



Introduction: Planning and Planning Education in 2015

Klaus R. Kunzmann & Martina Koll-Schretzenmayr

To cite this article: Klaus R. Kunzmann & Martina Koll-Schretzenmayr (2015) Introduction: Planning and Planning Education in 2015, *disP - The Planning Review*, 51:1, 16-17, DOI: [10.1080/02513625.2015.1038042](https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2015.1038042)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2015.1038042>



Published online: 14 May 2015.



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



Article views: 597



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

The State of the Art of Planning in Europe

Introduction: Planning and Planning Education in 2015

Klaus R. Kunzmann and Martina Koll-Schretzenmayr

More than a decade ago *disP – The Planning Review* asked planners in Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Canada to reflect on the future of a discipline that seemed to be continuously under challenge (disp 148 in 2002: *Zukunft der Raumplanung*). The response was cautiously positive, though planners noticed the widening gap between ambitions and reality, with contradictions between the rationales of planning and the rationales of democracy and participation rising on the horizon.

Twelve years later, times have changed and the concerns have certainly changed. Political developments, such as the global financial crisis, the crisis of economic development in Mediterranean countries, the diminishing appeal of the European project, and trends toward re-nationalism across Europe have changed the priorities of the political agenda. Planning, though an important field to maintain liveability in cities and regions, is not a priority, despite the efforts of the European Commission to launch a European Urban Agenda. Social, economic and territorial disparities are growing at all levels of planning and decision-making. The concern for the environment is losing appeal and is often expressed just to sell new technologies. Land consumption is still moving toward building suburban housing and new infrastructures, and the evolving e-shopping culture is promoting excessive logistics all over cities and regions.

At the same time, many architects and urbanists are raising their voices and dreaming of building resilient, green, healthy, digital, smart or compact cities. But are they all aware of the concerns of citizens and the economic and political dimensions of urban development?

This is the reason we decided to invite planning professionals working in a practice and academics doing research in the planning field to participate in our survey. Though it is not an update of the last survey, it does pick up on the problems that were beginning to emerge at that time. The six questions are as follows:

1. What is the present state of planning, whether urban and regional or spatial and environmental, in politics and in the society of your country?

At the turn of the century, the ESDP (European Spatial Development Perspective) thrilled academic planners across Europe because governments – and even planners – seem to have gradually lost interest in spatial planning, especially at the regional level. Is this observation correct, and does it differ from country to country? How is planning viewed in 2015? Do neo-liberal policies

dominate urban and regional development in Europe? Do citizens appreciate the role of planners, or do they complain about public regulation and intervention, about large infrastructure projects and a lack of democracy? Do investors argue about overregulation and planners complain about insufficient interest in planning matters? Is spatial planning, both urban and regional, finally appreciated for its efforts after so many decades, or still seen as a public sector instrument to control private investment?

2. What themes dominate the discourse about planning in your country? Does the national media, e.g. newspapers and television, report on these planning challenges?

The discourse on planning in the European Union is expected to differ from country to country. Our assumption is that it depends largely on the economic conditions of the country, its mainstream national policies, and on the amount of attention planning receives in regional and national media. The availability of jobs, land for development, accessibility by public and private transport, resource conservation, the integration of migrants, the provision of affordable housing in inner cities are all concerns that planners have to address these days. The respective discourse in a particular country reflects the concerns and values of its citizens and their satisfaction with the political system, as well as the impact of influential books on the zeitgeist. However, is the media concerned with or interested in spatial planning? Does the media offer an opportunity to inform people about emerging planning issues or launch debates about the impact that planning has on our living space? Is spatial planning largely ignored by the media except in cases of high profile infrastructures?

3. Is the gap between theory and practice in planning growing in your country? What role does English planning literature play in this discourse?

