

The Evolution of Planning Thought

The making of a field uncovered by its collective memory

Beatrix Haselsberger

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.” (Karl Marx)

Over the last five to six decades many energetic academic planning communities have emerged both nationally and internationally. Good examples from the German speaking countries are the ARL (Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung) in Germany, the ÖGR (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Raumplanung) in Austria, or the Schweizerische Vereinigung für Landesplanung VLP-ASPAN in Switzerland. Also every continent has successfully established its own academic planning communities. A few examples are: AESOP (Association of European Schools of Planning) in Europe, ACSP (Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning) in America, AAPS (Association of African Planning Schools) in Africa, ASPA (Asian Planning Schools Association) in Asia or ANZAPS (Australia & New Zealand Association of Planning Schools) in Australia and New Zealand. In 2001, in the wake of the First World Planning Conference in Shanghai, nine major academic planning communities have set up the GPEAN (Global Planning Education Association Network) to facilitate the exchange of planning ideas across continents.

Nowadays, all around the globe, universities are offering planning courses and planning conferences, such as those annually organised by AESOP or ACSP which are attracting between 700-1,200 participants. In addition, there is a wide range of international publication outlets, from high-ranked planning journals to planning magazines, that are used extensively to share both research results and to debate planning issues. Thus, it can be argued that over the years planning has become a well-established academic field in its own right and, due to its interdisciplinary nature, also helps to further other disciplines. The inverse scenario is also true. In many places all around the world, where planning has not yet become a stand-alone academic discipline, planners are educated in architecture, geography, political sciences or regional economic departments. But how did everything begin?

In its early days, meaning before planning became an academic discipline, social and spatial challenges posed by rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and growth were taken into account by a loose group of people with different professional backgrounds including architecture, economics or

political science. Though it is true that the roots of planning go back to the public health movement of the 19th century as well as the Beaux Arts, it was not until the post-war period that universities formalised and developed planning programmes. This period was when the first handful of scholars were trained in planning. At that time, which clearly marked the start into a new direction, an active research professoriate was assembled to provide intellectual leadership and to formulate the general principles of the “novel” academic discipline of planning. Thus, it can be argued that the intellectual roots of planning as a distinctive academic discipline have been established starting from the 1950s, particularly in the USA and in a few countries in Europe (e.g. the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany).

The first generation of academic planners, the pioneers of planning what regards planning research and education, were those that in the 1960s and 1970s came early in their careers to the field, appreciated the immense challenges in building up the intellectual substance as well as the institutional infrastructure to support their endeavours. A few of these first generation planners have already died (such as Rudolf Wurzer, Josef Umlauf, Brian McLoughlin, Jeremy Alden, Seymour Mandelbaum and more recently Peter Hall) and many others have retired already some years ago (such as Gert Albers, Jakob Maurer, John Friedmann, Peter Marcuse, Luigi Mazza, Patsy Healey, Andreas Faludi, Judith Innes, Dieter Bökemann or Klaus Kunzmann, to name just a few). Depending on where these planning pioneers lived and worked and, moreover, which academic planning community they helped to establish, they were/are either known only in their home countries, primarily in Continental Europe or in the USA.

There is a risk that in the haze of time the knowledge accumulated by the planning pioneers during this intellectual and institutional transformation will be lost to current and future generations, if not captured and secured now. Of course it could be argued that the wisdom of this influential generation has already been written down in several articles and books. This is true, but are we (the current generation) really able to adequately interpret, define and use the intellectual legacy of our founding parents, which has been generated in a completely different time, context and situation?

The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992) argues that every societal group (like an academic planning community) has to carefully distinguish between its historical and autobiographical accounts and memories, when trying to understand its intellectual roots. He argues that the first memory reaches the social actor through time-independent records, such as writings or photography. In this case, the past is stored and interpreted by social institutions and remembering is stimulated in indirect ways through reading or listening. The later memories, however, allow people to reconstruct and reinforce past experiences in the midst of others who had made or are confronted with similar experiences and challenges (Halbwachs, 1992). Putting it differently, autobiographical memory is “knowledge embodied in minds” which tend to fade with time and might get lost with the passing away of *the* person. I am arguing that each academic planning community, in the sense of a coherent body of people, draws its strength and endures its knowledge from its collective memory, meaning the embodied knowledge of all its members. But how can this knowledge be made accessible?

Working with embodied minds is a very sensitive and time-intensive endeavour. Here the tremendous pace with which planning theories are being developed, debated and discarded at the moment is not very helpful. Tendencies like the growing “publish or perish” culture within academic life has had an impact on planning as much as in other fields. There is a risk that in the rush for novelty in theory and practice or in the rat-race for more and more publications, the experiences and lessons of the planning pioneers are forgotten or are not transferred meaningfully to current and future contexts. Also it appears that planning as an academic discipline has always been in a kind of crisis, causing again and again controversial debates on the discipline itself, its nature and its relation to planning practice. This makes it additionally difficult for current planning scholars, who are following each other’s line of thinking to really appreciate the comprehensive legacy of the academic discipline as the basis for their intellectual work.

