

What a Taste from the South to the North, Sampling the Best of Norway!

The Travel Diary of the 54th International Society of City and Regional Planning Society
Congress and Young Planning Professional Workshop in Kristiansand

by Wenjing Luo

Foreword: From 1 October to 5 October in 2018, The 54th International Society of City and Regional Planning Society Congress was held in Bodø, a city with the fastest rate of urbanization in northern Norway according to statistics. The theme of the congress is Cool Planning: Changing Climate & Our Urban Future. As an integral prelude to the congress, the Young Planning Professionals' Workshop was held between 24 and 29 September in Kristiansand, as the capital city in Southern Norway. In addition to being selected as a young planner for the workshop, I have also been invited to present two papers and participate in the UPAT (Urban Planning Advisory Team) Seminar in the congress as I have been engaged in the Ningbo Xinmalu Historical District UPAT Workshop this April. Therefore, I went on this trip to Norway, which was, for me, the longest and the furthest I have been away from home. As gateway capitals with the fastest rate of urbanization in Southern and Northern Norway, Kristiansand and Bodø do not possess those iconic sceneries to fascinate tourists, but both have made me enchanted with Norway known as "the Northern European Paradise" with a delicious taste from the South to the North!

It was the first glare of the rising sun welcoming me at 7:30 when I stepped on the land of Oslo which was recorded deserve to be called as the only "city" in Norway compared to the scale of Chinese cities. Although with the sun shining, my hands were frozen numb from the morning chill of autumn. But luckily enough, I was not greeted by the well-known rainfall. During the short transit in Oslo, I took a speed-walk along the harbor for less than an hour. I had to admit my luckiness again as I was able to enjoy a sunbathe with the gorgeous sea view, which was quite the opposite to what I had imagined of Oslo as grey and gloomy. It was absolutely stunning to take photos in any corners of the city with colorful street furniture, pedestrians dressed in black-and-white and the nobly-white seagulls in the backgrounds of blue ocean and sky. The vivid-looking sculptures added some vitalities to the less-populated streets, which proved worthy of the well-known name of Oslo as "the City of Sculptures".



Figure 1 The Harbor Areas in Oslo

On the train to Kristiansand from Oslo, I finally got the chance to close my tired eyes. Kissed sweetly by the warm sunshine, my eyes were thrilled to bits, like dancing in colorful light blended with red, yellow, orange, green and blue. Especially when I received the letter from Martin Dubbeling as the current president of ISOCARP saying about welcoming me in person, I was again thrilled to bits, like dancing in colorful light in my mind. All the thrills activated my numb taste bud which had been tortured by the long and exhausting trip just like a delicate dish of appetizer!

