

JOINT CONFERENCE OF THE ECTP-CEU, SPA-CE.NET AND AUUP 'Future of the traces of modernity: public mass housing neighbourhoods'.

Opening speech by Janet Askew, President of the ECTP-CEU

The ECTP-CEU, SPA-CE.NET AND AUUP are delighted to be joining together to hear young planners from all over Europe address the theme of this conference, namely the re-planning and regeneration of mass housing neighbourhoods. The theme of the conference is inspiring, all the more so because it is so relevant to many countries, not just in Europe, but across the world.

The ECTP-CEU is of the view that it is up to planners to stress the importance and responsibility that we take on – that is, to contribute to the resolution of the some of the greatest challenges society faces at present.

The question is, how? And what role does the ECTP play in this?

In the ECTP-CEU, we recognise that different countries have different approaches to planning, but we exist to bring together planners across Europe. This determination was built into the international declaration of 1985, our founding charter, which attempted to define the role of a 'professional planner' and provide our members with a common framework to increase the visibility of planners and recognise their important societal role. A large part of our role is understanding and comparing planning approaches in different countries, something of which I have been a strong advocate. In an article about spatial planning, the authors Nadin and Stead (2008), promote the benefits of comparative planning. They recognise that spatial planning systems are 'deeply embedded in their socio-economic, political and cultural context' ⁽¹⁾. Nevertheless, they contend that as well as learning through exchanging good practice, talking to other planners results in furthering our own knowledge – comparison shines a light on our own practices.

One of our enduring questions is - what makes a planner distinctive? Why do we need an association?

The early ECTP-CEU declaration (updated 2015)⁽²⁾ attempted to circumscribe the role of the planner by listing our main attributes, including all our potential skills and knowledge. It took 7 years to agree on

1 Nadin, V., Stead, D., (2008) 'European spatial planning systems, social models and learning'. *Disp - the planning review*, Vol 44, Issue 172, Taylor and Francis Group

2 ECTP-CEU The Charter of European Planning (2013) <https://ectp-ceu.eu/2013-the-charter-of-european-planning/>

a definition about who we are. I have now been a planner for 50 years, and one of the issues facing us is that planning encompasses many related disciplines which contribute to the very wide field. In reality, this list is changing all the time, for example now in the 21st century, we might argue that there are many different types of planner – in reality, dealing with a wide cross-section of subjects. I think it has become more complex, but we are assisted now by a wider literature, deeper research, better educated planners and an extensive range of tools and instruments for dealing with issues, something that emerged from some recent research by ESPON⁽³⁾. Nevertheless, in its attempts to describe exactly who and what a planner is, the declaration was very ambitious.

Over the years, we have had challenges to this notion of the professional town planner – it was suggested that we should allow anyone into the ECTP-CEU. Anyone can be a town planner! Why not? It is a broad church. But in ECTP-CEU, we unanimously agree that unless we continue to define ourselves as a *distinct* profession, we will not influence the governments and communities that we seek to serve.

Since its inception, the ECTP-CEU has managed to work co-operatively across different countries because we have a common agenda and because we are working to similar aims. Two aspects must prevail. The underpinning principles which define the planner in Europe are social justice and citizen participation. In 2015, the ECTP-CEU published its manifesto on participatory democracy ⁽⁴⁾ the principles of which we would like to see every country and every local government signed up to. And it is to be remembered that planners can also be conflicted. The Council of Europe addresses issues of corruption, and professional ethics. A code of conduct demonstrates important markers to validate a profession.

How do we guarantee that planners are qualified to the highest standards? What does a planner in Europe look like?

This takes us to the importance of the education of planners.

