

A Giant Contribution to Global Planning Education

Klaus Kunzmann and the Founding of AESOP

Rachelle Alterman

The existence of a global academic identity for planning must not be taken for granted. If it weren't for Klaus Kunzmann, there would have been no AESOP. And if it weren't for AESOP, today's global planning education institutions would have not emerged or, at best, have been greatly delayed.

The vision that Klaus realized 30 years ago with the founding of AESOP has created a momentum with invaluable benefits not only for planning education, but for the citizen-clients of planning worldwide. Even though I was not representing any European school¹, I sensed that something very significant was in the offing; I therefore travelled to Amsterdam in 1987 to attend AESOP's inauguration ceremony (and was the only non-European there). I have followed AESOP's evolution and impact ever since. In this brief note, I would like to share with you what I have observed about AESOP's contribution to the emergence of planning education globally.

Unlike medicine or engineering, for example, planning is not a self-propelling global profession. Medical practitioners are dependent on knowledge transfer about dangers discovered, new medicines, or new technologies. In planning, the gains and losses due to knowledge transfer are more amorphous. In fact, planning has a built-in contradiction between the pull of localization and the push of globalization. On the one hand, planning is locally grounded both in its history and ideology: Historically, the planning profession emerged from local-national initiatives in a geographically fragmented process. Planning ideology seeks to enshrine locally specific "placemaking" as a valued norm. In each country, the planning profession is bounded by its own national and local legal frameworks, and it is embedded in specific socio-cultural and political contexts. The legal and political contexts differ greatly across countries, even when they might seem similar from a distance (Alterman 2017). At the same time, the planning profession cannot continue to serve its clients – the majority of humanity – without global knowledge exchange. Planning education and research

is the natural platform where global creation and exchange of knowledge can be nourished. Klaus Kunzmann and the colleagues he inspired in 1987 constructed the hand-made foundations for this platform.

While in Amsterdam, I sensed that AESOP might indeed be the experimental ground to see whether our field can mature into a global profession. The cross-cultural and cross-national exchange, I hoped, would release planning from the umbilical cord that ties it to its national-local origins.

However, when AESOP was inaugurated, even Klaus Kunzmann probably did not anticipate the "big bang" impact that this organization would have on the future of planning education globally. AESOP was viewed primarily as the European continental parallel to the United States' Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, founded a dozen years earlier as the home of US (and Canadian) planning schools. Kunzmann recounts how he and Patsy Healey – AESOP's founding mother – raised the idea of forming a European equivalent to ACSP. In Kunzmann's own words, posted on AESOP's website:

"When attending the Annual Congress of the American Association of Planning Schools (ACSP) in Atlanta in 1985, Patsy Healey and I regretted that Europe did not have such a forum of exchange. We both were impressed by the flourishing annual jamboree of members of planning schools in North America, presenting the results of their research and exchanging their experience in preparing planners for practice and research. Upon return from Atlanta we immediately explored possibilities of establishing a similar association in Europe, in a continent divided by languages, religion, culture and political traditions."²

Why did AESOP's founding turn out to be such a significant turning point for the global future of planning education, more than the establishment of ACSP? In my view, this was because AESOP set itself a goal with inherent global significance: To bring together planning educators and students from a highly divided continent. Europe did not have a political, linguistic, or cultural bonding equivalent to the

Rachelle Alterman is Emeritus (non-retired) Professor at the Technion, Israel Institute of Technology and currently heads the Lab on Comparative Planning Law and Land Policy. She is an Honorary Member of AESOP (the fifth scholar thus honored and the only non-European). Holding degrees in social science, planning, and law from Canadian and Israeli universities, she is the Founding President of the International Academic Association on Planning, Law and Property Rights. Beyond academia, she shares her knowledge with various national and international bodies, including UN Habitat, the World Bank, OECD, and the Chinese government's Development Research Council.

one that underpins America's ACSP. The continent at the time was even more divided than today. It was split into two geo-political-military blocks, lacked a shared language (English proficiency was lower than today), encompassed diverse cultures, had to contend with economic disparities and the lingering memories of bloody internal wars.

So, in 1987, Kunzmann's vision of planning education expanding across Europe was no more than a dream. No one foresaw the demise of the Soviet Union, yet AESOP was prepared from the very beginning. I can testify that during the initial discussions about the candidacy of the first slate of planning schools, AESOP decided to adopt the broadest map of Europe, and as long as some portion of a country's territory was located within Europe, its planning schools would be eligible. As incredible as it may sound, the theoretical example given was Russia, even though at the time it was firmly behind the Iron Curtain. When the Soviet Block collapsed, AESOP was ready to serve as the incubator for the planning schools gradually being established in Eastern Europe.

Thus, the idea of forming AESOP encapsulated the potential for globalization, even if this goal was not explicitly articulated. In order to enable exchanges of knowledge about planning across Europe, one must inevitably consider how to create planning discourse, knowledge, and pedagogy capable of transcending differing languages, geographic-demographic contexts, legal-institutional frameworks, and future political vicissitudes.

In a field such as planning, reliance on academic exchange by means of journal papers and books alone is not enough. Direct interpersonal communication among planning scholars and educators is essential in order to peel away the conceptual and terminological barriers that make it so difficult to understand the unique mixture of local and global that characterizes our field. The annual academic conferences held by AESOP became the world's first regular forums for direct cross-national exchange among planning academics. AESOP has been true to its mission and has made sure that the conferences are indeed distributed across the different regions of Europe. Unlike the American conference, usually held in (chain) hotels, AESOP's conferences are held in real-life venues, mostly at local universities. Participants are imbued with a sense of place, at least for a few days.

