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European planning studies at 30 – past, present and future

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces the 30th anniversary special issue of European Planning Studies. After briefly taking a retrospective look at some of the developments in planning research and practice over the last 30 years the article introduces a set of future-oriented perspectives which were commissioned specifically for this special issue. Each of the contributions contained in this special issue presents a unique perspective on the future prospects and directions for planning theory and practice in Europe. Taken together, these contributions contain a wealth of ideas which deserve further attention and reflection among planning scholars and practitioners.

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Introduction

2023 marks an important milestone for European Planning Studies as the journal celebrates its 30th anniversary which we celebrate in this special issue. Compared to the early 1990s, the world is now a very different place in many respects and yet, at the same time, various issues and challenges remain. The same is true for planning: the context has changed significantly but many key issues and challenges continue to be as important today as they were three decades ago. In this special issue we briefly take a look back at some of these developments and consider where planning currently stands. More importantly, we take a look forward to the future of planning, both in terms of scholarship and practice.

Past

Around the time of the launch of European Planning Studies in 1993, many important world events were taking place within Europe or on its doorstep. The early 1990s saw the reunification of Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall at the end of the 1980s, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the creation of sovereign nations in former Soviet

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Republics, the breakup of Yugoslavia and the formation of the new republics. Relations shifted between NATO countries and the former members of the Warsaw Pact, leading to the end of the Cold War both in Europe and other parts of the world.

The early 1990s were characterized by some rapid social, economic and political changes, especially with the increasing internationalization of capital, the emergence of 'third way' politics and the introduction of market economies in former Soviet Republics. Many European countries became more economically prosperous during the period although there were exceptions such as Russia which experienced deep financial crisis, resulting in hyperinflation and economic intervention from the International Monetary Fund and western countries. Neighbouring countries, such as Finland, experienced economic depression as its foreign trade with Russia collapsed.

The period also saw increasing attention to global environmental issues. The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 resulted in new international commitments for environmental protection, including the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change, recognizing global warming as a key aspect of climate change and seeking to coordinate efforts to reduce carbon emissions in the atmosphere.

The early 1990s saw some major changes in technology. In 1993, the world wide web had only just been invented and the first web browser had just gone online, sparking optimism about its benefits for commerce. Household personal computer ownership rose rapidly in the early 1990s. Meanwhile, mobile phone technology was still in its infancy (after its invention in the 1970s) and was only used by a small proportion of the population even in the wealthiest nations.

The early 1990s also marked a new era for European integration. The Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992, established the European Union and set out new steps for advancing European integration. When the Treaty was signed, negotiations were already underway for the northern and eastern expansion of the European Union – the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden – which would increase the number of EU member states from 12 to 15.

One of the EU's new responsibilities introduced by the Maastricht Treaty was the development of trans-European networks (TENs) for transport, telecommunications and energy. By the early 1990s, the construction of the Channel Tunnel was close to completion. This new infrastructure formed part of a TEN transport network in north-west Europe where a new high-speed railway axis would link Paris, Brussels, Cologne, Amsterdam and London. Meanwhile, preparations had already begun in the early 1990s which would ultimately lead to the drafting of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) by the end of the 1990s, a document offering a framework for spatial development policy across the whole of the European Union (Faludi and Waterhout 2002).

During the early 1990s, planning was discovering edge cities (Garreau 1992), fractal cities (Batty and Longley 1994), industrial technopoles (Hall and Castells 1994) and new urbanism (Calthorpe 1993; Katz 1994). Planning was increasingly concerned with urban decline and deindustrialization (Kunstler 1993), suburbanization and car dependence (Garreau 1992; Handy 1992; Kunstler 1993), the linkages between cities and their hinterland (Cronon 1991) and the quality of the public realm (Jacobs 1993; Calthorpe 1993). It was a time when there was increasing interest in communicative planning theory (Healey 1992a & 1992b; Sager 1994), power and politics (Hoch 1994), gender and sexual identity (Adler and Brenner 1992; Sandercock and Forsyth 1992),

planning and globalization (Cox 1993; Hall 1993a) and comparative analyses of planning systems (Healey and Williams 1993; Musil, 1993).

