

The Planner's Pentangle: A Proposal for a 21st-Century Model of Planning for Sustainable Development

Authors : Sonia Hirt

Abstract : The Planner's Triangle, an oft-cited model that visually defined planning as the search for sustainability to balance the three basic priorities of equity, economy, and environment, has influenced planning theory and practice for a quarter of a century. In this essay, we argue that the triangle requires updating and expansion. Even if planners keep sustainability as their key core aspiration at the center of their imaginary geometry, the triangle's vertices have to be rethought. Planners should move on to a 21st-century concept. We propose a Planner's Pentangle with five basic priorities as vertices of a new conceptual polygon. These five priorities are Wellbeing, Equity, Economy, Environment, and Esthetics (WE⁴). The WE⁴ concept more accurately and fully represents planning's history. This is especially true in the United States, where public art and public health played pivotal roles in the establishment of the profession in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It also more accurately represents planning's future. Both health/wellness and aesthetic concerns are becoming increasingly important in the 21st century. The pentangle can become an effective tool for understanding and visualizing planning's history and present. Planning has a long history of representing urban presents and future as conceptual models in visual form. Such models can play an important role in understanding and shaping practice. For over two decades, one such model, the Planner's Triangle, stood apart as the expression of planning's pursuit for sustainability. But if the model is outdated and insufficiently robust, it can diminish our understanding of planning practice, as well as the appreciation of the profession among non-planners. Thus, we argue for a new conceptual model of what planners do.

Keywords : sustainable development, planning for sustainable development, planner's triangle, planner's pentangle, planning and health, planning and art, planning history

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