

Planning's value, planners' values: defining and redefining for contemporary practice

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Introduction

The contemporary scene for planning practice can be painted in negative terms by authors – whether identifying ‘frustration, disappointment, and even despair’ amongst young planners (Tasan-Kok & Oranje, 2018a, p. 1); or the worrying emergence of ‘the austerity planner’ (Slade, Gunn & Schoneboom, 2019). It can seem to be a bleak time to be a planner. These negative feelings are often ascribed to an ongoing shift in the framing of planning policy and legislation, with planners – and therefore the idea of planning as an activity and a profession – portrayed as ‘enemies of enterprise’. For Raco (2018) this is evidence of an ‘inversion’ of planning’s core purpose. Whilst we do see this negativity in our own conversations with planners in the UK, we also see optimism, positivity and enthusiasm – and from students from many countries. This is not to suggest that studies which find negative or troubling aspects of contemporary planning are in any way mistaken, but we question the extent to which these reflect the diversity or ‘hybridity’ (Steele, 2009) of contemporary day-to-day practice globally, and sufficiently draw on accounts from planners in the widest range of settings, including from young planners (Nelson & Neil, 2021) and those in the private sector. Meaningful reflection on what planners do and why requires the voices of practicing planners to be heard, yet these are ‘barely heard’ in planning literature (Tasan-Kok *et al.*, 2016, p. 622). This special issue responds to this legitimate criticism and brings the experiences and voices of practicing planners to the fore, including young planners, those in the private sector, and from settings around the globe, to explore how they navigate the complexity of being a planner in the 2020s.

When we launched our open call for contributions in early 2022, we were hopeful that we would receive a breadth of responses, but the diversity in this special issue has exceeded our expectations. We hear from practitioners, established scholars and those nearer the start of their careers; from Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe; on topics ranging from the challenges of dealing with informal development to the perceptions of planning students on planning and health. What unites all the contributions is an emphasis on the voices of practicing planners and the energy and commitment of many of these practitioners to the role of planning in achieving positive outcomes around the world, despite some of challenges depicted. In this editorial we do not describe each paper in turn – the table of contents performs that role. Instead, in what follows we refer to the papers to frame our discussion and analysis, and to point out the breadth of issues faced by planners internationally.

This special issue is just one example of reflections on ‘the past and potential of professional planning’ (MacDonald *et al.*, 2014) or ‘the future of the planning profession’ (Parker *et al.*, 2020). It has been observed (Tasan-Kok *et al.*, 2016) that planning may be unusual in this sort of navel gazing about its identity and purpose. Whilst other professions are clearly not immune (see Baker, 2005; Twinn, 2013; Harper, 2016), the extent of critical appraisal within the planning profession is striking. Given, however, the wide reach of planning, and its significant role in responding to major issues, including climate change and housing affordability, reflection on what planners are doing now and why is surely essential. Most immediately, it has been suggested that in the UK, because of profound changes to the context within which planning takes place, ‘the planning profession’s ability to define and value itself is at risk’ (Schoneboom *et al.*, 2023, p. 195) – perhaps because of multiple state failures (Sykes & Sturzaker, 2023). A risk perhaps subtly acknowledged in the recent trend towards production of ‘state of the profession’ reports by professional bodies internationally, suggestive of the need for both self-reflection and advocacy.

