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Editorial: Planning inclusive spaces–in a new light

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It is deeply satisfying to know that Volume 10 of AESOP Young Academics' peer-reviewed journal pla*N*ext – Next Generation Planning is now available to you. This volume stems from the 13th Young Academics conference which took place from the 2nd to the 5th of April 2019 in Darmstadt and was hosted by the Graduate School of Urban Studies (URBANgrad) at the Faculty of Architecture of Technical University of Darmstadt. The conference was held under the title "Planning inclusive spaces: An inter- and transdisciplinary approach" and provided 50 young planning researchers with a platform for exchange for the following themes: "'Public space' and the dilemma of inclusion," "Health promoting urban planning and design," "Citizenship and governance in the production of space," and "From sustainable to resilient urban strategies."

This volume comprises three top-quality papers which were presented at the conference. These are highly valuable contributions, as they approach complex matters of "planning inclusive spaces" from a variety of aspects, make critical observations, and reframe and reflect on topical debates in academia and planning practice. By presenting these papers, we believe this volume provides an insight into advancing our collective knowledge through the debates on inclusivity. We learn our lessons from policies and practices that are "good" but also from those that are "not so good". The volume, therefore, shares these perspectives and viewpoints with relevance to the conference theme, and it does so by trying to identify what is really needed to adequately address spatial challenges and to facilitate a sustainable transition towards (more) inclusive spaces through inter- and transdisciplinarity.

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The complexities of life in cities, including but not limited to the consequences of recent migration flows and patterns and climate change have exposed societies to a precarious present and future, and socially unjust urban development. Unless these complexities are managed by democratic, progressive and redistributive planning models, living urban spaces would become dysfunctional, with worsened conditions to the disadvantaged. Several planning scholars thus call for inter- and transdisciplinary approaches that are needed to rethink the principles of inclusion to inform the current planning models in the face of unprecedented global challenges. In this context it is perhaps legitimate to discuss not only planning for inclusivity but also inclusive planning. This also aligns with the transformative promise of the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development, 'leave no one behind.'

The contributions in this volume explore this and other related questions from different perspectives and contexts. While they investigate the contribution of public participation to inclusive cities, they explain how uncritical engagement in the principles of inclusion risk the production of new patterns of injustices. The main questions investigated in the contributions, among others, are: what forms of governance and planning governance are needed to promote contextualized inclusion? Why is (local) politics a game-changer? What principles should be taken into consideration to ensure inclusive processes when partnering the private and voluntary sectors?

Social sustainability, urban innovation, and collaborative production of space

In the paper "Implementing Social Sustainability in Area Development Projects in the Netherlands," the authors Céline Janssen, Tom Daamen, and Co Verdaas look at the interdisciplinary practice of area development in the Netherlands. Two main questions guide the discussion: how are perceived social sustainability dimensions operationalized, and how does this relate to governance configurations and decision-making? Priorities for social sustainability emerging from the housing shortage, rising land prices, immigration, socio-economic segregation, as well as their spatial representation are pointed out as the centers of gravity in the debate going on at the intersection of area development projects and social sustainability. When it comes to implementation, the ambiguity of concepts and variety of dimensions and definitions of the term "social sustainability" adds another layer of complexity.

To further the discussion on operationalization, the authors employ Dixon & Woodcraft's (2013) conceptualization of social sustainability. Through this lens, one also acknowledges what is beyond the 'area' itself: a space to grow, a connection to the local and regional economy, and a consideration of environmental objectives. Although area development can be imagined as a tangible process that is bound to its on-site spatiality and temporality, it is not without its intangible tensions and conflicts among actors from various levels and scales, from individual to international, including private investments and political tendencies. This is a clear demonstration that governance conditions indeed shape urban processes. At this point, the first paper of this volume, written by Janssen et al., refer to an example by Elander & Gustavson (2019) for the case of Sweden that a successful integration of social objectives in policies does not guarantee anticipated outcomes. A mismatch in the levels and scales of administration seems to be evident: the central government is "governing from distance" with its regulatory power and financial and steering measures, whereas local authorities need to make all efforts compatible with the actual local needs. Another misalignment in this respect is found to be evident between the public interests which tend to be long-term and are facilitated by slower actions, and private interests which tend to be short-term and focus on quicker financial gains.

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All these necessitate a new look into the implementation of social sustainability in the context of area development, and perhaps a reframing. Janssen et al. propose that the conceptual foundation they build can, in fact, be put into use as it enables an analytical approach, which is supposed to help look into governance dynamics surrounding social sustainability. They conclude that implementing social sustainability in area development projects is indeed a governance process, which is vulnerable to the tensions between politics on the public end, and market-driven economy on the private end. One has to understand the complex nature of the variables at play well, and embrace their cognitive, strategic, and institutional uncertainties, as this seems to be a precondition that implementing social sustainability brings the outcomes it promises.

In the second paper, titled “Urban living lab: What is it, and what is the matter?”, Dexter Du introduces and highlights the current debates around the concept Urban Living Lab (ULL). To put it simply, ULL can be understood as a form that urban innovation and experimentation takes. Du’s point of entry is that, though there are some gaps which need to be addressed, a critical confrontation seems to be lacking. To tackle this, the ambiguity of spatiotemporality of ULL’s emphasis on “real” time and environment is questioned: attention and popular perception may hinder the questioning of the political context—as this is often the case with such highly-contested issues. The motivation for ULLs rests on the premise that a conventional business-as-usual is no more sustainable, and urban innovation and experimentation in actual situations beyond artificial environments and controlled conditions can provide the necessary responses. Against this backdrop, the research follows the line of thinking which leads to asking why ULL has had this certain development path and not any other, and how they may unfold in the future.