It is therefore that I argue that the time has come for a break to reflect on what the true intellectual legacy of the planning pioneers should be, and what should be remembered and taken forward in the planning community to ensure that it continues to advance without becoming trapped in an endless cycle of self-referential theorising. Out of this need, to capture the wisdom – the collective memory – of the planning pioneers for our collective benefit, the *Evolution of Planning Thought* project was born together with John Friedmann in February 2012. At that time he, a born Viennese, was in Vienna to give a guest lecture, where he was speaking about all the Austrians who have extremely influenced his way of thinking, such as Bertram Hoselitz, Friedrich Hayek, Joseph Schumpeter, Karl Mannheim, Martin Buber, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Karl Polanyi, Karl Popper and Paul Feyerabend (Friedmann, 2014).

The evening before he left, John Friedmann told me how enriching it was to look back from today’s point of view and to unravel how it all came into being. He also mentioned that any planning community would greatly benefit from uncovering the oral histories of all of the first generation planners who are still alive. I immediately understood what he was telling me, but at that time “this idea” seemed far too big to be realised. The months thereafter I was not able to get rid of the idea, which became more and more powerful over time. Therefore I approached a few people to figure out if they would be interested in contributing to such a project. In July 2012, I spoke to Patsy Healey. She was so enthusiastic about this idea and motivated me in her encouraging and supportive way that I should go for it. Thus, step-by-step, I approached the pioneers of planning and invited them to write a book-chapter about their intellectual transformation in an autobiographical way. Due to the very positive reactions, I asked my good friend and colleague, Paul Benneworth, to help me pull together this book. Unfortunately Paul had to withdraw from this project after 14 months of intensive work for private reasons. In December 2013, Laura Saija and Julie Knight (Porter) joined the editorial team.

But what is the *Evolution of Planning Thought* project all about? This book-project explores the evolution of planning ideas from a coherent body of notable planners. By revealing its collective memory it provides a means to reflect on the past in order to respond to current (global) challenges but also to reflect on the past to further the field of planning in the future. This book seeks in particular to: (a) unfold the several ways that planning ideas have evolved, developed, circulated and moved

through time and space; (b) unpack the original purposes for which the “big planning ideas and achievements” were generated; (c) provide a means to understand how these planning thoughts can be adopted meaningfully in a different time, context and situation; (d) offer insights about what should be learnt from past experiences; and (e) reduce misunderstandings and misinterpretations of established concepts.

The underlying idea of this extraordinary endeavour is to understand and unpack how ideas evolve with time and develop in different contexts (such as geo-political, institutional or personal ones). So doing it sheds light on how and why sixteen selected planning pioneers have developed theories and conceptual tools, how these conceptual tools shaped the development of practice, how these planners organised themselves increasingly at an international and global scale, and the conceptual, institutional and practical lacuna that remain to be filled. The knowledge base provided within this project builds on the collective autobiographical memories – the oral histories – from Louis Albrechts, Rachelle Alterman, Michael Batty, Andreas Faludi, John Forester, John Friedmann, Cliff Hague, Peter Hall, Patsy Healey, Charles Hoch, Judith Innes, Klaus Kunzmann, Peter Marcuse, Luigi Mazza, Barrie Needham and Gerhard Schimak. Unfortunately Peter Hall has passed away this summer (30 July 2014). This very sad news underlines once more the finite amount of time we, the current and next generation of planners, have to accumulate this knowledge from our planning pioneers. Peter Hall's book chapter is probably his last piece of writing and we will treat it as his legacy in our book.

There are of course many more planners out there, who have also influenced and shaped the field of planning over the last 5+ decades in one way or another and in all of the different countries around the world. Thus some may wonder why exactly the above mentioned planning pioneers have been selected? Firstly, all of them have distributed their knowledge regularly at international planning conferences or in English publication outlets. Secondly, all of them have influenced – and still influence – many planners also outside of their respective planning communities. Thirdly, it was this group of people I came across with, mainly through reading, in the frame of my planning education at the Vienna University of Technology, Austria. Being convinced that any planner out there would have selected a different group of people, I hope that this initiative will find imitators/followers, who are eager to unpack the history of planning through oral histories with a different set of highly respected planners.

