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Editorial: Planning for uncertainty

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Volume 12 “Governing the Unknown: Adaptive Spatial Planning in the Age of Uncertainty” of the peer-reviewed journal *plaNext – Next Generation Planning* comes as a product of the 2021 AESOP YA Conference that took place at Polis University (Tirana) during March 29 and April 2, 2021. This was the 15th conference of the YA network, aimed at fostering a welcoming environment for debate and peer-learning among students, young and senior researchers, and practitioners interested in urban planning studies. Being the first YA conference since the initiation of the COVID pandemic, it was organized in a hybrid format, with the organizers managing more than 50 participants remotely from Albania. Despite fewer spontaneous and informal meetings than in previous events, due to the limitations imposed by the hybrid format, the conference went smoothly and engendered insightful reflections that provided a tangible input for this special issue of *PlaNext*.

The conference theme, “Governing the Unknown: Adaptive Spatial Planning in the age of uncertainty” was tailored around the spatial-temporal context of uncertainty triggered by coexisting phenomena, such as the pandemic and its social and economic implications, as well as climate change. The mantra of spatial planning having to continuously reinvent itself,

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adapting to the ever-changing context, gains a new level of significance when confronted with the uncertainties bounding socio-ecological and economic systems driving the latter towards developing resilience and evolution. The conference was yet another opportunity to nurture the discourse around the resilience of complex systems and how spatial planning should seek for new knowledge that addresses uncertainty within such systems.

The concepts of adaptation and resilience have been the focus of several conferences and forums in recent years, often with a deep theoretical examination of the concept, but sometimes also little practicality. One more conference on uncertainty would risk adding to the buzzword. But the dilemma of the Local Organizing Committee was 'shaken' by two consecutive seismic events of magnitude 5.8 and 6.4, which occurred in September and November 2019, respectively, in the coastal region of Albania and the Tiranë-Durrës metropolitan area. The aftermath was tragic, with thousands of buildings damaged and ten-thousands more declared uninhabitable. Moreover, there were thousands of people that got injured, and 51 casualties were recorded. The 2019 earthquakes event brought to light many of the planning and construction failures in Albania, highlighting the need to rethink the overall approach of spatial planning and urban development. Suddenly the terms 'resilience' and 'adaptivity' did not sound like buzzwords anymore. Governing the unknown had become as much a necessity as it had become a practical matter.

In the light of these events, with a newer and wider knowledge horizon on how uncertainty can affect the urban socio-ecological and economic system, the 15th conference of AESOP YA examined uncertainty and the unknown by investigating seven themes, which touched upon adaptive planning theory and technology, climate change; socio-economic resilience; territorial governance and politics, including a specific focus on South-East Europe; and COVID19 and territorial governance. This special issue has put together some of the key reflections that the young scholars contributed to the conference following these seven threads of the 'uncertainty and the unknown' discourse.

Being able to cope with crises, adapt to sudden change and live with uncertainty, is a necessity that pushes towards changing planning paradigms. The famous saying of Donald Rumsfeld (2002) "there are known knowns, known unknowns and unknown unknowns" holds true also for planning. The complexity of the systems is growing, and besides dealing with uncertainty, planning and governance should also address the complexity of the unknowns. The high uncertainty in planning and resilience is related to and affects economic, political, social as well as environmental aspects, all requiring some level of adaptation. While improving prediction mechanisms and management of big data may help reduce uncertainty, the governance of "unknowns" requires perhaps a shift in paradigm and the way we deal with knowledge in planning altogether. Davoudi (2015) puts an emphasis that planners need to increase their knowledge of what their "does do". Spatial planning, as one of the main mediums for achieving territorial governance and resilience of socio-ecological systems, is a domain in constant evolution and needs reinvention as a response to the challenges ahead. The discipline has always been subject to various pressures and concerns trying to adapt to the world's dynamics. While in its early days, planning was trying to control the future, now the growing recognition that it needs to work with uncertainty is becoming one of the main drivers for change. Today, planning as a discipline has a more complex mission to face, and it needs to move away from the initial paradigms that created it.

As such, also in the framework of this special issue, by the "unknown", we refer to the relation that this notion has in and for planning. In Europe, for instance, planning should address the continuously increasing inequalities between people and places. These territorial inequalities

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drag development towards critical levels of unsustainability, which are further challenged by the (yet to be discovered) effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as by the long-term climate change impacts. Both, the pandemic and the climate change, as phenomena characterized by high uncertainty and unknowns are not to be seen merely from a health or environmental (respectively) perspective. Their socio-economic impacts are extremely important too and are displayed across territories and spaces, reflected unequally among various geographies. In these complex circumstances, planning can address the multitude of territorial effects resulting from these and further upcoming unknowns, only by building systems' resilience, which encompasses both adaptation and robustness.

In a nutshell, spatial planning is one of the main mediums for achieving territorial resilience through the governance of the socio-ecological system, and is in constant evolution and reinvention as a response to constant upcoming challenges. With time planning has shifted from trying to control the future/s, towards increasingly recognizing that it needs to work with uncertainty as one of the main drivers of change. As such, planning has embraced a more complex mission driving it away from the paradigms that conceived it in the first place.

The contributions in this volume explore the intertwined relationship between planning and uncertainty in a highly complex system of upcoming unknowns, departing from different perspectives and contexts. The special issue consists of 6 papers that provide pluralistic and multifold perspectives on the theoretical and practical challenges of planning and governing the unknown.

