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plaNext in transition: A decade of young academic publishing in planning (2015–2025) – Insights and futures

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This article reflects on the ten-year journey of *plaNext – Next Generation Planning*, an open-access, peer-reviewed journal initiated by the AESOP Young Academics Network (AESOP-YAN). First published in 2015, *plaNext* has served as a platform for early-career researchers to engage in planning debates, publish their work, and foster professional development. As the journal approaches its tenth anniversary, this reflection examines its history, legacy, and future directions, highlighting its role in promoting inclusive, critical, and innovative scholarship in the field of planning. Over the past decade, *plaNext* has evolved into a dynamic forum that publishes diverse contributions, fosters international dialogues, and challenges conventional planning paradigms. The journal's commitment to promoting interdisciplinary dialogues is evident in its eclectic range of published works, encompassing empirical research, theoretical discussions, innovative methodologies, and critical case studies. This breadth reflects *plaNext*'s mission to serve as a conduit for creative and socially responsive planning research. As the journal evolved, it remained steadfast in its dedication to nurturing the professional development of young academics by providing opportunities for early-career researchers to engage in editorial processes, peer review, and scholarly debates. As *plaNext* transitions to a new editorial board, this article offers a comprehensive overview of its evolution and impact. Drawing on the journal's trajectory and broader shifts in planning scholarship, the discussion highlights the critical role of platforms like *plaNext* in shaping the discipline's future.

Keywords: spatial planning; inclusive research; emerging scholars publishing; interdisciplinary planning futures; editorial transition

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Introduction

In 2015, the AESOP Young Academics Network (YAN) started a cool project called *plaNext – Next Generation Planning*. The idea was to create a space for early-career researchers to share their work and engage in essential planning discussions (Miraftab, 2009; Roy, 2005). This project kicked off because people recognised the importance of fostering communication. This work highlights a significant need for a more open and inclusive method of communication among various fields within the planning community (Tulumello, 2016). Fast forward to today, and *plaNext* has become a lively platform that does more than just publish various articles. It has become a space where people worldwide can come together and discuss new ideas while questioning traditional views on planning (Mehan, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; Varış Husar et al., 2025, 2023; Watson, 2009; Yiftachel, 2006). One of the things that sets the journal apart is its commitment to open access, making it easier for people to read and share work while giving a voice to those who might not usually be heard. This whole setup has helped spark thoughtful conversations around urban and regional planning.

This article examines the growth and impact of *plaNext* as it prepares for a change in its editorial board. It reflects the path the journal has followed while also considering how the field of planning research is evolving as a whole. It's clear that platforms like *plaNext* are taking an essential role in shaping the future of planning.

My past work examines the intersection of urban planning with social movements and cultural narratives. I've pushed the idea that we must include everyone when planning urban spaces. This philosophy aligns perfectly with what *plaNext* aims to do—serve as a bridge for innovative research and respond to social issues. As *plaNext* enters its second decade, it remains true to its core principles while adapting to the changes in the academic publishing world. The journal continues to focus on creating a welcoming space for new voices, encouraging research across diverse fields, and addressing pressing global issues through informed planning discussions.

Origins and vision

plaNext was founded by AESOP's Young Academics Network in 2013 to provide an open-access, peer-reviewed platform where early-career planners could publish without fees and challenge dominant Eurocentric planning narratives. The first issue[1] published in 2015, "Cities that Talk", established the journal's focus on inclusion, equality, and participatory urbanism. From the outset, *plaNext* committed to amplifying diverse voices—especially from the Global South—and nurturing emerging researchers through fair review processes, editorial opportunities, and community engagement (Mehan and Dominguez, 2024).

Over the past decade, *plaNext* has published 14 volumes addressing critical themes in contemporary planning. Volume 11[2] (2021) reframed planning theory through the lens of the Global South, Volume 13[3] (2023) explored human well-being and community dynamics, and Volume 14[4] (2024–2025) examined social mobilisations in times of crisis. By spotlighting grassroots movements, southern epistemologies, and resilience planning, *plaNext* has established itself as a dynamic forum for critical, socially attentive planning scholarship.

