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Echoes of a decade in the *plaNext – Next Generation Planning* journal and the road ahead

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plaNext – Next Generation Planning journal is an international, peer-reviewed, open-access e-journal founded by the AESOP Young Academics network. Established as a platform to amplify the voices of emerging scholars, *plaNext* enables early career researchers to contribute to international planning debates and make their work accessible to a global audience. The journal welcomes a wide range of contributions, including empirical research, theoretical discussions, innovative methodologies, case studies, and book reviews, fostering both academic engagement and professional development among young planners.

This paper presents a threefold contribution: (i) a retrospective overview of *plaNext*'s scholarly output over the past decade, (ii) an empirical survey assessing the journal's outreach within the Young Academics network and capturing respondents' perspectives on the contemporary publishing system, and (iii) a collective editorial dialogue. It culminated in a set of strategic recommendations aimed at enhancing editorial practices, strengthening mentorship mechanisms, and consolidating *plaNext*'s role as a supportive and inclusive platform. In positioning itself through these initiatives, *plaNext* aspires to serve as a distinctive and forward-looking model of an open-access journal committed to empowering early career researchers in the planning discipline.

Keywords: *plaNext*, planning, early career researchers, academic publishing, young planners, urban research

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Introduction

plaNNext – Next Generation Planning journal is an international, peer-reviewed, open-access e-journal founded by the Young Academics network (YAN) of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP). With a core mission of providing a platform for early career researchers (ECR), *plaNNext* aims to promote critical engagement with planning discourses and make young scholars' contributions accessible to a broader academic and professional audience. The journal emphasises inclusivity, mentorship, and experimentation in publishing practices. *plaNNext* positions itself as a distinctive and forward-thinking voice in the evolving landscape of planning scholarship.

In this paper, we provide a structured analysis and reflection on *plaNNext*'s publishing history, trajectory, and editorial vision. This is achieved through three distinct approaches: first, a retrospective overview of the journal's output over the last decade; second, a survey on the outreach of *plaNNext* within the YAN and the members' perspective on the publishing system; and third, a collective editorial dialogue.

The retrospective evaluation of *plaNNext*'s output over the past decade was conducted through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses. These analyses consider publication dynamics, including issue frequency, article output, and the geographical and institutional distribution of authors, and trends through keyword and content analysis. Together, these perspectives highlight the journal's diverse, interdisciplinary, and globally engaged profile.

What sets *plaNNext* apart is its commitment to amplifying the voices of young planners at a time when publishing remains a significant challenge for many ECR. To further understand and strengthen this role, a survey was conducted among members of the AESOP YAN to assess their familiarity with and experiences of *plaNNext*, while also exploring broader challenges faced by ECR in academic publishing. The survey gathered responses on participants' awareness of the journal, their publication experiences, perceived barriers to publishing, and suggestions for how journals can better support ECR. Participants were asked to identify the main challenges they face as master's students, PhD candidates, and postdocs, as well as to provide recommendations for how *plaNNext* could evolve to serve the needs and priorities of emerging planning scholars more effectively. The survey also solicited input on desired thematic directions and areas for journal development, providing valuable insights to inform the journal's future editorial strategy and support mechanisms for young academics in the planning field.

The third part of the paper focuses on the collective editorial dialogue developed around the findings. This dialogue centred on critical questions about the journal's ethos and future direction, such as balancing inclusivity with academic rigour, the role of ECR–senior scholar collaboration, academic visibility, and equitable open-access practices.

Through these questions and the insights they generated, this paper not only provides an original analysis of the publication history and accomplishments of *plaNNext* but also outlines a roadmap for how it can continue to innovate and lead as a truly next-generation planning journal.

A retrospective review of *plaNNext*

As the *plaNNext* journal reaches its 10th anniversary, a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative evaluation of its publishing trajectory has been undertaken to inform future editorial strategies and ensure the journal's stability, visibility, and continued inclusion in leading academic indices.

