler and Banfield argued that planners of rational planning had to work out goals and means for diverse interests which were almost impossible for a planner to measure. The system assumed planners as perfect who know the formula for good city (Grant 2005), and they don’t have right to be wrong (Rittel and Webber 1973). Therefore, planner’s ability and legitimacy to make comprehensive plans which was neither politically viable nor practically feasible remained questionable (Altshuler 1965, Banfield 1959). Long term predictions-based planning lacked relevant information and guidance for implementation due to influence of politics and market forces that planning should comply with (Faludi 1973).

The synoptic planning model had not traditionally included the aspects of distribution. In the utilitarian, social philosophic tradition on which synoptic planning was based, the total amount of utility is what counts, not the distribution between individuals or groups (Friedman, 1973; Medalen, 1987). The utilitarian way of thinking may imply that a small minority's vital interests can be sacrificed at the expense of more marginal benefits for each representative of the great majority (Naes 1994). Synoptic planning had therefore an inherent tendency towards pressure against the rights of minorities. Friedman (1971) argued that reliance of comprehensive

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planning on central authority and adherence to single standard for public interest made it appropriate for totalitarian rather pluralistic democratic systems.

British system of compressive planning was developed for the developed world to solve problems of post-war cities, but it spread to the other parts of the world including developing countries. However, it is argued that it did not work well for the developing countries owing to their legal frameworks, financial constraints, institutional incapacities, political intervention, and power structures in governance system (Farhoodi et al. 2009, Balbo 1993, Watson 2009). Presently, when developed countries has evolved other ideologies of planning in the face of heavy criticism on rigidity of comprehensive planning, it is still popular in many developing countries (Watson 2009). In planned cities of third world like Chandigarh, Brasilia, and Abuja, which were planned on rational comprehensive ideology, there are informal parallel cities for low income growing with the planned one (Watson 2009). Physical planning has been conceived for the cities of developed countries, not at all for the illegal city of the third world (Balbo 1993). In developed countries land information systems, coordination of institutions and established local governments make it possible for physical planning to take place according to the plans.

Moreover, it is the ideas of the 'state' itself that really meant. Welfare policies pursued during 1960-70s were based on the idea that collective interest does exist, whereas in developing countries it is very hard for the governments to claim legitimacy to represent. Building of a nation sate depends upon the sustainable welfare policy, and lack of resources make it almost impossible. Instead modernisation policies, increasing military expanses, market liberalisation, structural adjustments delegitimize the state in the eyes of poor which make majority of the population in developing world. Thus, internal policies increase internal conflicts more than eliminating them (Balbo 1993).

Farhoodi et al. (2009) elaborated the failure of comprehensive approaches to solve the urban problems in Iranian cities. He asserts that this planning systems is not suitable for the developing countries like Iran. He emphasizes that whole planning system, being maintained on the ideology of comprehensiveness; non participation; inconsistent implementing mechanisms; and mismatch between plan requirements and available capabilities; requires a change from rational planning to make it more suitable to the needs of developing countries like Iran.

Despite extensive criticism and abandonment of comprehensive planning in developed countries, it still is acceptable (though not workable) system in third world. The underlying reason is elaborated by Hudson, Galloway, and Kaufman (1979: 389) as follows

Despite its capacity for great methodological refinement and elaboration, the real power of the synoptic approach is its basic simplicity. The fundamental issues addressed-ends, means, trade-offs, action-taking-enter virtually any planning endeavour. Alternative schools of planning can nit-pick at the methodological shortcomings of the synoptic approach, or challenge its particular historical applications, or take issue with its circumscribed logic, yet the practical tasks it encompasses must be addressed in some form by even its most adamant critics.

CONCLUSION

The review of available literature on the development and working of rational comprehensive planning provides that it replied on skills of the technical experts to solve urban problems. The rationality based on second-hand knowledge and scientific methods of forecasting could not address the real-world issues. Regarding comprehensiveness claims of the approach, it provided minimal opportunities for public involvement. It could not accommodate the complex problems of social relations and failed to serve in democratic environment.Although it is not very useful for providing solutions to urban issues in the developing world, it is still considered a useful tool for urban policy making. Probably, the authoritative nature of the planning involved suits to the top-down institutional conduct in developing world where public consultation is not considered essential for decision making.

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