

SUMMARY REPORT TRACK 5: FORUM ON PLANNING EDUCATION. ARE WE DOING IT RIGHT?

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Challenges

Today a planner needs to address a complex society. In recent years the traditional role of planners has changed dramatically and the contemporary challenges and global events have instigated a shift in the planning profession.

The Work of a Planner

Planners are getting jobs that did not exist a decade ago or jobs that were not considered to be part of the planning discipline, for example: writing climate change policy for a local authority, assessing development loans for property developers, finding sites for hard infrastructure of energy companies (Coiacetto, Jones, & Jackson, 2011). Recent planning education literature also suggests that planning schools are failing to adequately equip students for the roles they will undertake in practice. One symptom of the hiatus between curriculum and practice is the leakage of talented professionals to other fields of employment. (Marita Basson; What do planners do? Define Your Discipline to drive undergraduate curriculum renewal)

The Profession of a Planner

Recent reviews have identified the need for development of new skills and qualities in graduating planners in Australia, including collaboration, communication, critical thinking and understanding complexity (Gurran et al., 2008; Jones et al, 2009). Students can construct such knowledge, skills and values by means of direct experience in a real world context, through a purposeful process of engaged, active learning - known as, "experiential learning" (EL) (Kassem 2007, p2). Learning in a context of experiential learning is dependent on a meaningful interaction between quality experiences and personal reflection of those experiences (Fowler 2008; Harvey et al. 2010) (Claudia Baldwin; Expanding Experiential Learning in Australian Planning Schools)

The Field of a Planner

In a fast changing world a contextual approach from a cultural perspective has to be developed. A planner has to focus on the overall environmental context, (societal dynamics, economic trend, job and production relocation, cultural and religious values etc.) This is a paradoxical state of 'inbetweenness' both in the territories of practice and the ones of knowledge. These concerns have raised the need to clarify realities holding different qualities - from urban and infrastructural, from rural to what is understood as natural - and the vital skills to intervene onto them. At the same time, these concerns have opened - if not enforced - questions which are often very different depending on the geographic area of the globe.

What We Learned

There is not one global planning education system in the world.

Planning should be a value based activity.

Planning education has to provide a common set of skills and knowledge to enable the students to explore the planning context and to implement projects. Additionally the planning education in every continent has to focus on the context oriented challenges.

Experimental Learning

Job training today is not included in the university environment. Experimental learning has to reach further than class based methods (guest speakers or city trips) and work based methods (working for a client or studio based design), but needs a real world context. It is a different learning style, which increases the enthusiasm of the student who is exposed to a new complexity.

Multidisciplinary Planning

Planning moves away from social sciences, and is more and more oriented to engineering and blueprint planning. A multidisciplinary approach, where designers, social scientists, economists and engineers create common solutions, is needed. Informal work to address mind change to attack social problems is of vital importance. Planning should be an intellectual attitude to explore the environmental context, to convert theory in problem solving and to formulate a solution with a normative focus to transform an ordinary place into a livable space

Planning Education

A survey learned, that more than 503 universities worldwide programme planning education. The planning schools contain a wide range of specialities: design; social policy planning; master planning; strategic spatial planning and many more.

The skills, knowledge, competences and attitudes educated in the different continents are diverse. The curriculum is linked to a historical context (e.g. in the post-socialistic countries). In a fast changing world it is important to embrace different types of planning professionals, to enlarge them in coproduction with other sciences and to explore what an employer wants. This wide range of interaction defines planning as a process dealing with a lot of conflicts.

What's Needed

Bridging theory and practice by implementing experimental learning and involving stakeholders in defining the planning discipline.

A multidisciplinary and holistic curriculum focusing on teamwork and especially on the link between social and technical sciences. Universities should learn to cope with the changing planning education approach.

To address all kind of planning tasks, there is need for reshaping the planning curriculum and producing new frontiers of planning knowledge.



The planning content, context and process must be reflected in the planning education and incorporate both practical civic engagement and authentic dialogue with the community. Planners require new knowledge and skills to be able to handle the challenges brought about by urbanization, population growth, poverty and climate change.

The environmental context (economical, ecological, spiritual, cultural, historical, emotional, technical issues) should be integrated in the planning profession, by relating the planning profession to other professions.

Experimental learning should be developed as real world learning, in corporation with private and public partners and the community.

Planners have to keep in mind that they should create sustainable and livable places with respect for human values.

The university, as an institute, has to facilitate the expansion of the educational area and search for the integration of these methods in the accreditation of the curriculum.