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The *plaNext* journal commenced publication in 2015 and has released a total of 14 volumes to date, with the latest issue published on the 21st of May 2025. Between 2016 and 2019, the journal maintained a biannual publication schedule. In contrast, in 2015 and from 2020 onwards, only one issue was published annually. This shift coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent changes in the editorial team, both of which affected the journal's operational capacity and publication frequency.

Excluding foreword and editorial introductions, a total of 79 articles, comprising 78 research articles and 1 book review, have been published in the past. As shown in Figure 1, the number of publications varies across volumes. The highest number of publications was recorded in Volume 11¹, 'Planning Theories from the Global South', with nine papers (also one of the most cited volumes), while the lowest was in Volume 6², 'Open Call', featuring only three papers.

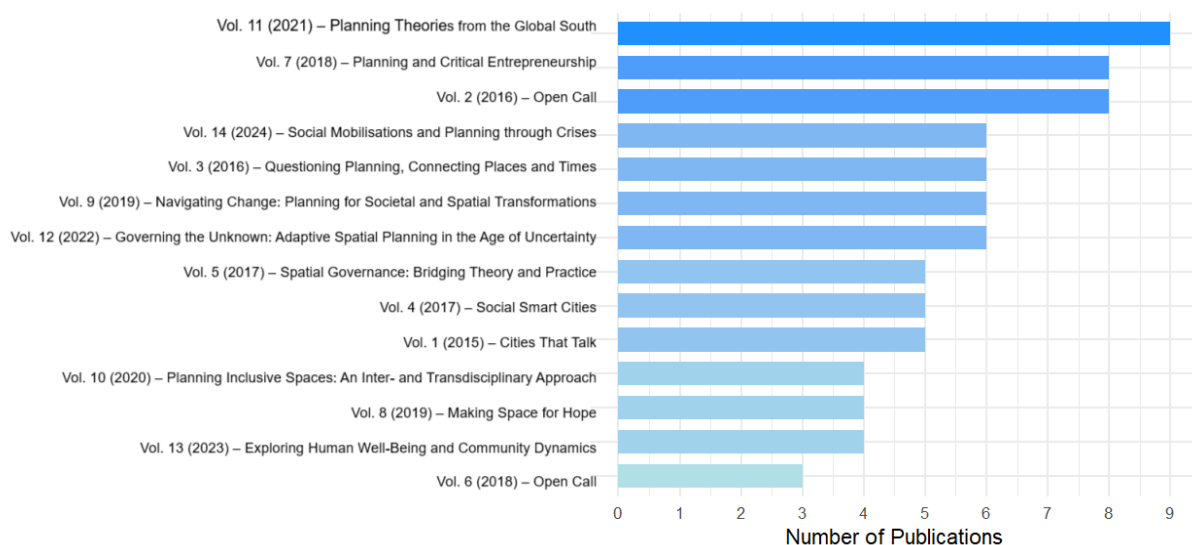


Figure 1. Number of publications per volume

The distribution of authors by affiliation country demonstrates the dominance of European-based contributions (53 %) to *plaNext*. However, it can be noticed that the emergent trend of the journal's international (beyond Europe) outreach corresponds to 43 % of the contributions (Figure 2). The affiliation countries of three independent authors could not be identified and are thus represented as 'unspecified' in the dataset. Germany (14 authors), the Netherlands (13 authors), and Italy (10 authors) are the leading countries. Approximately 34 % of all authors are affiliated with institutions from these top three contributing countries (Figure 3). The United Kingdom (9 authors) and the United States (9 authors) further strengthen the journal's connection with European and North American academic institutions. Together, the top five contributing countries account for 56 authors, representing 50% of all contributors. These top five countries are followed by Brazil (7 authors), the most numerous Global South contributor, Austria (5 authors) and Sweden (4 authors). Other countries, such as Canada, Estonia, Norway, Finland, Greece, Israel, Spain, Portugal, and Türkiye, each contributed between 2 and 3 authors. There are also authors affiliated with universities in the Global South, including Chile, Egypt, Ghana, Mexico, South Africa, Argentina, Georgia, and Taiwan. Additionally, the 'others' category, which includes authors from multiple countries with single contributions, accounts for 16 authors in total.

