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# Analysis of The Planning Education in the Light of the Contemporary Trends in Planning

Milan Husar <sup>1</sup>, Sila Ceren Varis <sup>2</sup>, Vladimir Ondrejicka <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Spectra Centre of Excellence, Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Slovakia, milan.husar@stuba.sk

<sup>2</sup> Middle East Technical University, Department of City and Regional Planning, Faculty of Architecture, Ankara, Turkey, cvaris@metu.edu.tr

milan.husar@stuba.sk

**Abstract.** This paper examines the way the planning education is taught and examines the recent trends in the curricula of planning education institutions. The introduction of changing economic systems and planning in the field of education is discussed against these changes. Additionally, the evolution in the planner's role and how it affects the planning education is discussed. The paper is addressing trends and challenges the countries and their planning changes are facing in 21st century. The trends such as increasing globalization, fuzziness of spatial structures and their borders, complexity and uncertainty and the growing interconnectedness of the world are discussed. Another aim is to prepare a common ground, a platform at the university level for scientific cooperation in the field of planning. This study aims at examining the situation of planning in the contemporary world. The identified challenges include the need for more flexibility in planning and planning education, the emergence of innovations and creativity in planners and planning projects, the necessity of promoting soft skills while keeping the existing technical nature of planning and lastly, the need for more interdisciplinary work. The final part of the paper is discussing the future planning education and recommendations on how the schools of planning should reflect these changes.

## 1. Introduction

The human society has changed in the last century more than in the past two thousand years. The rapid pace of change in the society is not likely to decrease in the near future and the gradual transformation of society is expected to continue. These alternations have affected nearly all aspects of life and people's professions. The planning profession is not an exception in terms of the alternations. Although the planning in the modern world is perceived as relatively new discipline with background in sanitary situation in the Great Britain at the turn of the previous centuries, the roots of planning cities is traced back to the ancient times. The challenges of planning are different across the course of time and they reflect the arrangements of each society. Such differences do not accidentally differ through the time, but are also based on geographic location, for example the tasks for planning are varied in the developed world and in the developing world.



The most frequent trends for the contemporary planning in the past few decades had been the globalization, changing nature of states, growing complexity of settlement structures and changing nature of the administrative borders. The basic question is whether these changes in the presuppositions of planning had been mirrored in the planning discipline and, for the purposes of this paper, in the planning education.

The paper is asking the question how the contemporary planning education is reflecting the new trends, the new planning reality and attempts to outline and discuss these trends and attempts to provide recommendations for the planning education institutions on how to adjust the planning curricula. On the basis of the global trends the point is to assess the state of planning education. The paper is structured as follows, the first part is devoted to the current challenges the planning and the planning education is going through. As an additional concept to be discussed, change in the planner's role is also elaborated corresponding to the current challenges. The second part consists of four selected features of planning education which need to be deliberated and incorporated into the planning education. The concluding part is devoted to the discussion over the future of the planning education with a number of recommendations. The paper will be concluded with the intension of creating a common platform for different planning education institutions. After first paragraph, other paragraphs are indented as you can see in this paragraph. After Introduction, divide your article into clearly defined and numbered sections.

## **2. Current challenges to planning**

One of the greatest impacts on the society in the late 20th century and today is globalization and its effects on the planning. Besides the obvious impacts of globalization such as increased flows of goods and tighter relations among markets and states, globalization is causing an increased complexity of the territorial systems. It changes the characteristics of administrative borders and spaces are becoming more fluid and softer. All this renders some of the approaches to planning as less than optimal and ineffective for sustainable territorial management.

The planning tools such as master plans elaborated in rigid blueprint way are not reflecting the pace of changes in the territory and the fact that it is not possible to rigorously plan the development. The role of borders is changing as well. Administrative borders do not encompass the area where an individual is moving in his everyday life and the functions do not neatly fit into such container view [1]. On the opposite, the character of borders is becoming more fuzzy [2]. What happens is that the administrative spaces and functional spaces overlap and do not neatly fit together. Individual during his daily activities can over-cross several administrative borders, not only local, but regional and national, particularly in the Schengen space in border areas where one can live in one country and commute daily for other activities to another country. This way one can spend significant amount of time in other administrative units and not be legally permitted to take part in the decision making processes in these spaces as his right to participate in these processes is limited to his place of stay.