In their article "*Covid-19 Response in Freetown's Slum Communities: Embracing Situated Knowledge in Crisis and Beyond*" Daniela Beltrame, Joaquin Benitez and Karena J. Groff question what constitutes knowledge in planning. This contribution begins with the recognition that successful pandemic responses often had in common their grounding in guidance, knowledge and the embodied experience of local communities. The paper engages in debates regarding how community generated data and knowledge, collaboration between grass-root community organizations and other development actors, and learning from past experiences can facilitate successful intervention in challenging times and contexts. The discussion is set in the context of Freetown's slum communities' response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Located in Sierra Leone, these slum communities took advantage of the experience in dealing with epidemics, namely previous Ebola outbreaks. The paper analysed how community-based organizations were able to "leverage their situated knowledge to negotiate, develop and occupy spaces of power in their city's crisis management systems". A rich dataset of semi structured interviews and personal communications with different stakeholders' sheds light on the importance of understanding what knowledge is, where, how and by whom it is produced, and how it can be collectively managed in challenging contexts and times. The importance of engaging in non-expert knowledge is particularly highlighted, together with how planning can benefit from this engagement. The wealth of this paper lies also in its reliance on grassroots experiences, and the strong case it makes for the inclusion of situated community knowledge in urban planning beyond the situation of exception or urgency created by pandemics.

In her article, titled "*Is Covid-19 going to change our relationship with space? A paradigm from Greece*" Eleni Komninou reflects around the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in cities and the lessons that urban planning should learn. Focusing on Greece, the author investigates the relationship between people and space to explain how the pandemic led to: counter-urbanization, quiet urban environment, lifeless streets, etc. It also brought a disturbance to the everyday lives of people as well as a shift in urban balances. Komninou showed how our uses of indoor and outdoor spaces have space during the pandemic and how this change has

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influenced the shape of urban landscape as well as people's conception of security in public spaces and interaction with their surroundings. If the emerging trends are to become the new normal, a complete shift in our perception and relationship with space is possible. The pandemic can thus be viewed as an opportunity to put in place an integrated planning framework that prioritizes humans and their safety.

Barbora Borotova's contribution "*Cultural heritage challenges and Smart City concept. A strategic planning tool in a strategic planning framework*" brings together the concepts of Smart City and of Cultural Heritage, to understand what are the potential synergies that can develop between the two. These concepts are often found in Planning literature and research, but not often found together. It focuses on the gap between existing Smart City strategies and technologies, and how cultural heritage is integrated into these. The paper is informed by a literature review and a review of Smart city strategy documents in European cities with a notable cultural and historical significance. It questions, what are the different approaches to integrating a cultural heritage in a Smart City strategy? Borotova discusses how cultural heritage could be used as an identity creator in existing Smart City strategies, but how this opportunity is often neglected. Ultimately this paper engages with an often-found challenge of planning, that of strategically integrating different agendas, strategies, and sectoral approaches and our shared spaces, identities, memories and desired futures. This lack of integration and coordination is a hindrance in the approach of "strategic spatial planning".

Another valuable contribution to this special volume, "*Planning with uncertainty: place development of undefined becoming in south-west Sweden*" by Rebecca Staats, looks into the complex and uncertain nature of contemporary planning. The article investigates the extent to which a post-structuralist planning approach can unlock the potential of "uncertainty-as-opportunity" through the studied case, Uddebo in south-west Sweden. Uddebo is a small town and goes through place development coordinated at the regional-level. Place development in the studied case shows the characteristics of structuralist planning, where there is relatively little room left for place development to evolve with – often unforeseen – complexities and uncertainties that inevitably emerge during any planning process from conception to on site implementation. Through a rigorous qualitative analysis, the study identifies a "mismatch" between the regionally-coordinated place development project and the already existing citizen-led initiatives in Uddebo in terms of their compatibility with complexities and uncertainties. Instead, taking on a post-structuralist planning approach with a focus on the process rather than the desired outcome could be more promising. The study confirms, for the studied case and beyond, that an approach which would not necessitate a fixation to the desired or predetermined outcomes can and should be adopted in order to unlock the potentials of working with unknowns and uncertainties. Otherwise, the rigidity of the accustomed structuralist planning approaches remains inadequate in addressing complexities which the planning discipline itself operates in.

A more theoretical contribution comes from the "*Reproduction of Spatial Planning Roles. Navigating the Multiplicity of Planning*" by Christian Lamker and Marjan Marjanović, who embrace Gilles Deleuze's concept of assemblage thinking to frame spatial planning as a continually changing multiplicity of diverse entities and emerging dynamic relations among them. The authors also refer to Niklas Luhmann's social systems' theory for promoting a perspective on planners as a multiplicity of roles grounded in continuously evolving self-descriptions and self-developed meanings. Their core argument is that planners achieve the organization (navigation) in an uncertain and complex environment through the reproduction of roles. In their view, planning is, therefore, a self-reflexive process that uses a multiplicity of role configurations that ultimately define and transform the meaning of planning itself.

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In “*The mechanics of drawing: helping planners use serious games for participatory planning*”, by Micael Sousa, the discussion moves to the opportunities provided by board games to facilitate participatory planning processes. The paper departs from the claim that the interactive tools can facilitate participation in planning and generate useful data. However, there are challenges to how planners can engage with and adapt to their needs the existing interactive tools. This is also the case with serious games. This paper explores specifically drawing board games that are easily available in the market, ludic and created for entertainment purposes. It identifies the characteristics of drawing games through a popular board game database platform, and goes further to discussing how the selected games and their drawing mechanisms can be adapted and/or transferred to support participatory planning processes. The paper also discusses current challenges faced by planners in using serious games in participatory planning processes, and how to overcome these challenges via existing, ludic, readily available board games. The final aim is generating a debate around the opportunities to engage in a meaningful, representative manner with a wide range of stakeholders, and generate meaningful data to better inform planning processes and decisions.

Reference

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