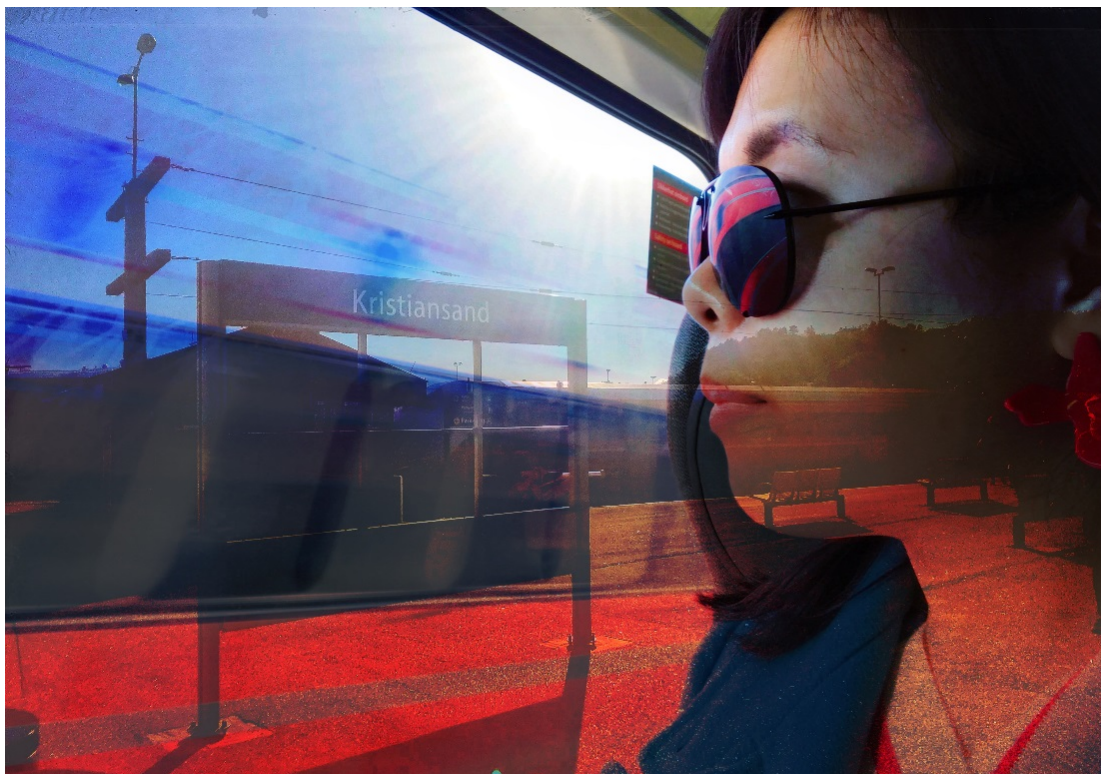


Figure 2 On the Train to Kristiansand from Oslo

The Salad in the South: The Young Planning Professionals' Workshop in Kristiansand

As the southern gateway to the European continent, Kristiansand is the administrative, business, technological and culture capital of Southern Norway, with the nickname of “the Coolest Riviera”. Although Kristiansand has become one of the favorite resorts for Norwegians according to statistics, it is still unknown to the world. To promote the regional development of Southern Norway, Kristiansand is in the process of merging with two neighboring municipalities Søgne and Songdalen to become the “New Kristiansand”. As a planned city, Kristiansand is well established with culture, leisure, retail and business functions with a population of more than 80 thousand, while the other two cities have only around 10 thousand inhabitants lacking vitalities. The key question local governments would like us to focus on the workshop is how Kristiansand can develop as a polycentric city and how can these centers complement and strengthen each other to make the new municipality not only competitive but also more dynamic and interesting for the inhabitants.

Having taken a long process to digest why these three municipalities decide to merge with each other despite limited connections, we have realized through investigation that the merge is facing challenges including inconvenient regional connections and unidentified city identities as well as the lack of public spaces and sufficient public supports. Therefore, it has been proposed that the workshop with the themes of “Cool Planning in Southern Norway” should be focus on the thematic reflections including connectivity and mobility, character and identity, sustainability and climate, interventions and placemaking, smart and innovative, new type-morphologies, impact on regional dynamics as well as center structure in the New Kristiansand. With the coordinators president Martin Dubbeling and professor Zeynep Enlil guiding ahead, 17 selected young planners coming from 13 countries were divided into 5 teams respectively working on sustainability, regional dynamics, mobilities, urban identities and place making and asked to complete the investigation, field trip, idea forming, poster making in less than 4 days. The teams also have to make 8-minute and 5-minute presentations in front of the local authorities and participants of the annual congress. As I was in the team working on the topic of regional dynamics, we found that the difficulties of this workshop focusing on regional planning is not only the time frame and the large workload, but also the Norwegian language and culture gap which has to be bridged to explore the social and the economic factors behind the spatial planning.

Different from the previous YPP Workshops, this time a variety of parallel sessions have been proposed to be added to the program including pecha kucha, lectures and other open lounges.