The ECTP-CEU wants to have a role in this. We aim to validate or ‘badge’ schools of planning with our code of standards, along with those subjects which define the planner and which schools of planning will work towards. We want to work with our academics to achieve this and this conference brings us together with AESOP, the Association of European Schools of Planning, who like us, have already defined a core curriculum. We aim to base planning courses in the distinctive theory of planning – something

3 Nadin, V. Stead, D. Dąbrowski, M. & Fernandez-Maldonado, A-M (2021) Integrated, adaptive and participatory spatial planning: trends across Europe, *Regional Studies*, 55:5, 791-803, DOI: [10.1080/00343404.2020.1817363](https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2020.1817363)

4 ECTP-CEU (2015) *The European Charter of Participatory Democracy in Spatial Planning Processes*, ECTP-CEU, <https://ectp-ceu.eu/2015-european-charter-on-participatory-democracy/>

which academics have fought for. We need to combine theory with skills and knowledge needed by the practising planner.

However different our courses are in Europe, it was the EU's ERASMUS programme which first enabled many of us to work across Europe, transferring our knowledge between universities in Europe. Students can count these studies towards their planning qualification in the home country. This points the way towards our ultimate ambition – that of mutual recognition for planning courses across Europe, enabling and giving opportunity to thousands of ambitious young planners the ability to work without barriers in countries across Europe.

This is not such a far-fetched notion. In recent research commissioned by ESPON (op cit) and in my own recent research, it is evident that our planning systems are coming closer together. A similar set of objectives crop up, namely sustainable development, environmental protection, citizen engagement, as well as planning reform, which is on the agenda in many countries. And although the EU doesn't have any competence in planning, it encourages member states to co-operate across borders, and the research verifies that this is increasingly happening, influenced by sectoral policies which aim to address cross-border problems.

But a disturbing finding from recent research is a decline in the influence of spatial planning in some countries, resulting in patterns of development which bear no relationship to the plan. There is a lack of integration. There are demands for de-regulation. Demands for investment result in attempts to encourage economic investment at the expense of other objectives, such as the achievement of net zero cities and lifestyles. Planning is dismissed as too restrictive. Planning is blamed for failures of government to provide, for example, decent housing.

Our own ECTP-CEU surveys show that there are considerable similarities across countries. I am pleased to report that some progress is being made towards mutual recognition. Planning associations and universities in Ireland and France have signed an agreement, which aims to achieve mobility of planners across Europe.

What are the *current* issues in Europe? To what extent do we all face similar issues? How are the different approaches coming together to resolve our problems?

It goes without saying that we believe that planners are central to the world's efforts to resolve some of the biggest issues of our time - climate change and its many outcomes, migration, poverty, social injustice and today in this conference, we hear about one of the biggest and most ubiquitous issues of our time – housing.

And if the pandemic was expected, many countries were ill-prepared for it. As we struggle to free ourselves of it, we know that planners have a vital role to play in recovery. This time last year, we were planning for a

post-Covid recovery, hoping that there was a silver lining from the reduction in traffic, changing working patterns and so on. But in such a short space of time, we find that war is on our doorstep, and we find a new role for planners in discussing how to rebuild a society and its environment in a post-war era. Our job is never done.

Finally, I turn to the theme of this conference. I would argue that one of the biggest problems, globally, is the housing problem which is a problem about *affordable* housing, and it affects every city in the world. There are many reasons for this, but some of it arises out of the vast profits to be made from land. In so many places, housing has become an investment asset for developers, sitting on land waiting for property prices to rise. Governments are unable or unwilling to regulate this. And we see policies which only exaggerate extremes of poverty and wealth in societies, alongside real issue threats to our lives from war, ill-health and climate change, including unsustainable lifestyles. This conference tackles just one of the housing issues – that of public mass housing neighbourhoods.

And with these young planners' projects, the next publication of the ECTP-CEU will be to bring together the ideas that young planners today will be exploring for us.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in the ECTP-CEU, we aim to define and maintain the distinctive role of the professional spatial planner in Europe.

We strongly believe that good planning requires well-qualified planners. Our enthusiasm for planning will encourage the next generation of students to take up our discipline for study.

Our young planners' workshops and projects offer us the most – they come to us with new ideas. The young planners across Europe are the policymakers of the future. We have an ambition to encourage the young planners to come together in a network, to be part of the ECTP to join in our decision-making.

Together, the ECTP-CEU seeks to work with governments and communities to use planning as a progressive force to create more sustainable, resilient and socially just places.

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