

CITY PROBLEMS: Experts Are Stumped

By **JOHN R. SULLIVAN**
(NC News Service)

Notre Dame—What makes a city worth living in, a good place for a man to work and enjoy the fruits of his labor?

More than 100 architects, engineers, sociologists and urbanologists — that new breed of 20th century generalist — pondered these questions for four days. They arrived at no simple answer.

Often, when confronted with the complexities of political and technological problems, they arrived at no answer at all, but rather, found themselves with a new set of questions.

The occasion was an international conference on "Cities in Context" sponsored by the department of architecture of the University of Notre Dame.

None of the participants came with any illusions. They left with their unease confirmed: the context in which American cities exist is one of increasing complexity.

The stakes are getting higher as pollution gets worse, as racial attitudes polarize, as transportation becomes increasingly bogged down, as the physical environment deteriorates.

Yet the conference failed to come to grips with the problem.

"Some very real sacrifices must be made by all of us, if the cities of this nation are going to survive," said one sociologist. "But I don't hear anybody talking about that. Instead, they seem to be absorbed with building. They ought to be working from the people and their needs, toward the brick and mortar."

The planners discussed not too enthusiastically the relative merits of expert planning versus public participation.

They agreed, as did Calvin Hamilton, director of planning for the city of Los Angeles, that "extensive involvement of the public through citizen participation has become an imperative." Yet, as Hamilton noted, "planners shudder at the impact of citizen participation." These planners clearly shuddered.

As Desmond Heap, controller and solicitor for the city of London, noted: "The thousand dollar question, as of course, 'Do the people know what they want; do they realize what sort of city will be good for them?'"

To Heap, education lies at the root of the question. If the planners have really done their job, the people will know.

Men like Heap—British, educated and knowledgeable in urban development—have become standard fixtures at such conferences. The British have, after all, constructed some 30 "new towns" since World War II, and have developed an experience in urban planning perhaps unrivaled in any Western country.

"New towns" are new to America—there are two outside of Washington, D.C., and few anywhere else in the nation. To Heap they are essential. There simply aren't enough cities to accommodate the urban population comfortably, he said.

To Lord Llewellyn-Davies, head of the Bartlett School of Architecture at the University of London, new towns aren't enough. The existing cities must be made to accommodate new situations—and made to do so quickly.

In the mind of every white American, this sense of urgency invokes an almost automatic response: "We must do it quickly or else the racial situation will so deteriorate that it will be impossible."

Other reasons for haste emerged. The air is becoming increasingly polluted, and it was mentioned at least once that some experts fear that man will run out of oxygen before many more years.

Albert V. Crews of the University of Chicago, spoke of the problem of accumulating waste.

He said the treatment of waste is a sadly neglected part of the economy. The disposable beer bottle is cheap because the public cost of disposing of it is ignored. The throw-away beer can is cheap because it costs to the countryside is ignored. Steel is relatively cheap because its waste products are dumped into the Great Lakes.

If the cost of cleaning up the lakes or the cost of treating the waste was added to steel's cost, the economic picture would change.

There was wide agreement that Americans must develop new means of dealing with each other and with their environment. Political boundaries which originated in the agricultural society of the 19th century must give way to boundaries and structures appropriate to the 20th century. Technology must be applied to all areas of life.

Francis B. Smith, assistant

administrator for university affairs of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), outlined significant ties between the management of the nation's space program and the needs of the cities.

Both require a variety of skills, Smith said, and involve long range planning and operations which must be coupled with rapidly developing technology.

Smith offered no concrete way to apply modern technology and management techniques to urban problems, but insisted

that if the space program could do it, so could the cities.

A similar note of hope was sounded by William L. Slayton, executive vice president of Urban America, an independent urban affairs organization in Washington.

Poverty can be eliminated if people become convinced it is cheaper to eliminate than to treat, he said. Discrimination and its effects must be eliminated. If the cities are going to survive, when these two factors are dealt with, he noted, physical rehabilitation and re-

construction will become more simple.

By the end of the conference, at least one participant saw a thread connecting this isolated discussion with the nation at large.

"We don't face a crisis of conscience," he said, "but we do have a crisis of leadership. We all know what should be done, or at least what questions have to be answered, but nobody is willing to walk out on a limb and suggest the answers."

His statement was accurate. Each of the speakers was highly descriptive; none had a prescription, with the exception of Slayton.

Able bodied persons must receive jobs from industry or government, and mothers and the handicapped must receive adequate, dignified welfare aid, Slayton said.

Fair housing must become part of this nation's law. "We shall not be able to rebuild our central cities on any scale other than a mere patching up of the more obvious deficiencies until we have broken down the patterns of discrimination to an extent that will permit the Negro in the ghetto and the Spanish-speaking American in the central city . . . to move into peripheral areas."

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