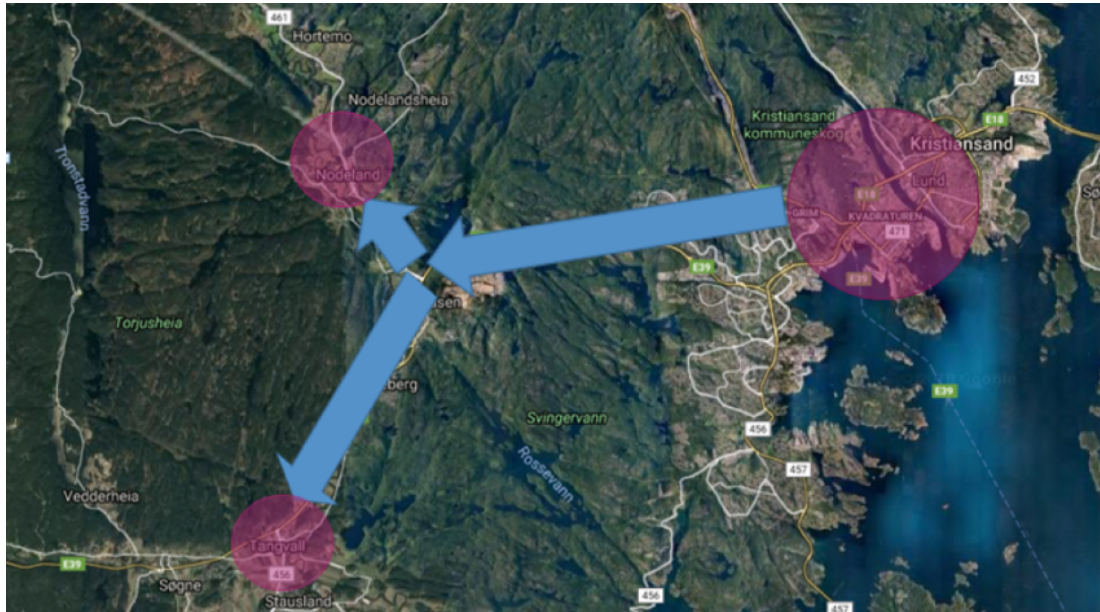


Figure 3 The Regional Spatial Structure of the New Kristiansand

Quite popular worldwide, pecha kucha is a presentation style in which 20 slides are shown for 20 seconds each, which lasts for 6 minutes and 40 seconds in total. Thus, every young planner has been required to present planning projects from their home countries with the themes of cool planning in the form of pecha kucha, which not only improves the presentation skills but also provides appropriate references for planning of the New Kristiansand by the intensive and flash-mob style dissemination of knowledge. Looking back at the pecha kucha presentations, I felt like having a lavish feast with all kinds of international flavors referring to local cases from the hometowns of the young planners. It seemed that Asian countries like China and India focus on spatial expansions just like enhancing the appetites. For example, Bipul Nayak from India proposed that the key to realizing polycentric structures is the collaboration and complementation between the centers. On the contrary, European countries like Italy and Romania appeared to be paying more attention to enhancing spatial quality just like tightening up waist belts. For instance, Siliva Tomasi from Italy shared the Smart City Projects by Eurac Research, in which the introduction of electric vehicles and sensor network has really broadened my horizon. It was also obvious to see Britain and the US focus on improving the public engagement in place making by organizing all kinds of activities. Anne Welch from the USA made a presentation about connecting

communities with regional trails like the hot tomato trails , the blues traits and etc, which enlightened me on how to shorten the mental distances between those three cities. Last but not least, Martin Ersdal from Norway shared his own experience to us about becoming and being an urban planner, which impressed me a lot especially by his view that “Axis are devils”.



Figure 4 Pecha Kucha

If pecha kucha can be considered as the recipe collection of homemade meals, then lectures can be viewed as a selected edition of three-star Michelin. For example, professor Elin Børrud from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences invented the concept of compact-ability concerning national and regional compact city planning policy at a macro scale , while professor Zeynep Enill from Yidiz Technical University debated about the differences between place making and space making at a micro scale. As a specialist in the study of working life and innovation , professor Hans Garmann Johnsen from Agder University College led a heated discussion about the relations between physical and social-economic structures, while Kath Davie as a cultural development specialist and independent practitioner with experience ranging from creative and community action made quite a vivid and humorous presentation about urban spaces influence on creativity. What impressed me the most is the 3C principles proposed by president Martin Dubbeling, including reality check, communication and constant change. Especially the “reality check” is quite easier said than done by not only about believing our own eyes but also exploring the reasons underneath.



Figure 5. Lectures

Even with the recipe collection of both homemade meals and 3-star Michelin, it is still a tough task for us to cook local food in the flavors favorable to the locals. Therefore, following the principles of reality check, we took buses among the three cities and began to collect information by field trips, investigations and interviews. In order to gain a deeper understanding about the social and economic factors driving regional developments, the regional dynamic group I was in spent almost 2 hours interviewing the staff from the local regional economic development department. Not only have we understood the problems of current regional economic developments, but also realized the deep roots of lacking public supports for the amalgamate. Therefore, with the intention to promote top-down regional development and improve bottom-top public acceptance, our group proposed the idea of the hanging vine growing as whole but also thriving on their own. The reason why we used this metaphor is not just matching the regional spatial structures due to ecological limitations but also to symbolize the meaning of sustainable growth, so as to make the New Kristiansand become greater than the simple sum of the three municipalities. Based on the principles of following up the flows and cooling down the forms, we proposed three aspects of strategies also by the metaphor. At first, make more veins to deliver the flows referring to tangible and intangible connectivity. Then, make more nutrition to increase the flows corresponding to regional roles. Last but not least, make more nodes to retain the flows referring to urban structures.

