Journal of Rural Studies, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 137–148, 1989
Printed in Great Britain

0743–0167/89 $3.00 + 0.00
Pergamon Press plc

Debates in Rural Land Planning Policy: a Twentieth Century History from New York State

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Abstract — Rural land planning has attracted much recent interest in the United States. Planners are largely unaware, however, that such planning has a legacy that stretches through the century. This paper presents an account of the history of such planning in New York State, an area where much planning occurred that was both original and innovative. It highlights the ideas encompassed in plans prepared for the state as a whole, focusing on how plans viewed the changing spatial form of the state, and the issue of which level of government should hold primary control for planning. What is revealed is a pattern of debate, consistency and change. The themes of the debate focused on the inevitability of changes in the rural landscape, with the polar positions accepting and challenging the abandonment of rural land with the advancement of industrial capitalism, and the role of local government control in this schema. The metamorphosis in planning ideas is linked to the changing nature of the planning profession. Lessons learned from this history center on the role of the planner and the plan, and the place of vision in planning. While almost all of the issues this history address remain unresolved in theory and practice, the actual circumstances of rural places seem to demand daring rather than timid responses.

Introduction

Rural planning is a topic of much current interest within the planning community in the United States. Citizen concern about such issues as agricultural land protection and rural growth management has opened opportunities for the development of theory and techniques for rural planning practice (Steiner and Theilacker, 1984; Dubbink, 1984). It is commonly asserted that the theory and techniques of urban and regional planning are unsuited to rural planning practice. The scale, social structure and environmental setting of rural areas necessitate the rethinking of certain prevalent assumptions underlying conventional planning practice (Lassey, 1977; Lapping *et al.*, 1980). However, it is not true that rural planning is an entirely new undertaking for planners. Especially in the pre World War Two era, but continuing through the 1950s, significant work was done in rural planning (James, 1926; Wilson, 1934; Cole and Crowe, 1937; Solbert, 1952). Early on rural planning was done by professional planners, but increasingly it was shifted to professional ruralists, such as those on the staff of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Zitzman, 1985; Solberg, 1952). The history of these experiences is largely unknown to today's rural planners. What happened, what lessons can be learned, and how that knowledge can inform and define current practice are questions that must be posed.

This paper examines the history of rural land use planning in New York State in the twentieth century. The focus of this history is the debate that developed early in the century over the inevitability of rural land abandonment. This debate continued as the focus of rural land policy into the 1960s as the issue of the balance of urban and rural growth. In addition, this history highlights the proposed roles of governmental units — local, regional and state — in land policy planning and implementation. This debate came to a head as the 'quiet revolution in land use control' in the 1970s (Bosselman and Callies, 1971).

The data for this study are the plans and policy documents prepared throughout the century. I specifically chose to examine the documents that express how planning was conceived, the ideal of planning, as opposed to how it was implemented.

My premise is that the ideas represented in planning documents reflect the mind-set, the paradigm, of planners and thus establish the parameters of actual planning implementation. This paper is thus a history of *ideas* about rural land use planning in New York State, focusing on conceptions about how to manage rural land abandonment and proposals for the level of government which should take the lead in managing the changing form of the rural landscape. This paper suggests the importance of these issues to rural planning thought in the twentieth century and offers thoughts on the structure of rural planning in the future.

Background: colonial times to 1900

Public policy debates regarding land use, growth and the level of government which should have lead authority in these areas, were very active in New York State at the beginning of the twentieth century. These debates focused on the rapidly increasing rate of agricultural and rural land abandonment. To all observers, land abandonment implied certain social and political changes within the state. Debate developed over the inevitability of this trend. Two principal schools of thought developed — the social Darwinists and the repopulationists. This polarity of opinion framed state planning in this area through the early 1960s.

What prompted the development of these two positions were the particular events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through the middle of the nineteenth century all of New York State grew rapidly in population and area. From 350,000 persons in 1790 to nearly 2.5 million in 1840, the state had also expanded from a belt of relatively restricted development — on Long Island, New York City and in the Hudson River Valley — to the current borders of the state. This was also the period of extensive exploratory settlement throughout New York State. Parts of the state now used as forest preserves, such as the Adirondack Mountain area, were then believed to have great agricultural potential (Crocheron, 1908). The development pattern of the state was widely dispersed and based on a strong and still emerging agricultural sector.

According to Gates (1969, pp. 115, 117), in the 40 year period from 1840 to 1880, New York State agriculture, and thus rural New York and the economically strong dispersed development pattern of the state, 'enjoyed its greatest period of prosperity'. In this period New York exceeded all other states 'in the number of farms, the number of improved acres in farms, the value of its farms, livestock, orchard products, the number of dairy cows, the sale of fluid milk, and the production of butter and cheese, hay, potatoes, hops, and maple syrup. Its farms produced and sold much of the fuel wood burned in nearly all locomotives, all the river steamboats, and many urban and small town residences'. Through 1880 the number of farms and the amount of land in New York continued to grow, until there were nearly 24 million acres of land in a quarter million farmsteads (Ellis *et al.*, 1967, p. 487).