[1] https://journals.aesop-planning.eu/index.php/planext/issue/view/1
[2] https://journals.aesop-planning.eu/index.php/planext/issue/view/11
[3] https://journals.aesop-planning.eu/index.php/planext/issue/view/17
[4] https://journals.aesop-planning.eu/index.php/planext/issue/view/19

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Impact and recognition

Since it started, *plaNext – Next Generation Planning* has steadily made a name for itself in the academic world, showing its dedication to quality, inclusivity, and fresh ideas in planning research. One of its significant achievements came in February 2025 when *plaNext* was accepted into Scopus, one of the best-known and most trusted databases for academic studies. Getting into Scopus not only helps more people find the journal but also demonstrates that it matters and makes a real contribution to today's conversations about planning.

What's compelling about this journal is that it provides open access and doesn't charge publications' fees. This means that researchers from all over—regardless of their location or financial situation—can share their work and contribute to academic debates. This concept aligns with the growing global effort to make academic publishing more equitable and accessible to everyone. The folks behind *plaNext* like to focus on special, themed issues that examine essential topics in planning. For example, in Volume 14, titled "Social Mobilisations and Planning through Crises," the journal digs into how neoliberal urban planning interacts with the challenges of global crises (Rossini et al., 2024). These themed issues have transformed the journal into a trusted platform for insightful discussions and fresh perspectives.

The influence of *plaNext* extends beyond this point. It's got a lively mix of authors from around the world, including newcomers to research and seasoned experts. This mix fosters a vibrant exchange of ideas, methods, and experiences, which helps push planning theory and practice forward (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Kiers, de la Peña, & Napawan, 2020; Tahar et al., 2023; Kozlowski et al., 2020). It's exciting to think about how such diversity can lead to new ways of seeing and solving problems in planning.

Challenges and opportunities

Over the last ten years, *plaNext* has been working diligently to learn about the complicated world of academic publishing. Like many scholarly journals, it has faced common challenges but has also discovered exciting opportunities for growth and innovation.

One significant challenge has been maintaining rigorous peer-review standards while handling an ever-increasing number of submissions. As more researchers seek to publish their work, finding enough qualified reviewers has become increasingly challenging. The difficulty often leads to concerns about whether the reviews are of sufficient quality and completed on time. This struggle highlights a broader issue in academic publishing, characterised by an insufficient number of reviewers to meet the demand (Open Publishing, 2021). To address this, we explored ideas such as open and collaborative reviews, which could help make the entire process more transparent and democratic for all parties involved.

Another critical issue is ensuring the journal has diverse contributors and editorial board members. Research shows that certain groups, like women, queer people, visible and invisible minorities from the Global South, and those just starting their careers, are often not well-represented in scholarly publishing (INASP, 2016). To combat this, *plaNext* has been actively working to diversify its editorial board and contributor pool. They're implementing inclusive policies and running outreach programs to connect with underrepresented communities, a significant step toward making publishing more accessible to everyone.

The journal's commitment to open access presents its set of challenges. While this model makes research more accessible to anyone, it also means that the journal must identify ways

to operate financially without charging authors for processing their articles. This process requires support from institutions (Fainstein, 2010; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Hammami, 2016; Healey, 1997). Crucially, *plaNext* has remained independent of commercial publishers thanks to support from AESOP, which provides a modest annual grant, which, together with the journal's nonprofit ethos, alleviates financial pressure and enables the journal to offer completely free publishing and access. This project advocates for sustainable publishing models driven by the community, which could ultimately benefit them in the long run (COPIM, 2023).

Despite these challenges, some real opportunities are on the horizon, especially when it comes to working across different fields. By building partnerships that span various disciplines and geographical areas, *plaNext* has enriched its content and reached a broader audience. Interdisciplinary research is gaining more recognition for its ability to tackle complex societal issues, and *plaNext* has made it a point to be a platform that promotes these collaborative approaches (Rossini et al., 2024; Mehan, 2024a, 2024b, 2023).