¹ <https://journals.aesop-planning.eu/index.php/planext/issue/view/11>

² <https://journals.aesop-planning.eu/index.php/planext/issue/view/6>

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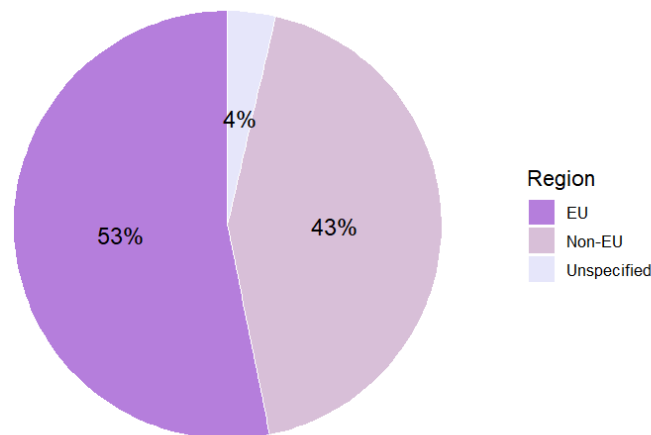


Figure 2. Distribution of authors' affiliation by region

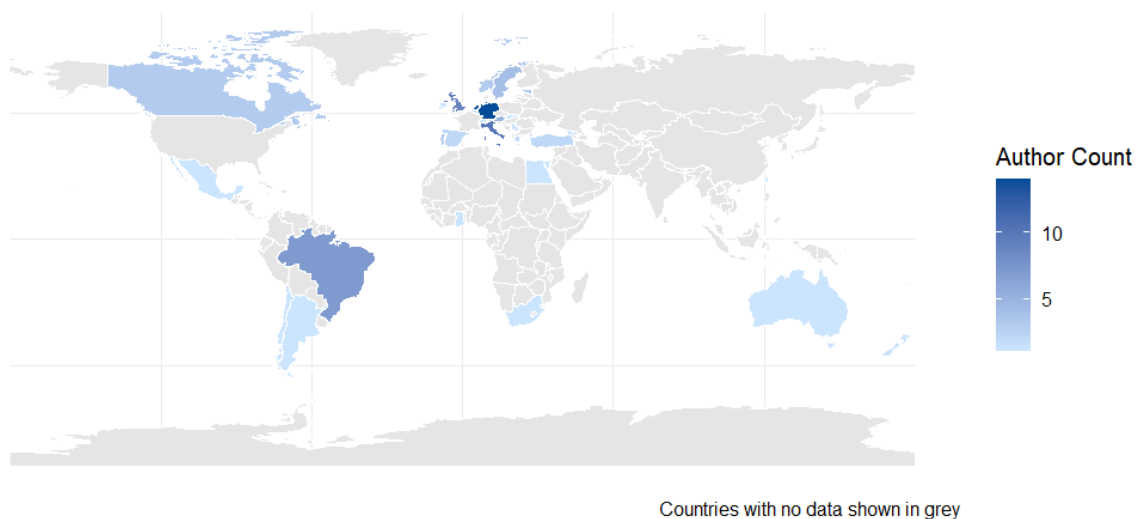


Figure 3. Distribution of authors by affiliation country

While these figures indicate plaNext's reach beyond its European base, they also reflect the journal's strong anchoring within European academic networks, particularly in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy. This orientation is closely linked to the historical roots of YAN and AESOP as Europe-based organisations and thus represents a natural starting point rather than a limitation. However, the journal is committed toward greater internationalisation. ECR affiliated with European institutions but originally from other regions—such as Asia and Africa—have played a vital role in broadening the scope of contributions and perspectives. Their engagement has fostered growing connections with the Global South and other parts of the world, suggesting a continuing potential for *plaNext* to serve as a platform for more globally inclusive planning scholarship.

The comparatively limited engagement from the Global South, with Brazil standing out as the only major contributor, suggests that structural barriers such as language, access to publishing networks, and uneven institutional support continue to shape participation. In the coming years, *plaNext* intends to adopt a more critical and proactive approach by prioritising outreach strategies that engage underrepresented regions, diversifying editorial and reviewer pools, and actively encouraging submissions that interrogate global asymmetries in planning

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knowledge production. By doing so, the journal seeks not only to expand its geographical diversity but also to foster a more reflexive, equitable, and critical dialogue on the politics of knowledge in planning.