World events at the time, as they continue to do, affected planning practice, scholarship and education. They clearly influenced the content of contributions to European Planning Studies, which is evident from the focus of articles published in the journal's first year. In the very first article published in the journal, Peter Hall set out his view of the future challenges for planning (Hall 1993b), many of which are taken up in the contributions to this special issue. His essay touched on a range of issues including the challenges of planning during times of economic stagnation and decline, the role of communication networks (such as high-speed rail and telecommunications infrastructure) in promoting urban and regional competitiveness and regeneration, and the changing role of the state in planning practice and the influence of European policies.

During its first year, European Planning Studies published contributions on various planning issues whose saliency and importance remain. These include the issues of environmental management (De Roo 1993; Marshall 1993), political ideologies and cultural aspects (Booth, 1993; Thornley, 1993), industrial transformation (Danielzyk and Wood 1993; Piccinato 1993; Pike 1993), transitions in post-socialist states (Artobolevskiy 1993; Parysek 1993) and European structural policies (Curbelo and Alburquerque 1993; Maggi, Masser, and Nijkamp 1993; Nijkamp 1993; Prodi, 1993; Uranga and Etxebarria 1993). While more recent contributions to European Planning Studies arguably consider these issues using a wider scale of analysis than in the early 1990s (Cooke 2018), the comparative aspect of articles in the journal remains a common denominator.

Present

Society is currently facing major developments and challenges, many of which place increasing demands on planning. Examples include rising local and global environmental burdens, socio-spatial injustices, transitions in technology, longer production and distribution chains, crises of representative democracy, globalization of culture and the economy, migration due to war, the ageing of the population, employment shortages and energy poverty. These developments and challenges not only add to the complexity of planning and its longstanding quest for better coordination between planners and stakeholders, they also call for longer-term thinking, new planning processes and innovative methods.

Under conditions of substantial and rapid change, traditional planning instruments and tools are often insufficient to tackle such developments and challenges and are sometimes unfit for processes of urban and regional transformation. They may be ineffective because they were designed for situations of stability (Schön 1971), certainty and reasonable clarity regarding the problems to be addressed (Christensen 1985; Forester 1993). Contemporary cities and regions do not always satisfy these criteria. As a consequence, planners are searching for new approaches which could give a sense of what could be appropriate and necessary, to contrast the negative effects of change and to devise positive action (Albrechts 2017).

The 2009 UN-Habitat Global Report on Human Settlements (UN-Habitat 2009) provided evidence that planning systems in a surprising number of countries have changed very little since the 1970s (Mazza 2010;). One of the key contemporary challenges for planning in this respect is to critically analyse what type of planning

approaches are best suited for dealing in innovative, emancipatory and transformative ways with the problems and challenges that developing and developed societies are currently facing.

Command-and-control planning (Healey 1995; Motte 2006), employed during the post-war era, was primarily concerned with maintaining existing the social order rather than challenging and transforming it. This type of planning was more concerned with pragmatic negotiations around the 'immediate' in a context of the seeming inevitability of market-based forms of political rationality (Haughton, Allmendinger, and Oosterlynck 2013). The foundations of statutory planning practices are still based on similar foundational principles. Command-and-control planning approaches gave less attention to the development of new visions of the future and 'imagining the impossible'.

Despite a rhetorical commitment to inclusivity, perceptions of diversity were limited, thereby leading to the exclusion of certain groups (Watson 2007). Even in places where the nature of plans has changed, the basic principles of the regulatory system have tended to remain the same (CEC 1997; Watson 2007). Indeed, most statutory planning is marked by the predominance of a technocratic logic where decision-making is presented as a matter of expert knowledge rather than political consideration (Booher 2008; Motte 2006; Swyngedouw 2010), resulting in the search for technical solutions to the practical and physical problems of the city. This then leads to a preoccupation with collecting and analysing data more scientifically and extensively.