Additionally, the journal is embracing digital technologies to enhance its publication process. Shifting from traditional print to digital formats has made it easier to share research with a broader audience and engage with them more effectively. Using new publishing tools and platforms, *plaNext* is continuously adapting to keep up with the fast-paced changes in academic publishing (INASP, 2016; Mehan, 2022). All these proactive strategies demonstrate *plaNext*'s commitment to evolving and staying relevant in the planning field, pushing boundaries while navigating challenges.

Future directions

As *plaNext – Next Generation Planning* enters its second decade, the journal is poised to advance a research agenda centered on equity, sustainability, and innovation. Future issues will foreground climate resilience, urban inequality, and the integration of emerging technologies—such as artificial intelligence and big data—into participatory governance frameworks. With the Editor in Chief's knowledge in social and environmental justice and different fields of urban studies, *plaNext* wants to gather articles that combine important ideas with real-world solutions, making it a top place for research focused on justice in planning.

Moreover, the Editor in Chief's scholarly vision—grounded in decolonial perspectives, community engagement, and global epistemic diversity—offers a guiding ethos for the journal's evolution. By incorporating a brief editorial reflection on this vision, *plaNext* can affirm its identity not only as an academic publication but also as a dynamic, values-driven forum. Such a statement, modelled after the personal yet academically grounded style seen in previous editorials, will inspire both contributors and readers, reinforcing the journal's mission as it advances into its next decade. The emerging critical expertise in socio-environmental justice and interdisciplinary urbanism will guide the commissioning of work that pairs rigorous theoretical critique with practical, socially responsive planning interventions.

A significant theme for the journal is the impact of climate change on cities and regions. Given the profound effects of climate change, *plaNext* is committed to disseminating research that explores strategies for cities to adapt, maintain resilience, and promote sustainable development. This approach aligns with the demands of many academics, who seek research that goes beyond theory and delves into the practical aspects of the climate crisis, as well as its impact on society and the environment. At the same time, *plaNext* wants to address urban inequality in relation to planning. It's essential to examine how planning can help reduce social gaps or, ironically, if it makes those gaps wider, especially as cities grow rapidly and the economy shifts. By focusing on fairness and justice, the journal aims to contribute to the

development of planning methods that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of all individuals.

We also can't ignore the tech side of things. With technological changes, planners today face both new opportunities and tricky challenges. *plaNext* examines the impact of artificial intelligence and big data on planning strategies. The journal is open to discussions that weigh the pros and cons of these tech advancements in making planning more participatory, improving how we manage cities, and tackling complex spatial issues. To tackle these urban challenges effectively, *plaNext* believes in bringing together ideas from various fields. Whether it's sociology, environmental science, or public health, the journal aims to integrate these perspectives to enrich the discussion surrounding planning and development. It's essential to draw on diverse perspectives to deal with the complexity of today's urban issues and develop innovative solutions. Lastly, *plaNext* is all about hearing from diverse voices in planning debates. The journal seeks to feature work from lesser-known regions and communities to broaden the pool of ideas and perspectives in planning. By encouraging various viewpoints, *plaNext* aims to support a global discussion that is both critical and inclusive in the world of planning scholarship. The journal strives to make planning knowledge accessible to all and reflect the diverse experiences of communities worldwide.

Conclusion

Over the last ten years, *plaNext – Next Generation Planning* has become an essential platform for new scholars looking to make their mark in the planning world. It focuses on being open to everyone, encouraging diverse opinions, and promoting new ideas. This journal has made significant contributions to the subject by ensuring that diverse voices are heard and sparking conversations across other areas of study. One of the things that sets *plaNext* apart is its commitment to open-access publishing. They don't charge fees for articles, making it easier for people from all backgrounds to share their research and connect with global audiences. The initiative is part of a bigger trend that aims for fairer and more open academic publishing. Another exciting development is that *plaNext* has recently been added to Scopus, a well-known database that helps people search for research articles. This inclusion indicates that the journal is gaining recognition and is vital for today's planning discussions. Looking ahead, as *plaNext* enters its next chapter, it will keep focusing on fostering lively and impactful research in planning. By remaining open to new ideas, supporting projects that span multiple disciplines, and upholding its commitment to inclusivity, the journal is well-positioned to help shape the future of planning theory and practice.

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