As recorded in the 1890 census, and continuing rapidly after 1900, agriculture and the strength of the dispersed development pattern began a continual decline. The Erie Canal, completed in 1825, was at first a facilitator to the development of rural New York. By mid-century it began to act as a vehicle for the outmigration of rural New Yorkers to other parts of the west, where land prices could be less than half New York prices (Gates, 1969). At the same time, changes in agricultural science and technology served to redefine the viable and efficient farm unit. The small family hill farm of earlier periods was unsuited to these developments, which required relatively large, well-drained level fields (Davis, 1951).

Together these forces contributed to a revolution in New York agriculture, and hence rural land.[1] One impact was a major rearrangement of people on the land, specifically a concentration of the state's population around its urban centers. The Hudson and Mohawk rivers form a transportation belt through the state, from New York City in the southeast, north to Albany and then west to Buffalo. At 20 miles in width, this so-called L belt forms 20% of the state's total land area. In 1875 the number of people living in and out of the belt were approximately equal. By 1890 the belt contained 68% of the state's population. By 1920 80% of the still growing population was concentrated in the major cities that dotted the L (Stein, 1926).

The progressive era: 1900–1920

Around the turn of the century, two sets of ideas developed about the cause and appropriate response, on the part of government and the rural community, to the process of rural land abandonment. Hoglund (1953) describes these two positions as those of the social Darwinists, as represented in New York by Liberty Hyde Bailey, prominent ruralist and then Dean of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University, and the repopulationists. The basis of the debate had to do with the inevitability of rural land abandonment and developments in agricultural science and technology.

The social Darwinist position was a transfer of the competitive evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin to the realm of social and economic relations. Social Darwinists explained differences in status, wealth and power as resulting from a process of natural competition in which the fittest survived the struggle and were rewarded for it (Hofstadter, 1944). According to this view, rural land abandonment in New York resulted from a competition among various users of land, both within the state and between the state and other locales, to maximize return on the land. Rural and agricultural land was being abandoned because small, family hill farms were no longer competitive within an environment which rewarded concentration and specialization of resources. Following from the theory underlying the analysis, it was further argued that there was no need to be concerned with abandonment. The process of competition would sort out inefficient farmers and farm units and retain a numerically smaller and more concentrated, but equally if not more efficient, farm system. This prognosis for the future was theoretically and empirically based. Given the trends of the post-1880 period, advocates of this position saw it as an inevitable outcome of current events.

The counter position in this debate was held by the repopulationists. They argued for the possibility of refurbishing the vibrant nature of New York's rural landscape. Their differences with the social Darwinists centered over the inevitability of change. Rather than viewing the abandonment of rural land, or the introduction of centralizing agricultural technologies, as inevitable in the unfolding of modern civilization, repopulationists pointed to the nature of implicit and explicit public policy, in areas of land, credit and technological development, that biased any process of natural competition. They argued that nothing was fixed about the size of the state, the nature of its agricultural industry or the distribution of people over the land. Nothing about the historic or current nature of technology development or land policy prevented halting rural land abandonment or even reversing it. The repopulationists urged an active program in this regard, through the recruitment of settlers and the development of support programs and services.

Nationally these two positions climaxed in 1909 with the release of the Report of the Country Life Commission (U.S. Congress, 1909). This report, prepared under the direction and then delivered with the ringing endorsement of President Theodore Roosevelt, sought to assess the obviously changing nature of rural America, changes captured by events in New York. The Report's conclusions and recommendations strike a relative balance between the two positions, though strongly leaning toward a more passive position of accepting land abandonment.[2]

In New York, however, the policy community seems to have partially endorsed the repopulationist position. Beginning in 1906, New York maintained a program 'aimed toward preserving farm units' (Colman, 1965, p. 50). A state bureau periodically published catalogs of farm units for sale and looked to the European immigrants of the period as potential settlers. This activity continued for a decade and a half. Then, by the beginning of the 1920s the perspective of the social Darwinists prevailed. The state dismantled its effort to repopulate abandoned farms or even support existing, old-style farm units. Instead New York directed its attention to those in the rural landscape who could successfully adopt modern scientific and technological practices (Hoglund, 1953; Colman, 1965).

The other significant event of the period was not directly related to rural land planning or policy but was bound to greatly affect such planning in the future. This was the adoption by New York City in 1916 of the first comprehensive, 'modern', zoning ordinance in the U.S. This action, quickly copied in cities of all sizes throughout the U.S., established the local unit of government as the one with precedent for exercising public control over the process of land use changes, population concentration and urban growth.

The 1920s

In the ensuing decade the debates about the spatial pattern and land use of rural New York, and the institutional place of government control over planning, remained unsettled. The state pursued policies and prepared plans which validated both perspectives about the land abandonment issue and which at least questioned the total dominance of local governments in land policy planning.

