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“Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee”*: giving voice to planning practitioners

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Introduction

Planning schools follow a more or less similar path in educating young practitioners as true guardians of “public interest.” Although planning theory and education define certain ideal roles for planners along this path (e.g. provider of equal access to urban services, distributor of rights to the city, facilitator, negotiator, reflective practitioner, mediator, decision-maker), the actual role of the practicing planner is shaped by the changing contemporary conditions of political economy. We often describe these as neoliberalism, market-led urban development, opportunism, entrepreneurialism, consumerism, financialization, and so on. The rules of the game in the city are defined by these forces, which influence not only the main field of action in planning, but also the experiences of planners in practice. While planning students are taught to be the guardians of the public interest, in the face of the power relations that are shaped by these dynamics, planners usually lack the power to fulfill that role, which surely frustrates them (Forester, 1982).

The gap between academic and practitioner understandings of practice, as well as the challenges faced in planning education, have been the subject of several different studies in planning (Balducci & Bertolini, 2007; Bertolini et al., 2012; Hurley et al., 2016; Innes de Neufville, 1983). The more the gap has widened between how academics perceive the action field of planning and the true reality, the more alienated and even politicized the planning practitioner has become (Penpecioglu & Tasan-Kok, 2016). Ongoing work (Tasan-Kok & Oranje, 2017) shows that, despite the challenges, there exist “boundary-pushing practitioners” around the world who explore new planning practice methods following their own coping mechanisms, activism and creativity to get around barriers and problems. It is these people that are the subject of this *Interface*. As you will discover from reading their reflections collected here, their modes of practice offer something from which we can and must learn.

In this *Interface*, I bring together essays that each offer a critical reflection on the major challenges faced by planning practitioners. I was particularly interested in the coping mechanisms developed by practitioners to deal with major challenges to their profession, such as authoritarianism, neoliberalism, informality, crime, fragmentation and transition. Taking a constructive stance, it is my intention to show that we can learn from these coping mechanisms, and that there is a need for what they can teach us about new methods, instruments and ways of thinking. The invited authors, all practicing planners from different backgrounds, professional stances and career paths, were asked to write a specific reflection on the learning practices that they consider should be included in planning education.

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In this way, *Interface* aims to provide a small window into the practitioners' world, but rather than making an interpretation of their methods in dealing with the challenges faced in practice, the intention is to let them speak freely about who they are, what they do, how they cope and how they try and make change possible. This is not intended as a collection of works representing different types of planners or their reflections, but rather an assemblage of evocative pieces written by reflective practitioners from different parts of the world, namely Belgium, Brazil, Israel, the Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden and Turkey. The contributors all face different challenges, different contexts, and different fields of action in their professional lives, but all are passionate about their work. They come from different backgrounds, both educational and professional, and include municipal planners, academics, representatives of professional organizations, private sector consultants and social planners, and employees of policymaking organizations. What unites them is their desire for social and environmental justice. They reflect on the reality in their own ways of fulfilling this dream through societal engagement, activism or simply by doing their jobs "differently". All of them are seeking a professional identity and are looking to reflect on what their role should be in urban policymaking, just as all have dynamic career trajectories with changing positions in the profession between disciplines, sectors, organizations and geographies. This *Interface* aims to share their experiences with planning scholars and practitioners; I am inspired by them, and offer them all my heartfelt thanks for taking part in this small experiment.

Urban planning may be one of the few professions that continuously searches for identity and definition of the field for its professionals. While there is a body of literature explaining how planning theoreticians and educators perceive the role of the planner (Albrechts, 1991; Ng, 2014; Siemiatycki, 2012), the voice of the practicing planner is barely heard, aside from John Forester's work (Forester, 1982, 1988, 1999, 2013), which is perhaps the most prominent example of bringing practitioners' voices to the fore, and a few recent studies with that particular aim (Fox-Rogers & Murphy, 2016). Despite the more or less similar educational principles and ethics taught in planning schools around the world, there is a vast diversity in the challenges faced in the field of planning that go beyond the imagination of planning schools (Tasan-Kok & Oranje, 2017). As educators, we do not (or perhaps cannot), simply put, equip young practitioners with the right instruments to deal with these unforeseen challenges, in that the challenges faced are too vague, too dynamic, too difficult to grasp and perhaps require a different set of skills than those that we anticipate planning practitioners should have. We give them an idea about what they may face in practice and provide them with a broad range of instruments, but we expect them to learn how to use them in practice. As a result, some of them fail in time, some enjoy the grey zones, and some become really creative in bypassing challenges in their own innovative ways.

Furthermore, the context in which planning finds its field of action has changed with the shift from the Keynesian to the market-driven political economic model. As a consequence, planners face a dilemma in their changing roles. We do not explain it in this way of course, but we expect them to "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee," to become change makers, ideologists, community heroes, justice distributors, deliberative or reflective practitioners, dreamers, and so on. But their real role requires them to be well-equipped bureaucrats or technocrats of some sort, who are able to safeguard public interest through their professional technical, legal and design knowledge. The current action field of planning, for instance, requires contractual relationships between public and private sector actors in order to regulate the increasing and active involvement of the private sector. Thus, beyond the usual action field, which includes plans and strategies, zoning decisions, vision documents, master plans, and so on, the planner has to learn how to make good (e.g. fair, strong, risk-free) legal deals, or at least know how to influence the contracts that regulate the main principles of large-scale property-led projects.

While planning decisions are implemented through fragmented projects articulated through sometimes vague strategic plans, there are also new forms of regulation and planning. Legal documents, for example, aimed at regulating market involvement in urban development at different scales, require planners to negotiate technical detail, and perhaps to work together with people with technical knowledge who do not share the same ideals. A new planner is, on the one hand, expected to work like (and to become) a technocrat and a bureaucrat when handling the contractual agreements and rigid technical requirements associated with dealing with the private sector. On the other hand, a planner's job remains as someone who fights for the rights of the city. Turkish planner Deniz Kimyon in this *Interface* collection speaks about "the swing between hope and hardship" when describing the feelings associated with this dilemma, which, as Mee-Kam Ng (2014) argues, may lead to the creation of "system-maintaining" and "system-transforming" intellectuals in the production of space. So true!

I asked the contributors to this *Interface* the following questions: Who are you? What challenges do you face in the practice of planning according to your daily experiences in your job/country context? What coping/bypass mechanisms have you developed or created to deal with these specific challenges? What makes you "happy" in your daily practice with planning? How should the practices of the planner be transferred to planning education? What message would you give to planning educators based on your experience in practice? As you will read below, some common trends can be seen in the responses of the authors to these questions, some of which highlighted the similar trajectories of self-reflection on the profession. First of all, in particular, the contributing planners from the public sector emphasized that they had limited influence, being a "small cog in the machinery," or even sometimes "mere spectators," while others believe that their impact in political activism and social entrepreneurship may be greater if they are in possession of the appropriate adaptive and responsive skills. All agree, however, that planners have to be creative within the boundaries of bureaucracy if they are to bypass its challenges; that they need to take proactive roles in using planning as a political tool, or even become an activist within the system; and that they need to create room for maneuver and learn from it. Moreover, quite opposite to the elitist (almost narcissistic) self-perception of the modernist planners of the past, contemporary practitioners seem to believe in the importance of collaboration, co-production and negotiation with diverse public and private sector actors and social groups.

But how? They all believe in collective articulation, proactive attitude and change, but while some pursue this change using their practical experience in the field to improve dynamics within their workplace, others use their social skills and networks outside the workplace in a form of activism. Others simply seek new approaches to pursuing their societal goals within the private sector. Each of the contributors has developed coping mechanisms and innovative methods to deal with challenges they face in their practice. Each has social drives alongside their career ambitions, and each uses different methods in achieving their goals.

Swedish practitioner Sandra Oliveira e Costa explains how she maneuvered her way through the mechanisms of public planning with creative solutions to push her original ideas aimed at increasing justice and social equity. Despite feeling like "a small cog in the machinery" at times, she learned that by taking small proactive steps, it is possible to lead change. Turkish planner Deniz Kimyon, having a similar dream, found herself in an active fight in the practice of planning in which she called upon the laws and regulations as part of the Chamber of Urban Planners. With a similar drive and approach, Brazilian Higor de Souza Carvalho suggests that planning can be a political tool for social reform when made part of a collective struggle. Following a similar path, Belgian practitioners Maarten Desmet, Tim Devos, and Seppe de Blust believe that planners can look for "room to maneuver" in order to stimulate innovation and induce change by playing an intermediary role between diverse actors, responding



tactically to cracks in the decision-making processes or countering official discourses. Israeli practitioner Hila Lothan also expresses the importance of communication among different interest groups and the collaboration of diverse disciplines, while Dutch planner Jimme Zoete shows that being aware of the limitations of the system can help the practitioner find solutions within the system by playing with the rules. Likewise, South African practitioner Peter Ahmad believes that with the right set of skills and products, planners can replace rigid “blueprint” planning.

