

Building sustainable cities ***Challenges for professional education***

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1. Importance of professional education for new urban era

Contemporary processes of rapid development and urbanization of many countries put the issue of urban planning on top of the urban governance agenda. At the same time these processes demand the approach different than in past, which comes from the emerging new planning paradigm. This paradigm – different to the one of times of modernity – is still under development, and many of its elements are still not defined. Moreover, according to many professionals and practitioners, even the outlines of this new paradigm are not yet clear.

But all discussions regarding the future of planning profession already pose new challenges to the planning schools. This relates to many different aspects and elements of planning education: both undergraduate, graduate and professional courses, as well as doctoral studies and other forms of life-long learning. At the same time these schools have to struggle with the challenges to the planning curricula emerging from the globalization processes as well as from differences and divides between countries, regions and even districts in one city, which demand different approaches to solve specific problems. In result, the planning knowledge which seems appropriate for one site, nor necessarily has to be applicable to another. This brings diversity to the planning profession, but – at the same time – also contributes to the discussion on its future and poses new challenges to the universities and other educational institutions, offering programs and courses in this topic.

These problems need even more consideration as the real urban era is emerging. As the world gets rapidly urbanized, more and more urban areas in the developing world need professional assistance. At the same time the scale of the planning problems starts to vary from social inclusion within slum areas to advanced implementation mechanisms for innovative urban projects. Paradoxically, all of these have to be included in the planning education, as the new professionals will have to struggle with challenges of different nature and – in the realities of globalizing world – in many cases in the distant places.

As it was mentioned above, the new planning paradigm is emerging within the professional planning discussion. Some of the protagonists of the sustainable development argue that it should be considered as the new mode of urban development. But the truth is that this concept is mainly interpreted via issues of environmental consequences of development and some social issues. At the same time many of the participants of the professional discussions regarding the future of planning underline the importance of “social inclusion”, which is frequently presented as the only solution to the crisis situation in cities. Both of these elements are important, but are they all that contemporary planners should deal with? What about the discussion regarding the urban design, way of making the formal planning regulation and others? At the same time many of these tasks are frequently performed in a way known for many decades by now. But the new paradigm, although perceived differently in various countries, require new planning approaches. Surprisingly, changes in this matter are much more frequently demanded by socially and politically conscious local communities than professionals. This in many cases comes out from the traditional planning education and belief that once earned knowledge and abilities are still a solid base for contemporary tasks.

2. Emerging new planning paradigm

Planning is nowadays frequently described not as the process of defining the physical shape of urban structures, but rather as the process of managing the urban change. This means that the role of planners is not any more limited to defining the material structure of the site, but has to involve all other aspects of production of space. If this is to be true, one has to take into account all elements that contribute to this issue. At the same time planning profession is not any more reserved for planners only – within the discussion on the future of planning one can hear more clear and loud voices of politicians and community leaders. This is the already visible spin-off effect of the public participation and inclusion of all stakeholders in the planning process, which more and more get to the mainstream of the development process.

Among these various aspects of new urban planning paradigm, in order to make the above mentioned definition true, one should identify at least three major groups of elements:

- definition of the desired urban form
- mode of discussion regarding definition of the desired urban form
- recognition of the implementation mechanisms, including the entire variety of tools and instruments of urban management.

In result, the new planning paradigm should include all of the elements which are now under discussion, supplement them with ones still missing from the discussion (or not perceived as part of the possible future planning paradigm) and put all together within one frame. At the same time one has to keep in mind that the new planning paradigm refers more than before to the urban form, which means – the physical shape of the city. This issue is accompanied by general re-recognition of the traditional urban values, which in past were frequently neglected in result of the modernist or neo-liberal paradigms. This brings back the discussion regarding different scales of urban design as well as its relations to the other elements of the planning doctrine.

3. Dilemmas in defining new urban planning and development concepts

Abandoning the modern planning doctrine was not accompanied with creation of the new proposal in this respect. Therefore, the discussion regarding the elements and structure of the new paradigm is still continuing, although in many cases does not deal with all important issues. Some of them include the quality of the space, which – frequently declared as the “planning credo” – is not transformed into the solid planning regulation or urban development rules and policies. At the same time one can mention a number of dilemmas, which come to our minds when discussing the above mentioned elements of the new doctrine. They emerge from the diverse approaches to the development policies adopted by cities and countries, which in many cases are embedded in the different development priorities and models. This includes also various approaches to the competitiveness in the global scale, which for many of the leading cities is the predominant concern. On the other hand, the environmental issues get more and more attention, as well as social ones. In result, the whole spectrum of issues is taken into account.