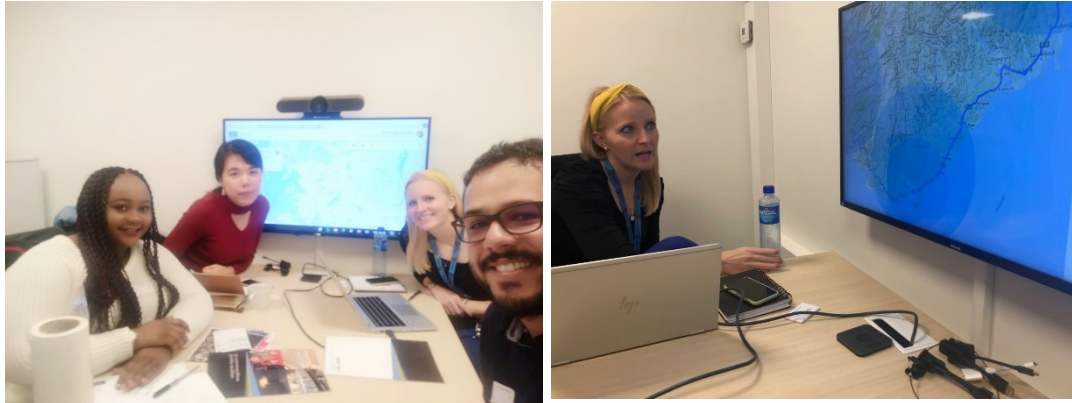


Figure 6 Interviews with Regional Economic Departments



Figure 7 Ideas of the Regional Dynamic Group

Meanwhile, other groups have proposed enlightening ideas and strategies from different point of views. The sustainability group put forward the idea of “Cool Print” to restructure the regions and proposed strategies in ecological, social and economic dimensions. Especially based on the data of daily commuting flows among the three municipalities, the mobility group proposed to remake connections within and beyond regions and social transport hubs with mixed and flexible uses in the city centers. To make full use of the resources, the urban identity group proposed to make the unperceived water element as media by organizing different activities along river banks and seashores. Last but not least, the place making group sketched the vision of the three centers based on historical and current city fabrics with the theme of “Urbanature”. Working top-down from the macro, meso and micro scales respectively, all the five groups not only maintained their own identities but also attempted to complement and strengthen each other, which comprised the whole result of the workshop just like a polycentric structure!



Figure 8 Ideas of the Sustainability Group



Figure 9 Ideas of the Mobility Group

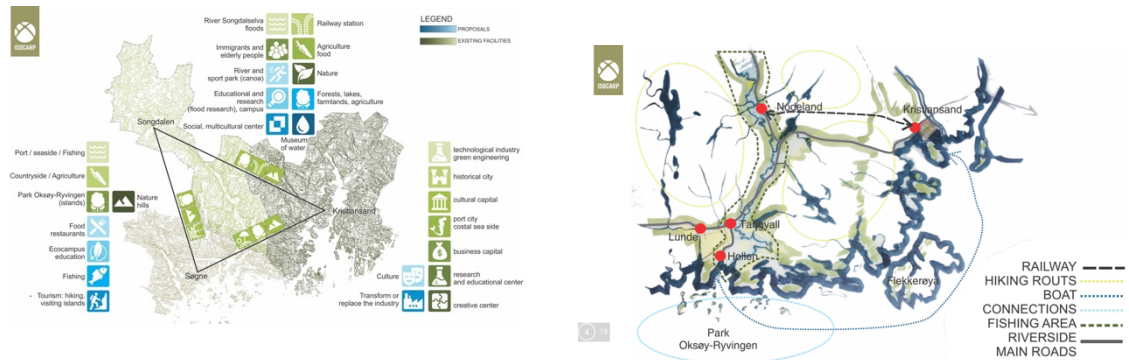


Figure 10 Ideas of the Urban Identity Group

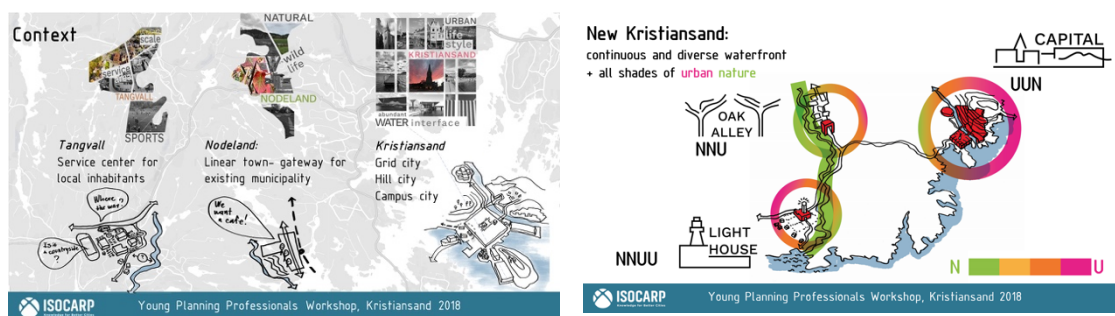


Figure 11 Ideas of the Place Making Group

With all the recipes and food in place, all we need is time to cook. However, it's only less than 24 hours left before submitting posters and delivering the 8-minute presentations in front of the local authorities. All the young planners have taken all their strength and even stayed up past midnight. By the pre-tasting of president Martin Dubbeling and professor Zeynep Enil over and over again, all the groups have succeeded in delivering the presentations and being well received by the local authorities and the public.