The closing of the state's effort to colonize the abandoned land in upstate New York was complete by 1921. This change in perspective on the part of the state was reflective of a growing national consensus about the rural land abandonment problem, and its solution. The new perspective focused on the mapping of rural land into categories of utility for agricultural production. Land policies encouraged the abandonment of settled land mapped as submarginal and marginal.[3] These areas were to be replanted into forests. Together the counties and state were to have an active role in the identification of lands and in the provision of funds for land

purchase, resettlement and reforestation. This position is a modification of the one defined by the social Darwinists. It is a policy of publicly directed abandonment, instead of a policy of condoned, market directed rural land abandonment.

The modified version of the basic position laid out by the repopulationists was taken up by members of the Regional Planning Association of America in a report prepared for the state in 1926 (Stein, 1926). This report is a landmark in planning, being the first statewide regional plan prepared in the U.S. It is also the most concrete representation of the RPAAs unique approach to planning.[4]

Drawing upon a taxonomy published the previous year by RPAA member Lewis Mumford (Mumford, 1925), the Report divided the past and future of New York State into three epochs. The first two epochs, represented in Figs 1 and 2, show the initial dispersal of population throughout New York and then the relative concentration of population along the L belt. The possibility of the future, represented in Fig. 3, is that period denoted as 'the fourth migration' by Mumford. In this period, then modern technologies — rural electrification, the automobile and rural parcel post among them — provide the possibility for a decentralized spatial pattern in which, as the title to the figures notes, 'each part (of

Figure 1.

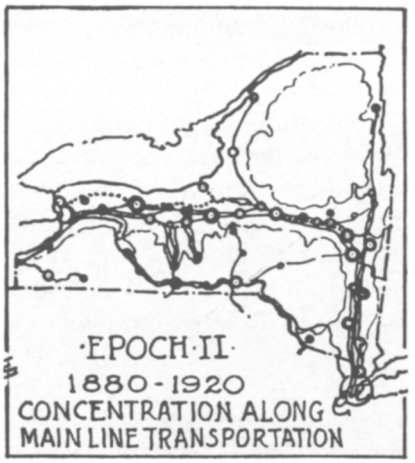

Figure 2.

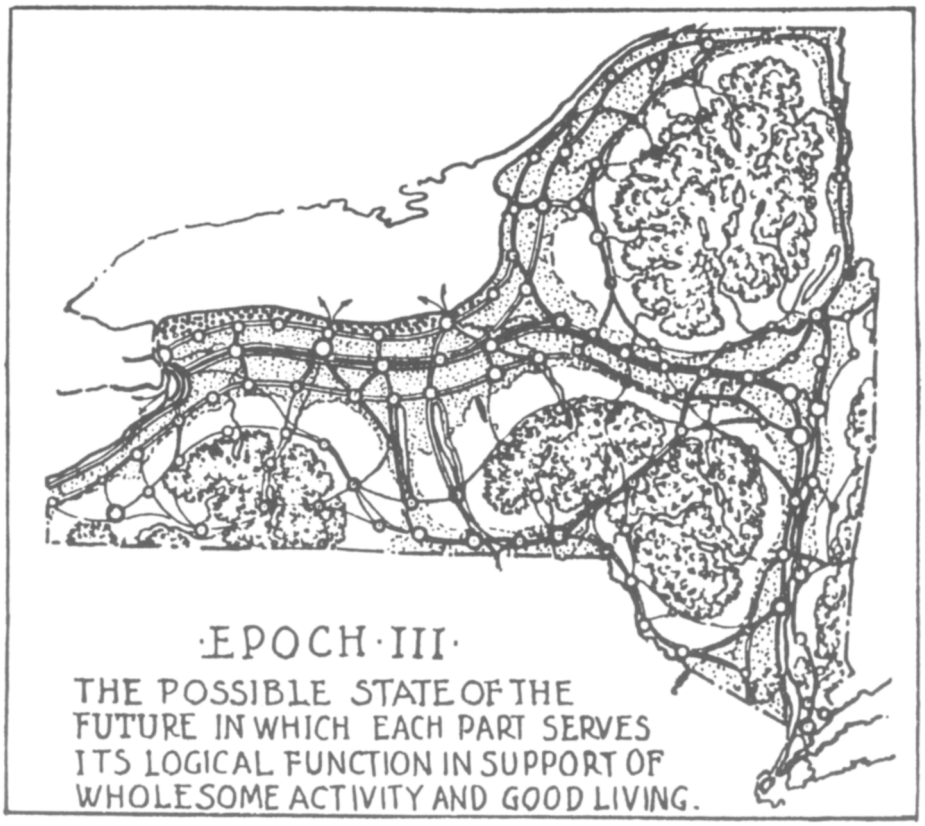

Figure 3.

the state) serves its logical function'. The inevitability of spatial centralization, concentration along the L belt, if it ever was strong, could now be challenged. Unlike the repopulationists of the previous period, this image of a vibrant rural New York was not based on a throw back to a time gone by. Instead it was an image of a yet to be achieved future in which the advantages of modern city living and those of classic country living were to be combined (Stein, 1926). Programmatically this included widening the existing L belt so more land was in active, managed use, an activist program of state aid to farming and forestry, the recognition that certain areas of the state were less suitable for intensive habitation, and were best left to managed forest growth and, via publication and adoption of this program, a clear framework for the development of responsible local planning (Stein, 1926).