For Maurice Halbwachs, the past – as remembered and transmitted from one generation to the other – is a social construction mainly shaped by beliefs, interests, and aspirations of the present and, most importantly, depends on social frames (Assmann, 2010). Similarly, Karl Marx has argued that history is not made in the circumstances of our own choice (Marx, 1852). Understanding the roots as well as the transformation of planning through oral histories, meaning in the context of personal values and experiences as well as in relation to an ever changing world, from those individuals who have first-hand knowledge of this intellectual evolution is very important. Several frameworks (e.g. particular places, pre-given political frameworks and value systems, national and international networks, expectations from institutions, professional experiences, international development, mega projects and events) influenced – and still influence – people to think/work in a particular direction. By capturing the

reflections of various first generation planners this book-project provides an essential understanding of what were and what are the most salient elements of the planning discipline, which should be valued and taken forward by current and future generations of planners. Placing oral histories into the centre of discussions allows the overall resonance of key planning ideas and major planning achievements to be understood better and doing so builds up the basis for clarifying and shaping the legacy to be taken forward. Moreover, it provides an understanding of what it means when planning theories and ideas travel from the past to the future and in particular how they can be adopted meaningfully in a different time, context and situation.

The book-project is set up as an inter-generational dialogue in which current and future generations' needs and interests build up the core element of its narrative. Firstly, this book applies an inter-generational editorial dialogue. It is edited by young, mid-career researchers from different cultural environments (Beatrix Haselsberger [Vienna University of Technology, Austria], Laura Saija [University of Catania, Italy], Julie Knight [Towson University, MD, USA]) who are representing the voice and interests of future planning generations in this dialogue, and who challenge their authors to come up with messages that have a resonance, interest and value beyond mere retrospective; but, instead set out a challenging agenda for planning theory, research and institutional practice into the future. An international Editorial Advisory Board, composed by John Friedmann, Patsy Healey, Judith Innes and Michael Batty is representing the views of the retired or soon- to-be retired elders of the academic discipline. Secondly, this project engages in a broader inter-generational dialogue between its authors and potential readers throughout the entire writing process.

In May 2014, fourteen of the sixteen planning pioneers came together in Vienna for a one-week long symposium at the Vienna University of Technology, Austria. Bringing together the planning pioneers and asking them to address different audiences (students, planning practitioners, lecture series participants, etc.) has been a challenge for both the organisers as for the aging pioneers. The event in Vienna facilitated an open and transparent dialogue about where we are as planners, how we have arrived here and where we are going into the future as a community. A few weeks later, a roundtable at the AESOP 2014 conference in Utrecht, NL turned out to be a very enriching follow-up event. Now I am looking very much forward to the ACSP 2014 roundtable in Philadelphia as well as to the keynote panel discussion at the AESOP 2015 conference in Prague. All of these initiatives seek to assure us that the embodied knowledge is made accessible to as many different generations from as many different planning cultures as possible. I am confident that the book, once it is on the market, will trigger of a new enriched discourse about the past and the future of planning.

References:

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Side Box 1:

Further information about the *Evolution of Planning Thought* project is available at our website (<http://info.tuwien.ac.at/planning-thought>). As this book is designed for readers to tackle contemporary and future planning challenges and not for the bookshelf, we are eager to continue discussing these themes and therefore invite potential readers to get in touch with us via twitter (@PlanningThought).

Side Box 2:

Dr. Beatrix Haselsberger is a senior researcher at the Department of Spatial Planning of the Vienna University of Technology (Austria). In 2012, she was awarded the prestigious Hertha Firnberg Research Grant from the Austrian Science Fund for the project COMPASS (Collective Memory & Planning: Across Social Separation), Project Number: T591-G16, which she is currently carrying out. The *Evolution of Planning Thought* book is one of the results out of this project. Contact: Beatrix.Haselsberger@tuwien.ac.at

Figure 1:

Bookworkshop Editors and Editorial Advisory Board. Participants: Judith Innes, Patsy Healey, John Friedmann, Mike Batty, Beatrix Haselsberger and Laura Saija (not on the picture).

(Photo: Laura Saija)



Figure 2:

Group Picture taken in Vienna in May 2014. Book Authors and Editors: Louis Albrechts, Rachelle Alterman, Michael Batty, Andreas Faludi, John Forester, John Friedmann, Cliff Hague, Patsy Healey, Charles Hoch, Judith Innes, Klaus Kunzmann, Peter Marcuse, Barrie Needham, Gerhard Schimak, Beatrix Haselsberger and Laura Saija.

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Figure 3:

World Café Discussion. Table host: Planning Thought Award Winner Sabrina Lai [Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Architecture, University of Cagliari, IT]; participants: among others Andreas Faludi, John Forester and John Friedmann.

(Photo: Beatrix Haselsberger)



Figure 4:

World Café Discussion. Table host: Planning Thought Award Winner Chris Maidment [Town and Regional Planning, University of Sheffield, UK]; participants: among others Peter Marcuse, Judith Innes, Gerhard Schimak and Patsy Healey.

(Photo: Beatrix Haselsberger)