Du’s critical reflection on ULL’s spatiotemporality shows that in terms of its spatiality, it is true that an urban experiment would be limited to a space, but this is not to separate or isolate it from what is going on in its surroundings in a physical sense. Though such place-boundness is clear, temporality is a bit tricky, because it is oftentimes referred to as being “real” time, without further exploration on what being “real-time” actually entails. Another critical reflection delves deeper into the origin of the term and uncovers that although the MIT definition of ULL from the 2000s is frequently referred to, an older definition by Bajgier et al. (1991) was able to better capture ULL’s recent implications. Such revelations are proof enough that questioning what is beyond apparent meanings is indeed a critical practice. Still, if the definitions and origins are so inconclusive, what is the way forward?

Du points out that one way of finding this is to be proactive and connect the dots. In the article, this is done by bringing together the discussions around production of knowledge and the knowledge economy, with an emphasis on the role universities and politics play. For instance, the fact that most ULL projects are also smart city projects is indeed an interesting one. Most of the time, data collection tends to be entirely open. But is the decision-making based on this data also an entirely open process? In this case, if the university-end of this equation represents “openness,” then is the politics-end representing “closeness”? In an attempt to respond to these questions, one thing to do could be to take a step back and reset our intentions to the benefit of the greater good, which may then diminish the importance of labelling any practice (e.g. as ULLs).

In her paper “The third sector in the planning, production, and regeneration of inclusive public space: Notes from an ongoing experience in a distressed Sicilian neighborhood”, Elisa Privitera focuses on formal and informal re-appropriation and self-recovery practices in distressed neighborhoods in San Berillo.

In Southern Italy, both public and private funds for production and regeneration of public spaces have diminished. However, there are collaborative efforts to produce and regenerate public space, though such practices may be ineffectual and confront the consequences of informality and irregularity, potentially diminishing their power to become a highly beneficial, consistently applicable local strategy. As tensions among the main actors, i.e. individuals, collective public, private, and social actors are shaping the intangible aspects of "space," the third sector (non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations, volunteers, etc.) receive attention. In search of an answer to the question, how collaborative paths emerge and in what ways they are important for the public spaces of such distressed contexts, the author introduces a fundamental line of thinking: collaboration, when deliberate, triggers innovation. And this innovation takes place in the "third-place," which is where experiences (the first place: the tangible aspect of built environment, actual, real) and expectations (the second place: the perception of the first place, virtual, imagined) unite. This is then the "enabling" space for experimental, collaborative processes, which is to some extent conditioned by planning practices, but in turn also influence planning processes.

Based on this, Privitera decodes the invisible practices of regeneration by site visits and systematic observations of social interactions. The core issue is, therefore, the collaborative experiments of "enabling" spaces, exemplified by the "invisible" practices of regeneration, which exist in-between inclusivity and exclusivity, formal and informal, conditioned and influential. This alone emphasizes the importance of the third sector, third place, and that deliberate efforts of collaboration which triggers innovation. But there are several dead-ends. The way to resolve challenges will include finding innovative ways to involve administration in self-organized inclusive placemaking and coming up with bottom-up proposals, but not without taking up on the responsibilities that come with it.

Towards post-pandemic inclusive spaces

There is no doubt that the recent COVID19 pandemic has been introducing countless unprecedented challenges to the communities worldwide, including all aspects of life such as public health, economic prosperity, including the way cities function. But more importantly, if we are to "plan" our way out, a better approach to inclusivity, beyond disciplinary or sectoral limitations, will be imperative. It seems that the core issues the authors talk about in this volume—social sustainability, urban innovation, co-production of public space—are not only the debates of the pre-pandemic planning research and practice, but also the building blocks of a post-pandemic urban life.

Resilience theory tells us that crises have transformative power and are therefore windows for opportunity. However, a crisis alone does not inherently bring about a systemic transformation towards a better world. There is still a lot of uncertainty surrounding the move towards post-pandemic phase. Despite the intense research regarding the virus, and the vaccine, people may need to be vaccinated against the coronavirus for "many years to come" (Euronews, 2021). This means that the virus is "here to stay" Scudellari (2020), and therefore, the gap between the rich and poor countries will widen in terms of providing the vaccine, and the consequences that will follow, which raises the question of what the new normal will be. The work towards the new normal will be "built on an oscillating reality with no fixed parameters" (Keil, forthcoming).

Currently, our capacity to navigate our way through is indeed dependent on how we deal with inclusivity: the pandemic has not just revealed where our social fabric has gotten thin—with

most damage done by the virus among the poor, racialized and precariously housed and employed communities—it has also deepened those inequalities even further with no clear exit strategy to make the structural changes that created those injustices in the first place. From the point of planning research and practice, having embraced the crisis "as a moment of change rather than continuity" (Hertel & Keil, 2020), followed by witnessing "urban planning's insurgent moment" after George Floyd's killing (Keil & Hertel, 2020), it is high time that we ask ourselves the extent to which we have made effective use of the instruments the planning profession provides us with.

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