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**Key planning issues for Europe for the next decades?  
Comparing perspectives from 1997 and 2017**

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## Key planning issues for Europe for the next decades? Comparing perspectives from 1997 and 2017

Andrea I Frank (Cardiff University)

Nowadays we don't often get time to reflect on the bigger picture, but this invitation to look back at five "issues for spatial development and planning in Europe" identified 20 years ago by Klaus Kunzmann represents a welcome opportunity to do just that. An initial reread suggests that these five challenges retained considerable currency. This is not very surprising, as they were framed at a level of abstraction that ensures longevity. As such, the issues don't lend themselves to simple or quick solutions and even if a technical solution may present itself, its implementation would likely be contested from a social, economic and/or environmental viewpoint. Challenges such as sustainable development, developing concepts of the multi-cultural European society or protecting heritage will thus remain ongoing tasks for the spatial planning and development community. However, the world has moved on over the past two decades. In light of, for example,

- the rise of neoliberalism and reduced state involvement in development;
- the manifestation of climate change through more frequent extreme weather events (flooding, droughts, warmer average temperature influencing the microclimate of cities);
- the growing influence of big data on urban management; and
- new ways of mobilizing and shaping public debates via social media

– to name a few – it is timely to consider afresh what are the major challenges. Changes in contexts (political, ecological and social) point if not to the formulation of entirely new dictums at least to a reframing and reconceptualization of future challenges. In fact, some issues seem to have increased in their level of urgency and scale, while new challenges appear to have emerged.

Within the limited scope of this contribution, I will focus, first, on two challenges for which we can see a noticeable step change and level of urgency. Second, I will pinpoint several emerging issues for the European planning community to address as amendments to the original list. These are based on my own observations and views and it will be interesting to compare them to the views of fellow colleagues from the AESOP community as basis for a dialogue on future professional profiles for planners, training and education needs.

One of the two challenges with heightened urgency is the "*conceptualization, promotion, and implementation of [...] sustainable (urban) development*"...While the interpretations and models of what sustainability constitutes have certainly evolved from the views customarily embraced in 1997, sustainability remains a vague and flexible umbrella concept with all its benefits and drawbacks. And whilst there has been progress towards sustainability especially through technological innovations, achieving more sustainable urban development requires also tough trade-offs – it cannot be all win-win (Campbell 1996). Significant behavioural changes by individuals, families and society are now required to reduce further humanity's ecological footprint (Rees and Wackernagel 1996). There is no such thing

as a (single) optimal sustainable state; rather the goal must ultimately be to keep resource use within social and planetary boundaries in order for humanity to thrive, possibly without economic growth in the traditional sense (Raworth, 2017). The fact that sustainability has found itself time and again at the core of major policy including the Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2016 - <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>) illustrates its staying power and enduring appeal. Planners' efforts engaging with other professions in pursuing either substantive as well as procedural paths (Campbell 1996) within their realm to reduce resource consumption, waste and pollution and protect nature need to continue vigorously as unsustainable practices radically undermine human and humane existence.

A second issue which in my view requires urgent engagement is the *“further development of the concept of the multi-cultural society in European cities, and socially acceptable management of spatial implications of immigration.”* General issues around global and regional migration for both origin and recipient societies are fairly well understood (e.g., Castles et al 2014). This includes brain drain implications for origin countries and resistance and fear toward immigrants in recipient nations. Recent times have witnessed a disconcerting increase in xenophobia in Europe revealing itself through attacks on asylum seekers, and a strengthening of political parties campaigning against immigration and free movement. Those sentiments stand in stark contrasts to needs and demands by various economic sectors that welcome and depend on labour mobility to address shortages and skills gaps in recipient countries. Integration of foreign workers and migrant families in European cities and towns is key to creating vibrant places and peaceful living environments. Creating much needed opportunities for interaction and relationship building amongst diverse sections of the population have in the past relied primarily government support and policy. However, with rapidly growing numbers of foreign migrants and refugees, integration mechanisms catering for comparatively low numbers are woefully inadequate. The unprecedented influx of around 2 million refugees into Europe seeking to escape the conflict zones in Syria, the Middle East and Africa since 2015 have created challenges around spatial and residential development not seen since the end of WWII. European countries are typically not equipped to deal with issues that require fast paced physical change. Complex regulations and processes ensure comparatively balanced development activities that mitigate the most negative outcomes for those affected, uphold property rights and so forth. But, how and where should tens of thousands of displaced families be accommodated and settled within just months? With no end to the crises in origin regions in sight, a continued and steady stream of large refugee numbers is predicted into the foreseeable future. The challenge will be to transition from short-term temporary solutions, such as container camps often situated in inaccessible locations and repurposing buildings such as sports halls to spatial solutions that avoid isolation and ghettoization effects.

Additionally, I propose four newly emerging challenges for the next decade or two:

- As demographic change and increasingly greater percentages of older populations are becoming a reality in most European countries - planners will need to progress *“concepts of the multi-generational society/city”* alongside those of the multi-cultural city.

- *“Understanding and critically guiding the development of urban and regional circular economies and smart city infrastructures while protecting truly public and inclusive urban environments and spaces.”*
- *Future proofing city environments for disasters and climate change related impacts* (i.e. making them more resilient) – this includes developing healthy and safe urban environments for citizens to thrive, considering also urban food provision and security. The link between planning and health is an old one but has been undervalued for decades with other agendas occupying the limelight. There is now growing evidence that environmental degradation leads to poignant and negative health outcomes for humans. There is a surge in interest in redesigning urban environments to create more healthy surroundings. Data collected by engaged activists (citizen scientists) are aiding scientists to develop better models and evidence on the linkages of pollution on human health and quality of life and planners should become more engaged in these discourses as they have begun already in terms of food and disaster risk reduction.
- As greater percentages of Europeans are living in extended urbanized areas there is a need *“to rethink and redefine the human – nature and in turn the urban/nature relationship for the purpose of guiding spatial development”*. This means not only protecting the natural environment but improving landscape, biodiversity and the quality of open spaces for all users (human and non-human). The importance of human contact with nature (also in health and wellbeing terms) will require the planning community to actively create (interconnected) natural spaces in and near urbanized areas in the sense of Cicero’s *terza natura*. These open spaces need to be developed to serve multiple functions: for recreation, food production and ecosystem services (such as providing clean air and water).

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