Figure 12 The Pre-tasting of President Martin Dubbeling and Professor Zeynep Enil



Figure 13 Presentations in front of the local authorities

Looking back at the past less-than-5 days of the YPP Workshop, I found it to be so fruitful and pleasant in the after taste just like a big plate of well-balanced salad made from local food inspired by the recipes from all over the world. However, although this plate of salad has been welcomed by the locals and the chefs namely young planners who have been awarded with certificates, it is still a tough

challenge to present it to all the participants from all over the world with even less time in the upcoming congress!



Figure 14 The Closing Ceremony

The Main Course in the North: the 54th ISOCARP Congress in Bodø

If the Young Planning Professional's Workshop in Kristiansand can be considered as a plate of healthy and flavorful salad, then I would see the 54th ISOCARP Congress as a delicate and delicious main course! As the gateway to the Arctic Circle, Bodø, with only a population of around 50,000, is almost the most densely-populated capital in northern Norway and going through city growth and industrial transformation. Especially with the relocation of the current Air Force Base and the civilian airport which has been occupying the south for almost 60 years, the civilian airport along with it will be moved to further south, which will allow for the development on the land area now being occupied by the existing airports and military facilities. Facing the new opportunities of “New Airport and New City”, Bodø has built up an ambition of becoming the smartest city in the world. Therefore, the 54th congress has pulled a magic to gather more than 500 planners from over 50 countries together as the new captains of Bodø to help with its transformation. What's more important for the congress to be held specifically in Bodø which has experienced a rare high-temperature summer in 2018, is the agenda to discuss about what can planning do to deal with the upcoming disaster of climate shift in the Arctic Circle. Based on this, this congress themed as “Cool Planning: Changing Climate & Our Urban Future” attempted to answer the question of whether we should make cities more sustainable and thus preventing even more severe global warming, or more resilient to adapt to this inevitable crisis.



Figure 1 New Airport, New City and New Captain

On the first day of arriving at the so called “City of Winds”, what welcomed us was a depressing gloom with chilly rain and wind, in contrast to the sunny Kristiansand.

At 4 o'clock of the first day of the congress, I was woken up by the sound of ice rain hitting on my bedroom window. As I was thinking that I would have to battle the wind and the rain to transfer between congress avenues, the weather forecasts just went through a sudden change from raining to sunny. Even the mayor was so amazed to see the sun come out hanging a smile on its cheek, which she owed to the cool congress chasing away the continuous rain lasting for the full month of September. I finally had the chance to enjoy the splendid glamour of Bodø with its concert hall, libraries and hotels sitting next to each other in the backgrounds of blue oceans, verdant hills and white ships in the bright sunshine. As the venues for the congress, the concert hall and the library built with high standards were located within the walking distance from almost all the hotels and residents, which I assumed would be the perfect example of compact cities against extreme climate in the Arctic Circle. Walking along the harbor, I opened the congress app on my phone, which I also found cool enough to look up the agenda, book programs, vote on line and switch business cards. The congress had a variety of sessions which did not only include the plenary sessions addressed by three extremely qualified, internationally renowned keynote speaker, but also six concurrent tracks covering the topics of Global View, Spotlight Cities, Climate-proof Cities, Technology and Infrastructure, Social Networks as well as Contemporary Planning Practices. Besides, there were several special sessions like the UPAT Seminar and alternative events like city tour, mentor program and get-together party before, during and after the congress.



Figure 2 The waterfronts of Bodø

The program of the congress was like a big menu of a great feast. And I would consider the most desirable dishes of the main course to be the speeches from three keynote speakers. Towards the topics of cool planning, the three speakers all responded with strong and impressive arguments beyond time and regions from their own perspectives. To start with, Jeremy Rifkin, as a globally acknowledged economist, futurologist and advisor to many countries, made a presentation of “Towards a Smart Third Industrial Revolution”. As he proposed in the speech, at a single historic moment there will be three defining technologies including new communication systems, new sources of renewable energy and new modes of mobilities emerging and converging to create a new general-purpose technological infrastructure, which will manage, power and move the economic activities more efficiently and rapidly by reducing the marginal costs to zero, while dramatically reducing ecological footprint. This could change the society’s spatial temporal orientation, business models, forms of governance and even people’s cognition and consciousness, which will lead the transformation from a carbon-based civilization to post-carbon in the next 30 years. In the smart future word, the top-down centralized globalization will be transformed into bottom-top lateral glocalization. Every city, regions, rural areas can become nodes connecting glocally both virtually and physically, with everyone else in the world. Therefore, urban planners at the center of this revolution should look beyond cities and regions to play the guiding role for citizens, governments and businesses to establish and implement planning all by themselves.