I find it highly motivating and energizing to read these thought-provoking reflections, and I hope you will share my enthusiasm.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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Dealing with segregated cities and identity crisis

Sandra Oliveira e Costa

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Getting a job and an identity crisis

My educational background is in sustainable development, physical and human geography, with a focus on urban planning, migration studies and ethnic conflict. A passion for environmental and social equality issues has brought me into contact with various activist and civil society groups. These experiences have awakened my interest in the issue of citizen participation in urban planning.

After a short period gaining experience freelancing in citizen dialogue processes I started work at the city planning authority in a major Swedish municipality. I was still the editor of a critical anthology about citizen dialogue when I started the job on how to raise social sustainability issues in the planning process. The transition from being a critical student and activist to a public sector bureaucrat representing an establishment I had long been critical of resulted in my first identity crisis. Today I work as a research assistant within spatial planning, and I am grateful for the experience of having been a planner at a public authority.

I have been taught that all actions are political. While this might be true in theory, and quite possibly in practice, it could be potentially paralysing for a practitioner to become absorbed in every single issue at work, thinking that every action might have a decisive outcome. Planners are supposed to solve problems so there is no time to be paralysed. We need to pick our battles, but how do we know which battle is worth fighting for?

How to know what is worth fighting for

One of the toughest parts of the job at the city planning authority was being able to identify which aspects to focus on in order to create a more just society. Planning is often about negotiating between conflicting interests and trying to reach an agreement between stakeholders and civil groups that want to occupy the same space for different purposes, so many issues are at stake in legally outlining land use.

One of my key roles was to develop social impact assessments, and the central challenge was to identify how to fulfil wishes and needs of different groups, for example when occupying a share of



a public space for the sake of building a kindergarten. My field of interest was about diminishing socio-economic housing segregation in the city, but it is rather difficult to identify how details in a small-scale plan could potentially impact greater patterns of segregation in the city.

I often found it difficult to be sure which details in planning were most effective to prioritise in order to fulfil the municipality's vision of creating a just city. It can be a deflating experience to feel like a small cog in the machinery, unable to incite the revolutionary change you dreamed about as a student; however, it is dangerous to think that the work you are doing is not important. It is when you think your actions do not matter that big mistakes occur that could potentially affect people dramatically.

My identity crisis was partly provoked by the development of a greater understanding of the civil servant role, the planning system, and their limitations. I understood that a number of civil servants are actively promoting social equality by the means they can access, and I became disappointed that during my education there was not much focus on this. I began to think that some of the academic research on planning was unconstructive and preoccupied with formulating conspiracy theories, so that any action, plan or solution that came from the public sector might appear good for society on the surface, but was merely a shroud hiding a neoliberal agenda. Coming from the leftist activist community, these thoughts made me feel like a sinner. I am not sure whether this change in perspective came through greater understanding of the civil servant role and current planning dynamics, or because I lost hope that we can contribute to positive social change when we are restrained by the dominant economic system.

The most important issue almost slipped through my fingers

The most important issue to arise during my time at the City Planning Authority would have passed me by if I had not actively involved myself in it. In 2015 the city was commissioned to find suitable places to localise housing for refugees. This was a period in which more refugees than ever before entered Sweden in a limited time. There was already a severe housing shortage in the country, and society had to take on special measures to accommodate the new inhabitants. Temporary building permits were to be approved for the cause.

When I saw the first draft of proposals on where to locate the housing units, I was astonished by the distribution of them within the city. The majority were proposed in areas with low-income and where a high share of foreign-born inhabitants reside, which would continue to build on deeply rooted patterns of economic and ethnic housing segregation. I thought that a better solution would be to locate the housing units in the highly segregated richer areas of the city to help reduce, rather than deepen, overall segregation levels. Traditionally, it is harder to build rental housing in owner occupied residential areas, but since regulations were loosened for temporary housing within this target group, there was a great opportunity to build for groups that are normally underrepresented in these areas.

Together with a colleague I analysed the situation and highlighted arguments in the city's vision and budget goals before approaching our boss and other civil servants working on the issue in the hope of lifting the question to a strategic level. As we were not officially supposed to be working on this issue we were told not to engage with it any further, but at least we raised the question and provided our colleagues with arguments. We knew others had the same standpoint and we hoped that they would continue the work.

The proposal that the city administration made public half a year later outlined that the housing units were to be built in the richest areas of the town, and the authorities argued that they worked to create a more equal city. I am sure this change was the sum of many people's effort, both politicians and civil

servants, so I am not giving too much weight to the intervention of me and my colleagues. Still I am satisfied that I did not remain passive when I felt that an intervention could contribute to something so fundamental. I regard it as the most important action during my time at the planning authority.

The public's response was disappointing. Even though many favoured the plans, some of the reactions were among the most outrageous and hostile I have known in Sweden. The aggressive response made me reassess whether it is smart to try to combat segregation this way, given the potential dangers for new residents. It also made me reflect on how authorities should handle public participation in these cases and how to handle dangerous predispositions by inhabitants.

A coping strategy against in-house segregation and the freedom of autonomy

At the city planning authority I felt frustrated that planning against segregation is such a slow process and how homogenous the planning sector in Sweden is in terms of race, ethnicity and class. I reflected on how social norms and codes replicate a homogenous work force and wondered whether the planning sector itself was reproducing segregation in the labour market, while trying to decrease segregation by urban design.

In an attempt to counter this situation I started an initiative in 2016 with architect Ahmad Alaydi called Arkitektur Språkcafé, which aims to open up the planning sector. Arkitektur Språkcafé is a language café based on an exchange between newly arrived foreign and established Swedish professionals in the field of urban development. The café offers the opportunity to practise the language that is needed within our profession while waiting for residence permits, language courses and jobs. Professional networking is important, and the purpose is to build contacts and practice branch-specific language and learn about the urban development profession in Sweden.

In June 2016, Arkitektur Språkcafé was awarded the Stockholm Association of Architects yearly prize the "Golden Room", for making Stockholm more dynamic and contributing to cooperation that breaks down hierarchies. The award clarified that many people want to, and in fact do contribute towards change.

This kind of initiative gives space for creativity. Even though I understand the need for bureaucracy, I retain an urge to step outside rigid bureaucratic structures to discover new possibilities and different ways to bring about change. My life balances my job with engaging in activities in my spare time around issues of importance that I am passionate about.

Preparing students to become practitioners

Through these experiences, I would like to share three themes that I feel are important to highlight in planning education. Firstly, it is important for planners to be strategic in their actions. Being one small cog in the machinery, it is important to be able to distinguish between routine tasks and those issues of real importance to you where you would like to trigger change. By understanding which the important battles are, it is hopefully possible to avoid exhaustion. Secondly, planners should remain constructive in their criticism. Students should be taught to understand and distinguish between theory and practice, because the complex realities of the job mean it is more challenging to implement urban planning than to criticise it. Practitioners want to have input from the research community, but routine criticism that lacks insight can make collaboration difficult and reduce the levels of trust and interest amongst practitioners in the advice offered by academics. Thirdly, there are limits to the impact of civil servants as part of a bureaucracy. Some decisions need to come from politicians. Encourage students



to be politically active outside the workplace to be able to affect parts of the planning dynamics that they are passionate about. We need more politicians with creative ideas that take brave decisions so that planners can get the prerequisites to work for just cities.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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The road taken

Hila Lothan

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There are many roads and paths in the practice of planning as a multi-disciplinary profession. In this paper I will share my own path, which has led me, after different stations, twists and turns, to work as a strategic planner in the public sector. From every station along the path arose different opportunities and challenges that shaped my world view and helped me to cope with the next step.

My path started in architectural studies at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, where, almost unknowingly, I dealt with the urban realm from a critical perspective. While in the studio I worked on substantial social and political questions; I also worked in architecture firms, doing mainly presentations and graphics. There I witnessed the daily practice of an architecture firm, and also the fragility of the labor market. This was the time of the 2008 global recession, and the firm I was working in downsized from ten employees to only four. As a student I had little to lose, but it was still difficult to see people with families and mortgages being sent home.

