

## **Shaping the new planning curricula in the post-socialistic context – lessons from Poland and Russia**

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*The planning education was, to a large extent, non-existent in the formerly socialistic countries. Therefore, after successful political and economic transformation, the need arised to develop the new planning curricula, focused on situation and problems that have to be dealt with in the context of post-socialist countries.*

### **Introduction**

Planning education is the issue widely discussed during various conferences and seminars, especially ones grouping the representatives of universities offering professional education in this field. But to a large extent this discourse is dominated by the realities and specifics of the highly-developed countries, which is also reflected in the structure of the organizations of universities offering those. At the same time planning education in these countries is in many cases limited to socio-economic issues, with no attempt towards dealing with physical planning or urban design. This situation is characteristic to many highly developed countries, as those of Western Europe or North America.

A different situation occurs in the post-socialistic countries, where the planning profession is traditionally dominated by graduates from the programs in architecture, frequently (and traditionally) treating planning as the “large scale architectural design”. Graduates of these programs have very little knowledge of the social and economic processes and are not ready to deal with modern planning regulation-making processes. At the same time, the cities in Central and Eastern Europe (as well as in other post-socialistic countries, including ones in various parts of the world) are in desperate need of modern planning solutions and planners able to deal with their problems.

### **New roles of planners in the post-socialistic countries**

After the transition from communist and centrally planned economy to market-based system, the role of planners in Poland and Russia has changed. In the formerly socialistic countries, the majority of planning professionals had traditionally an architectural background, with some exceptions of e.g. transport engineers and economists who were dealing mostly with economic development strategies. In the past both spatial and economic development strategies were in most cases completely separated.

With the beginning of integration of strategic planning on all levels of the Central and Eastern Europe countries starting from local and regional up to national, new skills and interdisciplinary approach was needed. The planner is no longer only a creator of a vision plan or a large scale urban designer and even though some large scale development still happens, especially in Russia, in most cases planners work on small scale interventions.

Even if a large number of planners work in the public sector in local regional or national level administration, their role has changed. Some still are traditionally working on development control or land use regulations, as well as in the regional scale. But one has to note that

these regulations usually take form of new “zoning-like” documents. At the same time the traditional urban design is either vanishing (like in Poland) from the planner’s workshop or is preserved in the form of “large-scale architecture approach” (like in Russia). What is interesting, this also has consequences in using certain names: i.e. in Russian there is no widely used term for urban design, and the usual term of “city builder” is used for the traditional large-scale design of the city development plans, defining precise locations of new buildings but not much more. Similarly, in Polish the term “urban planner” is used for a person who just deals with zoning – and the broad sense of this term has been vanished.

But at the same time there is an increasing number of those who are managing development or working with new planning instruments. Some planners are negotiators, facilitators of participation process and managers of change. They are responsible not only for creating plans, but also for their implementation - improving the life conditions of inhabitants and delivering high quality spaces. To achieve this goal they have to understand economic and social aspects of the development process, be able to create durable partnerships with all actors of this process and understand their aims and needs. Numerous planners are working in private sector. Some of them owe their own companies so they need entrepreneurial and managerial skills.

Nowadays, most planners work either in administration or in planning offices, but this situation is already changing. Many future graduates of planning schools are going to work for NGO, some for non- and low-profit or quasi-public bodies, with very different organizational models. It is important to consider the types of skill they will need, especially that this kind of work very often requires versatility and flexibility. Some of them are going to work abroad or for international companies and need to be prepared to work in this context.

One of the most important aspect of the planning process is civic participation. However, the majority of practitioners in Poland – 62% of the respondents in the survey conducted by Wrocław University of Technology (Damurski Ł. 2012) - think that their education didn’t prepare them to conduct public hearings (a major step of regulatory public approval in planning process in Poland). The greatest doubts are expressed by graduates of architectural courses, who make up the majority of practicing planners in Poland.

In the end we can conclude that the new planning workshop is developing and knowledge about contemporary approaches is available, but planners frequently do not wish to use these. In fact, many of them still believe in the omnipotent role of the planning profession and tend to believe they know best and do not need to learn or use any other modern planning instruments.

### **Need for new planning curricula in the post-socialistic countries**

The abovementioned changes imply that there is a need to rethink the curricula of the universities dealing with planning education within these countries. These changes and adjustments are needed on all levels of education, starting from undergraduate courses to postgraduate ones and finishing on mid-career programs for professionals already on the labor market.

Both in Poland and Russia new planning programs are being introduced. In Poland in the last decade new interdisciplinary spatial economy programs are emerging from Economic Geography, Business, Architecture and Agriculture Faculties. Depending on their roots, these programs have very different emphasis and focus. Also, the profile of their alumni

significantly differs. There was a need to set standards for knowledge, skills and competences, which the graduates of all planning programs in Poland should possess. A body which was deeply involved in this process is the *Committee for Spatial Economy and Regional Planning of Polish Academy of Sciences* with its *Expert Panel for Education and Human Resources Development of the Land Management Studies*. Finally *Union for Development of Spatial Management Studies* was created and 17 major planning schools in Poland are now its members. A new *Law on Higher Education* increased the dynamics of this process. In general it helped to relate national qualifications systems to a common *European Qualifications Framework* which was an important step; to compare the qualification levels of different countries and different education and training systems.

One of the examples of a new generation *Planning and Urban Design* curriculum is the program of *Spatial Management* course implemented in 2012 at the Faculty of Architecture of Gdansk University of Technology. The program is based on training modules, which consist of a theoretical part, as well as practical seminars, studios and field studies. The aim of the course is for its graduates to acquire basic knowledge, as well as important skills and social competence to be able to work in the development process (Ledwon S., Martyniuk-Pęczek J. 2012).

