The Planning Challenge in Iraq

Prof. Muthar K. Omar   Mr. Fu'ad A. Mohammad

SRU, University of Diyala   University of Kufa

Introduction ,

Searching for the meaning of "Planning" in dictionaries , encyclopedias , and W.W.Web pages comes with amazingly variety in definitions and types of planning . It indicates that "planning" becomes essential for everyday life in advanced societies , and as a way of thinking and doing things to ordinary man. The story is quite differ in less developed and under developed societies . They, may lack of , what could be called , " planning culture" . The term "planning" may be strange to some people , even those who are in charge of public responsibilities . And , it probably makes planning process harder at all stages of plan preparation .This is the crucial point the paper , trying to shed light on and elaborate . We convince that "planning culture" is the underlying cause of most , if not all , challenging factors that confronting planning process in Iraq .

The problem ,

The idea of planning in Iraq is so fuzzy that practicing it is considered a dilemma for public and private , common and individual identities . Besides , planners face multi – stage challenges : (1) stating targets and goals ; (2) collecting relevant data ; (3) analyzing data ; (4) drawing alternatives ; (5)evaluating them and choosing one ; (6) implementing the plan ; and (7) monitoring and updating the plan . Each stage of planning process has its own problems and obstacles challenging the planning team . They are :

Challenges at stage one

At stage one , a clear cut and precise strategic targets and goals should be stated . But , this may be so difficult due to political conflicts , and vagueness and broad targets sited (if there is any) by central government . This because :

(1) War destruction ,

The invasion of Iraq destroys almost every thing . Starting with the regime , then concentrating on destroying "State Infrastructure", and fragmenting society and disorganize it . The undeclared aim , is an attempt to eras Iraq as a state and people from the politics of Middle East.

Many countries suffered from war destruction , and plan to remedy the injuries and recovering the socio-economic status . The case of Iraq may differ and has its own merits . Studying the history and geography of the region , looking at its foreseeable future may give hints to indicate the possible features that needs to be dealt with in planning .

Planning to rebuild a country after a massive destroying war is a hard mission, needs to look at past trends , and the future in political and economic terms, bearing in mind the aspects of ad hog situation. The plan should be flexible enough to absorb and adopt the unexpected , and so firm to stay on truck and achieving the stated targets .

The physical and social environment are polluted by a variety of pollutants . This make the planning process harder , and should be thorough and comprehensive . Besides , dealing with individual local areas separately may not help tackling all problems . Some problems have to be tackled at meso and macro scale . This means , there should be a broad national

strategy, implemented by lower scale plans , down to the local urban areas .
Planning at this level is disparately in need of social awareness and planning
culture , which is doubtfully recognized in the case of Iraq .

(2) Absence of strategic targets ,

Although the previous regime had his own   Ideology , but it seems that
no clear cut strategic targets set out . This may be due to the high centrality
norms adopted by the regime . Which by turn , keeps local authorities reacting
to the fronting events and actions , waiting orders to act . Initiatives and
pioneering actions by local authorities regarded as unacceptable adventures ,
and setting local goals give the HQ a bad impression .

In other words , there is no strategy , neither previous to 2003 nor after ,
for both scales : national or local . And this is one of the causes for absence of
"planning culture" in Iraq . As democracy is a culture build gradually and had
its own price and values , so did the transformation away from centrality , and
constructing of a common planning culture .

Regional planning as a toll to solve conflicts between local authorities ,
and planning projects that's passes through and serve multi local authorities ,
is unknown to Iraqi authorities . In Iraq today , each province considered as a
region stands for its self with no considerations to nationwide infrastructure ,
and catchment areas crossing administrative boundaries . Regional planning as
a development means is diverted and used to draw political regions according
to ethnic criteria . Fragmenting Iraq to ethnic regions , serving outside political
goals is another challenge to planning process . So , regional planning has a
different meaning in Iraq compared with actual regional planning .

Challenges at stage two ,

After stating the ultimate targets and goals for the foreseeable future , looking for the relevant data comes next . At this stage many obstacles face planners . These obstacles are like :

(3) Lack of recent population census ,

In 1997 the last official population census was held . Since then , no official records regarding population structure set as acceptable due to political conflicts among leading parties . The population growth ratios in Iraq , in general , and with variety among provinces , show that the trend tend to slow down in particular areas and at certain periods and accelerating in others , according to the political environment in the region and the province . That means   planning at meso and micro scale should deal with local merits rather than overall mean . This situation gets worse after 2003 .