My graduation project won first prize in a competition for Most Sustainable Project. The competition was sponsored by a major real estate company in Israel and I was offered a position there when I graduated. I worked as an architect in the sustainability department, which promoted an organizational transformation and internalized sustainability policy as part of the company's agenda. There I witnessed the prominence of entrepreneurial conduct, which is geared towards maximizing profit. The outcome is twofold: the planners that were commissioned received a low fee for their professional services and had limited influence over the process and final outcome – and the neighborhoods were designed as “products”, detached from the local context, duplicated nationwide and marketed as the Israeli middle-class dream (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Neighborhood as a product – the neighborhoods were marketed as the Israeli middle-class dream. Source: The author.

The combination of this and the realization that I needed more hands-on experience led me to work once again in an architecture firm, focusing on mixed-use and housing projects. There I witnessed the challenges of small private architecture firms as they struggle daily to find more projects in a competitive market. Since the market is so competitive, big companies and public institutions are able to lower the fee in a way that coerces the firm to minimize the planning process and sometimes even to recycle ideas. During these years I was particularly interested in the relationship of buildings to the urban fabric, and less in the architectural design. That made me realize that I wanted to focus on urban planning and I decided to integrate my daily practice with advanced academic studies.

As a Master's degree student in the Department of Geography and Human Environment at Tel Aviv University, I joined the Laboratory for Contemporary Urban Design, headed by Tali Hatuka. The lab aims to bridge academia and practice, focusing on residential typologies, city-industry relationships, and planning methodologies. Working in the lab as a researcher taught me two main things: the joy of working as part of a team, and the need to critically think about the urban realm to challenge existing conceptions. My thesis examined nine new neighborhoods in three ethnically mixed cities in Israel. Surprisingly, despite their morphological and geographical differences, they all share a common pattern, which I termed "distinct space". The term describes a multi-dimensional separation, achieved through physical detachment, social exclusion and conceptual differentiation. It is based on negating the physical, social and symbolic elements of the city, as the neighborhood is perceived as negating the city (old versus new, random versus organized, homogenous versus heterogeneous). I had interviewed planners from the public and private sectors and discovered the different forces that shape the urban development and create "distinct space".

These exclusionary neighborhoods, together with what I had observed in the private sector, stand in sharp contrast to the academic discourse that emphasizes diversity, connectivity and social inclusion.

Therefore, deciding to go into the public sector upon graduation was a natural choice. I was looking for a position in a municipal planning department known for its integrity and professional conduct, and which cherished the public interest over entrepreneurial gain. This brought me to the city of Holon, located in the inner ring of the Tel Aviv metropolitan area, and to my current position as the head of the long-term planning department. The department is in charge, among other things, of the master plan for the future development of the city (2030), as well as preservation and urban regeneration plans. In light of my past experience I have developed some principles that I try to promote in my daily practice, mainly: it is crucial to regenerate the existing urban fabric, as opposed to just developing new neighborhoods, in order to avoid social and physical gaps within the city. I consider public spaces (e.g. streets, parks, squares) to be the city's generators, places for activities, encounters, belonging, and uniqueness. Overall, from my point of view, the city is an assemblage, and therefore each planning process should bring together diverse disciplines.

This agenda for providing public interest, social connection/cohesion, and collaboration, poses daily challenges, especially when different interests collide. For instance, developing a public space with some benches next to a residential area often entails opposition from some of the residents, concerned that teenagers would gather below their balcony in the late hours of the night. Residents do want public spaces (that also raise their property value) but do not want "others" to use them. Another possible collision occurs between the professional level and the political level, which must display immediate results to the public before the next elections. For example, urban regeneration processes demand extensive funding in welfare, education programs and public spaces – areas that do not generate revenues and whose influence cannot be witnessed immediately. De facto, urban regeneration plans are implemented mainly using private investments and focus on housing development. In addition, residents look forward to these plans and expect substantial change in a short period of time. However, these plans pose a vision for the neighborhood's future development, and their implementation depends on many external factors including market forces and transportation plans for example. In order to navigate between these different actors, interests and hopes, the planner needs to speak in different languages, translating the professional discourse which can be sometimes abstract, to the general public, policymakers, private investors, and sometimes even to one's own colleagues.

Facing these challenges I have developed some methods that help me to implement my agenda. First, addressing the need to speak in different "languages" with different actors that hold contradicting interests, I try to explain the rationale of the plan, the way it serves the public interest. I aim to be upfront and to say things "as they are", even when I know that the person listening (whether it is the mayor, a resident or a developer) will not be pleased. For example, we have identified a unique urban fabric in the city, to be defined as a neighborhood for conservation, which means a limit on future building development rights. We have since strongly stood by our decision, although it was challenged by politicians, residents and developers, who look at their own interests and not at the overall urban picture.

Second, long-term planning is about large-scale plans, overall visions and extensive resources. Sometimes it is easier to break it up into detailed and small-scale plans that are more easily accepted and implemented. By doing so, the plans simultaneously address the long-term vision and short-term actions, step by step.

Third, working in the public sector requires constant contact with people: colleagues from different departments, the central government, residents, developers and private sector planners. In order to carry out a project it is necessary to create a coalition, to recruit people that share your planning agenda and to work as a team in a steady schedule and framework. This enables mustering different resources as well as gaining a wider perspective, and many partners that share the success. For instance, when

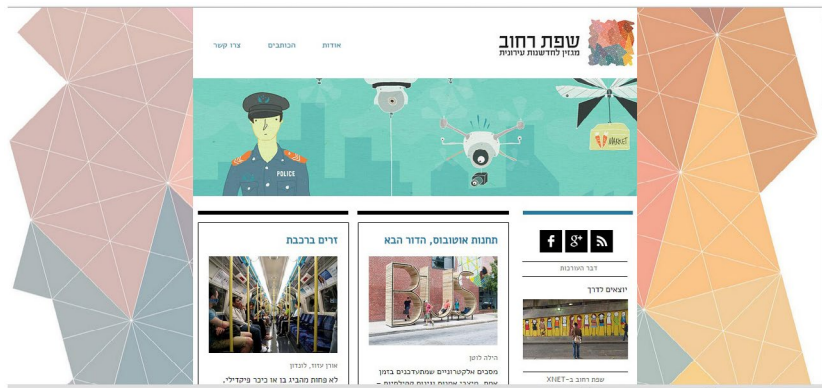


Figure 2. A screen shot of *Street Language* magazine. Source: www.stlanguage.com.

regenerating Holon's main commercial street the Ministry of Transportation funds traffic changes, residents share the responsibility for the upkeep of communal gardens, and the store owners must renovate their street fronts according to pre-determined standards.

Lastly, working in a municipality involves much bureaucracy and a tiresome routine. Dealing with many projects simultaneously does not leave you much time for innovation and risk-taking. To cope with this I have initiated, with two friends, an online magazine called "Street Language" (Figure 2). The magazine focuses on urban innovation, voicing the opinions of policymakers, planners, architects, designers, artists and community leaders. Its main aim is to act as an intersection of knowledge and practice, exploring new projects, urban initiatives, collaborations, strategic thinking, and innovative ways to re-think the urban environment. Working on the magazine opens up many opportunities for collaborations and allows me to stay up to date with ideas and projects around the world.

To conclude, every professional station added another layer to my understanding of the planning field and the forces that shape urban space. The different experiences – as an architect, a researcher, a student, a planner – incrementally created my professional knowledge and agenda. In a way, there are no short-cuts in this road to becoming a planner. The academic education provides essential tools for analyzing and producing policy papers and plans but eventually you must constantly enrich your knowledge and expand your expertise as part of your daily practice. Academia does discuss the existence of multiple agendas, but they remain theoretical until you witness them in practice. From my point of view this aspect is missing from planning education – the more practical side of planning, where you encounter multiple, and often contradictory, discourses. A significant part of the planning process is about convincing people and recruiting them to your cause, a daily craft that is often missing from planning education. Since planning is a multi-disciplinary field, the planner should gain diverse experience and constantly learn from practice. Therefore, planning education should always include practical projects that engage students with different actors from the real world, forcing them to step outside the academic comfort zone into messy reality.

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Planning as a political tool for urban and social reforms

Higor Carvalho

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While São Paulo city is known as one of the biggest, richest and most dynamic urban centers in the global South, it is also a municipality where poverty, inequality, urban and social segregation live side by side. In this city at least 890,000 households (about 25% of the total) live in subpar conditions (slums, subpar and irregular plots and precarious tenant houses). I am no exception. When I was a child, my family used to be part of this group.