In the international community of planners, there are growing concerns about a widening gap between theory and practice, as there are fewer and fewer bridges between academia and professional practice. In this context, language also plays a key role. While the quest for more participation in planning requires the use of the local language to communicate with citizens, English has become the language of the international scientific community. It would be worthwhile to explore how this gap could be narrowed again. Another observation should be men-

tioned: depending on regional traditions, planning theory has quite different roles in planning cultures across Europe.

4. To what extent do planners in your country address growing social, economic and spatial disparities, and do they believe that spatial planning could contribute to reducing such disparities?

Numerous research projects have documented empirical evidence of social, economic and spatial disparities. Concern is being expressed in many talks and reports all over Europe. Based on this empirical evidence, more planners are postulating increased political action to reduce such disparities in cities and regions, as well as between countries of the European Union, e.g. through transport planning or labour policies. The European Union is spending 25 per cent of its expenses to reduce disparities. Germany, after reunification in 1990, is redistributing money from West Germany to East Germany. Southern Italy has benefitted from more than fifty years of financial support from the North to the South, though disparities have not narrowed. The cohesion policy of the European Union includes contributing to the reduction of spatial disparities, but will such policies actually be able to narrow the growing gaps between countries and regions and within cities? Do different planning cultures across Europe see quite different solutions to such concerns?

5. Are planning students adequately prepared to pro-actively address future challenges in planning in your country? Should planning education return to schools of architecture or perhaps be offered in geography schools?

For half a century, ‘appropriate’ planning education has been a controversial issue in Europe. Though the planning community agrees that the challenges of urban and regional development require special competence and skills, acquired in a special transdisciplinary education, the discourse is also influenced by regional traditions, institutional conditions and personal biographies. Each participating discipline is said to have its shortcomings, such as design competence, action orientation, economic shortfalls or methodological or communication deficits. Planning has become a field of action that requires quite different skills and training, such as dealing with the public, being part of a team and solving new kinds of problems, all of which also depend on local, regional and national strategies and traditions. Educational systems and perspectives vary from country to country, as well as professional organisations. AESOP is a bridge-builder in this context, through exchange and communication to understand other national traditions. The Bologna agreement increases mobility and encourages more mutual learning, but it cannot

create a common curriculum, as some people had hoped. Moreover, e-learning proposals are knocking on the door. Once introduced by influential planning schools, they will have a considerable effect on planning education in Europe. However, do we know what the expectations for future planning education are?

6. Would you like to see urban and regional planning and spatial planning being regulated top-down by the European Union? Should the European Union formulate a joint European Urban Policy?

The European Commission, represented by DG Regio, convinced that the future of Europe is based on the future of cities in Europe, is increasing its efforts to promote a European urban policy. Cities in Europe, and their regional, national and European lobby institutions, who are expecting financial contributions from the EU for their urban policies, do not openly reject such policies – though they are concerned that guidance of EU regulation from above will intervene in their freedom to build and follow their own development paths. Do they fear that a Europe-wide policy will not respect their specific cultural conditions? Are they afraid that they will have to change their own local priorities and adopt European policy guidelines? Are they comfortable with the administrative requirements they will have to follow? Will it be easier for larger cities and city regions than for small and medium-sized towns to meet the requirements? Are cities in the south, for financial or other reasons, more willing to accept the guidance from Brussels than cities in Germany, France or the Nordic countries?

The Europe-wide exploration may give some answers to the above questions, to the challenges in their countries, and to the present mood towards spatial planning in their cities and regions. The selection was neither systematic nor balanced. Not everyone approached found the time to respond. We did not wish to receive politically correct country reports. Our interest was to receive personal responses from individual planners, who we considered to be representative voices of their country. We are well aware that some European countries are not represented in this survey and we ask our readership to accept the omissions. We also acknowledge that we received more academic responses than responses from planning practice. Fifty colleagues in Europe, academics and practitioners, were invited to respond to the above questions in one of the four languages of *disP – The Planning Review*. We wish to demonstrate a multi-lingual character.

We welcome your comments, critique and reactions to this *tour d’horizon* and hope that our intention to generate a Europe-wide discourse on the state-of-the-art of planning has captured your interest.