(4) Data reliability ,

By nature , planning is a decision making process , and the validity of decisions depend on the reliability and accuracy of data . In Iraq today , this is the dilemma . The available data could be :

a- Out of date data collected before 2003 ,

b- Estimations depends on data trends prior 2003 ,

c- Samples collected for political parties purposes ,

d- Personal estimates depends on experience and guess ,

e- Figures stated to convince the boss .

No one of these draw a real picture about the actual situation , and can be used to plan for the next two decades . Here is the challenge , to planner ,

decision makers , and the scientists .What kind of filtering process to use in order to distinguish between correct and incorrect data ?

(5) Demographic composition Changes ,

During the 1980s and 1990s , population turn over took place in many parts of Iraq . After 2003 , aggravated by spatial polarization and in \ out massive migration movements that restructuring the composition of local area population . In other words , the geography of population need to be rediscovered at the micro scale in Iraq in order to plan .

The population pyramid amended during the 1970s , 1980s , 1990s , and dramatically changes after the invasion . This put the planner in a puzzling situation . He cant depend on previous population trend , and has no reliable data at hand . The local authorities still depend on the central government estimations . Most of such estimation abstracted from previous trends and corrected according to personal judgments . Sampling procedures could help , but still not reliable enough to plan for 20 to 30 years ahead . People response with caution to surveys , especially when many parties collecting data for their purposes at the same time .

Challenge at stages three ,

The analyzing team should comprehend the mentioned challenges , and keeping them in mind , and connect them with the coming ones .

Challenge at stages four and five ,

Drawing future scenarios and evaluate them , amend them according to sponsored authority view gives the planning team a sharp headache . The

team should discus every details with the other party and convince them . The challenge isn't easy at this stage .

(6) Lack of planning education and practice ,

The sole Institute for Urban and Regional Planning in Iraq was established late 1960s , giving post graduate meta-disciplinary courses . Most of its graduates carry on their study and have Ph.D. degrees from abroad universities. Some of them rejoin the Institute as lecturing staff , others go back to their original background education , and few of them join planning authorities at the province level . This means that those who are qualified in planning , and practice as professional planners are so few . Planning isn't just an education , it is a professional practice . And , that's one of the key factors affecting planning system in its most crucial   components .

The paper considers the "Lack of planning culture" as the main cause for planning failure in Iraq . Planning culture looked as an educational bases that guide behavior of both practitioners and public . Lacking this knowledge and practice leads to reactions rather than positive response in solving problems . Reactions are , usually , emotional by nature not bound to strategic targets .

Challenges at stage six and seven

Planning is meaningless unless implemented completely and achieving the plan targets . Updating the plan to acclimatize with unexpected events need well trained planners . But who will do that ? Qualified for the job or not? And many other questions raised in our case study .

(7) Local authorities and planning ,

Planning at local authorities , chaired by persons with B.Sc. degrees in surveying or civil engineering . Their own duties restricted to "development

control" not to planning participations . Precisely , they act as "gate keeper" , allowing and preventing land use applications according to the Master Plan of the city . Anybody with intermediate school certificate can do such study .

Moreover , Master Plan , itself is not respected and committed by decision makers , so they push "gate keepers" to allow unacceptable uses in zones designated to other uses . The results , divergence from the plan gradually . Besides , Master Plan is regarded as a heavy obstacle facing personal wishes of many of those at province authority .

(8) Restless security situation ,

The war creates an environ that helps gangs to control streets and areas , all over Iraq . Some of these gangs wear a "Militia" dresses and act as political forces. What so ever the backing party , they accomplish what the invaders did. They achieve the second stage mission in destroying Iraq . The results , frightened people , no matter what their religion or ethnic group or Islamic division . Fear is one of the common feelings across the nation .

Surviving is the sole hope people can think about during such situation. So , they move to places where they thought they will find peace and help . In other words , a socio-political polarization took place to deepen the barriers between people . Preparing for the third stage they plan to "Dividing Iraq to sub-regions" .