Regarding the first of the proposed elements of the new planning paradigm – which means **desired urban form** – the most important issue is associated with transposition of the sustainable development principles into real development regulations. The most important dilemma in this respect is the size of the city – shall we promote the compact city, of high density and with many possible social, political and economic conflicts emerging from the

process of densification of the urban fabric, or shall we agree for some form or “organized” sprawl and certain amount of greenfield development. This problem is not so easy to be solved, as many protagonists of the green cities, being against urban sprawl, at the same time do not agree for the densification processes. This issue is accompanied by another problem, namely – shall we allow the high-rise development in our cities? If we promote the compact cities, the natural consequence of this is to go higher with new developments in order to accommodate the growing housing needs. Otherwise, if we do not decide to do so, we have to reconsider the “compact city” policy. Another aspect of this issue is associated with the approach to the heritage, as many of our cities are to some extent under heritage preservation regulations. Therefore, the more general discussion regarding “urban sprawl vs. urban densification” also has some consequences to this issue, and can influence it. On the other side, the strict heritage preservation policy can deeply influence general development strategy of the city.

Another set of topics regards the issues in **mode of discussion regarding definition of the desired urban form**. The basic dilemma is associated with the level and mode of public participation in the planning process, as well as willingness and possibilities of full inclusion of the local community into the decision-making process. This can and should be done in many different ways, but still the basic question is: to what extent the will of the general public shall decide about the final shape of the urban structure? This does not mean that public participation should be limited or discouraged – but definitely it should find its proper place in the decision-making process. The same relates to the possible cooperation and dialogue between city officials and private sector, playing – in the majority of cases – the key role in the urban development process.

Finally, the third set of important for the new planning paradigm issues regards the **implementation mechanisms**, including the entire variety of tools and instruments of urban management. They are related also to the mode of cooperation between municipal management and potential city dwellers, including large- and small-scale developers. One can imagine in this respect different strategies, including strong cooperation and creation of the attractive conditions for investments or just the opposite. In this game the municipalities can also create and implement its own, well thought-through municipal policy, or do just the opposite – wait for the action from the potential partners and eventually react to it.

Above stated dilemmas do not create the full list of them – one can imagine a much longer one, and possibly organized in a different way. But one also has to keep in mind that the discussion on the new shape of the planning paradigm is just beginning, and it does not enable involved partners to answer all these questions upfront. We should also remember that in many cases it is just not possible to answer all or some of the above mentioned problems in a clear way, as this answer may vary on the local conditions and one can also imagine a compromise between the stated propositions.

4. Challenges for planning education

In the realities of the emergence of the new planning paradigm, globalized world, increasing mobility of professionals and – at the same time – still lasting differences between developing and developed countries, the planning profession requires constant updates and adaptation to the new situations. Therefore, planners need to gain new skills and abilities, associated with all three elements of the new planning paradigm: the sustainable urban form; the efficient way of making development happen; and the proper involvement of the public into the decision – making process. In order to allow this, the new forms of education have to be introduced. Also the traditional approaches to planning education in schools of planning and

architecture have to be modified as the equal importance should be given to all three elements of the new planning paradigm.

In result, within this new situation we should start thinking about the new type of planning professionals. Also we should realize that defining the planning profession as the “universal” one maybe is not possible any more, and – in result – we could end up with the whole set of different “planning professions”. Some of them may be more associated with the traditional perception of the profession, but also the new types of professional profiles will be necessary. Among this group one can identify at least three major branches, which also demand different education:

- **„traditional” regulatory planners** – dealing with planning ordinances, legal issues and other types of formal regulations – which demands strong law-making abilities and knowledge as well as ability to imagine the spatial consequences of provided regulation;
- **„old-new” urban designers** – being able to define the physical shape of various types of urban structures, also at different scales; this group includes both architecture-oriented professionals dealing with the scale of small settlements and complexes and large-scale structure planners, able to deal with complex solutions for entire cities and even metropolitan areas;
- **„new” action planners** – responsible for action planning, including the implementation of the development policy and different types of urban projects.

On the basis of the above considerations we could also conclude that there is a need for highly-specialized professionals, being able to deal with some selected types of situations. But at the same time the planning assignments nowadays require a lot of interdisciplinary knowledge, including all of the above-stated abilities and knowledge. Therefore, it might be justifiable to state that in fact we also need the more general type of modern planner, who is able to deal with a number of issues, including:

- doing some spatial design assignments (or at least understanding spatial issues and consequences of undertaken actions);
- undertaking the participatory processes at different stages of the design and/or development process (or at least understanding the importance of these and knowing the role of public participation and dialogue with all key stakeholders within the design and development processes);
- understanding the urban development and management mechanisms, including the knowledge about the various tools and instruments of urban policy as well as about the ways of using them in different settings (or at least being aware of the issues associated with the implementation processes).