The complexity and uncertainty are two natural features of socio-ecological systems and these are by its nature impossible to exactly forecast, i.e. it is not possible to predict the future and prepare rigid plans and other planning interventions based on the logics that we have the rationality to blueprint-plan the future. Complexity is not new characteristics, although the planning education is oftentimes not putting enough emphasis on capturing it and working with it. In the past there had been attempts to create technical models which did not deliver satisfactory results and the focus shifted elsewhere, such as to softer forms such as the communicative/collaborative planning paradigm. In the era of interconnected globalized world working with complexity and uncertainty about planning interventions becomes a must and a basic precondition to do the planning job. One can either say that complex systems are unpredictable and volatile and planners cannot make anything about it just to omit it, or the planning incorporated tools for dealing with complexity and transform its way of thinking. No new planning paradigm is necessarily needed, nevertheless altering the way planners are thinking about the space is required. Following the second thermodynamic law that the entropy is slowly increasing in the long

term, planners need to seriously consider these ideas and accept that development cannot be fully planned, but other, more flexible tools are required.

Another trend in planning and political sciences is shifting the governing regime from central, top-down systems, where formal governments are administering the territory, into governance systems characteristic with bottom-up processes, opening up governing structures and increasing the level of participation from non-state actors. This trend is visible in the majority of the EU countries and other world. In the 1990s the paradigm of communicative/collaborative planning brought up the issue of public participation and this became legally anchored in all the EU countries. Gradually the thinking is shifting into upgrading this system into forms of governance and setting up frameworks for anchoring it into the legal systems. This is also a challenge for planning as this on the one hand makes things perhaps more natural as the actors in the territory are involved in the decision making processes, but, on the other hand, the increased number of actors makes the decision making processes more complex and intertwined.

Additionally, it also changes the role of planners and the planning. We can discuss a variety of roles the planners are taking, from the rational planner of the future settlement or facilitator of the discussion, a ringmaster, servant of powerful authorities, manager of the future development etc. It is not easy to say what role to teach in planning schools as the diversity of planning tasks is relatively large.

This is just relatively small list of new trends in planning which the planning needs to reflect. The next part of the paper is dealing with the challenges to the planning education and how they should be reflected in the curricula of planning schools.

### *2.1 Interdisciplinarity*

Planning is often dealing complex problems with solutions being not clearly defined. These issues are also known as wicked problems [4]. One of the potential solutions fostering the finding the correct answers to such issues is widening the base of experts dealing with them. More interdisciplinary teams are needed in planning projects which will broaden the range of professionals from a variety of more or less related fields using large variety of tools and methods to research the topic of the problem and tackle it [3].

Due to the nature of planning problems which are highly interdisciplinary, encompass various phenomena and require broader perspective, the amount of knowledge is often not possible to obtain by single discipline. Interdisciplinary teams possess greater amount of information, variety of views and diversity of experience. In these teams the frequent problem of single-sided view on the problem is omitted, i.e. when for instance a team of landscape planners is looking at planning project, naturally they will be focusing on the landscape perspective and use landscape solutions more than a team consisting of both spatial planners and landscape architects.

The issue of interdisciplinarity is already incorporated in many curricula. This is done through a variety of courses related to the sociology, natural sciences and architecture. These courses are often taken together with students from various fields so students are able to be in contact with them and enrich their experience.

Nevertheless, what is frequently absent is practical work with both students and professional with different fields. In practice it is very common that planning office employs variety of professions and sets up teams with mix of fields to deliver the most objective and most appropriate solutions. In such teams the planners can, besides their professional specific knowledge, contribute also with the ability to see the interconnections between partial issues and provide much broader view than professional with very specific narrow perspective.

In the past, for example ESDP had organized Intensive programs they created interdisciplinary teams from various countries and together were dealing with specific urban problems. It didn't only allow planners to work directly on interesting project with architects, sociologists and geographers, but also thanks to diversity of countries also to see how similar problems are dealt with elsewhere in the world and how countries are thinking about these problems. There are other examples of similar projects, but there is still a lack of them to provide equal chance for all interested students to participate.

### *2.2 Soft skills*

It is relatively difficult to determine whether planning technical discipline or not. On the one hand, decades ago it was perceived as technically rational and planners as rational beings planning the cities based on technical knowledge of how cities work. On the other hand, later on, planning started to become softer which was connected to the paradigm shift towards collaborative planning and proliferation of public participation in the planning projects.

Today, as planning is becoming more about managing the growth and the soft skills such as negotiations and mediation are becoming a crucial skill in the repertoire of planners. Some argue that planning as a profession is losing its validity and planners are becoming sellers of the best pieces of land for construction sector. One way or another, soft skills should definitely more taught in planning courses. In many planning education system, the initial semesters are dedicated to technical skills such as constructions, math or architectural courses and soft skills are taught later on. This way potential planners who are not interested in these technical skills predominantly are losing interests and are choosing different fields of study. Therefore, more balance should be achieved in the curricula fulfilling the needs both of future planners and the requirements of planning practice.