It was a surprise for me and my family that I did make my teenage dream come true: to be accepted as a student at the college reckoned by many as the most important one in architecture and urban planning in this country – the public University of São Paulo. I came to the university with the certainty that I wanted to become an urban planner – not an architect, specifically – I wanted to become a professional who could help to transform neighborhoods like the one where I, my family, and friends lived, and to help change the conditions of living of the most vulnerable people.

I remember the first time I became aware that political participation was a way to deal with these dreams and to achieve this goal. It was during college, reading a text for a class, about the history of urban planning. At that time some friends and I created a group to think and act on architecture and planning as political tools, working and learning with social movements for the right to adequate housing.

Eventually I was awarded a degree, bearing this complex background composed by consciousness of the urban and social reality regarding the living conditions in peripheral settlements (my personal history), critical and theoretical education in urban planning and production of space (learnt at college), as well as planners' political participation and the possibility of action (thinking and discussing with friends and social movements).

As soon as I was qualified I was invited by an important council member to be part of his team of advisors at the municipal parliament, working specifically on housing and urban policies. At that time the city was under the control of the right-wing party, so we were opposition from the left side. There I worked on many projects, especially on the resistance front against the social housing municipal plan. This plan would change many important principles of social policies, principles that were the victories of many actors from the Urban Reform Movement and the whole civil society in the last three decades, at least. I chose to detail this experience in this essay since it clearly illustrates all the factors

I wish to address: how planning can be a political tool by putting together different players in order to defend a public cause.

During the discussion of the Project of Law,¹ which dealt with the Municipal Housing Plan, an amendment from the Executive power² (then directed by a conservative and right-oriented party) subsidized by the political base of a council member proposed dangerous shifts in the law. These changes were meant to promote the reduction of minimum percentages allocated to social housing in social housing zones (a specific type of inclusionary zoning where any new construction must be a social housing building for poor families), probably in accordance with developers and landlords' personal interests. These shifts would create a potential loss of up to 30% of space dedicated to social housing. At the same time a provision was considered that would allow the property owner in social housing zones to build any other type of development, upon payment of a penalty assessed by the value of the property. This amount would be allocated to the Municipal Housing Fund. It would free the developer from the obligation to build social housing in these social housing zones, thus losing the most important contribution required under this social housing zones law: access to well-located areas in the city. This proposal had the support of a specific housing rights movement politically connected to the party that was then in power. This group had been promised that an empty industrial area would be transformed into a social housing zone, on which 5,000 houses would be built for them. This would meet the specific demands of this movement, which largely consisted of residents of a large favela in São Paulo.

Since I had uncovered this plan I was allowed by the left-wing leader council member to connect with other housing movements that would oppose the proposal, managing to block it and prevent it from being approved. During those months I was responsible for conducting political debates with the highest Secretariat members, and with that social movement, with people appearing in their hundreds during all those weeks, fighting for the law project to be passed. At that moment I confess I felt afraid for myself. However, in the last weeks, we got the support of left-oriented social housing movements, with whom we won this fight and, finally, this legal amendment was rejected by the newly elected mayor, from the left-wing party, in 2013. This showed me the importance of the political struggle in order to achieve the city we, as planners and social movements, want to build. Also, the importance of collective articulation in order to defend it and how planning itself can be a tool for this struggle.

After the left-wing party won municipal elections in 2012, I was invited to move from the city council to the municipal government, where I started working at the urban planning department on the new Municipal Master Plan, dealing with social housing zones in the city. It taught me an important lesson on how planning unfolds since the real city is much more complex than the isolated discipline of technical planning can foresee. There is no political-free technique. In the real city, actors from sectors outside the government (such as social movements, researchers, real estate developers, investors, and neighborhood associations) are really important players in the production of the space, and therefore must be considered. They are people with whom you must engage, think and have a political debate – taking their opinions into account in order to build a plan that could be good for all and especially for those in need.

Bearing this in mind, I would say that planning in the city has not proved to be easy, but, as a society (including activists inside and outside the government, professors, researchers, council members, professionals for community projects, and the mayor himself, who was sympathetic for this subject) we have achieved important victories. These include the increase of zones for social housing in the new master plan and the implementation of a mandatory budget for land purchase for social housing production. The new master plan resulted in a much better law than we had in the previous decade.



Months later I came back to the city council, invited by another important council member, working as an advisor on urban policies. With the council members' support, we made important contributions to the improvements of projects of law on urban and housing policies, always contacting and explaining to social actors what was happening and why they should be aware, as a way to avoid losses of rights.

Years later, since the Municipal Secretariat of Social Housing changed its composition, I had the honor of being invited by the new Secretary to be his assistant on a clearly left-oriented team. We have been dealing with the proposal of a new housing plan, which would propose a policy as diverse as are people's housing needs. It is a real pleasure to be a part of a team that defends and holds dear the same issues as you, a place where you do not have to defend the obvious. I have briefly written about these experiences in this essay in order to show how I deal with my profession: by believing in planning as a tool for social transformation and as a way of political struggle.

However, working inside the government presents difficulties with changes in the political administration – since in Brazil elections happen every four years – and risks regarding discontinuity of policies. In addition, it is important to say that our democracy is still very young – and facing what is going on in the Brazilian political scene nowadays shows that it is still very fragile – so this discontinuity has been even more frustrating nowadays. After the last *coup d'état* that happened in the Federal Government this year (2016), many social housing developments we were organizing were cancelled by the interim president. This review of social policy was justified by the economic crisis.

Where should planning go in this context? It is necessary to be clear and to have in mind where you came from, what interests you have and who is counting on you, in order not to be absorbed by these pressures and to keep doing the best you can, with creativity and strength.

Thinking about the planning educators' role, I would say that they should consider students' reality and background in order to teach (and to learn with them), trying to think together how planning resonates with their personal lives and the cities in which they live. In this way, planning should not be taught as a theoretical subject only, but as one that deals with the real city and its politics. Stimulating students to be part of public debates on urban projects, to conceive projects and plans inside communities, talking to local players and social movements, learning in real contexts and trying to create solutions with them could be a good way to prepare students for this struggle through planning.

What I stand for, as a planner and citizen, is not a personal cause. I am only one person from a big collective of strong people who fight for cities for all in this country, from whom I have learnt a lot! We are all part of a collective project of social and urban transformation, aiming to reach a more equal society and city. To get there, in my opinion, we must be optimists. Being an optimist is not being naïve. Being an optimist means that you can recognize all these limits, contradictions and conflicts you have to face and, still believe that, through your work and the work of others, people can live better and we can build a city for all.

Notes

1. In the Brazilian Parliament, before passing a Law, the author should write a "Project of Law". When it is approved by vote at the Parliament, it becomes a Law (known as a Bill in the US system).
2. Amendment from the local government.

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From activists to social entrepreneurs, and back?

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We (M.D., S.deB. and T.D.) have established an enterprise called Ndvr (short form of endeavour), reflecting our endeavour to practice social planning right after completing our studies. We are an Antwerp (Belgium) based office specialising in what we have termed “socio-spatial research”, as a means to pursue our mission of “increasing the social value of spatial projects”. We have developed the company over the last three years out of a shared interest in the social dimension of spatial planning and the increasing focus on co-productive approaches to address the gap between spatial planning or design practice on the one hand and socially innovative neighbourhood development on the other. M.D., educated as an architect, developed an interest in the social sustainability aspects of urban design and planning during his thesis research in Bhutan on the development philosophy of “gross national happiness”. S. de B. on the other hand is trained as a sociologist and, after having worked in local politics, developed an interest in spatial issues and subsequently completed a Master's degree in urban planning. T.D. studied architecture and urban design and was half way through his PhD in social geography (on participation in urban projects) when he met S.deB. and M.D. By starting up Ndvr, we have been exploring the viability of a practice specialising in the participatory aspects of urban planning and spatial transformation processes.

Over time the way we (Ndvr) frame participatory planning practice has changed significantly, along with the roles we adopt and the methods we deploy in our daily work. Specific local contexts, shifting coalitions and different types of assignments constantly challenge us to search for innovative approaches and rethink the professional role we want to pursue. In addition, as we remain involved in academia our research interests, teaching and writing feed into our practice and vice versa. Therefore we conduct a continuous co-productive and reflexive action research, exploring concrete opportunities to induce change. Reflecting on this, we will sketch out some of the most influential challenges which have defined our professional work over the last three years.