In recent years in many Russian cities, first of all in Moscow, but also in Sankt Petersburg, Perm and others, we can observe a significant number of new post-graduate planning programs. These initiatives are undertaken by both public and private institutions. One of the most spectacular examples is the *Strelka Institute*, a postgraduate school for media, architecture and design, which offers a 9-month postgraduate educational program in English, that focuses on the urban environment. Education at Strelka is cross-disciplinary and is combining economics, social and political studies as well as art & culture. Both lecturers - designers, architects, government officials, city activists and entrepreneurs - as well as participants come from all over the world. The alumni are prepared to work for both public and private institutions, to work in academia or to shape new urban movements.

As experience from wide range of programs and initiatives on national level in post-soviet countries should be capitalized, there is a need for international cooperation. This spring a consortium of high educational institutions from five EU countries including two from Central Europe, three universities from Russian Federation and two from Kazakhstan applied for TEMPUS grant for international cooperation in the field of planning education. The objective of the project is to modernize the planning education in Russia and Kazakhstan, in order to improve its quality and relevance to current situation. Development of effective planning education will help to support the economic growth of Russian and Kazakh cities. This objective will be met through creation and implementation of the new Master level program in Urban Planning and Development. The pressing need to develop new methodologies and models of education provides unique opportunity to have much wider impact on the national level.

### **Mid-carrier programs**

There is more need for new under- and postgraduate planning curricula. People who are already working as planners frequently realize they need more knowledge in the specific areas. Also, the newcomers to the profession tend to look for the opportunities of getting the skills and knowledge required for their professional development. This also relates to the

process of reshaping their education and to developing planning skills among people who have different mode of education – like i.e. transportation engineering. In many cases they require new knowledge and abilities to strengthen their knowledge and gain new qualifications which they need in their everyday praxis. This is not only the case of professionals working in public administration or in local and regional development agencies, but also employers of private sector development companies or even research institutes with the spatial planning profile. Those planners often work in responsible positions, such as elaborating planning policy in local, regional and central administration, they lead comprehensive local development process working in local and regional development agencies or work as project managers in development companies, both for private and public sector.

A good example of such an approach are two mid-carrier programs: *Architectural and Urban Revitalization of the City Structures*, *Spatial Management of the Urban Areas* co-financed by the European Social Fund. These programs are taught at Gdansk University of Technology by professors from several Polish universities (Wroclaw, Silesia, Lodz) and also practitioners of different specializations, private and public sector, owners of planning offices, executives from public bodies and politicians. The programs started in 2009 and during its first editions the majority of students were architects and engineers who sought to widen their knowledge about the social and economic processes they dealt with in their work - the knowledge, which they lacked having only engineers' education. In later editions there were more and more urban planners, geographers, lawyers and civil engineers who, on the contrary, wanted to improve their physical planning or urban design skills.

A survey carried out every year shows that in both programs planners understand that opening to global and European trends in urban planning and changes in legislation is a cause for constant need for knowledge complementation. Adaptation to organization culture and the efficiency of learning are the skills that today must be constantly and dynamically developed. Moreover, more and more often the educational background does not determine today's career paths of planners in Poland. Polish employers often do not treat degree in a specific field as a condition to get a job; they often employ those who did not complete studies in planning, but people with a related degree, who have basic knowledge necessary to meet specific work requirements. The interest in this mid-carrier programs in the field of revitalization and spatial management is very strong. Students appreciate that most classes are in the form of study tours, workshops and design studios, which shows the need for practical education. There is a need for training experts to carry out the regeneration process and to work as managers of space in Poland. Highly qualified professionals with different specialties in regional and local governmental structures are required. Most respondents emphasized they had insufficient knowledge for the current position they held, resulting from the lack of broad enough undergraduate education. People participating in these courses want to become experts in the field of urban planning, fill the gap that exists in this area of the labor market, and thus count on career progression and improvement of their working conditions.

*The Ministry of Science and Higher Education* in association with *United Nations Development Programme Design Office in Poland (UNDP)* invited Polish Universities for partnership to prepare curriculum for postgraduate studies on Sustainable Human Development and Transition. Gdansk University of Technology will be responsible for the module concerning smart cities' development. It is also a way to propagate planning

education, especially that this program is addressed for the local and regional development actors. For the past six years the UNDP is also implementing, in cooperation with the Central European University of Budapest, a summer school in the field of social development. This school is addressed to officials and policy makers, postgraduate students and scientists from Central Europe and West Asia countries, as well as practitioners interested in the subject.

## Conclusions

At present significant changes in the planning paradigm, such as recognition of traditional urban values, can be observed. There is a search for the ways of including them in the planning system. Moreover, there is also a rising understanding of what the planning paradigm should be based on: creation of urban spaces, participatory process leading to definition of the desired urban form and understanding the implementation powers (Lorens P. 2010). To make these changes happen, new curricula need to be involved in the urban design, planning skills and competences. Graduates should also have knowledge and understanding of the development issues, both in general theory, but especially those emerging from the political and socio-economic specifics of post-soviet countries. Not only socio-economic conditions, but also planning culture specific to these countries have to be taken into consideration. International cooperation and capitalizing different experience could be a useful tool to achieve these goals.

Under this condition there is a necessity of evaluation of the planning profession challenges: still some practitioners will be "traditional" regulatory planners, some will be "old-new" urban designers, but the rest will become "new" action planners. They have to be able to design urban space and be ready for undertaking the participatory processes (Lorens P. 2010).

Further challenges for planning education include further recognition of the needs, validation and verification of the present programs and courses offered in regard to requirements and paradigm changes. It is vital to link the educational offer with changes in planning system and new roles of planner.

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