On the subject of the scale of planning activity, the Report sought a middle ground approach. Its authors recognized both the inadequacies of a purely local approach to the management of growth and spatial concentration, because of limited perspectives on issues and ecologies, and the dangers of a centralized program of planning, because it tended to 'mean the loss of all those distinctive values which are characteristic of the . . . rural area as a whole' (Stein, 1926, p. 65). What was envisioned was a relationship where local governments would continue to be the initiating force in land use planning, but they would be more strongly encouraged by the state to cooperate with each other. Their work would be nested within an activist state role which facilitated such cooperation and sought to coordinate state level actions so as to not counter local ones (Stein, 1926).

The New Deal

These concerns, and the counter proposals for addressing the so-called 'farm problem', were empirically based in a rapidly changing rural and urban landscape in New York. Rural New York continued its post 1880 period of decline. During the decade of the 1920s 300,000 farm units ceased operation, two-thirds in the last half of the decade. Farm product prices were at their lowest in nearly 40 years. Rural land abandonment was almost epidemic (Bellush, 1955, p. 91–92).

Into this situation came Franklin D. Roosevelt, who assumed the governorship in 1929 for two 2-year terms, until his election to the presidency. He brought with him a reputation as a politician with strong interests in rural and agricultural issues (Slichter, 1956, 1959). During his terms he experimented with policies and programs which appear to indicate his support for the ideas expressed in the RPAA report, and which drew on the arguments of the repopulationists (Fusfeld, 1956).

During his campaign Roosevelt enunciated a theme of equity for the farmer and farm family. To show his commitment to this issue, in the period between his election victory and his assumption of office he appointed an Agricultural Advisory Commission to investigate and report on rural issues. Following from the recommendations of the commission, a survey of the state's agricultural resources was conducted and Roosevelt supported a major program of state purchase of sub-marginal farmland for reforestation. However, Roosevelt also actively supported the notions of spatial decentralization and rural industrialization. He saw them as ways to manage both the farm problem and growing urban unemployment (Slichter, 1959; Roosevelt, 1931).[5] In addition, Roosevelt sought to establish a Rural Life Commission for New York State following the model of the earlier national Country Life Commission. After his election to the presidency, Roosevelt further developed these ideas. Many found expression in the work of the National Resources Planning Board and what Conkin (1959) has called the New Deal Community Program.

Roosevelt's successor was his lieutenant governor Herbert H. Lehman. While he expressly sought to conduct a 'Little New Deal' in New York (Ellis *et al.*, 1967), at least in the areas of spatial form, rural land and agriculture he showed less enthusiasm and provided less direction. Lehman's potential for policy action in these areas was further hampered by the state's and the nation's worsening economic circumstances. The expenditure history of the Hewitt amendment is good evidence of this.

The Hewitt amendment was the constitutional provision passed during Roosevelt's administration to purchase and reforest submarginal farmland. The amendment mandated a $1M plus schedule of expenditures for more than a decade. The first appropriation of $1M was made on schedule. The next appropriation in 1933 was reduced to $640,000. In his 1934 Budget message Lehman reluctantly requested a further reduction to $400,000 — this being a full $1M less than was called for in the program. In 1938 the state's constitution was formally amended to remove the mandated expenditure provision, and by 1939, when the original schedule had called for expenditures of $2M, the state appropriated $250,000 (Hopkins, 1942).

One of the most significant actions taken during Lehman's terms with regard to rural land planning,

was the appointment of a state planning board. Such a board had been called for in the 1926 Report but did not come into being until 1934, under the active encouragement of the federal level National Planning Board (U.S. National Resources Board, 1935). The Board's first report in 1935 recommended tripling the state's public lands, from three to nine million acres, through purchase of sub-marginal farmlands in forested regions. The Board further recommended the establishment of a permanent state planning council (NYS Planning Board, 1935).

This council was established and delivered its first report in 1936. The report recommended continuing with the suggested expansion of the state's public domain. However, unlike the 1926 Report, it did not recommend challenging the market-directed process of rural land abandonment and spatial concentration. Instead, the report called for a market-following program of industrial development. In addition, reflecting the national mood of the times (Wirth, 1937); the 1936 report of the State Planning Council asked for reconsideration of the dominance of local governments in the areas of planning, taxation and regulatory authority (NYS Planning Council, 1936). This position in particular was a consistent theme through the administrations of both Roosevelt and Lehman.

The post-war lull

Relatively speaking, the 1950s was a quiet time in New York's rural land planning history. Very little had come of the proposals and policies of the past decades — there had not been a concerted effort to halt rural land abandonment or spatial concentration in the L belt, and local governments had not lost any of their powers for controlling the process of growth and spatial concentration. This was true both in New York State and in other states throughout the U.S. (Moore, 1964; Wise, 1977).