The interpretation of traditional statutory plans in terms of form and content (legal certainty, comprehensive, detailed, etc.) is often a negation of change, dynamics, uncertainty. This means that they soon become outdated, are often utopian, not based on sufficient and correct data. In a similar way, they barely consider the resource or time implications or the practicalities of implementation. They often force actors to make decisions far in advance. This represents a type of planning that claims to have the knowledge, technical skill, and thereby also the power to steer the development of places. Actions, policies become more rational, decisions more principled, and the future subject to human control. The outcome represents an instituted order, a local law. It aims to provide legal certainty by suspending alternative ways of interpretation. In this way, it fails to capture the dynamics and tensions of relations coexisting in particular places (Albrechts 2015). This is done through a focus on carefully stage-managed processes with subtly but clearly defined parameters of what is open for debate while suspending alternative ways of interpretation. As these very carefully orchestrated processes are mainly in favour of groups with access to power, they force concerned and politically engaged citizens and community groups to create their own informal deliberative and democratic spaces (Albrechts and Balducci, 2013; Legacy 2016; Albrechts et al, 2019).

The rise of neoliberalism as a hegemonic urban narrative has privileged issues of urban and regional competitiveness, mainly through the subordination of social policy to economic policy, which has resulted in more elitist forms of partnerships and networks (Jessop 2000; Allmendinger and Haughton 2009). City and regional governments have been lured into adopting more entrepreneurial styles of planning to enhance city and regional competitiveness, which is a cause for serious concern given the nature and scale of structural problems and challenges mentioned above (Cerreta et al 2010; Healey 1997a,b; Young 1990, 2000).

Future

Some of the major challenges which need to be addressed in contemporary and future planning practices are related to the uneven distribution of power, the networks of control and influence, and wide social and spatial injustices (Žižek 2006). These challenges cannot be tackled by means of traditional discourses and approaches, more market mechanisms, more technology or more modelling. Neither can they be tackled by privileging economic growth, vested interests and outdated practices. A critical debate is needed which fundamentally questions the political and economic processes on which planning is based as well as a wider search for new paradigms and practices (Allmendinger and Haughton 2010; Albrechts 1999, 2004, 2013; Albrechts et al 2019; Moulaert et al 2017; Sager 2013).

Starting a critical debate about the processes underlying planning and searching for new paradigms and practices are the central aims of this special issue. To initiate the discussion, leading planning scholars were specially commissioned to offer their opinions. The result is a set of articles which provides a rich collection of ideas about the future prospects and directions for planning theory and practice in Europe. We were delighted that so many scholars with different academic perspectives accepted our invitation to contribute to the special issue (at relatively short notice) and we are equally delighted with the result.

Our contributors were asked to consider a set of indicative questions about the future of planning in the medium and long-term. What are the key societal challenges which planning and planners will face in the future and how can (and should) planning and planners respond? Are new objectives or practices for planning required? Is systemic change of planning necessary, useful and desirable? How can planning and planners be more ambitious in achieving their goals? Are there opportunities for planning/planners to develop and adopt new creative approaches and/or practices? The contributions reflect a variety of approaches, perspectives and opinions. While the contributions do not all address the same questions or adopt the same structure or focus, they offer a wealth of ideas and directions which we believe deserve further attention and reflection among planning scholarship and practice.

The first contribution to the special issue is from Benjamin Davy, Meike Levin-Keitel and Franziska Sielker whose focus is on plural rationalities in planning theory. Their contribution outlines two approaches to help planners navigate these rationalities. The first approach asserts that plural rationalities are inevitable and that planners should listen and respond to multiple rationalities. The second approach, on the other hand, asserts that planners should make clear and reasoned choices about which worldview, rationality, or bias they wish to follow and pursue.

In the second contribution, Simin Davoudi presents a conceptual framework of prefigurative planning, based on ideas of prefigurative politics, or prefigurativism, which can be described as a way of engaging in social change activism that seeks to bring about transition by 'planting the seeds of the society of the future in the soil of today's' (Raekstad & Gradin, 2019: 3). Davoudi's article contends that prefigurative planning represents a call for optimism and a return to a utopianism, not in the sense of choosing specific utopias, models or ideals but rather in the sense of starting a process of fundamental questioning and setting out alternatives for the current situation.

