

A response to David Dewar on the 'Future of the Planning Profession'

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David Dewar, in an article on the Mykonos workshop on the Future of the Planning Profession in Issue No 40 of *Town and Regional Planning* (predecessor to this journal), states several opinions on which I would like to comment.

Dewar says it was clear to him from discussions at the Mykonos workshop, held late in 1995, 'that there is no general agreement about what the focus of (urban and regional) planning is or what its role should be.' He says there 'was a call to broaden the statutory definition of what constitutes urban and regional planning, in order to facilitate broader access to the profession.' He goes on to express his opinion that the broadening advocates were not clear where 'this broadening should stop of what defines planning's edges or ... its focus'; that there was a tendency at the workshop 'to define (urban and regional) planning as anything which people do in the general field of development.' Dewar contends that at Mykonos there was a sentiment that there is a distinction between 'spatial' and 'development' planning, but that the former is less important than the latter.¹ This serves as a convenient straw figure for him to attack in making an impassioned plea for the obvious - namely, that there cannot be a distinction between responsible spatial planning and development planning; that there cannot be effective separation between spatial and policy planning; that so called 'spatial planning' necessarily has policy implications and vice versa.

Dewar seems to move sideways into discussion of his views on what constitutes the core of planning, the charge that the advocates of broadening the definition of planning are not interested, in and of itself, in broadening that definition, but simply want to exploit it as a means to 'facilitate broader access to the profession - meaning as a back door for more black South Africans to enter. Unfortunately this position denies the legitimacy of raising the substantive issue of whether and how the profession, as well as the academic discipline of planning, should be broadened.

My view is that the two issues are separate. Whether 'planning' is 'broadened' or not, it is imperative that the field quickly become more representative of the demographic reality of South Africa.

A further issue Dewar raises is in fact more important. His contention is, in so many words, that planning is/should/can be non-political. What he fails to recognise is that the 'humanist and environmental ethic' which he rightly believes planning should have as its core purpose is indeed very political. It derives from a particular ideological point of view which is not universally embraced - not by all planners, nor for that matter by all medical doctors, school teachers or others. There are members of all professions who can best be described as 'right wing', believing in the survival of the fittest, and their ideological persuasions consciously or unconsciously affect which policy positions they support in professions as well as what they do in practice as professionals.

To pretend that planning decisions are not

¹ Having attended the workshop I know that not to be an accurate description of the sentiments of the majority of the attendees.

political, are not about resource allocation, distributive justice or injustice, or by small or large increments, are not increasing the power of some

and decreasing the power of others, is naive. Worse, it allows planners to pretend not to know or be aware of their actions.¶