In the UK, the professional body for planning, the Town Planning Institute (now Royal Town Planning Institute, RTPI) was formed in 1914, shortly after legislation giving local government new planning powers (Cherry, 1996). At this time, the objectives of the TPI were focussed on the notion of ‘civic design’ (MacDonald *et al.*, 2014, p. 96). At around the same time in the US, similar moves were made to ‘establish a city planning profession that included a government-supervised comprehensive approach to growth and development’ (MacDonald *et al.*, 2014, p. 104). These early principles, being concerned with the appearance of cities, and emphasising the role of the state, were replicated in many other contexts, for good and for ill. Some have emphasised the former, for example ‘The principles on which the RTPI was established have been vindicated not only in England and Europe, but also in formerly colonized nations’ (MacDonald *et al.*, 2014, p. 101). Others, now promoting more progressive futures for such colonised nations, have rightly argued that to do so is to struggle against ‘a colonial mindset’ (Myers & Owusu, 2023, p. 200), including that instituted through the planning legacy of colonial powers. Looking to the US, it is observed that ‘mainstream urban planning has been intentionally used as “the spatial toolkit of White Supremacy”’ (Agyeman, 2020, cited in Fainstein *et al.*, 2023, p. 253), with Australian and Canadian planning being likewise highlighted for its failures in relation to first-nation and indigenous people (see Porter 2017, and Porter & Barry 2014). These, and other authors, make a strong argument for reconsideration of planning norms in relation to non-white, non-Anglophone contexts (see Pojani, 2023). In this issue, Chakravarty & Prakash (2024) highlight the neglected subject of ethics and values in scholarship and practice in India, and draw attention to the ‘vestiges of colonial laws, post-colonial anxieties and disjunctures’ (p. 17). Similarly, Navitas *et al.* (2024) depict the enduring legacy of ‘Western planning concepts’ (p. 1) on Indonesian society and extol the need for thinking about initiatives and approaches to urban planning education in post-colonial societies. More broadly, Peña (2024) in this issue reminds us of the imbalance in research about what planners do, with its predominance in the global north. Inspired by the set of international perspectives on planners contained in this special issue, we suggest that there is a need for a renewed reflection on the role of the planner, and in what follows we briefly set out six factors which we hope will generate debate: (1) politics; (2) the public interest; (3) professionalism and whether this matters in different places; (4) the changing context within which planning takes place; (5) planning’s relationship with the public; and (6) a trend towards proceduralism in planning.

Factors for debate

Politics

It would be hard to find a planning scholar today who argued that planning is, or should be, a purely objective or technical exercise. Since at least the 1960s, planning has been recognised as an activity which cannot be separated from the context within which it takes place – planning was established to institute control over land, ‘an activity that sits firmly within the realm of politics’ (MacDonald *et al.*, 2014, p. 96). It is perhaps startling, then, to find that some practicing planners and even politicians often argue for the reverse – that politics should be somehow taken out of planning (Hopkins, 2021; Barnett, 2022; Rockliff, 2023), being seen as ‘a dirty word, infecting some notional “technical” purity of planning decisions’ (Schoneboom *et al.*, 2023, p. 197). This may, at least in part, be in response to the narrative of increased politicisation of planning (Grange, 2017), with the political environment of planning described as ‘toxic’ (Bates, 2021), with politicians from across political divides bemoaning the ‘broken system’ (Booth *et al.*, 2020) and calling for neo-liberalising reforms focussed on efficiency and growth (Grant, 2022). Perhaps because of this uneasy relationship, the question of how planners should grapple with politics and politicians in practice is not often explicitly addressed. In this issue, Peña (2024) concludes that ‘planners are ill equipped with tools to deal with power and politics’ (p. 15). In the code of conduct of the RTPI, for example, the only mention of politics in the seven-page document is to affirm that RTPI members should ensure that their own political interests do not affect their decision-making (RTPI, 2023). Yet, both Grant (2022) and Grange (2017) emphasise the need for planners to adopt a ‘critical ethos’ within the profession’, and the need for ‘strong’ professional organisations to give ‘voice’ to planner’s ‘values and visions for the future’ (284). Pertinent also in this issue, are Chakravarty & Prakash’s reference to cynical politics, and the impact of the liberalisation of the Indian economy on this (2024); and Riddell’s observation that the

technical and the political inevitably intertwine (Riddell, 2024). The question emerging here, perhaps is how should professional bodies and associations better support planners in advocating for the positive role of planning in addressing society's challenges, whilst also withstanding undue political pressure?