In the pattern of the National Resources Planning Board, the State Planning Council, created in 1936, was by 1941 absorbed into what became the State Department of Commerce. It increasingly did little research of any significance. The state's one major rural land planning program, the purchase of sub-marginal farm land under the Hewitt amendment, was by the 1950s no longer necessary. Researchers at Cornell University noted that changing settlement patterns, attendant to wartime industrial production, had made New York's rural land valuable for non-farm rural residences (Conklin, 1946). While the purchase and use of these lands was not being done in accordance with any plan, it was arresting problems of local tax delinquency.

The quiet revolution

The 1960s and 1970s were a period of great experimentation in the field of land use planning. States across the U.S., and for a period the federal government itself, sought to assert a stronger role in land planning policy. Most commonly this assertion was aimed at the scale issue — the locus of authority for land planning policy — and less explicitly at some plan or theory of spatial form.

According to Bosselman and Callies (1971) it all began in Hawaii. The quiet revolution in land use control saw its first legislative success with the Hawaii legislature's passage of the Land Use Law in 1961. If it all began in Hawaii it was soon given a strong push by the activities of New York's new governor Nelson Rockefeller, reportedly directly spurred by Hawaii's effort at statewide planning. Before Rockefeller's first term was half over the process of actively assessing New York's spatial form and the responsibility for land planning policy has been vigorously renewed. Throughout his term in office these issues were addressed multiple times, though, importantly, the emphasis of the attempts changed considerably.

The first ostensible result of this renewed interest in the spatial form and scale issues was the publication in 1964 of the report *Change/Challenge/Response* by the New York State Office of Regional Development. The crux of the report is a multi-colored map of the state titled '60 Year Land Use and Development Outlook', which is self described as 'a modified and updated version' of the 1926 Report by members of the RPAA (NYS Office of Regional Development, 1964). Forty years later, after considerable investment in some of the best planning talent and technology in the U.S., New York State found itself with a proposal for the use of its rural land that differed little from the investigation conducted in the 1920s. Rather than accepting a mere extrapolation of trend lines in industrialization, urban decay, suburban sprawl and continued rural decline, the authors of the report called for an integrated program of sub-state regional development. In programmatic substance and spatial form the 1964 report does in fact bear close resemblance to the 1926 Report, a fact noted by Mumford in his generally enthusiastic review of the plan (Mumford, 1965).

The plan sought to redefine the balance among local and non-local responsibilities in the area of land use planning. As in the 1926 Report, the plan recognized both the limitations of purely local planning, especially in the state's rural areas, and the dangers of 'overcentralized planning'. The vehicle suggested

to achieve a balance was to strengthen the weak county system in the State and to combine counties 'in such a fashion as to balance environmental resources and make fuller use both of natural opportunities and the existing pattern of urban settlements' (Mumford, 1965, p. 153). Like its predecessor, though, this effort brought no direct policy action.

The second effort of the period dominated the middle part of the decade and set the tone for land use planning in New York State for the ensuing years. It was initiated by the New York State legislature. A joint legislative committee prepared and partially implemented a legislative and research program which won an award for innovation from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (NYS Joint Legislative Committee, 1967).

In introducing the committee's 1967 report, Committee Chairman Senator Thomas Laverne specifically rejected the posture of Mumford and related reformers. Instead, he asserted the need for practicality in public policy. In his terms, and reflecting the mood of the period, practicality meant strengthening the governing and planning powers of county governments, at the explicit expense of existing local governments — towns, villages and cities. Following from the 1964 plan, *Change/Challenge/Response*, the Committee report also urged establishment and sustained commitment to multi-county regional planning agencies. Noticeably absent from the report was any discussion of the spatial pattern of the state. Unlike both the 1926 Report and the 1964 plan, the 1967 report of the Joint Legislative Committee offered no comment about the existing and future pattern of city, suburban and rural form.

The Committee's 1968 report continued to offer no substantial comment about the object of planning reform — decaying cities, sprawling suburbs at city edges and a scattered and economically weak rural land use pattern. The report further urged a policy program of regionalism, defined to center on a reallocation of existing planning powers to greater-than-local units of government. Yet, responding to pressures from suburban governments throughout the state, the report's introduction expressed a high degree of deference to local interests and structures. Specifically, the 1966 recommendations of the national Committee for Economic Development, calling for an 80% reduction in the number of local governments in the U.S., was disavowed. With minor exception, even the limited policy proposals of the Joint Legislative Committee went unimplemented. The support of the Committee, and many of the supporters of its work, shifted to what was to become the third and final major effort of the period.

The final effort expressed well the national mood of the quiet revolution — a focus on procedural and institutional reform absent policy having to do with the spatial form these reforms were designed to meet. In 1970 Governor Rockefeller's Office of Planning Coordination brought to a close a multi-year review of New York's planning and zoning laws. Their conclusions and policy recommendations were presented in the form of a final report (NYS Planning Law Revision Study, 1970), a study bill submitted to the Legislature (NYS Senate, 1970), and a land use plan for New York State (NYS Office of Planning Coordination, 1971).

