

Planners' roles in collaborative processes

Collaborative planning can demand of planners to fulfil a multitude of roles, including such as are focused on the social aspect of the process. To cope with these different roles means to reflect one's of self-concept. To begin with, we can point out two extremes of planners' self-conceptions, that of the **artist** and that of the **servant**.

- Many planners, especially those directly engaged in urban and landscape architecture, like to conceive of themselves as **artists** creating a commissioned work: they are given a topic and certain conditions that must be met, often in the shape of a tender. Within this framework, they have artistic license.
- On the other hand, planners can also be seen as **servants** to the society they live in: having the technical knowledge, they will employ their skills to make possible what others have found to be necessary, desirable or beautiful.

These concepts refer to the degree of professional **self-fulfilment** planners are used to searching for: To realise one's own visions is a natural urge of those who have chosen the profession and often was a crucial motive for their choice. Then there is a second measure of planners' roles, namely their degree of **activity**:

- When working on a large-scale project, planners will usually assume a very **active** role of developing and promoting things on their own behalf.
- But there are also planners acting as consultants whose role is rather **passive**. They do not develop projects but contribute expertise when asked only.

Seven roles of planners

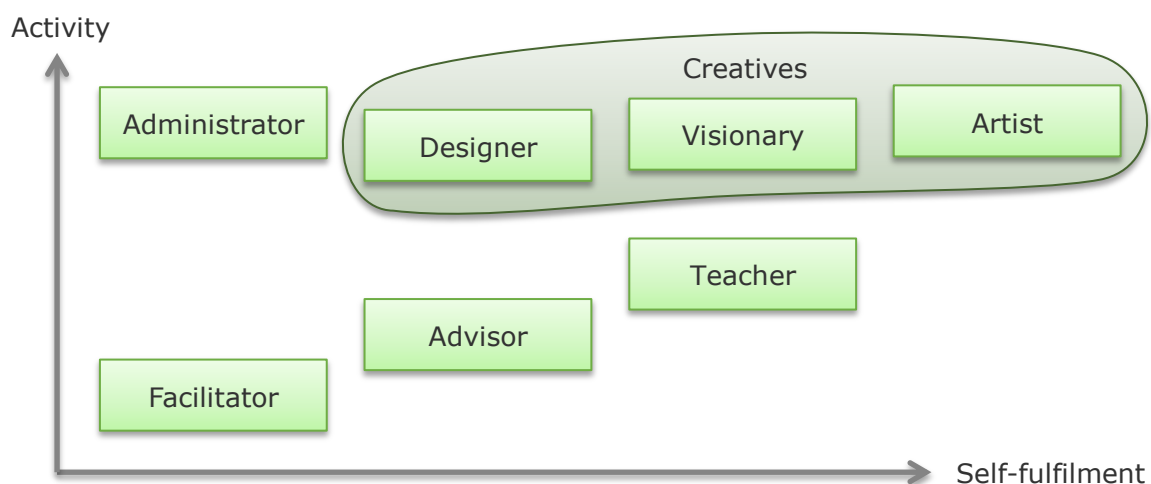


Fig. 1: Seven roles of planners, measured by activity, self-fulfilment and creativity

Figure 1 places some possible roles a planner can assume in a grid measuring activity and self-fulfilment. Both properties represent of course a continuum, and the placement of roles and labels displayed are to some extent arbitrary.

In the following, we will detail the implications of these roles, and each one will be given a motto saying what kind of self-conception it requires. We will see that not all of the roles deserve the attribute often associated with planners' work – to be creative.

THE FACILITATOR

Make possible what others have conceived

A facilitator presides over negotiations without imposing his own will. The planner in this function is not asked to contribute or even suggest his own solutions. It is a role focused on social skills, with technical knowledge required only insofar as is necessary to evaluate and implement other parties' decisions.

Being mere facilitators is rather unusual for professional planners and poses perhaps the greatest challenge to them because they can neither become very active on their own behalf nor gain much professional self-fulfilment from this role.

The facilitator role is often required of a comparatively new professional guild of *regional managers* to be found in some European countries, if these can be called planners. Otherwise, the head start they have on the technical field will almost invariably cause planners to interfere with technical details. But it is important to know that often a facilitator will be needed during a collaborative process and that the role can either be outsourced to professional mediators or taken on by planners themselves.