Figure 3 Speeches of Three Keynote Speakers

As a professor from Curtin University in Australia and a leading world expert on sustainable cities, Peter Newman delivered the speech of “Cool Planning: Climate Change and Our Urban Future”. He proposed that planners should help cities to adapt to the slow loss of natural capacity and build more resilient and sustainable options. From exploitive cities in early times to sustainable cities and regenerative cities in the future, urban transitions should be made in both ways of resilience

and sustainability to reduce and even regenerate ecological footprints. The best way for cities to move forward from the setback after natural disasters is to rebuild without depending on fossil fuels. In this way, centralized infrastructures and linear metabolism should be transformed into decentralized infrastructures and loop metabolism. Emphasizing on making the full use of the disruptive transit technologies, he used the traditional theory of urban fabrics to visualize the future cities shaped by transport, which included walkable CBD, transit corridors with centers linked like pearls on a string, local AV-EV shuttles feeding into centers as well as middle and inner connectors by trackless trams creating new walkable sub centers.

Last but not least, Herbert Girardet as the co-founder of the World Future Councils and consultant to UN-HABITAT and UNEP made a presentation of “Regenerative Cities: Make Cities work for People and Planet”. As he said in the speech, cities tend to see themselves as “centers of the universe” around which the world revolves, however the metabolism of cities is not confined to the intraurban realm but reaches across the planet involving biosphere, aqua sphere, lithosphere, atmosphere as never before. By looking back at the differences between resilient city, livable city, smart city and sustainable city, he proposed the concepts of “Regenerative Cities”, which established an environmentally enhancing, restorative relationship between cities and the eco systems they depend upon, supported by the mainstreaming of efficient, renewable energy systems for human settlements across the world and the provision of new life choices and economic opportunities which will encourage people to participate in the transformative process. The transformation from agropolis and petropolis to ecopolis can then be realized through the construction of a new supply model between cities and regions. In summary, the three masters not only visualized the future of cities in the age of climate changes from their own expertise, but also led the direction and luminated the way of cool planning for urban planners. What a lavish and nutritious dish which was hard for me to digest at that time, but worthy to be chewed carefully and swallowed slowly even now.

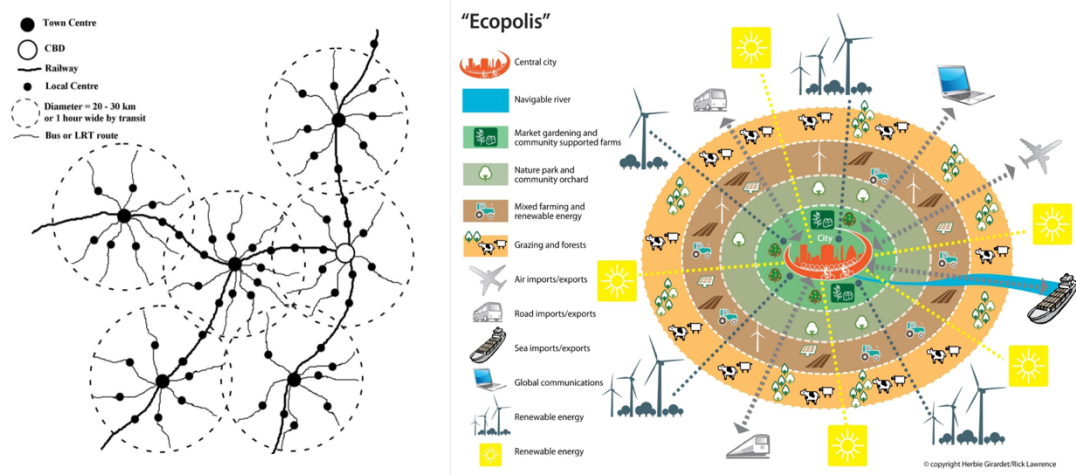


Figure 4 The Fabrics of Future Cities (left) and Ecopolis (right)

But of course, the six concurrent tracks following the keynote speeches actually can be considered as small alternative dishes which were more digestible. Track 1 was about the Global View aimed to interrogate the general issue of impacts of climate changes beyond cities, towns and regions, and these areas' generic capacity for sustainability and resilience. The Spotlight Cities track took a careful look at some of the most vulnerable cities and specifically discussed the new techniques and infrastructures to respond to frequent climate events in coastal, remote and Arctic cities. Track 3 defined climate-proof cities as urban areas where basic provisions such as food, water, energy and shelter are deemed vital in readiness for future extreme weather events. The Technology and Infrastructure track presented the use of smart technologies and how next-generation infrastructures will affect urban ecosystems, with a special session of Urban Mobilities in Transition which focused on perspectives and challenges on urban living and public space in China. Track 5 of Social Networks interrogated models of citizen participation, urban governance and cultural transformation required for the transition to sustainability and resilience. Different from the previous five tracks which focused on climate change, the Contemporary Planning Practice track offered insights into the diversity of the current issues, methods and solutions of the planning profession worldwide and attempted to characterize the pattern or paradigm in the contemporary planning. With a good appetite, I would like to taste all the dishes of the six tracks, but my stomach failed to store those delicacies as I was busy with the presentations of my two papers and my participation in the UPAT Session.