Year after year, while attending each annual AESOP conference, I have witnessed how plan-

ning academics that at first had little common ground, gradually began to share knowledge, overcoming the impediments of language and culture. As academic exchange intensified year by year, I witnessed the leveling out of the conspicuous discrepancies that had existed during AESOP's initial years – especially between British and continental academics. AESOP has become the world's prime experimental ground for transforming the planning profession from local to global.

An additional AESOP institution which has contributed to globalization is the PhD Seminar held annually. I participated four times as part of the mentors' team in different host countries. The PhD seminars are a distilled version of what globalized planning scholarship is about. The students are selected so as to represent many languages, cultures, and national affiliations. Occasionally, students from outside Europe also submit their candidacy. Other associations of planning schools have not managed to establish equivalent forums. Thus, Europe's future planning educators and researchers are implanted with the genes of globalized thinking. Perhaps Klaus Kunzmann should help AESOP to clone this format as a global model, to be held frequently in various parts of the world.

Following AESOP's model, additional multinational and multicultural planning associations were established. The Asian Planning Schools Association was founded in 1993³, and the Association of African Planning Schools was established in 1999⁴. These associations cover regions of the world with what are, arguably, more difficult divides than AESOP had encountered. In these parts of the world, political relations are sometimes acute and the danger of war looms large. Major humanitarian crises are an ongoing fact of life. Yet, despite these mighty impediments, the strides towards globalization of planning taken by AESOP have travelled great distances not only geographically, but also in the challenges they have sought to overcome.

A further milestone in the globalization of planning education was the establishment of the Global Planning Education Association Network – GPEAN – composed of all the supra-national or continental associations of planning schools. Its establishment was announced during the First World Planning Conference held in Shanghai in 2001, and it has since promoted regular global conferences of planning schools.

And yet, the momentum towards globalization should not compromise planning's inher-

ent mission to be grounded in local communities, local knowledge, and local places. Planning education must retain its local grounding. Klaus Kunzmann has always recognized this inherent ambivalence and did not seek to obviate the European planning mosaic. On the contrary, he persistently expresses his strong view that even though English must be the common language of communication, AESOP must also cherish its multilingual structure. With Kunzmann's encouragement, AESOP adopted policies that embrace all the European academic journals in planning in any of the continent's languages and it awards prizes for best papers in any language.

Wisely, Kunzmann's vision did not seek to impose a single definition of planning or a uniform structure for planning education. The self-scrutiny and debate over "what is planning?" continues today (see, for example, Lennon 2017) and may never be resolved. Thirty years after AESOP became the first multinational planning association, there are still fundamental differences across the world in the definition of what constitutes appropriate planning education. What should be the title of the degree, the institutional affiliation within universities, the contents of the curriculae, or the relationships with other disciplines or professions? As may be expected, there are major differences in planning education across the world (Stifel et al. 2009), among Asian countries (Kunzmann 2015), as well as in Africa (Watson, Odendaal 2012). There are many variations in planning education even within Europe (Frank et al. 2014; Bertolini et al. 2012).

Planning education around the world is unlikely to converge into an over-dominating model. Such an outcome contradicts the forces of local pull that characterize planning everywhere. But in order to meet the tough challenges of urbanity across the world, planning must continue its concomitant process of globalization. In igniting the AESOP engine, Klaus Kunzmann had the wisdom to create a model with the desirable balance between the local and the global forces within planning and planning education.

Notes

- 1 My university, the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology – cannot be a member of AESOP because it is not located within Europe.
- 2 http://www.aesop-planning.eu/en_GB/what-is-planning (Accessed on 1 May 2017)
- 3 The word "Asian" is in fact a misnomer. The Association in fact accepts membership only from East Asian countries.
- 4 <http://www.africanplanningschools.org.za/about-us/who-we-are> (Accessed on 13 March 2017).

References

- ALTERMAN, R. (2017): Planners' beacon, compass and scale: Linking planning theory, implementation analysis and planning law. In HASELSBERGER, B. (ed.), *Encounters in planning thought: Autobiographical essays from key thinkers in planning*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 260–279.
- BERTOLINI, L.; FRANK, A.; GRIN, J.; BELL, S.; SCHOLL, B.; MATTILA, H.; MYNTTINEN, E.; MÄNTYSALO, R.; BERTOLINI, L. (2012): Planning education: Time to think, time to act. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 13 (3), pp. 465–490.
- FRANK, A.; MIRONOWICZ, I.; LOURENCO, J.; FRANCHINI, T.; ACHE, P.; FINKA, M.; SCHOLL, B.; GRAMS, A. (2014): Educating planners in Europe: A review of 21st century study programmes. *Progress in Planning*, 91 (2014), pp. 30–94.
- LENNON, M. (2017): Viewpoint: What is planning? *Town Planning Review*, 88 (2), pp. 147–151.
- KUNZMANN, K.R. (1991): Planning transatlantic: Planning education in the nineties between San Francisco, Oxford, Brussels, and Weimar. *Environment and Planning B*, 18 (2), pp. 137–140.
- KUNZMANN, K.R. (2015): State of the Art of Planning and Planning Education in Asia, *disP – The Planning Review*, 51 (4).
- WATSON, V.; ODENDAAL, N. (2012): Changing Planning Education in Africa: the Role of the Association of African Planning Schools. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 33 (1), pp. 96–107.



A Giant Contribution to Global Planning Education

Klaus Kunzmann and the Founding of AESOP

Rachelle Alterman

To cite this article: Rachelle Alterman (2017) A Giant Contribution to Global Planning Education, *disP - The Planning Review*, 53:2, 21-23, DOI: [10.1080/02513625.2017.1340535](https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2017.1340535)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2017.1340535>



Published online: 26 Jun 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 677



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)