



Reflections on Internationalisation of UK Planning Education

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Challenges, opportunities and legacies: experiencing the internationalising of UK planning curricula across space and time

Drawing on interviews with selected UK planning academics and survey results from current planning practitioners, this article provides valuable and timely perspectives on how internationalisation is experienced by those within and beyond the immediate institutional context. Although internationally focused planning education helps planners tackle the manifold urban challenges in the global South, the article goes on to argue that relational approaches hold much promise for planners working in so-called developed countries, including the UK, to understand the diverse needs of different diasporic communities. Such knowledge is crucial to develop sustainable planning solutions in the face of uneven processes of urban development.

Keywords: internationalisation, planning education, global South, post-colonial, global context of planning

Introduction

There has been much discussion of the content of planning curricula in parts of the global North, in particular that more should be done to encourage planners to deliver safer, cleaner, well-designed and sustainable places in a range of different geographical contexts (Frank, 2018). Planners, as ‘world professionals’ (Sykes et al., 2015, 82), are therefore being readied to manage the scale and speed of urban growth in parts of the global South (UN Habitat, 2009). But despite these laudable ambitions, there are also repeated concerns over the extent to which planning education in the global North is appropriate for preparing future practitioners to address contemporary and near-future urban challenges (Peel and Frank, 2008; Sykes et al., 2015; Carolini, 2018). There are, of course, several instructive accounts of how global dimensions should be embedded within programme structures (for example, Hoey et al., 2017; Ratnayake and Butt, 2018). However, in response to recent suggestions for more sustained empirical

Reflections

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Key Issues

- 1 The need for trained, professional planners to improve quality of life of urban populations and protect/enhance natural resources (global challenges)
- 2 'Hyper-mobility' of people, goods, services, information and the 'collapsing' of spatial scales in an era of globalization
- 3 Growing internationalization of education and transfer of knowledge, provoking comparative studies, as ideas move across time and space



Key Issues

4

Doubts remain over whether internationalization is being 'sufficiently' embedded and reflected in (UK) planning curricula

5

Are future practitioners being equipped with knowledge and skills to help solve complex and intensifying global challenges?

6

But *what* are the opportunities and challenges encountered by UK planning educators and practitioners in this context?

Data



Interviews with planning educators teaching on Royal Town Planning Institute-accredited (RTPI) programmes in the UK

Views from thirteen respondents working across different universities that face different educational, institutional and professional *challenges*. These perspectives highlighted the varied approaches to teaching and research in international contexts



Online survey with practicing UK planners

An RTPI-distributed survey. Seventy-two respondents provided thoughts on their *time working in planning*; the *value of international planning education*; and ideas on the skills needed to *work in different international settings*

Experiencing Internationalization

- ❑ Respondents were generally positive about recent efforts to explore the global nature of planning. These efforts enrich discussions over how to tackle impacts of climate change, urban growth and other global challenges
- ❑ Value of international case studies, well-designed UK-based or international field visits, and exchange opportunities



Experiencing Internationalization

“ So, when I take students on overseas field visits, they also learn how to, you know, how to approach people, talk to people, they learn [...] how to be a little more open, [...] you know, move around, smile, touch, smell, see and things like that. So, it's not, so being a planner is not just about [laughs] knowing how to develop policy or apply a policy or something like that

(R4, female, “new” university)

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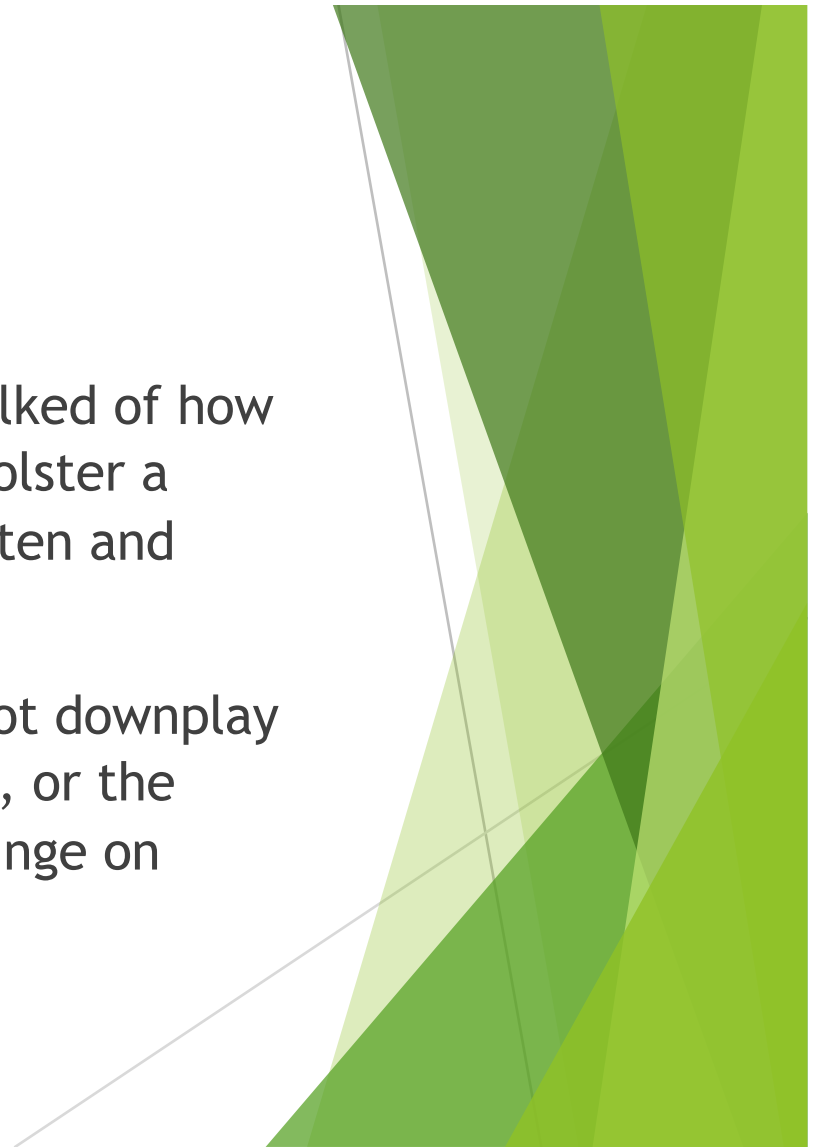
Experiencing Internationalization