This package of proposals sought a complete overhaul of New York's system for formulating and implementing land planning. Rather than continuing on with the dispersed system of control over land use planning, where the most local of governmental units have the authority to adopt plans and land use controls but very little responsibility to coordinate those efforts amongst themselves, these proposals called for a thoroughly integrated system of centralized and mandatory planning. The scale issue was to be addressed by shifting existing power upwards. Power currently held by local governments would be reallocated to counties, regions and the state itself.

As outlined in the study bill, S. 9028, the reallocation would be achieved by redefining the nature of local control over planning and by adding to the powers of counties, regions and the state. Sections of the bill mandated continuous planning, removing a locality's right not to plan or exercise land use controls, required coordination among local plans within a county, and allowed the state to directly plan and adopt controls for selected types of local land uses. In these 'areas of critical state concern' the state was to be empowered to supersede what it deemed to be inadequate local control. Areas of critical state concern included areas in the proximity of major transportation facilities, areas of statewide agricultural importance, unique historical, cultural and aesthetic places, and important recreational, forest and ecological areas. This provision of the bill allowed for the *de facto* state planning of rural New York, especially when combined with those provisions which required the development of county and regional plans that meshed with the plan developed by the state.[6]

With regard to spatial form, the Plan offered no challenges to the continuing trends of land use in New York State. The future was presented as comprising a decline in central cities and productive farm units and farm land in rural areas, and growth of suburban sprawl at the edge of the state's major cities. What was offered was a planning program

where the centralized power of the state would be used to manage a process of inevitable spatial change.

The *New York State Development Plan I* was to be the first part of a three part plan; the other two were never written. The study bill was never reported out of committee. Following publication of the plan the legislature reorganized the Office of Planning Coordination and made it absorb a 50% staffing cut. In style the office was directed to follow its new name, the Office of Planning Services (Agena, 1971).

The 1970s

The early part of the 1970s is generally viewed as exemplifying the quiet revolution. It was the time when the report which coined the phrase denoting the period was released by the Council of Environmental Quality, and when many of the actions which describe the period were taken by state legislatures. New York State was seen as a leader in this movement. However, it is not for its failed effort to centralize planning in Albany that New York is known as a leader in the movement, but rather for its success in implementing a scaled down version of the state wide program for a specific region of the state, the Adirondack Park. Thus, in what many hoped to be an era of major reform in land use planning and policy, New York's actions in creating a regional planning agency for the Adirondack Park represented not the climax, but really the anti-climax of efforts at change.

The scaling down of reform efforts, from those that encompassed all planning issues for the entire state, to comprehensive planning for a selected region, was the trend in rural land planning policy in New York. In the period of the 1970s, reform proposals were either restricted as to their geographic area of impact or their subject matter, addressing single environmental or land resource issues. Examples of the former type of planning reform include programs established or proposed for the Adirondack Park, Catskill Park and Tug Hill areas. Examples of the latter type of planning reform resulted in legislature programs for fresh water wetlands, coastal areas and agricultural lands.

This change in emphasis, however, does not mean that there was any less controversy about rural land use planning in New York State. The Adirondack Part proposal, while it came to exemplify the quiet revolution and was thus widely admired by the reform advocates throughout the U.S., was born amidst a great deal of controversy.[7] Many of the full time, permanent residents of the region did not want the scaled down version of the statewide planning proposal for their home area. Not only was it seen as an overly strict imposition of state control in an area of largely local concern, but it was viewed as inherently unfair that one area of the state should be selected out for special treatment over all other areas. While the opposition to the proposal lost in the legislature under the considerable political pressure applied by Governor Rockefeller, opponents continued, especially in the early life of the Park Agency, to express their dissatisfaction with what one observer has described as 'the new feudalism' (McClaughry, 1975).

Efforts to replicate even this scaled down version of comprehensive procedural planning for other selected regions of the state were not as successful. An effort in the early 1970s to create a Catskill Park Agency, similar in purpose though somewhat different in form than the Adirondack Agency, was soundly defeated, largely because of the backlash from the local residents in the Adirondacks. A third effort to create a planning agency for the Tug Hill area west of the Adirondack did prove successful, in large part because it was consciously structured to remove any similarities to either the Adirondack agency or the earlier statewide planning program. In other words, the Tug Hill effort succeeded as a result of foregoing any attempt to revise the existing system of local control over the planning process (Hahn and Dyballa, 1981).

The other policy programs of the period are indicative of the fragmentation of the movement for integrated rural land use planning. Rather than seeking an integrated system of planning for all rural and environmental resources, the policy process began, in part under the impetus of changing federal guidelines, to promulgate individual approaches to individual resource issues. In the case of fresh water and coastal wetlands the approach was largely centralized and regulatory; for agricultural lands it was incentive based and facilitative. For each of these programs the type of political opposition that arose relative to the statewide program and the regional programs for the Adirondack and the Catskills did not materialize. This was, in part, because the resource's location was diffuse and political organization was difficult (Straniere and Krause, 1976).