In fact, all of the above mentioned groups of professionals are necessary and will be absorbed by the market. But this diversification of needs has to be met with the supply of the professionals. At the same time one has to remember that the traditional ways of education are frequently based on the standardized curricula. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the changes in “demand” should effect in changes in “supply”, which means that the traditional ways of education need to be revised in order to allow development of the different specializations in planning. This relates mainly to the less developed countries and their planning schools, which – in many cases – still try to develop the “universal” planning curriculum.

5. Some lessons from Poland

It might be useful to verify the above stated conclusions regarding described situation and needs for changes within the planning education system within the context of the particular planning and educational system. Therefore, the example of Poland was chosen, which can be regarded as specific due to a number of reasons. Among them one can name the present state of the urban development, legal system, tradition and present situation within the planning education system and – finally – challenges for this system. This example also allows discussing the problems and issues regarding the future of the planning education in other developing countries and presents some possible models for its alternation.

5.1. Urban development processes in Poland

Poland is the medium-sized European country, located within the zone called Central and Eastern Europe. With its population of approx. 37 million people, Poland is the largest country in this region. This country faced rapid changes during last twenty years. These changes emerged from the political and economic transition, initiated by the collapse of the communist system in 1989.

Changes within the political, social and economic systems had the severe consequences to the urban development model. One of the most visible ones was the change within the development paradigm, effecting in the abandonment of the modernist ideas and accepting the neo-traditional model. At the same time private investors took the leading role within the development processes, which effected in great richness of the new developments. But this phenomenon, associated with the liberal approach to urban development presented by local authorities, effected in great spatial chaos both within the urban and sub-urban zones. Therefore, the planners, educated within the framework of the modernistic paradigm and confronted with these new realities, were not able to deal properly with the new situation. This relates also to the new phenomena, which include both different patterns of urban sprawl and urban regeneration, which were not present within the structure of Polish cities before 1989 and now become the key elements of the contemporary urban development model.

5.2. Changes within the Polish planning system and the consequences to the profession

Besides the changing pattern of urban development, also the planning system in Poland has faced a substantial change during last twenty years. It was changed from the “command and control” system, working within the realities of single investor – the Polish state – to the “regulatory” one, where many different, predominantly private and individual investors, are present. Also the re-created after the year 1990 local governments started to play a key role in urban planning, which was associated with major change regarding the planning priorities. One has to remember that before 1989, under the “command and control” system, the priority was give to the “development planning” associated with the investment priorities of the central government and the local authorities – although existing – in fact had very little to say about these. But after the year 1989 the local governments become the key players in this game, so they had to learn how to deal with the development process. At the same time the planning system had to be deeply modified in order to accommodate new needs regarding development control. In result, the entirely new type of local plans was introduced and the nature of the structure plans for the entire municipalities was also deeply changed. Also, these spatial planning documents are no longer properly coordinated with the socio-economic plans (like i.e. urban development strategies), which comes – among others – from the lack of abilities to do so among the professionals dealing with this situation.

All of the above described changes in the planning practice had severe consequences to the profession. First of all, traditional structure planners and urban designers started to vanish, and new graduates from the planning and architecture schools (although educated in this matter) were not interested in professional development in this matter. Secondly, as local governments started to follow the neo-liberal model of urban development, the public interventions started to be highly restricted only to the infrastructure projects and – at the same time – no serious public-private partnership model was developed. In result, there was no room for implementation of the already well developed in the West-European and North-American countries so-called “action planning”, associated with the implementation of urban concepts and strategies. And at the same time one could face the development of the new in Polish realities planning profession, focused on legal aspects of private development and on enabling investors and developers to build “almost anything almost anywhere” in accordance to the frequently highly chaotic and complicated local legal regulation.

5.3. Present planning education pattern in Poland and need for lifelong education

At present most of Polish planners have the architectural education as the first degree earned in their career. Therefore, most of them were entering the planning profession with strong design skills and needed a lot of self-education, in many cases earned by practice and informal studies. This effected in the development of very tradition-oriented approach to planning and slowing down the process of introducing the new ideas and concepts. The same relates to the planning paradigm – for many of the Polish planners still the modernistic approach is the only one they know and the only one that is a subject of implementation. In result, since the transition that took place in the 1990-ties, Polish planning workshop was dominated by the solutions known in the highly-developed countries since 1970-ties. The same related to the planning education.