Figure 4 presents the distribution of contributing authors by university affiliation. While a significant portion of authors (80 individuals) are affiliated with a wide range of institutions grouped under the ‘others’ category, several universities stand out with multiple contributors. University College London (the UK) and the University of Twente (the Netherlands) are the most prominent, each with five contributing authors. They are followed by TU Wien (Austria), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (the USA), and TU Delft (the Netherlands), each with four authors. Institutions, such as TU Dortmund (Germany), the University of Groningen (the Netherlands), and IUAV University of Venice (Italy), each have three contributors. This distribution reflects a broad international engagement, with a modest concentration around a few leading academic institutions known for their planning, design, or technology-oriented programmes. At the same time, the visibility of such institutions also indicates a higher likelihood of contributions involving senior scholars who are strongly connected to AESOP, suggesting that *plaNext*’s networked position within established academic circles continues to shape its authorship profile. Nevertheless, maintaining this balance between established academic connections and the journal’s core mission of amplifying ECR remains crucial, underscoring the need for editorial strategies that safeguard space for emerging voices while benefiting from intergenerational collaboration.

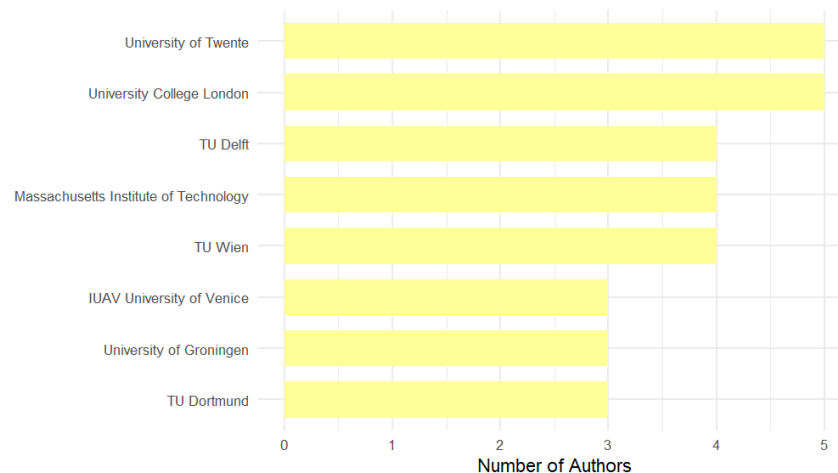


Figure 4. Distribution of top contributing universities

Figure 5 illustrates the career stages of *plaNext* contributors, with the majority being PhD candidates, complemented by smaller proportions of postdoctoral researchers, master’s students, and early-stage professionals. Importantly, postdoctoral researchers are also considered part of the ECR community, aligning with the journal’s mission to provide a platform for emerging scholars. This distribution reflects *plaNext*’s proactive editorial policy of prioritising contributions authored solely by ECR, without requiring the co-authorship of senior supervisors. The intention behind this policy has been to empower ECR to publish as leading authors, thereby operating outside traditional academic publication hierarchies. Senior scholars, by contrast, typically appear in *plaNext* not as article authors but as co-guest editors of special issues, ensuring intellectual diversity, thematic depth and intergenerational exchange of ideas and reflections, without overshadowing the platform’s focus on early career voices. The patterns visible in Figure 5 therefore reinforce *plaNext*’s role in carving out a distinct space where ECR can develop authorship experience, visibility, and confidence as independent scholars.