In many ways, the 1970s was a period of more active policy development for rural land than other periods in New York State history. It was different from previous periods, though, in that policy activity shifted considerably in emphasis. There was no longer any attempt to discuss issues of rural spatial form. Even programs for institutional reform were

greatly scaled down from previous periods. It was, in the words of one observer, a period of 'patchwork land use planning' (Hawkins, 1975), or as another observer characterized the times, the planning that was done was 'piecemeal' in nature (Booth, 1980, p. 659).

Lessons learned

This article examines the *ideas* which have informed rural land use planning in New York State in the twentieth century. As a locale for this investigation New York State is particularly instructive because of the amount of rural land planning activity in the study period, because some of what occurred was often a first of its kind (e.g. Stein, 1926), because much of what occurred there was often innovative (NYS Office of Regional Development, 1964; NYS Office of Planning Coordination, 1971; NYS Joint Legislative Committee, 1967), as well as the fact that in the past the state has been recognized as generally innovative in public policy (Walker, 1969; Gray, 1973).

What do we see from the experiences of the state in the twentieth century? What is revealed is a pattern of debate, consistency and change. There are two themes to the debate. One was established early in the century around two polar positions — those of the social-Darwinists and the repopulationists. What these positions did was frame out a basic question which is still relevant for rural planning — what is the role of the rural planner in modern industrial society? Is it to follow the trends of that society and shape the landscape and social structure to meet the needs of industrial civilization or, conversely, is it to challenge the premise of the 'inevitability' of trends in rural depopulation, technological development and land use, and posit politically based alternatives, i.e. alternatives based on political discourse and social choice? Even as the debate emerged, a presidentially convened commission on the future of the countryside endeavored to address these choices. It appeared to seek a middle path, which attempted to reconcile the two positions.

The second theme of this debate focused on the locus of control over land use. Was it local or central units of government, or some combination of them, that should exercise authority for the planning of private land? Through the century this question became bound to a larger set of issues about modern governance and specifically, the capabilities of local governments in an increasingly complex and centralized system of public and private decision making.

For rural planners, those actually preparing plans for the future of the state, there was consistency for much of the century in the ideas they held about appropriate planning, though this consistency did not as easily translate into consistency in public policy. For the mid 1920s through the mid 1960s plans prepared reflected ideas based in the repopulationist presumption of the ability to challenge the notion of inevitable trends. The 1926 Report (Stein, 1926), Governor Roosevelt's work in the 1930s, and the 1964 Plan (NYS Office of Regional Development, 1964), all contain the same ideas and the same recommendations about the possibilities for decentralized and revitalized land use and rural community in the state, ideas in direct contrast to the outcomes of market directed policy. At the same time these plans were consistent in their ambivalence about the scale of governance issue. Both the utility and the shortcomings of local control were recognized. Plans sought to find a role for both, while leaning toward a leadership position for local governments.

In the late 1960s, there was a distinct change in this pattern of consistency. In the substance of planning there was formal acknowledgement of the futility of the former approach, and of the 'wisdom' of the social Darwinist position. What resulted was a set of plans and policies that more closely accepted the inevitability factor of modern industrial capitalism, and, if anything, sought to sweep up after it. In this latter period, plans for the state as a whole did not seek any fundamental change in the land use and community patterns which resulted from market forces. Likewise, there was a change in perspective on the scale issue. Shared governance, with local leadership, was abandoned for the necessity of centralized control. Plans reflected emergent national consensus on the inability of local governments to act appropriately in the area of land use.

These patterns of debate, consistency and change are, in and of themselves, not surprising. They are reflective of the development, growth, uncertainty and reorientation of the planning profession throughout the century. Early commentators, such as Beard (1927) and Mumford (1927), noted the inherent conflicts facing the emergent practice of planning in an industrial capitalist society. Whose interests would planners serve — those of the people or those of capital? In a classic debate in the late 1920s, Mumford contrasted the 1926 Report prepared for New York State, to which he contributed, to a monumental effort to plan the future of the New York City metropolitan region, coordinated by Thomas Adams (Sussman, 1976). He accused Adams of succumbing to the whims of capital and the notions of inevitability in spatial form and centralization in social–political control. Mumford put forth the early New York State plan as an

example that there was an alternative notion of planning, as well as role for the planner. Mumford continued this debate through the decades, most notably with master builder Robert Moses. Wilson (1983) has poetically contrasted their positions as that of the mole (Moses) and the skylark (Mumford), the pragmatist and the dreamer.

One of the issues this debate presents, and is captured so neatly in the case of New York State's planning efforts, is the relative role of vision versus practicality in planning. Is it planning's position to lead or to follow? Are plans prepared to accommodate the inevitable or present visual and policy alternatives to what appears to be inevitable so there can be active discourse on the alternatives and their consequences? The history of the profession is infused with vision and visionaries (e.g. Fishman, 1977). This is what brought so many professionals to the practice of planning — the ability to dream of and the opportunity to act upon the creation of a better world, in the city and the countryside.