New situation emerged in the end of 1990-ties, when the new tracks of planning studies were developed under the name of “spatial management”. Although these studies are focused on economic and geographical aspects of urban development, they provide a chance for creation of the new class of planners understanding the modern urban development processes. But at the same time the graduates of many of these programs were lacking the design skills, which was the reason for the opinion that they were unable to undertake the professional career as urban planners. In result, in order to obtain the positions requiring modern planning skills, the graduates of both tracks of studies (“architectural” and “spatial management” oriented) needed to complete the specialized post-graduate courses.

In result, at present most of the schools of architecture and spatial management offer the courses associated with planning, but only few of their graduates get the proper education, enabling them to undertake successful career. This means that the present curricula in planning, offered at both types of schools, need further adjustments (or – in many cases – deep reform). At the same time there is a need to develop the new tracks of the post-graduate studies for already working professionals. And these studies can become a chance for many of already working professionals for getting the new abilities and knowledge, emerging from the new planning paradigm.

5.4. Post-graduate educational offer in Poland

In response to the above described needs, the new offer in the respect of the post-graduate studies was created. Among them one can identify both short, professional development oriented courses (lasting from few months up to one year) and few years long doctoral courses, focused more on scientific development of the students.

When discussing the short-term post-graduate courses, one can notice a rapid development of such an offer within the existing architectural and spatial management schools. This is partly perpetuated by the demand of the Planners' Chamber (organization associating the professionals being legally able to develop the formal planning documents) that all candidates for the members of the Chamber should complete such the post-graduate courses. In result, many of these courses and programs are named as "fully commercial", as the students have to pay the full cost of these studies. At the same time in case of many of these students their employees pay for this education – or at least cover a substantial part of these costs. These studies are usually of the general character, which means that the whole variety of the professional issues are included in the study program.

But one can also notice the creation of the programs sponsored by the EU-based programs (financed from the European Social Fund), which create the new situation in this market. Within these studies usually the majority of the costs are sponsored from the EFS sources, and the students have to pay for only small percentage of them. These studies are usually of the highly-specialized character, i.e. covering the selected aspects of urban regeneration or development management.

The third group of newly created studies is associated with the doctoral programs in planning, emerging at many universities in Poland nowadays. As the scientific programs, they are offering some general courses and create a chance to explore the highly specialized topics in planning theory and practice.

6. Conclusions

Within the realities of emerging new planning paradigm the new planning professionals are needed in the local communities, which relates both to the highly-developed and developing countries. At the same time the existing planning curricula – in many cases embedded in traditional architectural education and reflecting the modernistic approach to urban design and development – do not provide the education adequate to the present needs in this matter.

In result, the new type of the educational offer is required, which allows planners already active in the profession a chance to gain new skills and knowledge, adequate to the present needs. Such the offer can take very different forms, which include both new undergraduate and graduate courses, post-graduate studies and courses as well as doctoral programs. But in realities of still developing countries, like Poland, there is a big need for the offer of short-term courses of different nature. They should become a basis for professional education of planners within the realities of emerging new planning paradigm and within the realities of changing demands in times of on-going globalization. Therefore, these post-graduate studies can and should constitute the basis for life-long learning offer.

One should also note that a number of these courses are already offered at different academic and non-academic institutions. But what seems necessary is the formal recognition of them at the national levels (and – in many cases – also at the international level) as well as linking them to the existing planning systems. At the same time one should remember that

there is a big issue associated with the cost of such the programs – in many cases these costs are very high or are perceived as very high, especially from the perspective of the developing countries. But they are usually highly cost-effective, as for the – in fact – moderate cost provide relatively rich program and chances to gain important new skills and abilities.

When discussing these issues in post-graduate education, one should also remember that this offer should include both general programs and highly specialized ones. Creation of such the offer at the local, national and/or international levels should be fore warded by:

- further recognition of the needs,
- validation and verification of the present studies and courses offered in regard to needs and paradigm changes,
- making these courses more accessible for especially young professionals
- linking the educational offer with changes in planning system.

In this perspective the new role should be given to the international organizations. They can become a platform for integration of the educational offer from different parts of the world, and also for creation of truly interdisciplinary programs. Therefore, such the organizations as ISOCARP should undertake further efforts to recognize the opportunities and chances for creation of such the programs.

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