The keyword cloud analysis provides valuable insights into the thematic orientation and research priorities of the articles published in the journal. It was generated in RStudio by visualising the keywords extracted from all published articles. As illustrated in Figure 6, the most frequently used keywords are urban planning and informality, each appearing four times, indicating their central position in the academic discussions addressed by the authors. These are closely followed by keywords such as participation, smart city, urban governance, governance, public space, and Brazil, each occurring three times. This distribution reflects the diversity of research interests represented in the journal and indicates a particular emphasis on governance practices, participatory planning mechanisms, urban innovation, and case studies focusing on specific geographical contexts, such as Brazil. Additionally, the term 'planning culture' emerged twice, highlighting discussions on the values, norms, and practices that shape planning across different socio-spatial settings. Overall, this analysis reveals that the research published in the journal predominantly engages with critical urban issues, combining theoretical perspectives with empirical case studies, and addressing contemporary debates on informality, participation, governance, and smart urban development.



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Of the 78 research articles published in plaNext, only 30 did not include a specific case study. This demonstrates that ECC present research grounded in rich empirical analysis and research, which might often be characterised by immersive fieldwork and direct interaction with the context under study. As shown in Figure 7, the remaining 48 papers are based on case studies and are distributed as follows: 27 focused exclusively on non-European cities, 20 on European cities, and only one article incorporated case studies from both European and non-European cities, indicating that international case study comparison remains an underutilised approach among ECR. Given that 53 % of authors are affiliated with European universities, this data tells us that, despite being affiliated with European universities, many of them dedicate their research to non-European contexts.

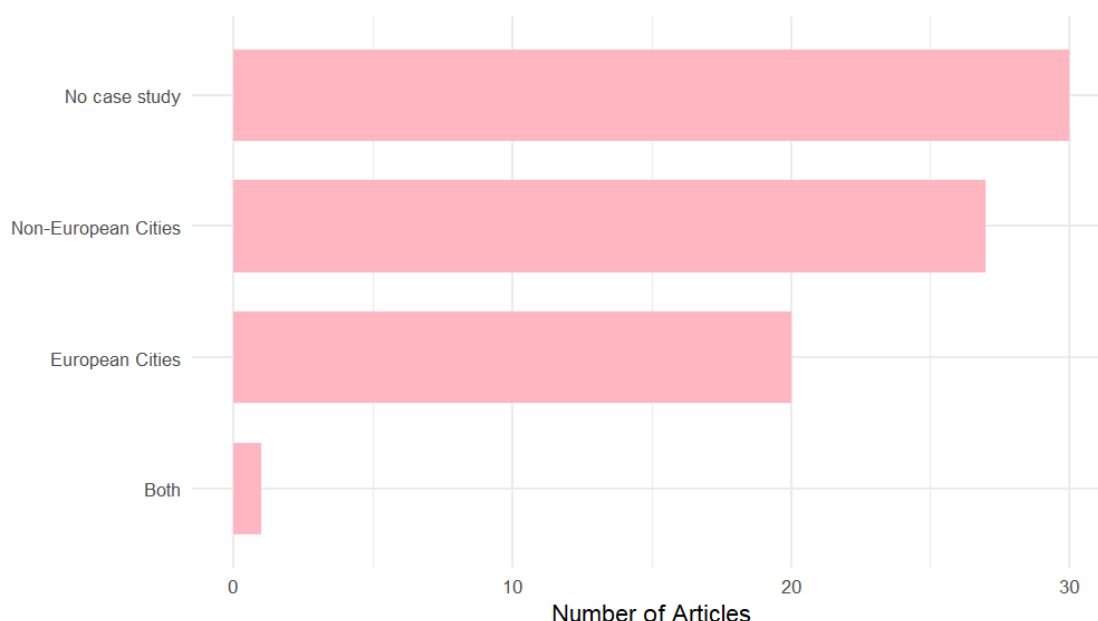


Figure 7. Distribution of case study regions in published articles.

Survey of early career researchers

The survey was conceived as an instrument to capture young researchers' priorities and perspectives, enabling these insights to inform future editorial dialogue within the *plaNext* editorial board (EB). This approach sought to establish connections between the bottom-up needs of the AESOP YAN communities and the strategic vision for *plaNext*'s development. The objective was to examine how a young-academics-led journal might better address the institutional and professional challenges encountered by emerging scholars.