Figure 5 Paper Presentations and the UPAT Session

With all the big and small dishes presented in the congress, not only me but also all the participants must have gluttoned themselves. But don't forget the exquisite salad namely the final presentation of YPP on the final day of the congress! After rehearsing over and over again, all the groups have managed to deliver satisfying final presentations in the required time. I was honored enough to represent our group and made the presentation with fluency and confidence. Standing on the stage of the concert hall facing planners all over the world, I imagined all the audiences as carrots, which may seem silly but helped me overcome my nervousness and accomplish my performance better than my own expectations. What is worth mentioning, the Bodø YPP Workshop proposed prospective and creative multi-scenario plans for Bodø and got applause from all the audiences by thinking in a glocalization way, which succeeded in accomplishing the responsibilities of the "new captain" ahead of others.



Figure 6 Final Presentation of the YPP Workshop

Last but not least, the best part of the splendid closing ceremony for me was the summary of the congress, especially of all the six tracks. It actually helped every participant to have an overview of every dish of the main course in case we missed any when all the rapporteurs reviewed and summarized all the presentations and made concise and remarkable comments. As an overall summary, the general rapporteur Dushko Bogunovich also answered the key question proposed at the opening ceremony, which was that adaptation and resilience should take priority over mitigation and sustainability! Although there have been catchphrases like “regenerations”, “renewable resources”, “resilience” and “regions” all starting with “re”, whether they are the key words of cool planning is for every participant to understand by themselves after digesting the gorgeous main course. Maybe it is time to drink a glass of wine helping with digestion!

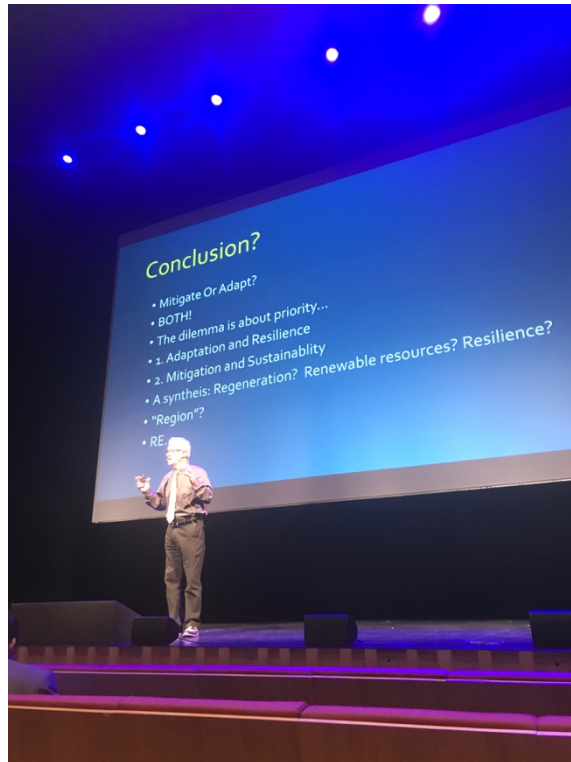


Figure 7 The Summary in the Closing Ceremony

Drink after meals in Norway: immersion, indulgence and intoxication

As Jeremy Rifkin said in his speech, knowledge is the most important renewable resources in the 21st Century. But for me, knowledge is the greatest delicacy! This trip to Norway including the YPP Workshop and the congress offered me a feast of knowledge just like a sequence of the colorful appetizer, the delicious salad and gorgeous main course! I have been totally immersed in the feast and even indulged in all the mingling during and after the congress, like a pleasant intoxication from alcohol!

I have been totally immersed in my enthusiasm for my profession! Although the long exhausting trip made my legs aching even till now, I have totally forgotten the physical pains and mental stress thanks to my immersion. As president Martin Dubbeling said that it took a lot of courage and spirits of adventure for a Chinese urban planner to step out of his or her comfort zone and put aside routine work to face the challenge without substantial rewards. But only by stepping out of the comfort zone can we capture the splendid brilliance of the silver lining, enjoy the unexpected thrill of meeting rainbows and maintain the everlasting enthusiasm for advancing forward in our careers. Great thanks to president Martin Dubbeling's encouragement, I have rebuilt my self-confidence, accomplished a mission impossible for me to imagine at the beginning, and most importantly find my own ambitious vision during my struggling moments. I have to admit that I have never imagined having the courage to go this far without any experience studying or working abroad before!