Tensions

 <p>Student recruitment 'vs' educational and professional priorities</p>	 <p>Radical, wholesale change to curricula may be unwarranted and unnecessary</p>	 <p>Celebrating / accommodating different abilities, learning styles, language levels, language requirements, cultural backgrounds, expectations, motivations and prior experiences</p>
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International Examples

- ❑ Some experienced planning practitioners talked of how planning education should encourage and bolster a sense of acquisitiveness; a willingness to listen and learn from other contexts
- ❑ But, increased global perspectives should not downplay the need to learn about economies, culture, or the other internal and external forces that impinge on ‘internal’ planning processes



International Examples

“ *Curiosity. Openness, listening and observing a lot before speaking. Understanding planning as a way of managing people in space here and now - but that it is subject to change - not as an absolute recipe [...] adaptability [is important]*

(practitioner, female, twenty years' planning experience)

Understanding the legislatives and policy regime of foreign countries is important; the policy objectives, and how they apply locally. This is transferable from UK work experience, but only to a limited extent, without understanding how they translate and adapt

(practitioner, male, White-British, aged 25-34, ten years' planning experience)

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International Examples

- ❑ The RTPI encourages accredited planning programmes to assess the experience of spatial planning in different contexts and spatial scales
- ❑ But further opportunities that explore the *historical* imprint left by Western planning concepts, that sometimes overlooked or suppressed existing indigenous knowledges, affiliations and ways of life



International Examples

“ *Some of the students from the global South come to us because they think that our planning practices are superior, and they need to learn from these practices to bring them back to.*

So, they themselves haven't really in a way put themselves in the postcolonial mode. Like, actually, all students can [do more to] question some of the stuff you are going to hear because it may be that it's rooted in very colonial or exploitative practices. [So], there is an interesting ambiguous dimension here

(R6, female, Russell Group university)

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International Examples

“ *I think because of the academic pressures, academics and literature has got more theoretical. I'm not sure that's an entirely good thing. I think the sort of discourse of planning has got more abstract. But actually, to understand the history and the background of your profession and where it came from and what it's done in different places, and what the debates have been around the outcomes of planning, is probably a better way of making people wise about future decisions*

(R10, male, Russell Group university)

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Spaces of Diaspora

- ❑ Respondents talked of how customs, cultures and forms of exchange that take place in certain diasporic communities are shaped in some way by (persistent) colonial forces
- ❑ A shortage of trained UK planners, combined with ongoing concerns around public sector cutbacks, might limit ambitions
- ❑ However, acknowledging that legacies of global connection have created diverse urban centres may help broaden current interpretations of change, which stress importance of corporate finance, compliant planners and avaricious developers in shaping urban environments



Spaces of Diaspora

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[W]e critically engage with this issue of policy mobilities, [...] and the discussion is on the city statutes and why and how it came out of progressive struggle between different groups and those with different backgrounds [...] So, we do ask the British students to try to think about these power dynamics and solutions in different communities and question what's informal and illegal in the British planning system

(R6, female, Russell Group university)

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Further Reflections

- 1 Strengthening research collaboration, and curriculum design may help to increase students' preparedness of (urban) ideas that stretch out across different geographical contexts
- 2 Enduring tensions, though. 'Pure' internationalization 'vs' locally focused, professionally accredited education, and attempts to 'sell' programmes that appeal to lucrative overseas markets
- 3 Persistent calls for joined-up approaches to manage, resource and sustain efforts to internationalize in ways that benefit students, staff and employers



Further Reflections

4

University, practitioner and institutional support to provide future planners with 'necessary' skills to deliver (global) solutions

5

Greater alignment of international marketing, student recruitment and support services with staff recruitment, expertise, teaching and research agendas

6

Recognise how staff and students of different backgrounds encounter efforts to embed international ideas across formal *and* informal higher education time-spaces

Further Reflections

7

Fora that share and capture critical reflections on the experiences of staff and (former) students, could help build inter-institutional dialogue and shared knowledge bases

8

Expand the range of teaching resources that expose students to global dimensions of planning, when the world of 'places' is being (re)shaped in increasingly networked global society

9

Encourage students to reflect on the importance of collective memories, traditions, customs and place attachment that manifest in many diasporic communities in parts of the global North