The public interest

As discussed extensively elsewhere, the notion that there is a single monolithic public interest to which planning can cleave has been comprehensively repudiated (Campbell & Marshall, 2000; Tait, 2016). In this issue, Sabah and Gülümser (2024) note political instability, cultural diversity and 'political and social polarization' (p. 4) as major issues which planners must navigate in their Turkish context. Despite such challenges, 'the public interest' remains an intensely powerful idea and thus retains a strong influence over planners, being central to their codes of conduct and often being used to justify their behaviour (Murtagh, Odeleye & Maidment, 2019; Sturzaker & Hickman, 2024). What practicing planners mean by the public interest is less clear, with 'diverse and sometimes contradictory' interpretations being revealed through observations and interview testimony (Schoneboom *et al.*, 2023, p. 193). In this issue, Clifford & Vigar (2024, p. 6) note that definitions of the public interest offered by practitioners tend 'not to be that detailed or reflective': an observation confirmed by Navitas *et al* (2024, p. 9) by reference to planner's formulating 'an ideal solution for the public interest'. Also in this issue, Andres *et al* (2024, p. 10) highlight the different public *interests* that planners must work with, and their tensions, and conceptualise *a public interest of fragments* as a practice enabler not only for the South African context about which they write, but with broader international relevance. This work reflects the wide understanding that any planning decision made will have differential impacts on different groups, some benefiting more and some benefiting less or indeed losing out. Further, Martins *et al.* (2024, p. 14) acknowledge the 'ideological fog' of the public interest in a Brazilian context, asserting the 'strongest' as winners in juxtaposed priorities. How planners reflect upon this, and consider the weight they may choose to place on these considerations is raised by Bakunowitsch *et al.* who note the balancing of planning consideration as a bundle ... a constellation of practices' (2024, p. ?). Is something that codes of conduct are much less adept in dealing with – reflecting wider societies, which find it easier to decide which plan to adopt than they do 'reaching consensus about what is right or good' (Wachs, 2016, p. 465). After all, 'debunking a unitary public interest is the easy part'; considering how a plurality of interests can live together is much harder (Fainstein *et al.*, 2023, p. 248). A range of perspectives on these matters from this issue's contributions both confirms the ongoing pull of the public interest ideal but reaffirms the difficulties in practice. The call for planners in a contemporary context must be to actively draw on Andres' ideas of a 'public interest of fragments' as a motivator for positive engagement with complexity rather than taking complexity as an excuse for inertia in decision making.

Professionalism and professionalisation

The extent to which planning is recognised as a distinct profession with associated planning education and accredited degrees varies around the world (see Mieg & Oevermann, 2021, and Alterman, 2017). This special issue reflects this pluralism, with contributions from parts of the world where planning has a long established history as a recognised profession with an associated regulatory body (such as the UK), places where planning has more recently become professionalised via regulation (such as South Africa), and elsewhere, where there are associations of urban and regional planners but more limited professional regulation (such as Turkey, Indonesia and Brazil), with planning functions often (although not exclusively) fulfilled by trained architects.

Whilst we know that the proportion of planners as a total of built environment professionals in any one country is strongly collated with the degree of professionalisation (RTPI, 2019), it does not follow that this correlates with levels of positivity of planners, or their level of agency to affect positive change. In this special issue, we make repeated calls to professional bodies to advocate or respond to the challenges we identify. However, the plurality in degree of professionalisation thus prompts questions about the extent to which professionalisation is important in relation to the challenges we have already outlined. Whilst

scholars such as Grange (2017) strongly assert that the weakly institutionalised nature of the planning profession in Sweden impacts the degree to which planners are heard and can exercise independent professional judgement, significantly more comparative research is needed on the role and effectiveness of planning's professional bodies internationally, and a focus on who advocates for planning and planners where there are none.

One important area for professional body engagement is the changing structure of the planning profession. The use of the public interest as a justification for planning has historically, in most contexts, been tied to an understanding of planning as primarily a state-led activity (Inch, Wargent & Tait, 2022). It is ostensibly easier to claim that planning is acting in the interests of the public if it is also acting at the behest of governments which are elected by that public. However, in some countries, a significant proportion, if not majority, of planners accredited by professional bodies now work in the private, not public sector (Hickman & Sturzaker, 2022). This is in contrast to other contexts (Puustinen *et al.*, 2017), but further comparative data is needed here. Around the world, of course, property development now tends to be market- rather than state-driven. Both Anand (2024) and Martins (2024), in this issue, identify this as a particular issue in South Africa and Brazil respectively. Planning thus needs to factor in the needs of the market in a way very different to the immediate post-war years. The variety of private sector employers, ranging from small sole practitioner businesses to large scale multinational and multidisciplinary public listed companies, must also be considered. The implications of the latter in particular, with organisational priorities including maximising stock price and quarterly profit reporting, could be significant (Linovski, 2019, 2021). Empirical work exploring the attitudes of small samples of planners working in the private sector suggest a range of approaches, from a strong rhetorical emphasis on working in the public interest to protecting the interests of clients, and all points between (Lauria & Long, 2019; Schoneboom *et al.*, 2023; Sturzaker & Hickman, 2024), including the pursuit of profit. Chakravarty & Prakash (2024), again in this issue, provide an important reminder that these issues are not unique to an anglophone, largely Western context, noting the ethical questions associated with the rise of consultants in urban planning in India. How this changes planners' relationship with the public, and indeed what it means to be a professional planner, and whether existing codes of conduct where they exist are adequate in the face of what in the UK at least is a rapid change to the constitution of the profession are only starting to be understood – but 'changes in the profession are happening "here and now"' (Bicquelet-Lock, 2024, p. ?), and demand urgent reflection.

