

The meaning and content of education in (urban) planning and planning practice in different social contexts

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Some of the issues we are proposing to discuss in the Plenary Session are: The meaning of urban problematic and planning in the South and in the North. Theoretical views of the urban problematic in planning education in these different contexts. What does differentiate urban planning theory and practice in the North and in the South? The content of urban planning. The possibility of a process of crosspollination between education in planning and planning practice. The role of the academic milieu in this process.

Planning as an academic praxis: lessons from UFMG’s metropolitan experiment

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Planning, as a profession, does not exist in Brazil. Nevertheless, several urban and regional planning experiences from Brazil have inspired other countries in the

world. In fact, Brazil has a wide planning tradition rooted in technocratic reformism, but also on its critique, mostly linked to the southamerican structuralist school. In the last decades, however, participatory planning gained importance and guided experiences at the urban and municipal levels. The social and political gains that came from the 1988

National Constitution produced the institutional support and legitimacy for propositions and actions that involve civil society in the process of planning.

Metropolitan planning, experienced as a federal and state technocratic practice during the military governments, lost its momentum during the redemocratization process of the 1980s and only in this century was it restored. In Belo Horizonte, UFMG, the federal university, has played a central role in metropolitan planning since 2009, working with the State, municipalities and organized popular sectors and communities. A methodology based on participatory processes reoriented planning approaches to emphasize life space as opposed to abstract space, while focusing on metropolitan restructuring based on a blue-and-green-weft and on the construction of urbanity and metropolitan citizenship. These experiences have raised questions about planning practices and theories as they bring transdisciplinary approaches to academic teaching, researching and university practices and relations beyond its walls.

Decolonizing planning curricula – perspective from Africa

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Planning curricula in Africa as well as the Universities in which they are taught still bear the strong imprint of their colonial histories. While African cities are now significantly changed from colonial times these older planning pedagogies and concepts persist. Major structural issues block change: many PhDs train in Europe or the US where scholarships are more plentiful, many senior academics trained there and most planning literature to which students are exposed is also based on global North contexts and ideas. This leaves planning graduates ill-equipped to respond to

the current realities of African cities and the need for processes of civic engagement, and they graduate with technicist ambitions to transform African cities into ‘orderly’, controlled and largely middle-class environments based on global North urban models. In recent times South African students have called for a decolonization of their University institutions and curricula, echoed in other parts of the world as well. I will put forward some of the central concepts of a decolonized higher education, drawing particularly on philosopher Achille Mbembe. I will argue that applying these ideas to planning curricula and their institutional homes is exactly what is required to produce planning graduates sensitive to the central issues facing African cities and able to respond to them. Decolonization of planning education will produce better planners and cities.

Planning Thought and the Problem of Eurocentrism

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The discipline and pedagogy of planning is embedded in Eurocentrism. In this talk, I present Eurocentrism as an epistemological problem, one that cannot be solved by bypassing the history of the West and including the diverse histories of the non-West. Instead, as I argue, it is necessary to cultivate methodologies and practices that reinterpret the urban experience and planning norms of the West in relation to a world constituted through colonialism and imperialism. Prompted by a renewed moment of black power and black liberation struggle in the United States, I reflect on how planning education, at the heart of empire, must speak directly to difficult questions of racial exclusion and the elusive promise of spatial justice.