

Open Access Journal

Editorial: *plaNext* and planning in transition (2015–2025)

Sıla Ceren Varış Husar

Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Slovakia
Corresponding author: silaceren.varis@gmail.com

Elisa (Lizzy) Privitera

University of Toronto Scarborough, Canada

Copyright: authors. Protected under CC BY 4.0. ISSN 2468-0648.

Please cite as: Varış Husar, S. C., & Privitera, E. (2025). Editorial: *plaNext* and planning in transition (2015–2025). *plaNext – Next Generation Planning*, 15, 13–17. <https://doi.org/10.24306/plnxt/114>

Open Access Journal

When *plaNext* first emerged in 2015, it was born out of a decision that the field of spatial planning needed a dedicated platform for emerging scholars who would highlight new voices. Ten years later, the world we plan for has shifted significantly, and so has our journal.

The purpose of this special issue “*plaNext* in Transition 2015–2025” is to reflect on the journal’s evolution over the past decade and to envision its future trajectory for the next ten years. It marks a moment of reflection and reimagination. Over the past decade, *plaNext* has accompanied and often anticipated momentous changes: the climate emergency transitioning from future threat to present crisis, new movements for social justice and spatial equity gaining visibility, digitalization and AI altering how we imagine urban futures, and an increasingly interconnected yet still fractured global planning discourse. We thought that it would be interesting to see how *plaNext* has evolved over the last decade, and to reflect on the next decade for the journal, especially as the name of the journal implies to “plan” what is coming “next” as in “next generation of planners and planning as a discipline”. This special issue brings together contributions on both editorial developments and future directions, as well as on current planning debates, challenges, and emerging trends.

In this special issue, we have gathered contributions that do more than revisit old debates; they reinterpret them in light of today’s urgencies. The works presented here speak to transitions in pedagogy, in politics, and in planetary boundaries while asking critical questions about what it means to plan “for the next generation” of planners, i.e., early career scholars, and the next generation of planning, i.e., the evolving nature of the discipline in an era where intergenerational justice is no longer a philosophical ideal but an existential imperative.

At its core, *plaNext* has always stood for more than just a publication platform: it is a community of early career thinkers, practitioners, and scholars navigating the edges of what planning can and should be. As we enter our second decade, we reaffirm our commitment to fostering critical, inclusive and experimental approaches to planning knowledge and practice.

The issue opens with a foreword by **Giancarlo Cotella**, current **Secretary General of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP)** and once a representative of the Young Academics (YA) network, where the seeds of *plaNext* were first sown. His reflections provide a deeply personal yet institutional narrative of the reciprocal relationship between *plaNext* and AESOP, revealing how the journal has functioned not just as a publication outlet but as a living laboratory for emerging academic voices in Europe and beyond.

This moment of transition also introduces **Asma Mehan** as the new **Editor in Chief**. In her opening editorial note, Mehan shares a compelling vision for the next decade of *plaNext*. A vision that embraces interdisciplinarity, planetary-scale thinking, engagement with justice and diverse planning. Her ambition is clear: to extend *plaNext*’s reach across boundaries, disciplinary, geographic and linguistic, while keeping its heart anchored in the values of critical thinking, justice and collective learning. She also points to potential future developments and areas of interest on the horizon of planning and of *plaNext*, including climate-related themes and the integration of emerging technologies.

Following this, we honor the exceptional dedication of **the founding Editor in Chief, Feras Hammami**, whose decade-long leadership, along with fellow co-founders and editorial board members, was instrumental in shaping *plaNext*’s open-access identity, its commitment to academic mentorship, and its transdisciplinary ethos. Feras’ contribution addresses the current challenge of publishing ethically in a world where knowledge production is increasingly shaped by human rights violations, social inequalities, colonial legacies and systemic

Open Access Journal

exclusions. In doing so, his handover goes beyond disciplinary or editorial development; it is also a handover of the values that *plaNext* has embodied over time and should remain committed to in the future.

This special issue for *plaNext*'s tenth anniversary includes commemorative essays from two of our key contributors: **Simone Tulumello** and **Batoul Ibrahim**. Tulumello's work, **"For a dialectic of planning pasts and futures: Theoretical courses and recourses in conversation with Patsy Healey"** challenges planning theory's static relationship with time, advocating for a more dynamic, "open, experimental" engagement. He draws on his collaborative experience with the late Patsy Healey, urging a shift away from a rigid, modernist view. Simultaneously, Ibrahim's essay, **"Grounded futures: A decade of planning through humanitarian and Southern lenses"** traces *plaNext*'s evolution as a critical platform, particularly in humanitarian and Global South contexts. She highlights how the journal has centered community agency, participatory methods and reparative justice, moving the discourse toward inclusion, ethics and contextual sensitivity. She unfolds how the cross-cutting skills developed through editorial work can support career pathways both within and, especially, beyond academia, particularly in industry and the humanitarian sector. Together, these pieces serve as a dual reflection on *plaNext*'s journey, showing its role in not only broadening planning's theoretical geography but also deepening its ethical engagement with the real-world challenges faced by communities globally.

The following three contributions are dedicated to tracing the achievements, innovations, and challenges *plaNext* has faced over its ten years of activity. Two of these contributions approach this reflection through the perspectives and accounts of those who have been directly involved in the journal's editorial work over the years. They feature conversations between old and new editorial boards, presented in a more experimental, dialog-based format. Both pieces offer a unique perspective on the journal's journey.