Changing political economies

Scholars of planning typically promote the idea that planning is transformative, and that the planners they are helping to educate should go on to seek to contribute to that activity, for example by acting as advocates for those who are less well off (Davidoff, 1965); bringing people together in pursuit of consensus (Healey, 2006) or 'planning in the face of power' (Forester, 1989). Students, we know, are strongly motivated by ideas of planning as a positive agent for change (Hickman, McClymont & Sheppard, 2021); and surveys of practicing planners often find a similar sentiment – Anand (2024) and Close (2024), in this issue, being two examples. Perhaps because we do not wish to depress our students, we may not emphasise to the same extent that what a practicing planner does is set within the frame of the contemporary political economy (Tasan-Kok *et al.*, 2016), one which – as noted above – is in many contexts strongly influenced by neoliberalism, but this in turn, can lead to disappointment and frustration in early career practitioners (Tasan-Kok & Oranje 2018b). In the UK this neo-liberal turn means, for example, that the budget of the central government department which deals with planning and local government has been cut by an extraordinary 86% since 2010 (Arnold & Stirling, 2019), with very large cuts to local authority planning departments following, reducing staffing levels and resulting in a rise of short-term contracts and planners moving quickly from place to place – the so-called 'austerity planner' (Slade, Gunn & Schoneboom, 2019). In this issue, Riddell (2024) attributes the increasing distrust of planning and planners as, at least in part, to austerity, a distrust which reaches into the heart of a UK Government which increasingly sees planning as a problem, not a solution (Best *et al.*, 2023), and despite rhetoric around 'localism' has centralised power over the same period (Sturzaker & Nurse, 2020). The opportunity space for planners working in the public sector in the UK has therefore been significantly circumscribed over the last

decade or more, and Clifford & Vigar (2024) suggest that working under a 'neoliberal hegemony' (p. 2) can result in planners 'working in less progressive ways due to a governance context that requires this from its state actors' (ibid.). This illustrates the (perhaps implicit) pressure that professional planners can come under, and the need, in our view, for support and sympathy, as much as critique, from scholars.

Planners and the public

Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the changes discussed to this point appear in turn to have had consequent impacts on the nature of activity that planners undertake or prioritise. How planners engage with the public has long been a source of contestation, of course, with the canonical works of Jacobs (1961) and Arnstein (1969) prompting reflection and calls for change from scholars and others (for example Skeffington, 1969); but despite engagement being 'a central shibboleth of planning theory and practice' (Brownill & Inch, 2019, p. 7), its genuineness and effectiveness remain the subject of well justified criticism (Quick and Feldman, 2011). With reductions in public expenditure, resources for public engagement can be squeezed, the activity perhaps 'seen as a tedious waste of time and resource' (Tasan-Kok *et al.*, 2016, p. 636). The 'public sector churn' seen in the UK can mean that planners are not *in situ* in a place long enough to build up the strong relationships with communities that are needed for mutual trust (Parker *et al.*, 2020). The end result of all this is that working with communities may now be a minority aspect of the work of some, if not many, planners (Schoneboom *et al.*, 2023). Andres *et al.* (2024), in this issue, draw attention to the scarcity of planning skills in South Africa, and the consequential impact on the effectiveness of state-society engagement. Peña, also in this issue, goes one step further, and suggests that 'working on public participation' is not even present in planners' answers to open questions about their role (2024, p. 14). This underscores, as much of this special issue does, that the norms in education, training and capacity, and moreover the realities of planners actually do on a daily basis, observed in some European/Anglophone contexts are not necessarily uniform, and further reinforces the need for context-specific approaches to planning theory (Watson, 2016).