Kristina Grange's article focuses on the antidemocratic trends and threats to planning, and potential responses to them. Grange asserts that critical questions connected to

human rights, women's rights, and racial, sexual and religious discrimination are being silenced. Her article considers what this silence means for critical planning theory and practice. Grange's view is that standing united against antidemocratic threats is a crucial response. The planning profession needs to acknowledge its contribution to plans that have not delivered desirable futures for all and start a journey towards new and alternative paths to more democratic futures.

In the next contribution, Patsy Healey calls on planning to reach out beyond established disciplinary and professional boundaries to seek common causes. She sees a stronger role for planning in mapping out newly emerging practices, highlighting and evaluating promising experiments and providing well-grounded, careful critiques of existing practices where they are unfair, unsustainable and/or undemocratic. Planning, she contends, needs to give closer attention to understanding and caring for the lived experience of citizens in different situations and show an appreciation of how to improve life chances across the globe.

Jean Hillier's article addresses alternative perspectives of seeing and thinking about the world, and identifying new modes of thinking and acting. Drawing on artistic expression as a way of uncovering new perspectives to see and think about the world, Hillier seeks to stimulate discussion about the creation of new or reconfigured concepts, institutions and practices. In doing so she aims to find non-Western-oriented approaches to planning in non-European contexts. Hillier's contribution asserts that artwork not only provides new ways to experience modes of thinking and acting, it also helps to discover a multiplicity of possible worlds lying dormant in people's perceptions.

Kristian Olesen's contribution focuses on the political legitimacy of planning and making planning relevant again. Regaining the political legitimacy of planning, Olesen asserts, represents one of the key challenges for planning at present, particularly since losing political support after the global financial crisis around 15 years ago. In his contribution he argues that planning can make itself relevant again by addressing the most prominent challenges for contemporary urban areas, such as the current energy crisis which demands a rapid transition to renewable energy sources. Spatial planning, he argues, can and should play a key role in supporting the sustainable energy transition by identifying appropriate spaces of production and building support for these production facilities among local communities.

Stefano Moroni, in his contribution, advocates greater attention to rediscovering the importance of plans and developing new ideas, skills and techniques across the wide range of instruments that are available to planners. Distinguishing between planning and the plan, Moroni identifies the latter as only one of the many tools that planners can employ. His article calls for a rediscovery of the importance of plans and of skills and techniques that are needs to develop them. In addition, he points to the need for new ideas, skills and techniques in planning regarding the development and use of regulatory instruments.

Petter Næss' contribution contends that the planning profession needs to develop new discourses to address the current crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and social inequality. Arguing that planning strategies and discourses currently pay too little attention to these crises, Næss calls for the planning profession to develop a stronger counter-discourse. Scenarios and alliance-building with stakeholders sharing similar causes can be helpful in this respect. At the same time, planners

should be mindful of the difficulties and limitations of planning for sustainability under current societal conditions.

The contribution by Luca Bertolini considers the nature of and opportunities for a paradigm shift in planning which moves beyond current thinking on mobility. The emphasis of this new paradigm is not on facilitating or even managing mobility but rather on a much more diverse set of goals. Bertolini contends that developing and demonstrating how such a paradigm could be operationalized requires both envisioning and disruptive experimentation with active involvement from professionals, policy-makers and citizens. Envisioning and experimenting should be seen as closely interconnected: the former giving direction and purpose to the latter, and the latter creating insights for the former.

In their contribution to this special issue Husar et al provide an outline of the challenges for the planning profession from the perspective of young planning academics. Arguing that the demands on planners are increasingly complex, their article identifies how young planning academics can be better prepared for the future planning challenges that they are likely to face. Husar et al set out a list of core capacities for future planning professionals and academics, and a framework for the future planning education based on more sustainable and people-centred principles.

Bringing our special issue to a close, a concluding essay by Charles Hoch provides his personal commentary and reflection on the other ten commissioned articles.

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