The survey was developed by the editors of this special issue to systematically collect young researchers' perspectives on contemporary academic challenges. The survey comprised 12 questions addressing journal awareness and experience, publishing obstacles encountered by ECR, desired institutional support mechanisms, and recommendations for journal advancement and thematic development. Data collection occurred between February and March 2025, with survey distribution through YAN newsletters, social media platforms, and the 2025 YAN conference in Hanover, Germany. Additional dissemination occurred through targeted email networks.

The survey yielded 37 responses from an internationally diverse cohort, predominantly comprising PhD students or candidates (n=22), postdoctoral researchers (n=8), master's students (n=2), and scholars with other academic positions (n=5). The age distribution centred

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on the 25–35 demographic (n=22), with relatively balanced gender representation (13 women, 11 men, 2 undisclosed). Geographic distribution encompassed multiple countries, with substantial representation from Italy alongside responses from Türkiye, Greece, India, the United States, and other countries.

Analysis of survey responses revealed significant insights regarding *plaNext*'s current positioning and the systemic challenges confronting ECR. Limited journal awareness emerged as a primary finding: only 16 of 36 respondents demonstrated familiarity with *plaNext*, with initial exposure occurring primarily through collegial networks, academic conferences, or social media channels. Publication experience with *plaNext* was minimal, with only one respondent reporting prior engagement, noting editorial motivation while identifying concerns regarding process duration and communication consistency.

Respondents articulated four principal categories of challenges affecting ECR: structural and institutional barriers encompassing funding constraints, inadequate support systems, and supervisory complications; academic and publishing pressures, including performance anxiety, journal selection difficulties, and insufficient training; workload and temporal management challenges; and psychosocial factors involving recognition deficits and linguistic barriers. Regarding publishing support deficiencies, participants emphasised requirements for enhanced mentorship structures, expanded networking opportunities, comprehensive writing process support, increased funding accessibility for research and conference participation, and more holistic approaches addressing psychological dimensions of academic career development.

The survey generated substantive recommendations for *plaNext*'s strategic development in supporting ECR. Key proposals included implementing supportive publishing processes featuring constructive editorial feedback, transparent review mechanisms, and integrated mentorship programs; developing enhanced peer networking and collaborative research opportunities; establishing comprehensive training programs in academic writing and peer review methodologies; introducing innovative journal features including thematic special issues and experimental publication formats; improving accessibility through affordable publishing models and enhanced resource provision; and strengthening community-building initiatives that acknowledge the precarious conditions characterising early career academic positions. Thematic priorities identified by respondents demonstrated preferences for bridging theoretical and applied perspectives while providing platforms for emerging critical scholarship addressing urban futures, social justice, climate change, and academic labour conditions.

The road forward: Editorial dialogue on *plaNext*'s next decade

As part of the 10th anniversary of *plaNext*, a dialogue session was organised to reflect on the challenges and opportunities currently faced by ECR, as highlighted through the survey, and to investigate how an ECR-led journal could try to address them. The dialogue also aimed to generate a space to envision the future direction of the journal under the leadership of the new editorial board.

The session, held on Zoom on the 2nd of May 2025, lasted two hours and was moderated by Sila Ceren Varış Husar, alongside Lizzy Privitera, who presented the results of a targeted survey. Participants included previous and current members of the editorial board—Pavel Grabalov, Esra Kut Görgün, Chandrima Mukhopadhyay, and Milan Husar—who engaged in an open exchange around four strategic questions:

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- What challenges has the journal encountered in balancing inclusivity with academic rigour, particularly in the context of open peer review?
- In what ways does *plaNext* facilitate collaboration between ECR and established scholars, and what impact does this have on ECR?
- What is the significance of the recent Scopus indexing, and what further steps are being taken to enhance the journal's academic visibility?
- How does *plaNext* contribute to the global conversation on open-access publishing and support more equitable publishing practices?