Proceduralism

Another perceived consequence of these changes has been a move from planning as an 'input system (plans, policy) to an output system (project, market-led)' (Parker *et al.*, 2020, p. 479). Some see this as a negative, facilitating as it might 'the fragmentation of planning tasks' (ibid.). Others, however, have advocated for a shift of some form, given that 'The public responds to outcomes, not policies' (MacDonald *et al.*, 2014, p. 105). The risk, however, is that fragmentation also leads to instrumentalisation, specialisation and proceduralisation. If planning systems and processes are framed and their powers constrained, perhaps in pursuit of neoliberalisation, the controls that planners have can be diluted. The expansion of 'permitted development rights' in England are an example of such dilution, taking an increasingly large quantum of development out of the control of planning, with deleterious effects on social inclusion, health and environmental sustainability (Clifford *et al.*, 2018). *In extremis*, this framing has been argued to result in 'a rather bleak picture of planning as a relatively narrow, highly pragmatic activity involved in managing and smoothing development and restricted to challenging the worst aspects of proposals, but without the power or position to fundamentally change the nature of development' (Schoneboom *et al.*, 2023, p. 194). A parallel trend, linked to neoliberalism and ideas of 'new public management', is 'a shift from occupational professionalism towards organizational professionalism' (Puustinen *et al.*, 2017, p. 79). The former would involve professionalism based on autonomous decisions and discretion, whereas the latter sees a standardisation and routinisation of work practices, and external regulation and accountability. This has been observed in planning in multiple contexts, including Finland (Puustinen *et al.*, 2017), and the UK (Hickman & Boddy, 2020; Schoneboom *et al.*, 2023). In some post-colonial contexts, there is a push back to a more historic characterisation of professionalised planning practice as highly technocratic (see Putri 2020). In parallel, there is evidence of practice in the UK (and elsewhere) of a shift towards a more technocratic form of planning, as the planning process becomes ever more burdened with information and assessment (Savini & Raco, 2019). In this issue, Clifford & Vigar (2024) suggest that 'almost all UK planning appears incremental to varying degrees, very rarely radical' (p. 15), and

experiences from Brazil and India suggest significant constraints on the opportunities for planners (Chakravarty & Prakash, 2024; Martins, Versari Ferreira & Gonçalves, 2024). Perhaps most stark is Peña's research showing planning practice in Mexico to be 'more focused on processes rather than critically understanding aspects of ethics and values ... between rational planning and a system driven by the market' (2024, p. 2). He calls for planning education to tackle the weak engagement of Mexican planners with issues of social justice, but says nothing of professionalisation. Questioning the role of educators and professional bodies (where they exist) in accepting or pushing back against these trends is surely an appropriate response here.

What might a renewed purpose look like/is there space for hope?

The preceding section presents a somewhat depressing litany of perceived problems for, and issues with, planning as a profession, but as we have sought to articulate these are by no means uniform across the globe. There are different attitudes one could take to these – some would use them as further justification for calls for a fundamental reorientation of society, and a recalibration of the relationship between capital and labour. Others would advocate for a radical approach to planning, one which seeks the abolition of institutions that have resulted in regressive or racialised outcomes (Heil, Turner & Wilson, 2023). We do not seek to denigrate more radical solutions, but our own inclination is focus on the here and now, and the changes which we consider are necessary, and might be possible, within such institutions.

The first factor we wish to consider is a perennial question for planning educators, mentioned above – how do we balance the importance of *utopianism* with *realism* (Sanchez, 2020)? Utopian ideas have a strong history in planning – the ideas of Howard (1898) are clearly utopian to some extent, and literally influenced by the originator of the term, Sir Thomas More (Howard *et al.*, 2003). Such ideas, and their descendants through the twentieth century have been rightly criticised for, *inter alia*, being insufficiently cognisant of the needs of the poor (Jacobs, 1961), or being hopelessly optimistic about the prospects for societal change. However, the importance of utopian ideas in planning continues to be emphasised (Koning & van Dijk, 2021). How much, however, should we expect planners to be the standard bearers for utopianism in their day-to-day activities? Planners are urged to adopt an 'activist mode of planning' (Albrechts, 2018, p. 291), or are critiqued for being 'profiteer planners, who conform to the existing planning system' (Taşan-Kok & Penpecioğlu, 2018, p. 113). Schoneboom *et al.* (2023, p. 183) were concerned by 'the relative silence of planners surrounding the commercialisation of local authority planning', suggesting that these planners should be confronting this change in their workplace. These are of course powerful arguments, and we do not intend to undermine them, but it is also reasonable to ask, to what extent is it fair to expect planners, with the same bills to pay as we all have, to speak up in a situation where the balance of power may be strongly against them; to perhaps risk their jobs, in opposition to a neoliberal approach which is widely regarded to be hegemonic? Fair or not, it is evident that many planners do not feel they can, or want to, speak out in this way. Furthermore, we suggest that it is legitimate for planners to see planning as 'just a job' without necessarily being burdened by utopian ideals. However, professional codes of conduct for planners could take the sorts of moral judgements which some professional bodies tend to avoid (Wachs, 2016) – they could for example explicitly state that professional planners have a duty to advocate for the least well off; or place more emphasis on promoting 'the public interest' (however defined) ahead of the views of politicians, or over the interests of employers or their clients (Clifford & Vigar, 2024, in this issue). This would be a big step and go beyond where, certainly in the UK, the professional body has been willing to tread – though there are voices arguing that it should go further (MacDonald *et al.*, 2014). The ethics code of the American Institute of Chartered Planners (AICP, 2016) does indeed cover such issues, urging members to 'seek social justice' (p. 2) and it is notable that the code of professional conduct of the Planning Institute Australia requires members to pursue 'sustainable and ethical development' (PIA, 2023, p. 3)