But in the post World War period, and especially in the period of the late 1950s forward, the premise of the profession began to change. Multiple critics pondered the utility of a profession with good ideas but the inability to translate these ideas into implemented policy (e.g. Meyerson and Banfield, 1955; Meyerson, 1956; Altshuler, 1965; Catanese, 1974). Out of these critiques came a new orientation to planning which stressed the pragmatic over the visionary.

However, very recently there are signs that the pendulum may be beginning to swing back in the other direction. In the last few years several commentaries have appeared questioning the utility of this reorientation, and specifically calling for a reemergence of the planner and planning as visionary and utopianist (e.g. Isserman, 1985; Brooks, 1988). The issue as it is posed by these authors is 'what is the utility of having an impact, if this impact is not informed by any vision?' Put another way, this query can be posed as 'why have the profession of planning if all it is doing is aiding in the process of inevitable decisions?'

The queries, and the resurgence of interest in the role of vision — in the questioning of the inevitable — are particularly important and useful for drawing the lessons learned from the experience of New York State with land use planning in the twentieth century. In its period of consistency, planning can be seen as full of vision and strongly lacking in implementation. Yet, in its period of change, when it became more practical, planning also seemed to have little impact on the actual process of land use change, unless impact was defined as providing the justification and the recording for what was being determined outside of the planning process. So, what is the appropriate model for the future?

Part of the answer to this query can be found in the actual circumstances of rural places within industrial capitalism in the late twentieth century. Rural areas are clearly in the throes of yet another set of crises. The recent wave of bank foreclosures in rural areas, the increasingly uncertain future for small-scale farmers, and the existence of widespread environmental problems, such as in groundwater pollution and dumping of toxic waste, hint at structural problems in the relationship of rural places to urban ones. Regardless of their political–economic persuasion, few ruralists would argue with the contention that rural areas exist in a subordinate position to urban places. Some authors (e.g. Young and Newton, 1980) argue that the internal logic of capitalism actually *requires* this poverty of rural land and people to sustain the accumulation of wealth by a select few in urban and rural places.

It seems clear that the modern day version of the social Darwinist's position, that of allowing rural places to 'naturally' find their place under the rules of the market place in modern industrial–capitalist society, is unlikely to result in anything but further crises and further degradation of rural lands, communities and people. The history of rural places has been that of increasing dependency and integration into a society dominated by urban economies, peoples and ideas. It has been like this throughout the last century, and there is no reason to believe it will be any different into the future.

Therefore, if there is a lesson to be learned from the experience of New York State in its planning throughout the century, it might be in the potential of planning for raising, articulating and giving shape to alternative visions of a future, which can then be used as the basis for political debate. If there was a failure in the history of New York's experience it was in the inability to bring the alternative visions forth into the center of social and political discourse. But, if there is a success it is in seeing and illustrating what futures there could be that were anything other than inevitable.

The lessons learned from the debate on governance over land are less clear. While the debate about local control over land use raged with particular fury after the mid 1960s, what appeared to be an intellectual consensus on centralized control never took hold in policy development and administration. Why this was so, and how this issue might be addressed in the

future are matters of active disputation (e.g. Jacobs, 1988; Popper, 1988; Heiman, 1988).

The rural areas of New York State, as well as the rural places in many developed and less developed countries, stand at a juncture similar to that faced by rural places in developed countries in the late 1800s. In 1925 Lewis Mumford argued that the advent of then modern technologies eliminated the need for large urban places and allowed for the viability and desirability of decentralized control in rural places. The late 1980s, an age of truly global communication via home-based computing, and an era of an emergent post-industrial economy, seem to increase the validity of this argument even more. The lessons learned from New York State's experience suggest that rural planners can accept the challenge of these opportunities and present creative alternatives for the future of rural places, understanding that they will have to work hard to get the ideas heard and understood, and that their ideas will be challenged as Utopian, or they can continue to accommodate the inevitable and be assured of nothing more than facilitating a process of continued rural decline. The choice seems clear.

Notes

1. The term 'revolution' to describe these changes is used by both Davis (1951, p. 47) and Ellis *et al.* (1967, p. 486).
2. A history of the Commission's activities can be found in Ellsworth (1960).
3. Excellent discussions of the change in perspectives are available in Guttenberg (1976) and Kirkendall (1966).
4. Early recognition of the landmark nature of the Report is noted by Hynning (1939, p. 10). Background material on the RPAA and their approach to planning can best be obtained through the collection of their work edited and introduced by Sussman (1976), and the interpretive history by Lubove (1963).
5. Sussman (1976, pp. 197–198) speculates on the direct influence of the RPAA on Roosevelt's thinking by noting his attendance at a Roundtable on Regionalism organized by the Regional Planning Association of America in 1931.
6. These proposals for land use planning reform in New York State closely parallel the final recommendations of the American Law Institute (1975). An optimistic review of these efforts, printed prior to the legislature's action, is contained in Moore (1971).
7. There is a good deal of research available on the Adirondack Park experience. For the best examples see Liroff and Davis (1981) and Booth (1980), as well as sections in Popper (1981) and Healy and Rosenberg (1979).

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