The discussion addressed several strategic concerns and proposals:

- *Editorial timelines and process efficiency*: Participants emphasised the need to implement internal deadlines for reviewers and adopt a maximum turnaround policy to improve accountability, while avoiding rigid, superficial review models common in commercial publishing.
- *Co-authorship with supervisors*: Opinions varied regarding whether supervisor co-authorship should be discouraged. While some stressed preserving the journal's ECR focus, others advocated for case-by-case flexibility, particularly when co-authors are also in the early stages of their careers.
- *Mentorship models*: There was strong support for introducing a mentored article section, which would offer a guided editorial process and constructive feedback for early career authors. The model takes inspiration from practices observed in the Regional Studies Association.
- *Challenges faced by ECR*: The discussion reinforced several persistent barriers faced by young scholars, including a lack of institutional support, time pressure, imposter syndrome, journal selection difficulties, and language barriers.

In response, the group proposed a range of actionable steps:

- *Mentorship & training*: Webinars, writing workshops, and peer-to-peer review initiatives could help strengthen author capacity and confidence.
- *Recognition & incentives*: Introducing best paper awards and formally acknowledging contributors and mentors was recommended to increase motivation and visibility.
- *Community building*: Regular editorial events such as 'write-together' sessions and deeper integration with the AESOP YA network were proposed to foster a stronger sense of belonging.
- *Funding & accessibility*: The group encouraged exploring external funding sources (e.g., COST Actions, British Academy) and offering language editing support to non-native English speakers.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to transforming *plaNext* into a more inclusive, transparent, and supportive platform for early career planning scholars. The editorial board will further refine these ideas in upcoming meetings to integrate them into long-term strategies for the journal's development.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, *plaNext* has established itself as a key platform for ECR, offering space for critical, experimental, and diverse contributions in planning scholarship. While the journal's trajectory reveals steady growth, strong engagement from European institutions, and a consistent presence of young academics, particularly PhD candidates, it also highlights the

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need for broader geographical outreach and strategies to strengthen inclusivity and global representation in the years ahead.

The collective evaluation process initiated during the *plaNext 10th Anniversary Special Issue*, enriched by survey results and an open exchange of perspectives, has generated valuable insights into the strengths and areas for improvement within the journal. Building on these discussions, a series of strategic recommendations has emerged to guide *plaNext* toward a more consistent, inclusive, and supportive future for ECR in planning and related fields.

Firstly, editorial consistency was identified as a key priority. Maintaining regularity in annual issue numbers is essential to ensure the journal's credibility and reliability among its readership. Similarly, the presence of editorial forewords should follow a clear policy, either consistently included or intentionally omitted to avoid editorial ambiguity. Standardisation in the number of papers per issue will also help strengthen the journal's structure and identity.

The participants further emphasised the need to transition from open calls to theme-based calls that reflect timely and relevant debates in planning theory and practice. Such a shift will not only improve the journal's topical coherence but also enhance its visibility and attractiveness to both authors and readers. To improve article quality and discoverability, formal limits for keyword usage, such as a minimum of three and a maximum of six, should be implemented.

Importantly, *plaNext* has achieved a notable level of geographical diversity among its contributing authors, particularly in terms of institutional affiliation. This diversity should be protected and expanded upon, reinforcing the journal's international character and broadening its impact across different academic contexts, especially towards Global South countries.

Complementing these editorial refinements, proposals arising from the 10th Year workshop also focused on addressing the specific challenges faced by ECR. This includes implementing a mentored article section with structured guidance and feedback, improving timeline transparency and review turnaround times, and carefully re-evaluating policies on supervisor co-authorship to preserve the ECR focus without restricting collaboration. Additionally, there was widespread support for community-building activities, such as regular writing sessions, peer-review training, and stronger ties with the AESOP YA network. To further support ECR, the journal is encouraged to explore external funding opportunities that could provide resources for proofreading or language support, especially for non-native English speakers. Recognition mechanisms such as reviewer acknowledgements and best paper awards may also contribute to greater engagement and motivation among contributors.

Together, these recommendations point to a shared commitment: to strengthen *plaNext* not only as a scholarly publication but also as a supportive ecosystem for ECR. By embedding consistency, mentorship, inclusivity, and responsiveness into its editorial framework, *plaNext* can continue to serve as a distinctive and transformative platform within the planning research community.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank all the early career researchers who took the time to complete the survey and share valuable experiences and insights. Their continuous contributions and engagement will help guide our actions and vision for the future of *plaNext*.