A second factor may be more to do with our attitudes as planning scholars – we would argue that scholars should recognise that there is scope for planners to act in a progressive way wherever they work, at the same time as there are constraints to what they can do regardless of the organisation that employs them. We have taken issue elsewhere with what seems to us to be a lacuna wherein private sector employees

‘are not perceived as planners at all’ (Hickman & Sturzaker, 2022, p. 246) by some critical scholars. Our own anecdotal experiences, and the evidence of our (admittedly small) sample of interviews and focus groups discussed in our contribution to this issue (Sturzaker & Hickman, 2024) suggest that the status of a planner’s employer bears little relation to how that planner thinks about the public interest and the ethics of the decisions that they make. As we acknowledge in that work, there is of course a risk of naivety on our part, and (self-)deception on the part of planners working in the private sector. Equally, others have pointed to changes in planning more broadly affecting how planning is conceived, regardless of employer – a move away from a public interest/service approach ‘towards a more procedural and transactional form of planning, focusing on ‘customer service’ (Schoneboom *et al.*, 2023, p. 196). This can of course be strongly linked towards the neoliberal hegemony discussed above, and the tendency to view citizens as customers/consumers. Whilst we share a reluctance to embrace this tendency, it does now reflect the reality of the lived experiences of many of us, and recognising this might be helpful in developing our understanding of what planning is today, rather than what we might think it should be. Editing this special issue has, however, illustrated to us that the experience in the UK is not necessarily a universal one, and that practice varies hugely around the world. In this issue, Sabah & Gülümser (2024), for example, found that some of the planners they surveyed could be described as ‘careerist’, but by no means all of them, and Peña (2024) did not convey frustration by planners with the strong procedural sense of planning in Mexico.

To end on a positive note, it may be that a new generation of planners are (gently or otherwise) pushing their organisations in more progressive directions. Hickman, McClymont and Sheppard (2021) depict a UK and international body of planning students highly intrinsically motivated by issues of social and climate justice, keen to make a difference. Schoneboom *et al.* (2023, p. 186) observed ‘resistance’ from younger planners to longer working hours, in pursuit of a better balance between work and home life. This mirrors a wider societal trend that some in the conservative commentariat are keen to label as ‘snowflake’ behaviour, but perhaps suggests a more positive relationship with work for us all (Jewell, 2022). Our own research (discussed in Sturzaker & Hickman, 2024) found senior staff referring to more junior colleagues pushing the organisation to work on particular projects, for example:

we increasingly have a younger workforce who... have an expectation and a right to expect us to be ethical in the projects that we’re working on, and the clients that we’re working for

(participant in roundtable who was at director level for an international, multi-disciplinary consultancy)

Of course, as that same research found, senior colleagues are those who have to worry about ‘paying the bills’ and making difficult decisions about which projects to work on and which to decline; and the literature suggests young planners struggling with a transition from idealistic student to professional (Tasan-Kok & Oranje, 2018b) – but these are positive signs nonetheless.

We finish this editorial firstly by thanking all the contributors to this special issue, whose various perspectives we have found enlightening and thought provoking. Before reading those articles we had perhaps fallen into the age-old trap of believing that our own experiences, largely of the English planning system and planners working within it, were fairly universal – despite urging our own planning students to always remember the importance of context, and to always seek to learn from and reflect on, practice internationally! It is clear that context is equally important when considering the value of planning, and the values of planners, in different parts of the world – and that assumptions about these are dangerous, whatever that context.

Finally, we reiterate our call above, for greater debate on the topics and factors we have discussed here – as many of the papers have noted, the world is changing perhaps as rapidly as it ever has, and planning must be ready to change with it.

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