Assignments specifically focusing on the participatory and social dimensions of spatial development are strikingly scarce in Flanders. Rather, architecture or urban planning offices are increasingly expected to simply incorporate “participation” as part of their tasks in drafting plans or proposals, often with a very limited budget. Therefore, citizen involvement, seen as a tedious waste of time and resource, often becomes reduced to a pro forma, mere communicational efforts, conducted by architects or planners



who are not equipped or prepared to do so, or glossy communication experts. Therefore, responding to an urgent need to innovate in this area, we decided early on to consider Ndvr as an impact-driven social enterprise rather than a classical urban planning office.

Instead of haphazardly applying to tender, we started out by engaging in several business-modelling exercises, seeking professional coaching to explore the different possible ways to run our business and delineate specific services. Based on these exercises we have created a way of working which considers assignments as shared learning processes: knowledge creation occurs in coalition with local actors and the input and direct involvement of the client is seen as essential. Moreover, we aim to view every new assignment as a means to create new products and innovations. Academic work plays an important role in building and maintaining credibility. In line with our scientific interests and backgrounds and a process-oriented research agenda, we therefore work on a consultancy-based model and have established ourselves as a cooperative enterprise.

Let us illustrate this with some examples. After setting up our company, we quickly and pro-actively engaged in a complex and multi-layered project, namely the planning process of a former slaughterhouse site in the neighbourhood of Dam, Antwerp. We were approached by a local neighbourhood committee who wanted us to support them in their ambition to be more directly involved in the early stages of the planning process. This pro bono project provided the necessary freedom and opportunities to explore what kind of role our practice could play in relationally complex neighbourhood development projects. We worked in close cooperation with both the city and local neighbourhood actors, exploring the potential of playing an in-between role. We consider "Den Dam" as a "playground" to invent and test strategies and instruments for socio-spatial research in a hands-on way, building up a reputation as an office and creating a portfolio from scratch.

With the Dam as a reference, and much to our surprise, we quite rapidly managed to win our first tenders. We conducted a research project for the city of Antwerp where we developed a new way of approaching issues of safety in public space by developing a set of very concrete tools and manuals. Directly involving different types of municipal actors in a learning process, ranging from police officers to social workers and designers, we expanded the way "safety" was perceived in this assignment, avoiding a simplistic focus on nuisance to a more interpretive focus on the subjective impact of specific design decisions or social interactions in public space. In a neighbourhood development project in Ghent (Muide-Meulestede), the assignment to construct a vision for the neighbourhood was used as a lever to co-productively develop three alternative planning instruments, each suggesting an alternative organisational model in relation to the way city and neighbourhoods could organise themselves in response to future challenges. In a third project in Genk we were asked to revitalise the realisation of a masterplan for the Sledderlo neighbourhood, strategically putting to use a trajectory of process-guidance as a means to create time and space for experimentation.

In each assignment we aim to identify "room to manoeuvre" in order to stimulate innovation and look for opportunities to induce change. We believe mobilising different forms of collective learning can enlarge this "room". Through these different projects we discovered that a knowledge-research driven way of working works to our advantage to claim a relatively independent position, construct new coalitions, and strategically react to changing conditions. Instead of drafting masterplans, facilitating hearings or writing up recommendations based on participatory workshops, we seek to use our position as planners to support collective neighbourhood mobilisations, introduce platforms for discussion, bridging administrative borders or developing tools to use local knowledge.

Our way of working is very much influenced by our personal engagement in several civil urban movements, where we have developed an attitude of tactically responding to cracks in decision-making

processes or countering official discourses. Therefore, we consider our work as fundamentally political, which does not have to be considered as inherently incompatible with running a successful professional practice. While walking a fine line between planning and politics is certainly not a new dilemma within planning theory, we believe there is a need to establish new types of practices, which put this balancing act at the very centre of their professional mission. As an independent researcher-entrepreneur one can actually claim a surprising amount of professional freedom.

Pursuing change requires taking a proactive stance outside of commissioned assignments. This is necessary in order to safeguard the necessary space for experimentation to constantly adapt new skills and ways of working to deal with specific power structures or institutional contexts. Therefore, we allocate part of our revenue from commissioned assignments towards non-profit, self-initiated projects. For instance, when the news was announced that a modernist high-rise building in the centre of Antwerp, currently the local police headquarters, was up for sale to the highest bidder, we responded instantly. We formed a coalition with other engaged citizens, local organisations, project developers, lawyers and architects to explore the possibility of collectively buying and co-developing this iconic building in order to provide affordable space in a prime location, enabling a dynamic diversity of users, with a focus on those organisations such as local cultural organisations or education facilities who often struggle to find suitable space in the regular real-estate market. We see such endeavours as an integral part of our DNA, allowing us to continuously question or reinvent our role within spatial processes.

The dynamic combination of the three perspectives addressed above – adapting a social-enterprise approach, mobilising coproduction and constantly looking for new ways to maximise our social impact – is how we aim to set our work apart from more mainstream practices. Ndvr is simultaneously a goal and a medium, shaping and engaging in co-productive action research and looking for opportunities to induce change in direct response to contemporary challenges in planning practice.

From our point of view – and our short working experience – we feel that contemporary planning education should more explicitly challenge students to “take a stance” and critically reflect on the variety of roles they can take up in society. Planners are equipped with the tools to shape our built environment and by doing so directly influence the well-being of future generations. Planning education has a responsibility to challenge students to think about the impact they would like to have during their professional careers: will they be profit-driven and make compromises for profit, or will they choose to be impact- and value-driven and always give priority to this impact which they aim to realise?

Moreover, in the twenty-first century planning context, students should be trained or at least prepared to engage in dialogue with local actors, stakeholders and ever more vocal civil society initiatives and mobilise local knowledge for the benefit of more than just planning outcomes. Developing dynamic and multi-layered coalitions, often mediating between formal actors and professionalising neighbourhood actors, is the crux in a co-productive era of city making. Lastly, we strongly feel that planning educators should not shy away from stimulating the entrepreneurial spirit, which does not necessarily contradict a social agenda. Neither does being an impact-driven professional practice or enterprise imply that you are not economically profitable. On the contrary, an impact-driven business model is more sustainable in the long term.

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How do we swing between hope and hardship?

Deniz Kimyon

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While the urban planning profession faces troubles within the hegemony of the neoliberal and authoritarian planning sphere in Turkey, still I harbor some hope. The consciousness I developed about the world came with a strong belief in public benefit, social equity and the quality of urban space, and I can attribute much of my awareness of these issues to a family tradition of activism. My father, who is an architect in a small town (Iskenderun), has been a source of much inspiration to me, having witnessed his long struggle for public benefit in the face of personal attacks and political objections. Despite the hardship, he has never given up fighting, and having this in the background throughout my undergraduate education in Urban and Regional Planning at Middle East Technical University (METU), fostered the development of my own political awareness. In short, my hope and ambition for activism was derived from this.

I am an urbanist, a PhD candidate and a research assistant at METU. While working to become an academic, I am also involved in the work of the Chamber of City Planners (CCP),¹ and the dominance of the mission of the CCP in my daily life has had a clear and obvious influence on this essay. Since 2014 I have been a board member of the Ankara branch of the CCP. Ankara is my context of action, as the city in which I live, where I conduct my research and where I strive for the future. In the CCP I am involved in monitoring contemporary planning services in Ankara, pursuing legislation changes related to urban planning and supporting judicial processes, preparing reports and briefings, and contributing to the organization of activities.

Internalizing public benefit

There is an increasing tension within the urban sphere as a result of capital- or political-led interventions, and planners are obliged to deal with such experiences while practicing planning. This sometimes causes distress and frustration.

For me, the way to deal with this frustration is to take part in the struggle by channeling my efforts through the CCP, which endeavors to support practitioners on principles of sustained public benefit and equity, setting and guarding the moral principles of this work, and resolving the problems that arise in the daily practice of city planning. These duties are legally and institutionally defined, and give the CCP responsibility over the planning community and its practices. Managing and acting as part of the CCP is a demanding calling and, in the face of urban politics, the critical and professional role of the CCP is crucial for the provision of public benefit.

The current political establishment is occupied mostly with (urban) space, and is evidently concerned with urban planning. The alliance between political power and capital reproduces itself through the (re)production of space. In Turkey the current authoritarian planning practices, and the state's counter response to increasing urban social movements, generate new responsibilities for the CCP. The significance of the CCP has thus become enhanced in recent years, stretching to mobilizing social action and producing counter-hegemonic discourses. I support fully the activities of the CCP, the backbone of which is built upon the monitoring of planning practices and political action.