The restless security situation does not encourage investors to invest in long term production activities . Instead , consumption goods and short term production activities are the available alternative . These activities do not construct an economic bases to plan for a prosperous nation . This is another planning obstacle , planning to what ? Keeping the situation as it is ? Or push it

a little bit ahead ? Or plan for dramatic changes and help to re- build the country with strong economy ? Planning for unified Iraq ? Or a country divided to sub-regions ? Planning for individual town as an administrative centre ? Neglecting what's going on at its adjacent region ? Taking what local people hope and wish as an ultimate target ? Or the target that stated by province authority ? Do elected authority for four years has the right to decide the future for the next twenty years ? Who really knows what is going to be in the near future and determines it ? Local people ? Local authority ? Central government ? Others ? Well known that the only permanent thing is "change" , what kind of changes have to be dealt with and plan for ? That is the dilemma .

These are the common obstacles and challenges confronting planning team . The team may face other challenges related to local area properties . It was said that there is no twin cities , each town or city stands for its own characteristics . The next section of the paper will shed light on "Al-Najaf" city as a case study presenting some of the mentioned above challenges .

Al-Najaf City as a Case study ,

Al-Najaf is an Islamic holly city , located at the conjunction of longitude 44.19 east and latitude 31.59 north . Visitors come from around the world , especially Iran .Its population in 1947 (56261) , raised to (381486) in 1997, that's (6.781)times in fifty years . Looking at this finding in more detail , it looks like that the city gain (9312) people per year . This is for the long term (50 years) , but it is fluctuated during the period and ranged between (3239) to (14038) people according to the political situation in the region . Table (1) shows these findings .

Table 1

Al-Najaf population : 1947 – 2007*

year	population	Annual increase
1947	56261	
1957	89190	3293
1965	134027	5605
1977	186479	4371
1987	304832	11835
1997	381486	7665
2007	521864	14038

- 2007 estimation , others census results

The holiness of the city comes from the shrine of "Emam Ali Ben Abi Taleb" , his Mosque , and Its cemetery . Nearby are Al-Kufa town and Kerbala City . The three settlements together make a polarization centre attracting people to visit and to live near . Map (1) represents the land use in Al-Najaf city in 2010 .