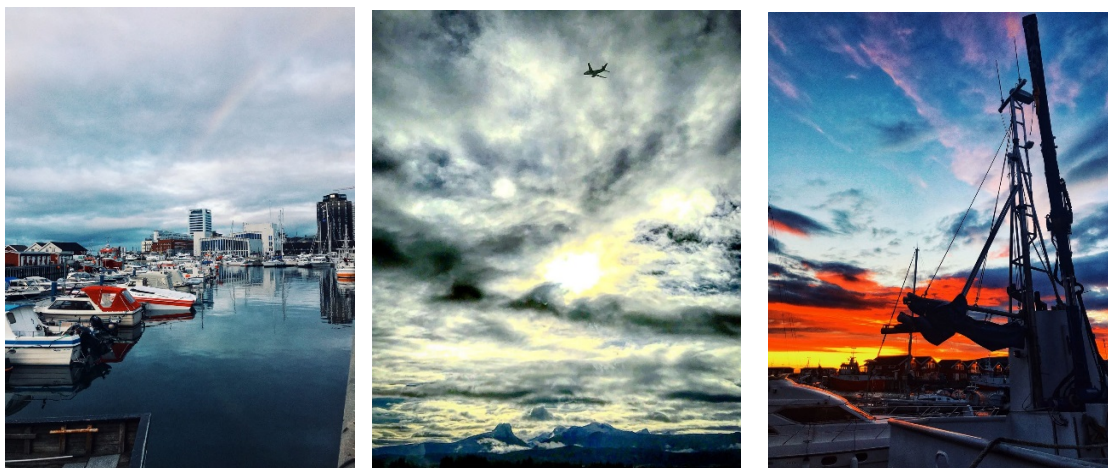


Figure 1 The Beauty of Bodø

I have also been indulged in the blossom-out of Wuhan in the World! In the congress, Wuhan has stepped on the stage of international planning field once again with the applause as the East Lake Greenway Implementation Plan won the 2018 ISOCARP Awards for Excellence! And I also had the honor to present Wuhan Planning Lab to the world and share the experiences of “Univercity” in Wuhan by my papers, which was well-received by the audiences. After my presentation, participants from Lithuania and Bodø came to me and shared similar cases in their own cities, which encouraged me to share more experiences with them after the congress! As a local born and raised in Wuhan, I would no longer be worried about foreigners not knowing where I am from when I introduce my hometown to them because Wuhan has become gradually known by the world. It is due to not only the famous East Lake, but also the nickname of “Univercity” which will be spread all over the world soon!



Figure 2 The Awards Ceremony and Presentations

Last but not least, I have been totally intoxicated in the so-called “Paradise of Northern Europe! Although recalling the chilly wind and the freezing rain still makes me shiver from the cold till now, I have been deeply moved by the warmth of Norwegians, no matter friends or strangers, thanks to my intoxication in Norway! Especially the care of Jackie and Sherry from Ningbo and Guangzhou which made me feel especially warmer in a foreign country than at home! As I have been told that the difference between a conference and a congress lies in the latter being more about congregating rather than only conferring, which offers a place to mingle! Admittedly, cool planning is a necessity against climate change. However, the cooling off of physical space would require the warming up of social networks as a basis. Although in the upcoming glocalization, there will probably be no more physical boundaries to define cities, towns and regions. As the physical distances will no longer be problems, the mental distances among people are getting longer and becoming obstacles. As an urban planner who only has the ability to work on physical environments, I would like to put more focus on public spaces like the third spaces for people to mingle so as to make our cities warmer to feel but cooler to touch against the climate change!



Figure 4 The Closing Ceremony

With the first glass of rose, I got totally immersed.

With the second glass of champagne, I got totally indulged.

With the third glass of red wine, I got totally intoxicated finally.

I hope I can maintain the immersion, indulgence and intoxication forever!

Epilogue : Deserts

The last night in Norway happened to be my birthday and also the last day of the Norway tour show of the Swedish jazz singer Lisa Ekdhal who used to accompany me to sleep every night! From Bodø to Oslo to Tonsberg, I travelled all alone with my heavy luggage and arrived at the show on time with luck. I have to admit that it was and will ever be the dreamiest and most beautiful birthday night of mine! Thanks to the most welcoming hostess I have ever met from the most artistic Airbnb, who volunteered to drive me to the show! Thanks to Lisa's hugs, flowers and birthday wishes, which had put a sweet ending to this trip to Norway! No, it will never be an ending as I will definitely come back!

Acknowledgements

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