A crisis of legitimacy

Most urban projects in Turkish cities are realized in cooperation with the private sector. Plans, as actual legal documents, are the major route to legitimizing and justifying capital accumulation processes in the interest of powerful groups. I deal with several issues in my role in the CCP that motivate me to maintain this professional support position.

The CCP examines the plans approved by municipalities and ministries, as well as the decisions of the cabinet related to urban space. It is here that I am involved in planning progress, but in a legal supervisory role. When the CCP encounters cases that go against the plans, we develop legal arguments to have these projects cancelled, working according to our main driving force: to protect the public interest. The planning practices against which the CCP raises objections and lawsuits include dispossession of public spaces and land expropriations. As a consequence, in approximately 90% of cases the courts decide in line with the decisions of the CCP, resulting in the cancellation of urban projects. As a result, the legitimization of the authority is shattered, and ultimately it is the field of legal struggle that serves as a major coping mechanism for us.

Being part of the CCP board, it must be pointed out that we do not always succeed in getting what we desire. We have experienced frustration on many occasions when destructive urban projects that were opposed by the CCP went ahead, despite a court decision cancelling them. In such situations, I feel like a mere spectator, and this feeling also arises when court rulings work too slowly against rapid development. Construction technologies are very fast, and while we wait for the court decision, projects can be completed. In these cases our actions, made on behalf of the public interest, do not come to anything.



Coping mechanisms and moments of hope through legal fights

While monitoring planning activities, I also come across highly challenging daily practices. Sometimes I need to analyze urban projects that are realized despite the lack of legal justification that lead implicitly to devastating spatial decisions with severe effects on public benefit and losses of cultural and natural values. Like me, many planners are frustrated by their daily encounters with illegality, injustice and political-economic interventions, but these frustrations motivate us to become part of more organized social actions, and to use the media. I feel very motivated when the court decides to cancel a plan to which the CCP has objected. This may be about the conservation of natural or historic assets or cultural values, interventions into public space, public benefit, risky technical or infrastructural projects, or the prevention of privileged building rights. The CCP's juridical position, supported by academic expert reports, weakens the legitimacy of unruly political economic interventions within urban development.

The Gezi social movement is a good example of how collective frustration can lead to a broader public response. The Gezi movement was actually a collection of local responses that spread across the country in May 2013 against the destruction of a public park in the center of Istanbul to build a commercial complex under the orders of the President. The CCP (Istanbul branch) was just one of the chambers that advocated the protection of the park, and objected to the redevelopment project and the revision of the existing zoning plan. Gezi Park became a symbol and a beacon of hope as public reaction grew spontaneously against all authoritarian policies.

Moreover, after the Gezi events we began to receive an increasing amount of support when calling for organized public activism at the CCP. It gives hope to see that ever since the Gezi Park protests, public awareness about urban planning problems has dramatically increased. Organized social responses are now common in urban areas, advanced by social movements that are themselves triggered by authoritarian and contradictory urban policies or speculative urban renewal projects. These projects, driven either by state-led agencies or the market, destroy existing socio-spatial patterns, and speculative interventions into these areas inspire urban movements. As a result, there is a recurring form of resistance in the city within the field of urban planning.

Disappointingly, the Council of State overruled the objections to the Gezi Park project in spring 2016, which was followed by a statement from the President saying, "No matter what, the project will go on." The image from the front cover of an opposition newspaper (*Birgun*) reads: "We buried the gas masks, but have not forgotten where we buried them", reminding the ruling authority that a new counter movement can be formed in reaction to any new state intervention in the city (Figure 1). For me, the swing between hope and hardship originates from here, as we find ourselves between the hope derived from social movements and our struggle, and the hardship grounded in authoritarianism.

Power derived from uneasiness

As you may observe, the uneasiness derived from injustice triggers my motivation. I choose to keep trying to defend the principles of both planning education and my professional organizational work, as I believe any attempt, either legal or social, may work to the advantage of our main principles. We should continue to be concerned about urban problems and unjust actions in the city that prevent the implementation of the principles of planning practice, as otherwise my profession, abilities, ideals and principles all become meaningless. As a result, I keep trying in different ways, and believe that education should be more devoted to enhancing an understanding of social struggle in urban space.



Figure 1. We buried the gas masks, but have not forgotten where we buried them... Source: *Birgun* newspaper, 13 May 2016.

If we teach students how to be part of organized action, how to channel urban social movements into place-making activities, and how to hold on to their principles and ethics, young planners may find their way and know how to act and decide in professional life, even if it may be very painful at times.

It is difficult, however, when discussing ongoing urban projects and property development with planning students, to tell them that what they learn in the university may not be applicable in practice due to the current political economic conditions that we are forced to endure in daily life. Planning students should be more conscious and sensitive to these kinds of political and economic drives during their education, while also improving their analytical skills and research methods, gaining a deeper spatial understanding and perception, and embracing critical thinking. The contemporary opportunity-driven approach in urban planning downgrades the planner to the level of a servant of capitalism, which is blinding. Urbanists can only overcome this blindness by becoming conscious of daily urban practices. I believe we need to focus on teaching this reality in planning schools if we are to create conscious and reflective planners.

Note

1. CCP is a professional chamber with legal authority granted by a constitutional decree and a law enacted in 1954. In other words, it is an association that is committed to working as a public institution for public benefit through supervision of the authorities.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.



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Struggles of collaboration: planning in practice where everyone plays a part

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For the last two and a half years I have worked as an urban planner at the engineering company Witteveen+Bos. It is my job to represent and combine environmental and social issues into one spatial/urban development plan. I work on zoning plans for wind energy and large infrastructural projects.

So how did I get into planning? In my final high school year I struggled in choosing a degree. I was fascinated by how both the brain and how buildings work. So, I was hovering between architecture, sociology and psychology/neurology. At one of the many university open days I had a spare hour. I decided to fill this hour by joining an introduction to environmental and infrastructural planning. As it appealed to both my interests I decided to go with this degree program at the University of Groningen. This program focuses on complex policy development and integrated decision-making with courses on multiple environmental subjects and planning procedures. It was here that urban planning grew to be my ambition, work and hobby at the same time.

Later, I went on with a Master's degree in the same discipline – an international degree with students from all over the world. While international students thought Dutch planning was planners' heaven, we soon learned that every system has its pros and cons. At the end of my studies I looked forward to encounter planning practice. Concepts such as complexity and participation were not new to me. Yet the practical implications were. Nowadays, having spent more than two years in Dutch planning practice I still need to adjust to the idea that even in such positively perceived planning contexts there are prevalent and fundamental challenges.

Challenges in the field of planning practice

In my short planning practice I have encountered two main challenges: limitations of representing stakeholders, and limitations caused by lack of knowledge on the importance of landownership in Dutch urban planning. For each I have developed different coping mechanisms.

Challenge 1: representation of stakeholders

Projects I work on are mostly led by a combination of governmental organizations. As a rule of thumb, these organizations are represented by one person in a project team and yet these organizations consist of more than 100 people. Apart from governments there is usually a private party (initiator), and

multiple consulting agencies involved. Next to that there are those who are more commonly referred to as stakeholders: local companies, citizens and non-governmental organizations.

In order to illustrate the challenge of stakeholder representation, I will use an example of a dilemma in one specific project; a wind farm project I work on has a project team consisting of a private initiator, two municipalities, one province, two national government agencies, and three consultancy firms (that is where I come in). With this team we are to realize a large wind farm, including 100 new turbines that will have a huge impact on the landscape. This has created resistance. The project team meets biweekly and discusses progress. Parallel to the project group there is a steering group, which consists of authorized representatives of the government agencies. This steering group meets monthly and is the body that can make binding decisions for the project. They expect to receive reports two weeks in advance.

During the process, the need arises to communicate to external stakeholders, especially local residents, prior to a formal decision, which will be taken in 8 weeks' time, about the project. The goal within the project group is common: convince inhabitants to participate and not send a motion against the decision. Yet the arguments differ: the government members want the arguments to be coming from the initiator ("it's their project"), but the initiator knows opposing parties might only be convinced by the project being a joint effort with the government. Both parties know that expressed common interest of the surrounding residents is essential for the continuation of the project. The initiator agrees to prepare a draft letter. The following process is set into motion:

- draft prepared by the initiator is sent to government organizations (7 weeks left);
- draft is checked by government organizations (6 weeks left)
- draft is converted to final (5 weeks left)
- final is sent to get consent for publication
- consent is given after minor change (4 weeks left)
- joint letter is sent to external stakeholders
- residents are given 2 weeks to reply (2 weeks left)
- just in time – phew! It is positive ... And the positive response is sent to the steering group.