Three Master plans were designed to the city , first one issued by Doxiadis Association in 1958 [i], the second by Ministry of Municipalities in 1973 , and the third one by Ministry of Planning in 1976 . The percentages of land uses according to these three Master Plans presented by table 2 below .
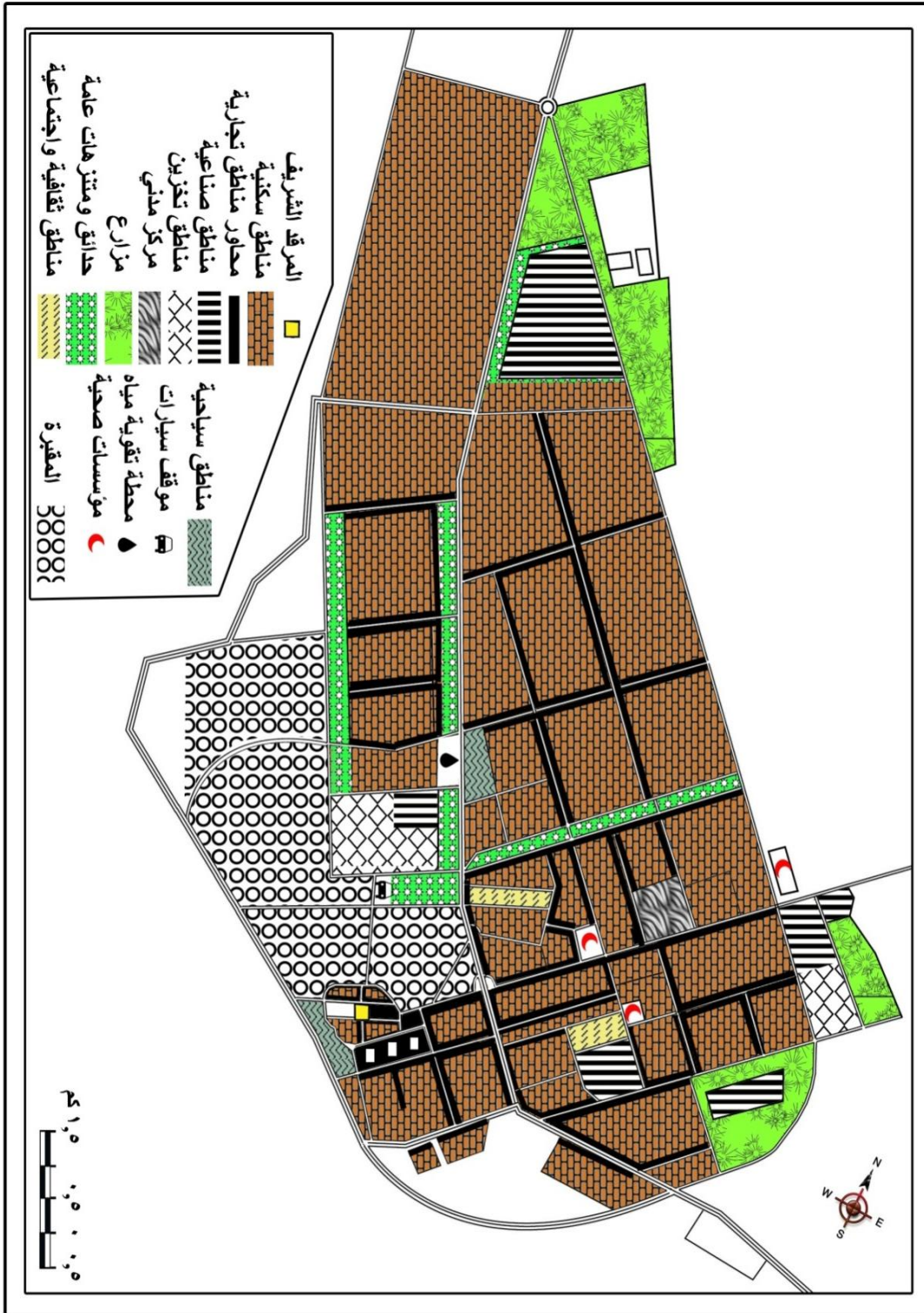
Figure 1

Land use in Al-Najaf City 2010

Table (2)

Land use allocation according to Master Plan

of Al-Najaf City[ii]

	1958 Plan		1973 Plan		1976 Plan	
	Area Hectar	%	Area Hectar	%	Area Hectar	%
Residence	1500	37.5	1160	54.71	2871.46	44.16
Commerce	250	6.25	30	1.41	178.94	2.75
Industry	450	11.25	87	4.1	560.8	8.62
Transport	1000	25	580	27.35	1232.48	18.96
Public utilities	800	20	230	10.84	274.53	4.22
Green & Open					846.61	13.02
Admin. uses			33	1.55	162.7	2.5
Touristic areas					107.72	1.65
Vacant					264.4	4.06
Total	4000	100	2120	100	6500	100

- Hectar = 10,000 sq.meter

Causes for Master Plan Failure ,

The first Master Plan is criticized for the ignorance of the religious importance of the city and its character , had no indication to preserve architectural heritage , and does not account for the arid climate of the area . The second plan failed to fulfill the designated green areas within the built up

area and the type of recreation accompanied it . Beside that , it follows the previous plan 's view and land use estimations .

The third plan , after (14) years , only (67%) of it implemented due to incorrect estimations of land uses and locations needed for the time span . Moreover , the allocated residential land use had been allocated (100%) one year before the end of the stated period . The plan does not cover the whole area with sewage system . It seems that , most Master plans at this period do not depend on accurate field survey data , and their suggestion does not present a comprehensive development plan . [iii]

The Centre for Urban and Regional Studies which considers the failure to implement Master Plans as a scientific problem has to be investigated by his students and staff . The main points mentioned by their studies are :

a- Centrality of decision making , due to the number of qualified persons in planning , and the overall governmental policy . Many issues at the remote urban areas was not recognized by those at the central planning team . Instead , judgments were taken depending on false data or inadequate sampling procedures . [iv]

b- Although Iraq rich by its natural resources , but the utilization and allocation of the return of these resources to public services and development activities are considered as great obstacle to planning process . [v]

c- Lack of co-ordination channels between governmental departments , at both levels : central and local make planning process extremely hard from the first stage to the end . [vi]

d- Marginalized public participation due to centralized plan preparation and political and technocrats points of view . Public participation is

considered by planning theorists as a key factor to let public understand what is going on and why, and to encourage them to co-operate .[vii]