The first contribution, **"Bridging generations: A decade of open peer review and collective knowledge-building in planning scholarship through *plaNext*"** reflects on *plaNext*'s foundation in open peer review and how this principle has cultivated a mentorship-driven, collaborative publishing environment. Now, as the journal enters a new phase with its Scopus indexing, this dialogue explores the crucial balance between maintaining its original mission and navigating new institutional expectations for visibility and sustainability. The second piece, **"Empowering scholarship: Young researcher-led journals as spaces for learning, envisioning, and experimenting with alternatives,"** looks into the unique role of young researcher-led journals as spaces for learning and experimentation. It also highlights how *plaNext* has provided a supportive platform that challenges the competitive norms of academic publishing, with its open peer-review process serving as an emblematic example. Finally, it reveals how the diverse skills gained through editorial work (from upholding ethical standards to managing complex responsibilities) are highly transferable, supporting career pathways both within and beyond academia.

These two just-mentioned contributions, together with Feras's piece, show how, from its earliest calls for papers to building a rigorous peer-review structure and indexing recognition, this team transformed an experimental initiative into a trusted scholarly platform. Their efforts were not simply editorial but infrastructural: they built the foundation upon which new generations now stand.

Finally, the third contribution, titled **"Echoes of a decade in the *plaNext* – Next Generation Planning journal and the road ahead"** provides a comprehensive retrospective of the

Open Access Journal

journal's scholarly output and presents a set of strategic recommendations for the future. By qualitatively and quantitatively assessing the journal's outreach and capturing insights on the contemporary publishing system, this piece positions *plaNext* as a distinctive, forward-looking model committed to empowering the next generation of planning scholars. Together, these contributions offer a rich, multifaceted narrative of *plaNext*'s past, present, and future, affirming its role as a vital community for critical thought and practice.

This special issue is also enriched by the voices of early-career and senior planning scholars, who offer fresh and forward-thinking perspectives on the evolving content of planning discourse, the broader contexts shaping it, and its pedagogies. The last section of the volume demonstrates that planning has always been an evolving discipline, and today's rapidly changing realities demand that it continues to adapt to emerging needs and challenges. *plaNext* can serve as a platform to further discuss and develop these new directions in planning.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to **Peter Ache**, who contributes a timely and thought-provoking piece on Artificial Intelligence and the planning task, drawing from the ongoing work of the AESOP Urban Futures Thematic Group. Ache's essay anchors the journal in a broader dialogue on technological transformations and invites readers to consider how critical planning must adapt—not only methodologically but ethically—to the accelerating influence of digital systems on urban futures.

Secondly, the article by **Ender Peker** argues for the foundational role of urban design in planning education, highlighting its unique ability to cultivate spatial, analytical, and collaborative skills. It identifies six key contributions, from studio-based learning to engaging with public needs, that help students critically analyze and shape the built environment. We would like to thank Ender for his endless support and efforts for *plaNext*. We also commend his contributions to the pedagogies and research of the planning field.

Thirdly, the paper by **Lizzy Privitera** argues that, in the current context of polycrisis, planning should strive to be critical, environmental, just, and action oriented. She offers insights for future developments in planning theory and debate, drawing on emerging critical disciplines. The essay explores the extent to which these approaches have already been incorporated into planning studies and practices, the added value of integrating their critical tools, and, in particular, the potential for urban planners and policymakers to engage in spatial and practical experimentation with such provocative concepts.

Alongside these, the issue proudly features emerging scholarly voices that reaffirm *plaNext*'s original mission: to support and elevate the work of young academics. **Alberto Bortolotti**'s piece on "Financialization and deterritorialization in the Milanese major urban development project" offers a compelling critique of contemporary urban governance through the lens of finance capital and spatial displacement. Likewise, **Lorenzo Stefano Iannizzotto and Alexandra Paio**'s contribution titled "Rethinking the In-Between: Designing with a socio-ecological approach to activate the potential of Terrain Vague spaces" brings to our attention the value of marginal and abandoned urban spaces, such as wastelands and brownfields, which lie in their potential to be transformed into sustainable and resilient environments rich in biodiversity. The authors also provide some indicative strategies for analyzing and designing Terrain Vague spaces according to a socio-ecological perspective. These contributions not only expand the thematic scope of the issue but also signal the journal's continued commitment to publishing bold, grounded and analytically rich debates by emerging voices.

Open Access Journal

This culminating volume offers a compelling retrospective on the first decade of *plaNext*'s vibrant history, documenting its trajectory from the inception to the current status. It stands as a testament to the power of a collective endeavor, one skillfully led by early career researchers who, through effective peer-to-peer collaboration and sensible engagement with senior scholars, forged an original platform. This platform is distinguished by its intellectual and methodological openness, fostering an environment conducive to the uptake of fresh ideas in both scholarly content and editorial practice.

The volume's very structure and content embody this self-reflexive commitment, mirroring the original editorial principles of its members. Beyond merely celebrating past achievements and milestones, this transitional period marks a new chapter characterized by the dedication of the editorial board to not only sustaining but also intensifying the foundational spirit of openness, experimentation, and collaborative intellectual enterprise in the years ahead, thereby ensuring *plaNext* remains at the forefront of the planning discipline.