To outsiders (and perhaps you!) this is bureaucracy. To me, it is internal stakeholder representation followed by external participation. My struggle is that "real" participation with external parties takes an extremely long time as there is already a "hidden" internal participation process that here I have called stakeholder representation. I find it challenging that we try to fit participation into a tight project management planning schedule. My coping mechanism is to speed up stakeholder representation by using methods to draw up "pain-points" and wishes, in order to skip the kind of drafting steps I discussed above. I also repeatedly ask for consent in advance and on which basis consent can be given. Digital applications concerning internal and external stakeholder representation will also help gain more time for real participation.

In my opinion the literature on participation is clear in theory, but lacks methods for an already complex planning framework. Perhaps planning theory thinks too little about stakeholder representation by calling it bureaucracy rather than internal participation. My message to educators would be to get students to think about the consequences and methods of planning that they would use to integrate participation. Think of yourself as a student. What could have helped you anticipate these kinds of challenges and prepare for them? Besides the inspiring literature on participation it seems evident that large projects prove to be complex enough in their internal participation. Thus, maybe by studying real cases students might find out how to integrate both processes.



Challenge 2: lack of knowledge on the importance of land ownership in urban planning

As I work in both infrastructure and wind farm projects, my projects tend to stretch over large geographical areas. This means projects cross multiple parcels of lands. According to EU regulations large projects are obliged to perform an environmental impact assessment (EIA) to study alternatives. However, they are not obliged to investigate land ownership alternatives as this would be seen as “unnecessary” spending of (public) funds.

An EIA provides environmental arguments for integrated decision-making in zoning plans. These zoning plans also contain an implementation paragraph in which they account for the feasibility of a project. While environmental alternatives are explicit in urban planning, financial and land ownership alternatives are not (in this stage of a project). This presents a challenge especially for public–private partnerships (PPPs). Private initiators are very aware of the challenges of multiple land ownership and the costs that come with this. Yet the Dutch planning system has little incentive for public parties to be aware of these challenges. At most it is a limiting condition.

To demonstrate my struggle I will present another example. Since the project is still in progress I will sketch a fictional yet representative episode. In the planning of a wind farm, 100 wind turbines need to be lined up both north to south and east to west to fulfill the wishes of the EIA criteria of landscape preservation. The grid that is given by public stakeholders for the systematic placement of turbines causes the position in one corner of this 14,000 ha project area to change the position to the opposite corner. In this situation the EIA determines the position of turbines, thus leaving no room to decide per farm acre which position is best suitable or affordable. This means that the initiator is forced to “stick with” landowners, even if they ask “unreasonable” prices. The result is that the EIA has financial consequences. In a fully public planning system this would leave the possibility to expropriate; yet in a PPP this is commonly found unacceptable.

To keep the project feasible the initiator is now bound to oversee more risks and needs to look for other options to increase revenues. They also confront new legal questions to determine how landowners will be held to comply with the chosen alternative in the definite zoning plan. In other words these financial and legal consequences are directly linked to the alternative of the EIA (and the zoning plan). Yet they are not integrated as part of the EIA and the decision-making.

As PPPs become more common, these legal and financial consequences of land ownership are growing more important for realizing collective sustainable energy systems. As a planner this means I struggle to make and present integrated decisions as I am not fully aware of the financial and legal options (neither are public officials). As a coping method I suggest clients consult legal and financial advisors not only on their preferred outcome but also on a wide range of alternatives. In meetings I try to outline specific bottlenecks and their consequences. Yet it remains odd that a system that aims to plan urban development shows many limitations in the decision-making around sustainable energy alternatives. For reference, every turbine that is lost due to feasibility–EIA conflicts is equivalent to providing approximately 2500 households with renewable energy.

My message to educators would be that planners can only become enablers of (sustainable) urban development if they understand the basic dynamics and consequences of land ownership in both financial and legal terms. Otherwise they will not facilitate urban planning but only stay reactive. In a PPP this is clearly related to feasibility. In my opinion feasibility studies should be a mandatory subject in planning education, concerning both legal and financial areas.

Joys in planning practice

Urban planning is a field that is genuinely changing every day. This makes it a challenging profession but also one that provides a lot of opportunities. In general I feel that as an urban planner I am trusted with the most undefined questions in my company as I was trained to explore projects while carrying them out. Strategizing and reflecting on decisions and consequences is second nature. My studies have definitely contributed to an ability to switch perspectives between environmental impact, policymaking, and politics. This leads me to conclude that the most fun part of being a spatial planner is fitting societal ideals into actual achievable plans.

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Planning the Rainbow Nation's dream landscape: the place and space of planning professionals in contemporary South Africa

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In 1994 I bought a one-way ticket to South Africa to seek a professional opportunity, given the dire job situation for graduate planners at that particular time in the UK.

South Africa: a country that was quickly coming to terms with its hard-fought democracy. I would fast come to terms myself with the skills and competencies required, and the challenges faced by the town planning profession in South Africa.

I had lived a privileged and safe life in the UK. My immediate family (a Pakistani father and white South African mother) had been directly impacted and damaged in different ways because of the South African Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949),¹ the Immorality Act (1950) and other discriminatory laws. However, my life in Sunderland, UK could never have been described as hard or arguably relevant to the challenges facing South Africa. Studying town planning at the University of Manchester between 1989 and 1994 our planning courses dealt firmly in the developed world context: the conventions of planning regulations, design and enforcement firmly embedded in that context.

Nevertheless, I had the good fortune to finally enter public service as a town planner two years after the historic elections that witnessed the end of the apartheid regime and the birth of the "Rainbow



Nation". The tangible excitement and aftermath of the elections and nation-building, quick-wins of the Rugby World Cup in 1995 and African Cup of Nations football triumph a year later papered over some of the indelible fault lines woven into the apartheid landscape: the fragmented urban and rural spatial form, the scarcely believable extremities of wealth and poverty, the duality of a globally welcomed formal economy, and an increasingly prevalent and much needed informal economy premised primarily on trade and accommodation.

Now – more than two decades later – an increasingly competitive and depressed global economy, rampant urbanisation (manifesting spatially in burgeoning informal settlement and backyard development), high levels of unemployment, and basic service provision are among the key drivers impacting on the spatial, social and economic functionality of South Africa's urban and rural areas.

Citizens, politicians, businesses and professionals of the country all had a key role to play in the transformation of its places and spaces. However, in the fledgling post-apartheid years planners were fighting for a place in that space. The profession had expertly executed the legislative mandate of the previous regime and succeeded in wholesale legal spatial segregation and fragmentation of racial groups and extremes of service provision and amenity. Notwithstanding the liberal credentials of a number of the country's tertiary institutions, active non-governmental organisations and individuals who had rallied against the system, the fragmentation of space in terms of rigid racial and land use categorisations was designed and implemented by planners. Correctly so, the profession was eyed with suspicion.

South Africa quickly became recognised for promulgating some of the most progressive legislation. The Constitution as the pivotal example is lauded globally and much of the planning and sectoral legislation was equally ambitious. The anxiety came not so much in the messages and commitments of the legislation but in the actual results. The deep and urgent desire to demonstrate speedy, at-scale evidence of spatial transformation, social justice and integration were foremost in the minds of an increasingly diverse racial planning professional community.

Our profession's reputation began to build in the late 1990s and early 2000s via the processes associated with land development objectives (LDOs) and integrated development plans (IDPs). These products sought to unbundle and redress the spatial distortions and clarify developmental objectives and outcomes. Most planners have championed these planning documents and associated participation processes that sought to replace rigid "blueprint" planning.

Quantifying the initial success of plans and implementation in numeric terms was positive. Housing developments and transfer of rental stock initiatives to beneficiaries who had previously been denied access to land and title realised a million housing opportunities by 2000. Nevertheless, these laudable efforts by built environment professionals across the public and private sectors were tempered in qualitative terms with accusations of "business-as-usual" placement of the new and upgraded settlements: they were located on the urban periphery, removed from jobs and economic infrastructure, and were characterised by poor construction and widespread corruption in the issuing of construction tenders and allocations processes. The evidence that quantity had trumped quality remains hard to refute.

Planners frequently found themselves fighting for principles (better location of land, more inclusive typologies and mix of products) in the face of burgeoning demand that could only be met, at-scale, by a one-dimensional housing policy and product that satisfied (partially) the immediate backlogs and demands in relation to housing need. Secondary to this were the immediate network expansion costs and longer-term operational (especially in relation to transport costs) and household costs associated with peripheral settlements. National and grassroots politics have all contributed to these spatial and

financial outcomes, and regrettably planners have often been unable to provide affordable and viable alternatives to the greenfield turnkey approach.