Soft skills are absolute key for communicating the planning projects, for effective argumentation, negotiation and mediation. Additionally, it helps planners and the planning as a discipline to be more competitive on labour market and on the market of development projects and the development overall. Unsuitable communication might be one of the causes of the unfortunate quote by former British Prime Minister saying that we should 'get planners off our back.' Better communication proficiencies can also help to better translate the planning ideas to the municipalities, the citizens and the private sector, too.

### *2.3 Innovativeness and creativity*

In close connection to the soft skills, innovations are more than ever before in great demand. The rationale goes that although the planning problems often repeat themselves, planners are using similar set of solutions which do not fully work. Developing innovations and innovative solutions is simply a must and it can be done through fostering out-of-the-box thinking and creativity and looking for non-conventional solutions.

The creativity as a potential answer is, though, hard to teach. If it occurs in the planning workbook, be definition it is not creative. Creativity can be trained, not taught. One can expose students to a variety of problems, list previous solutions and evaluate them and let them work on their own. This is also closely linked to interdisciplinarity which fosters creativity and innovativeness.

Generally speaking, being bound by numerous regulations and rules is mostly hindering creativity. Autonomy is needed, both students and planning professionals require great deal of independence and autonomy and being let be and work creatively. At the same time, though, some general framework is needed. It is possible to discuss whether we need more regulations or rather making them more concise, it is not possible to work in an environment without any regulations.

Last point is that being bound by regulations and formal rules could be one of the culprit of the low attractiveness of the planning profession in many countries in the past few years. When high school student is in the process of making the decision what to do in life and the prospects of planning are sitting in planning office with the building code as the basic rulebook, no wonder that the interest in decreasing. Planning schools need to transform planning into creative activity, creative profession of finding solutions to complex problems.

### *2.4 Flexibility in planning*

The last challenge for planning of the paper is a transformation for a profession producing rigid blueprint, ready-made plans into flexible plans based on strategic thinking and responsiveness. It is not possible to predict and exactly plan how the territory will look like in horizon of next couple of years. Even after acknowledging it, the question remains how to incorporate it into planning tools and how to teach these the future planning professionals.

The content of planning courses is largely determined by the law of the country or regions and it is a duty of planning schools to teach what is stated in the law. If the law is not reflecting the changes in society and that the tools it is prescribing are not up-to-date, the schools need to react by walking the imaginary extra mile and still include new innovative planning tools in their courses.

Another point can be made the labour market and change in production patterns. The modernization and robotization is changing the demands on professions in many sectors. It is very hard to predict which professions will be sought-after by the labour markets in a decade or so. In such case, skills related to flexibility are another moral requirement for education institutions. The question is how to prepare students for vocations which do not exist yet? One potential answer is that we can promote skills such as flexibility, whole range of soft skills, ability to adjust, resilience etc. This holds true for both planning future and how the profession will change and what skill will be required in the future. With average age of people going to pension, which is still slowly increasing, is around 70 years, it means that people after school will work for the next 40-50 years. Latest trend is that people are not stuck at one job for their whole life, but they are switching jobs on a fairly regular basis. In case of planning education institutions this is also relevant regarding the roles of planners mentioned earlier in the paper.

### 3. Future of the planning education

Natural, socio-ecological systems are complex and unpredictable and it is hard what the future will look like. What planners can do is to employ a wide range of methods to be trained in and be in their toolbox to be able to flexibly react to future needs of territory. What schools of planning can do is another question and, again, it is nearly impossible to give an exact answer. It is related to intuition of the managers and their priorities and their ability to rationally look at the evidence and make deliberate decisions.

At the moment, it seems to remain one of the best ways to provide future planners with a much larger set of tools than they need at the moment, expose them to the variety of approaches, theories and methods so that they have theoretical and at least partial practical knowledge about these. It should serve as the necessary minimum which can be later utilized and revived as needed. Students should be provided with seeds of knowledge which when nourished will grow.

Table 1 is summarizing the main points and providing a concise overview over the presented ideas. It attempts to compare the existing and potential future character of planning as a profession and as field of study.

**Table 1.** Comparing the existing and potential future characteristics of the planning profession

Planning profession	Field of interest	Skills	Actuality, up-to-dateness	Problem approach
Existing	Single discipline	Hard skills	Low	Rigid
Future	Interdisciplinarity	Soft skills	Innovations, creativity	Flexible

### 4. Conclusion

The point of the paper is not re-invent the profession, but rather open up the discussion and make educators deliberate the way the planning education is heading to and assess whether the way is the desirable one. It is important to build on the existing knowledge and link the planning to the practice more to foster the mutual exchange between the theory and practice so that schools are producing graduates with developed skills so that are suitable for the labour market ready to step into planning practice. The mission of schools is to prepare people for successful careers and make them equipped with skills to advance the profession further and make it adjusted to the ever-changing world. The

planning education is ought to keep up with the general challenges which directly or indirectly affect the subject of planning.

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