

Reading Tips and Study Questions: Planning and interest-group politics—October 10th

Required reading:

1. Review pp.91-93 in *RPT* (Chapter 4).
2. (Case) **Arthur Lubow**, "The Road to Curitiba" (*New York Times Magazine*, May 20, 2007, pp.76-83).
3. pp.299-304, 311-324 only in **Alan Altshuler**, *The City Planning Process: A Political Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965).

Tips and questions

Having juxtaposed two broad views so far in this unit—that between expert designers and more bottom-up development—we'll use the next few weeks to explore the politics of planning in greater depth: What different kinds of politics has planning used to discover (or declare) the public interest? How does it handle private or subgroup interests? What kinds of citizen participation in planning are likely to be fruitful and why?

Our case for this session and the next is planning in Curitiba, Brazil, which, as **Lubow** notes, is famous for planning-driven "livability" and, more and more, for being a pacesetter in environmental sustainability ("going green").

But paired with that case for this session is one of the most widely read, taught, cited, and debated political analyses ever written of city planning—**Alan Altshuler's** critique of the comprehensive rational planning ideal. In the course, you first saw the category of argument of which Altshuler's is a part in the Klosterman reading: It was part of what he called "pluralism" or the notion that planning is about resolving conflicts among distinct interests in cities and society.

The Lubow article is lively and sometimes inspiring, the Altshuler excerpt a bit dense in places. But make no mistake: His analysis of how planning actually worked in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul in the late 1950s raised questions planners worldwide still confront on a daily basis. This is the definition of a classic, and the study questions below will help you focus your reading of that classic on the ideas that are most important for our purposes.

1. Review **Klosterman's** summary of "Pluralist arguments."

2. **Lubow** writes, initially as a compliment, that Curitiba gives one a sense of what cities might be like if governed by planners rather than politicians. He includes nifty examples of the (very) rational planning the city did, particularly under planner-mayor Jaime Lerner, to green itself, enhance public transportation, and more.

But later he notes, in the context of current problems the city faces, that “the progressive planning of Curitiba was not initiated by a democratic process” but rather by a dictatorship. And explaining why the 1970s and 80s model for planning and governing Curitiba has been transformed, he ends with the proposition that “Mayors need to be politicians, even in Curitiba.” Was it appropriate to approach planning as Lerner did in the 70s and 80s, given the circumstances at the time? How about today?

3. **Altshuler** outlines a variety of mid-20th century criticisms of the comprehensive rational model—criticisms which were, when he wrote in 1965, very current. (Writing in 2005, Bish Sanyal addressed these criticisms in historical retrospective, in reading you did for Session 2). We want you to focus on planners’ *claim to political legitimacy* more than their claim to *possessing knowledge comprehensive enough to make wise comprehensive plans*.

Altshuler addresses these two claims side by side. But focus on the former: his critique of the idea that public planning can be “above politics,” i.e. that as an enterprise, planning can know the public interest independent of interest-group politics. This above-politics claim is central to the original, “modernist” rational model: Experts can tell us what’s best, free of the parochialism and dirtiness of politics.

Does Altshuler persuade you that planning will lack legitimacy if planners pursue their ideas independent of the push-and-pull of interest group politics? Does he also persuade you that the best planning can hope for is “middle-range” plans that win the support of interest groups and politicians? What does the Curitiba case suggest about these claims?