The Art of Planning

It is only a hundred years ago since the history of planning was established as an academic subject and a discipline at the Department of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool. The Town Planning Review journal was founded in 1910 at the same institution and was based on the idea of presenting theory and good practice. A third event at the same time was the start of a planning course at Harvard University.

The author has followed the development of theory and practice in planning for 50 years. He has been a professional planner, a researcher and university lecturer.

He argues that we have witnessed a change in making many examples of good practice into objective science. We are longing for facts, but the crucial issues are what we do with the facts and what types of action do these facts trigger.

“We are all practitioners”, claims the author.

But what do planners really do? They listen, read, speak and write when working on theoretical issues in a university, at a municipal planning office or as a private consultant. They all work with language in different and very practical ways. They approach their profession by bridging the gap between theory and practice.

This brings us to the title of the book; The Art of Planning. This does not mean art like a painting in a gallery or art as a work in an auction. Rather art as performance, the good and meaningful use of language, art as understanding the context of time and place, and art as creative and innovative action. So just like the art of engineering or the art of downhill skiing, this book is about skill and excellence.

The first part examines theoretical issues such as
- Wholeness and the fragment
- Borders in mind and space
- The art of rhetorics
- And the risk society

This is written as a commentary upon on-going discussions in planning theory. The second part of the book presents a concept for teaching planning based on different approaches such instrumental rationality, communicative rationality and the rationality of power.

About the author

Born in 1941, Sigmund Asmervik graduated as an architect and urban planner in 1966 at the Norwegian Institute of Technology (NTH) in Trondheim, Norway and was awarded a doctorate in traffic planning in 1976 by the same institution.

Since 1990, he has taught planning and planning theory at NTH and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, the Norwegian University of Life Science and the University of Stavanger.

He has been active in different ways in the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) since the early 1990s.