Chapter V
The ALERT Model:
A Planning-Practice Process for Knowledge-Based Urban and Regional Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is presented especially for the use of practicing planners. Practicing planners, as intended here, are broadly defined and inclusive as a set of local stakeholders. Given the widespread need to develop an active civil society, it is important that representative local actors, and diverse urban and regional stakeholders engage in developing their communities intelligently over sustained long-term futures. Practicing planners in this context include, but are not limited to professional urban and regional planners. Citizens and other professionals, such as business persons, bureaucrats from all levels of government, employees from nongovernmental public organizations and their volunteers, and other individuals all have stakes in, and contributions to make to the development of their city-region in the relatively new context of a globalizing and increasingly knowledge-based world economy and networked society. The chapter, therefore, presents the background to these new development dynamics and it introduces the ALERT model. In the form of a conceptual framework, the model is a planning support system designed for the use of the diverse and wide-ranging stakeholder-planning practitioners who seek to engage planning in the steering of these new technology-enabled and knowledge-based development forces to attained desired outcomes. The ALERT model is not so much directly prescriptive, rather it is directional and relational with the intention that engaged planning practitioners will design and tailor their own planning processes to be responsive to local demand and need. At its best, the model can catalyze and stimulate the stakeholders to invent their own strategies that capitalize on the unique assets and development potential of the locality's communities.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is addressed to practicing planners. At the risk of becoming marginalized, planning practice needs to change. The practice of regional and urban development planning around the world in today's environment of globalization and increasingly pervasive information and communications technologies (ICT) should be effective. To be relevant, it is imperative that the practice of such local, sub-national planning reflects this new increasingly knowledge-based environment. In this context, "practicing planners" as addressed here include professional planners, as well as individuals who are citizen planners, volunteer planners, and special-interest agents who represent the interests of businesses, governments, and other institutions in local-area strategic planning efforts of various kinds. All of these types of planning practitioners, therefore, need to acknowledge the recent important changes on cities and regions that are caused by globalization with explicit planning attention to information technologies and the enhanced knowledge generation that is facilitated by these technologies. The planning behavior of these various practicing planners should be reflective of, and proactively engage these new realities.

The principal aim of the chapter is two-fold: (1) to draw attention to needed new planning processes to foster urban and regional development for knowledge-based production functions, consumption functions, and quality of life amenities; and (2) to mobilize the strategic planning of effective, intelligent development by the principal stakeholders of city-regions throughout the global knowledge economy.

The chapter includes a definition for, and discussion of, next possible action steps for initiating intelligent development, and outlines a new local and regional planning process that builds on our collective current understanding of the global knowledge economy by addressing the practical question being asked increasingly by planners and their local development clients. They ask "now that I have an initial awareness and understanding of this new global economy, what can I do about it?"

The emergence of world cities and the growing global role of urban areas and urban institutional entities support our primary geographical focus on the city-region (Scott, 2001). This is the scale and level of development that is most congruent for local response to the environment and forces of globalization. Being informed by the ALERT model elaborated below can enable communities to be productive and more competitive within the new context of the global knowledge economy and network society.

By necessity, this brief chapter discussion is introductory. It is conceptual and therefore relatively abstract. There is little room here to provide the extensive empirical and concrete material in direct support of the organizing frameworks that are introduced. However, these critical evidence-based examples and elaborated working definitions are developed elsewhere. Refer to Corey and Wilson (2006) for a more complete examination of the ALERT model and its implications for more effective planning practice in the global knowledge economy and network society.

This chapter introduces the ALERT model. It is a new approach and a normative support system for regional and local planning practice in the global knowledge economy and network society. The acronym of "ALERT" is derived from the key words that define the content of the model: Awareness; layers; electronic-business (or e-business); responsiveness; and talk. The ALERT model is a decision support system that enables urban and regional planners and related development stakeholders at the city-region scale to plan and implement successful strategies for local knowledge-based development in the context of the global knowledge economy. The chapter is organized into two substantive parts. Part one provides background; it discusses a collective understanding of the global knowledge economy,

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