



The Australia and New Zealand Association of Planning Schools Conference

Natalie MURDOCH

PhD Candidate, Department of Environmental Management, Lincoln University, New Zealand

1. INTRODUCTION

The Australia and New Zealand Association of Planning Schools (ANZAPS) is a scholarly society formed by the various urban planning schools of both Australian and New Zealand universities. The association was established in 1994. In October 2015 the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) hosted the ANZAPS conference. The theme of the conference was “translating urban planning research and pedagogy into practice”. The aim was to understand how academia can influence politicians, the profession, and graduate students through the planning programmes taught at Australian and New Zealand universities. There were 45 delegates; 38 from Australia and seven from New Zealand (including three delegates from Lincoln University).

In total, 32 papers were presented at ANZAPS 2015 over the course of three days (23rd to 25th of October) and ten plenary sessions. The conference raised a number of questions relating to planning education. It focused primarily on the skills required to be an effective planner and within that remit examined the role of the “pracademic” (a planning professional who draws on both the practical and academic spheres of planning), the challenges facing early career planning practitioners, the possible role of activism in planning both as a scholar and a practitioner, the role of planning practitioners as narrators, and also offered advice on how to revitalise the planning profession through the use of emotion. These topics are discussed in turn.

2. THE “PRACADEMIC” HYBRID

The “pracademic” is someone who is both an academic and active practitioner in their subject area¹. It is a form of life wide learning; the parallel learning that

happens in life, outside of the workplace.

Part of this is being aware of current planning research when working in practice. Hurley (2015) asked whether planning practitioners engage with applied planning research. A joint paper between Hurley and Taylor (2015) entitled *Not a lot of people read the stuff*, makes it clear that they do not. Hurley concluded that planners can find planning research intimidating, and both difficult to decipher and access. The authors found that planning practitioners face severe time constraints and tend to rely on google scholar for a flavour of what academic research has to offer but do not tend to delve deeper².

3. EFFECTIVE EARLY CAREER PLANNERS

There was much discussion about early career planners (a planning practitioner with one to five years of experience). The importance of their contribution was noted; their energy, skills, and potential source of new knowledge in the workplace. However, Grant-Smith noted that a large percentage of pre-graduation professional work experience in Australia is unpaid. While there is value in pre-graduation work experience, Grant-Smith recommended that early career planners should not be taken advantage of, and should therefore have advocates within university institutions to argue for fair pay scales similar to those of the engineering professions³.

Reeves’ (2015) new publication *Management skills for effective planners* also noted the differences between early career planners and managers views on desirable

2 Hurley, J., Reading the stuff – the use of academic research by practitioners, Session 1

3 Grant-Smith, D., The costs and value of unpaid pre-graduation professional work experience for early career planners, Session 6

1 Reeves, D., Professional skills for planners, Session 4

skill sets. In particular the discrepancy between the importance of interpersonal skills (listening and ability to empathise). Early career planners rated interpersonal skills higher than managers. Also discussed was the fact that early career planners should have the confidence to say when they do not know something.

4. THE ROLE OF ACTIVIST SCHOLAR AND PLANNER

A theme that ran through the conference was that planning scholars and practitioners should see themselves as agents for change, and should look to become involved in non-traditional forms of planning. A number of informal planning mechanisms were discussed including community garden and art installations in Christchurch (Vallance, 2015)⁴.

In addition, a number of commentators spoke about the use of media such as radio, newspaper, television and social media to communicate planning research in Australia⁵. Taylor and Nichols spoke about their experience of creating a radio show called “The Urbanists” that was broadcast on a Melbourne community radio station over 30 weekly shows⁶.

5. A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PLANNERS AS NARRATORS

An Auckland specific session looked at Auckland’s strategic planning issues. In particular Auckland Council’s planning vision of becoming the world’s most liveable city and the Tamaki Strategic Framework. These were both thought to be planning narratives based on an over optimistic evidence base⁷.

Fergusson focused on the Foucauldian concept of responsibility and how five fictional narratives included in the Council’s Tamaki Strategic Framework demonstrate how people of Tamaki (a traditionally socio-economically deprived area of Auckland) should take responsibility for their own lives. It was concluded that this was a means for local government to foreclose discussion about how they can improve the area and tackle inequalities.

Similarly, Auckland’s planning vision to become the world’s most liveable city was viewed as a “fuzzy” political narrative, premised on an over optimistic evidence base which lacks a sufficient implementation strategy. This is particularly evident in the case of meeting future housing projections for the region⁸.

It was concluded that planning practitioners should learn from failed strategic plans and poor outcomes.

6. PUTTING THE EMOTION BACK INTO PLANNING

A thought-provoking session focused on what we do as planning academics and practitioners when challenged by our reality as landowners. How we can be relatively objective when looking at planning issues that indirectly affect our lives, but become emotional when a planning decision has a direct impact on our own property.

The example of New Zealand case law was offered: how a planning specialist cannot provide expert witness evidence on their own behalf because a witness is required to be value free (Rennie, 2015). The following question was asked - Is the price of being a professional losing our passion? There was a call for planning practitioners to be emotional. The rationale being that if you are not emotional, you do not understand the issue⁹.

4 Vallance, S., From activist scholar to activist planner (and back again), Session 1

5 Buxton, M., Whitzman, C., Millar, R., Taylor, E. and Nichols, D., Communicating planning research to the public, Session 2

6 Taylor, E. and Nichols, D., Planning on the radio, Session 2

7 Fergusson, E., Narratives of responsibility: unpacking the Tamaki Strategic Framework, Session 8 and Murdoch, N., A critical analysis of the world’s most liveable city. Auckland: a case study, Session 8

8 Mohammadzadeh, M., Small scale development in Auckland, Session 8

9 Rennie, H., ‘Being in the Plan’. Quandaries of ethical professionalism versus land ownership, Session 9