The market-driven property boom in the 2000s catapulted many South African towns and cities into a wholly unsustainable growth trajectory: a trajectory that saw infrastructure delivery outstripped by sprawl; key historic central business districts enter bust periods in their property cycle; and cross-subsidisation opportunities afforded by the growth of rate-paying land uses and income groups taking precedence over critical maintenance and operational costs of existing networks. Questions asked by planners at this time such as “how much is this development going to cost, not just now but longer-term?” and, “how does this support integration and inclusivity?” frequently went unanswered. Millions of square metres of office space lay (and continue to be) unoccupied in the central business districts across the country. Infrastructure networks began to fail routinely and congestion levels in many metropolitan areas eroded positive locational “pull” factors.

The premise of equalising municipal services and economic opportunity to all communities was a fundamental premise post-1994. Irrespective of an individual’s capacity to pay for those services or contribute to the municipal/state revenue bases, the population was to be serviced equally through progressive upgrading and minimum standard setting. The sustainability of funding this approach in the absence of a limitless supply of financial and human resources continues to confound all spheres of government.

The notion that “any development” equals “good development” to expand the rates base and growth prospects led to ruinous investment decisions for a number of municipalities caught up in the boom period. Many urban areas experienced development outstripping the pace of service provision both in social amenity and bulk engineering infrastructure.

The financial sustainability of towns and cities has become another aspect the contemporary planner must be able to understand and influence. Crude urban edges were designated in many spatial plans to counter sprawl at the behest of not only the planners, but also their engineering and financial counterparts who required greater clarity on the direction and speed of future development to allow the most effective allocation of the limited resources at hand. The urban edge as a growth management tool remains hotly debated. Frequently, the spatial and environmental planners sit at one end of the spectrum – the “pro-edge”. Conversely, the public housing-related planners and strong private sector lobby occupy the “anti-edge” end.

What became important was to begin defining indicators and an evidence base to replace anecdote and theory with tangible and credible facts and data. How fast, where, when, what? And perhaps most importantly, what does the intelligence tell us and mean for planning, for communities, for spatial transformation? These questions require a range of analytical approaches, and increasingly geographic information systems play a pivotal role in routine work. We need to be adaptable and responsive to opportunities that can deepen our understanding and broaden our means of communicating recommendations to our fellow professionals, communities, businesses and politicians.

The tertiary institutions charged with building capacity in planners do their level best to equip our future professionals. I have observed a “split” in emphasis, with the universities placing greater time and effort on the strategic and policy aspects and the former technikons (vocational higher education institutions) placing a greater emphasis on the regulatory, land use planning and technical drawing aspects. Both approaches have their merits but the realities of the professional work environment, in the private or public sector are often overwhelming for the newcomer. Individual and collective coping mechanisms are required by all parties to prevent disillusionment getting the better of the



fledgling and seasoned planner alike. It has constantly begged the question what can academics and practitioners do to better equip current and future generations?

Grounding the theory with direct exposure to practical work experience within the public and private sector is critical. The academic, private and public planning organisations should look to prioritise this if the disjuncture is to be remedied. A greater emphasis on mentoring and tracking progress within the work place is another aspect that is currently too loose and ad hoc. It is directly linked to the need to set down continued professional development standards and remains an aspect the professional body should consider more proactively.

There is a need to take stock generally, for all of us who have played a part, big or small, successful or not, and to prepare well and invest richly in our future generations of planners. I consider it an honour and privilege to have served thus far and I look forward to continuing to play my part in that future.

Note: The views represented here do not necessarily reflect the views of the City of Cape Town. They are written in my own capacity.

Note

1. This act is amended in 1968 and 1985.

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Comparing reflections of practitioners on the challenges of contemporary planning practice

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Inspired by our encounters with many different international planning scholars and their efforts to give voice to young practicing planners about their profession and its practice, *Interface* brings together a small number of planning professionals who project these ethical challenges from the point of view of practice. By giving voice to these planners, our intention is to highlight the personal and professional

coping mechanisms developed by planning professionals. This has seen very little coverage in planning literature, and it is our belief that these should be reflected also in planning education.

As planning scholars, most of us are aware of these challenges, but while some of us argue that we need to stick to the principles of the old-school tradition in planning and urban design, leaving no room for change; others highlight the achievement of planners in practice as “facilitating leaders”, and look for them to develop self-produced mechanisms that bypass systematic challenges. A further school of thought argues that we need to change planning education by first hearing the voices of practicing planners, in that it is these people who face the challenges in their daily lives that we write about in our publications (Hoey, Rumbach, & Shake, 2016; Watson, 2002). The challenges faced in practice require creative and even revolutionary efforts, but how do we transfer these practices to planning education? Where do we start? One thing is obvious: we need to start listening to the voices coming from those in practice.

There are multiple, nonlinear trajectories by which people enter into planning, underlining the nature of a discipline and profession that is all about bridging different views and worlds to have impact on a complex reality. This is both why it can be difficult to profile planning among prospective students, and also what makes it so fascinating. The practitioners contributing to this *Interface* define the planning profession as a political tool in similar ways: planning fulfills the wishes and demands of different groups by negotiating among conflicting interests and trying to reach agreement between stakeholders. It is a tool for social transformation, social justice and reform, and is a means of political struggle that engages one both inside and outside the workplace. This is something emphasized numerous times in these contributions.

A number of different challenges are highlighted too: not only the classic issues of finding a way of dealing with diverse and overlapping interests and tiring bureaucracy, but also those resulting from the involvement of private sector interests in urban development, dominating property-led or market-driven planning dynamics, discontinuity of policies due to changing administrations, the limitations of token participatory efforts on communication and the lack of knowledge of planners in certain technical fields. The accounts presented here document an ambivalent combination of the awareness of the preponderance of technocratic and bureaucratic realities in day-to-day planning practice, and the strong social and political drive of planners (resulting in a tension that is perhaps best highlighted by the Swedish piece). Some of the most innovative practices (seen, for example, in the pieces from Sweden, Belgium, Turkey, Brazil and Israel) share the strategy of skillfully “playing out” these ambivalences, often by adopting “lateral” ways of dealing with them. These stand in interesting contrast to the more “midstream” and perhaps less radically innovative practices of the Dutch and South African cases.

This *Interface* can be considered a unanimous call to expose students more and directly to planning practice during their studies, if not to fully integrate practice and education in a continuous, open process (Porter et al., 2015). It is important here that practice be interpreted in its broadest sense, to include the realities of both day-to-day planning work and social or political activism. This involves building both awareness of the ambivalence of the profession, and the need for ways of skillfully “playing it out.” It is a call to pay more attention in education to the “true” economic and political drivers of urban development, and of the powerful role of apparently neutral and technical property, and financial, legal, and procedural arrangements in shaping outcomes.

Moreover, these planners ask us to pass the message on to students to learn to be proactive. Perhaps we need to confront them with complex real problems, establish interactive teams to overcome these problems and motivate them to seek alternative solutions. The use of simulation programs, scenario playing, role playing, and technical and soft tools of negotiation, and planning real situations in the studio should perhaps be explored more systematically by planning schools. Some of this is already



practiced in many schools; however, we also need to teach students to deal “laterally” and transformatively with the everyday realities of planning. This can be achieved by stimulating them to take part in public debates, to make them meet and work with practitioners, to get local players and social movements involved in academic research, and by transferring this knowledge to the students to prepare them for fighting through planning. At present, this is far from central to planning school curricula, if it exists at all. Planning education should challenge students more explicitly to reflect critically on the variety of roles they may take up in society. Furthermore, we need to engage in more constructive research into planning practice in academia to establish transformative practices between academia and practice (Hurley et al., 2016).

The energy and passion held by the contributors to *Interface* for their profession has been very motivating to read. Looking at our collaboration with the authors of this *Interface*, and our own personal and professional encounters with practicing planners, we can see that the planning profession needs not only system-maintaining and system-transforming intellectuals, but also inspirational academicians who appreciate this motivation and maintain an open mind when looking for ways to accommodate new approaches that can bring practice closer to planning schools. We hope that this *Interface* inspires scholars to see the willingness of practitioners to contribute to academic debate, and motivates us to explore and co-create new approaches with their contribution in the near future. Only by learning from each other will we be able to raise practitioners who know how to “float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.”

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