THE ADVISOR

Contribute your knowledge when asked

The planner as advisor is in the role of a consultant: he gives his professional opinion when asked. He explains whether ideas of other participants are feasible and what it takes to put them into practice. He remains a service provider but acts on a more technical level where he can contribute some of his own knowledge in a neutral way.

Being advisors in this sense is familiar to a lot of planners and related professionals who have chosen to work as consulting experts.

In collaborative planning, the role of advisor is frequently required when ideas and proposals from laypersons must be evaluated for feasibility.

THE TEACHER

Enable others to compete with you

The teacher decides to pass some of his knowledge to other participants in order to enable them to act as planners themselves, within reasonable limits. This role implies more activity than being an advisor because the planner is dealing with a larger field of knowledge and, by doing so, has more room to convey his own views and personal techniques. The role provides some professional self-fulfilment to those

who are not afraid of educating people who might by that education try to compete with them.

Planners as teachers are common at universities and vocational training facilities. They are also a major target group of CoPack.

Education in this sense can be a part of collaborative planning. The planner may have to give a brief introduction to technical and legal frameworks related to the planning issue in question, or to teach some techniques and methods useful for developing and evaluating ideas.

THE ADMINISTRATOR

Guide the process, do not impose the details

An administrator fulfils a role similar to that of a facilitator but more actively so: he does not wait until asked but promotes a process, being responsible e.g. for keeping to a timeline and ensuring a certain grade of the outcome. Still he is not supposed to impose his own wishes and suggestions. It's a serving role.

Planners as administrators are often found in planning and building authorities acting on behalf of a government. In this function, they must see to it that a project be completed within the time given. They will usually leave the technical details to other planners who are often invited to submit entries through a tender.

The administrator role is also frequently required in collaborative planning: The planner, knowing best how to carry through a project, will have to schedule activities and be responsible for a timely and technically sound result.

THE DESIGNER

Find the optimum solution

This is the first of three categories of 'creatives' we will introduce. A designer, under the above classification, is a planner who employs the state of the art to find an optimum solution to a task. Compared with the following two categories, the designer role can be described as rather conservative and, to a large extent, as a serving one.

Being a designer is a standard role many freelancing planners know: they are given a task and conditions that must be met and will develop a solution.

In collaborative planning, this role will be needed on a regular basis. However, it is important for planners to realise that it is a temporary one. They may be asked to suggest a solution as designers and then switch back to the function of facilitator and compare it with other participants' ideas as neutrally as possible.

THE VISIONARY

Explore new paths and carry others away

The difference between a designer and a visionary is only gradual and is often a result of circumstance: the visionary has more freedom to develop his own creative solutions. He sets out to explore new possibilities on his field. Being innovative is a much-used term to describe this function.

Visionaries can be found mostly among freelancing planners, when engaged in projects that offer opportunities to work 'off the beaten track'.

However, being innovative in that sense mostly means following a quite personal path which makes the role problematic for collaborative processes. It is not entirely discouraged but planners who have a vision should be aware that other participants may have good ideas as well, and a collaborative process is mostly about developing a shared vision.

THE ARTIST

It's your turn – realise yourself

While most of the differences between a visionary and an artist are gradual, there is a quality specific to the latter: A visionary tries to carry other away, whereas the true artist does not care about the public's opinion. He enjoys a maximum of artistic license.

There have been planners acting as artists in that sense in connection with what is called land art, a discipline on the borderline between landscape planning and visual arts.

The artist role provides the highest grade of self-fulfilment achievable in planning, approaching to egocentricity. That makes it rather unsuited for a collaborative process unless the planner is able to switch to other roles when necessary. Having artistic ambitions can enrich a collaborative project if, and only if, the planner is able to put them into perspective.

Which type are you?

We have seen that there are very different roles a planner can assume. With collaborative work, it is the serving rather than the masterful roles that are required, and the passive ones more often than the active ones. Most of all, however, the challenge for planners is that they will have to reflect their roles and assume different ones in the course of a collaborative process.

Using the model described above, think about the following questions:

- What is your favourite role, the one you would like to act out?
- If you're already in your working life, which role do you have in your current environment?
- Can you imagine to assume other roles as well, to switch from the facilitator to the visionary and back again?

An answer of 'yes' to the last question is a good qualification for a collaborative process.