Al-Najaf witness a rapid land use changes post 1990 . Fu'ad studied these changes and found that they wave like in their pattern . The total commercial uses take over residential uses during the period (1990 – 2010) are (7687) cases , and (2394) industrial uses take over residential use . These changes spread over (40) neighborhoods, changing land use structure and shopping trip (at least) . The pattern and trend of such changes , should be kept in mind when plan to update the Master Plan of the city . This means that collecting data about the ad hoc situation is not enough to plan for future . Changes in adopted technology and community life had its reflections on land use . So , the changes in urban fabric and their trends make another challenge to planning processes , they should be explored and considered deeply .

What's next ?

In order to develop and achieve progress , planning is the ultimate way to do so . And to make planning work , the mentioned challenging obstacles should be dealt with first . But priorities have to be arranged first , the most common and crucial has to gain the first order . We believe that "planning culture" comes across most of the mentioned challenges , and act as a base and guide to decision making at various levels . So , the raised question is : how to establish such a base to local authorities and public ? The answer may be by achieving one or more of the following suggestions .

a- Expand old planning institutes and establish new ones across the country , especially as interdisciplinary undergraduate courses .

b- Organize post graduate planning courses at departments of : Law , Ecology , Geography , Civil Engineering , Economy , Administration , Sociology , and community services .

c- Organize post graduate multi disciplinary courses , at the university level passing over departmental restrictions (Post graduate studies College).

d- Organize non-certificate courses for those involved in planning and not allowing to carry on further studies .

e- Organize sandwich training courses for those involved in planning at local authorities .

f- Set out a monitoring system to check the process of implementing Master Plans .

g- Review and update planning regulations and laws according to the recent situation and raising matters .

h- Plan for deploying planning culture across the country and among society .

[i] Iraq Ministry of Planning , Development Board , Doxiadis Associates Consulting , The future of Najaf and Kufa , 1958

[ii] الجبوري ، فؤاد عبد الله محمد ، تحليل جغرافي للتغيرات الوظيفية ضمن البنية العمرانية لمدينة النجف الاشرف ما بعد ١٩٩٠ ، أطروحة دكتوراه ، (غير منشورة) ، جامعة الكوفة ، ٢٠١١

[iii] الشماع ، احمد ناطق محمد علي ، التوجهات التخطيطية المطلوبة بين الأصالة والمعاصرة للبنية الحضرية لمدينة بغداد ، منطقة الدراسة ــ عرصات الهندية ، رسالة ماجستير (غير منشوره) مركز التخطيط الحضري والإقليمي ، جامعة بغداد ، ٢٠٠٢

[iv] حسون ، ضياء وفيق ، الاسناد التخطيطي لمتخذي القرار باستخدام نظم المعلومات الجغرافية ، إطروحة دكتوراه (غير منشورة) ، المعهد العالي للتخطيط الحضري والاقليمي ، جامعة بغداد ، ٢٠٠٥

[v] محمد ، اوس محمود ، دور مصادر التمويل في التخطيط وادارة الخدمات البلدية في مدينة بغداد ، رسالة ماجستير (غير منشورة) ، المعهد العالي للتخطيط الحضري والاقليمي ، جامعة بغداد ، ٢٠١٠

[vi] الفتلي ، باسل احمد خلف ، تقويم تنفيذ التصميم الاساس لمدينة الحلة ، أطروحة دكتوراه ، مركز التخطيط الحضري والاقليمي ، جامعة بغداد ، ١٩٩٨

[vii] الزبيدي ، نجوى عبيد عجمي ، المعايير التخطيطية للمساحات المفتوحة والخضراء في مدينة بغداد ، رسالة ماجستير (غير منشورة) ، المعهد العالي للتخطيط الحضري والاقليمي ، جامعة بغداد ، ٢٠٠٥