

The appropriateness, usefulness and impact of current urban planning curriculum in South African Higher Education

Briefing note on the progress of Project Objective 3 – an assessment of the extent to which issues raised by a changing colonial context is considered and addressed in the UK undergraduate and postgraduate planning curriculum

December 2017

BACKGROUND

This briefing note provides an update on the SAPER Project Objective 3 – an assessment of the extent to which issues raised by a changing colonial context is considered and addressed in the UK undergraduate and postgraduate planning curriculum. The note reflects on the status of the lessons emerging from interviews carried out with UK academics and RTPi members involved in teaching international students and shaping the agenda of international planning curricula.

KEY IMPACT

Data from the interviews will help to draw out lessons for teaching urban planning to overseas students studying on RTPi-accredited planning schools in the UK, particularly towards adopting a critical and reflective analysis of Northern approaches in postcolonial contexts. This objective forms part of the wider study into the appropriateness, usefulness and impact of the contemporary HE urban planning curriculum in a South African context.

The impact of this part of the project relates to the need for a deeper reflection into the implications of the South African study for UK planning education; this is especially important given the recent increase in students from the Global South registering for planning and planning-related courses in the UK.

PROGRESS

The data collection is progressing well. At the beginning of December 2017, eleven interviews have been conducted with academics drawn from a selection of the RTPi-accredited planning schools based in the UK. On average, the interviews lasted for 30-35 minutes. The interviews were carried out during October and November 2017. Interview questions were framed around four themes:

- Internationalisation of Higher Education, and the relationship with planning curricula;
- Knowledge and skills required of an international planning students, and the RTPi accreditation process / programmes reflect these needs;
- Motivations of students to become planners, particularly comparing UK and international students;
- Thoughts regarding potential future international links / connections.

Overall, interview participants welcomed the opportunity to talk about these and other issues relating to improving planning curricula. Furthermore, initial analysis of the interview data suggests that there are several fresh areas of inquiry relating to international planning. In addition to the interviews, and following internal testing of the questionnaire, the RTPI has received a questionnaire including closed and open questions on 'International Planning Education in the UK'. The RTPI will distribute this survey to RTPI members via its monthly bulletin.

The survey is key component in the SAPER project, as it looks to gather RTPI members' views on planning education, their aspirations / motivations for being a planner, destination of study, and their thoughts on the value of international planning. Although the RTPI is a member organisation representing 23,000 planning professionals working worldwide in the public, private, charitable and education sectors, it is anticipated that this survey will result in over a hundred responses. The results from this survey will be available in early 2018, allowing for the analysis of the surveys to be performed by using quantitative and qualitative analysis software

Similar data already exists for South African planning practitioners (Project Objective 1). The overall aim here is to have two comparable data sets, which when analysed, will allow for a more thorough exploration of the issues affecting planning practitioners in relation to the wider debates regarding internationalisation.

Preliminary findings from these data will inform a workshop with key academics and / or representatives of the RTPI and of the Commonwealth Association of Planners (*circa* 25 participants). This will lead to a further reflection and consideration of how these lessons might inform innovative learning tools related to an assessment of teaching methods.

LIMITATIONS

Regular and constructive dialogue occurs between the UK project team. However, practical constraints have hindered the progress of this particular aspect of the project. For example, and despite regular requests made on behalf of the project team, teaching and research schedules affected the extent to which planning academics could contribute time to the interview process. Overall, however, and in spite of these practical limits, progress on this Project Objective is encouraging.

NEXT STEPS

Further interviews are planned with UK academics during December 2017. The interviews will be transcribed in December / early January 2018.

Ongoing dialogue is required with the RTPI regarding the status of the survey. This will take place during December. This will ensure that the survey reaches a sufficient proportion of RTPI registered members.

Discussions will take place between the RTPi, the Commonwealth Association of Planners and academics over the timing, date and format of the workshop. These discussions will take place in early 2018.