



## GUEST EDITORIAL

# Planning and heritage

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to introduce the papers selected for the present special issue on planning and heritage. This paper aims at advancing knowledge about the variety of uses and meanings of planning tools and practices in the cultural heritage field, by bridging disciplines and by building on evidence from the studies composing the special issue.

**Design/methodology/approach** – After a review of the debate on planning in management studies, the paper briefly outlines the features of the five selected papers and it reconstructs a composite narrative on planning in cultural heritage, as it emerges from the collected papers taken together.

**Findings** – In the fields of both management and urban studies a similar trajectory of “rise and fall” of rationalistic views of planning has taken place. Today’s discourse of planning in urban studies is strongly dominated by the issue of inclusiveness and participation. When looking at “who” really participates in these processes, it is clear that a vast array of public and private actors is involved, at least formally. When looking at “how” they are involved, a variety of possible approaches to participative planning are in use, from more formal, to more informal and emergent ones. Whether these participative forms of planning in cultural heritage actually “work” remains in part an open question.

**Originality/value** – Despite the increasing centrality of plans and planning in cultural heritage management, an investigation about the state-of-the-art of the debate on planning in this field and an exploration of how planning is done in practice are missing.

**Keywords** Participation, Management, Cultural heritage, Planning, Urban planning

**Paper type** Research paper

The issue of planning has become increasingly important in the heritage field, as part of broader changes at various levels. On the one hand, the “managerialism” wave in public sector transformation, more or less all over the (western?) world, introduced new issues of autonomy, accountability, customer orientation, and resource control (for a review of the New Public Management debate see: Hood, 1995). This came along with a new emphasis on programming and planning and the associated strategy rhetoric (strategic/business/management plans, mission statements, SWOT analyses, and the like). On the other hand, the diffusion of the notion of “site management” within the international community of heritage experts and international agencies (e.g. ICOMOS, UNESCO, ICCROM), largely dominated by professional traditions of urban planning, introduced urban planning logics and professional practices (master plans, participatory planning processes, etc.).

Despite the increasing reference to plans and planning, a serious ambiguity surrounds the meanings, the features and the very usefulness of similar (yet not the same) planning tools and approaches in the multidisciplinary context of heritage and among the various professions involved – urban planning, conservation, archaeology, museology, business, and organization theory. Moreover, scholarly literatures are also divided, and rarely acknowledge reciprocal influences or share epistemological and operational issues.

The purpose of this special issue is then to bridge different literatures on planning, trying to understand how they evolved over time in different disciplinary contexts. This offers the opportunity for a critical reflection on the variety of uses and



meanings of the practices of planning in the heritage field, between mainstreams and specificities.

Developing such reflection is important for several reasons. First, despite recent developments, an investigation about the state-of-the-art of planning is missing in the heritage management field. It is worth starting a discussion and share basic understandings on the uses and attitudes around these increasingly diffused tools. Second, this could reduce the risk of uncritical and naive applications of management and urban planning tools within the context of heritage. For instance, within management literature, the value itself of formal planning has been seriously questioned, leading some scholars to refer to the “rise and fall of strategic planning” (Mintzberg, 1994). It is crucial that a similar critical reflection is carried out in the heritage field, to avoid potential pitfalls and lack of relevance that have characterized the mainstream management discourse on planning. Third, this reflection is relevant for strategy/management studies, in that it responds to the renewed call for practice research in general (Pfeffer, 2009), and on planning practice, in particular (Whittington and Caillaud, 2008), and inasmuch as it advances knowledge about the encounter between strategic planning rationalities and other professional rationalities (e.g. Oakes *et al.*, 1998).

A special issue is a suited platform to start a similar discussion. We therefore called for case-based empirical research on planning from the heritage field, from a variety of disciplinary viewpoints, a variety of experiences and objects of plans, and a variety of countries, to avoid ethnocentrism. The selected papers, taken together, can help us developing some understanding of how plans are developed and used in the heritage field[1].

In these pages we will first give some insights on the debate on planning within management studies. Next, we will introduce the selected papers, describing their relative positioning and differences in dealing with some recurring elements. Finally, we will add some comments from our own point of view, as critical management scholars, involved in field research on management practice (in general and with reference to planning).

### **Planning and management**

To understand the current status of the notion of planning within management studies, a few insights on the evolution of the management field are useful. The massive establishment of management studies as a body of knowledge at the international level after Second World War is one of the most striking phenomena in social science (“the new Latin”, as Gherardi and Jacobsson, 2000, argued)[2]. Moreover, the complex multidisciplinary nature of the field has to be taken into account, if not its fragmented status (Whitley, 1984). Several sub matrixes compose this body of knowledge, from the economic one (including economics, finance, marketing, accounting influences) to political and sociological sciences (with a particular reference to the sociology of organization).

In such a context, the establishment of a specific area of research on “strategic management” is in itself interesting, particularly for the relationship between strategy and planning. Two main schools can be identified: the design and the process school. The design school was the first one to develop (1950s and 1960s), and it still informs mainstream management thought:

Among the schools of thought on strategy formation, one in particular underlies almost all prescription in the field. Referred to as the “design school”, it proposes a simple model that views the process as one of design to achieve an essential fit between external threat and opportunity and internal distinctive competence. A number of premises underlie this model: that the process should be one of consciously controlled thought, specifically by the chief

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executive; that the model must be kept simple and informal; that the strategies produced should be unique, explicit, and simple; and that these strategies should appear fully formulated before they are implemented (Mintzberg, 1990, p. 1).

The underlying assumption is that of a linear nature of decision making processes: the decision maker understands the context, has clear willingness, no ambiguity on cause-and-effect relationships, all of which leads to a “decision.” Within this framework, a clear meaning can be attributed to planning: planning is the tool guiding the implementation of previously formulated strategies (or “policies”). The relationship between strategy and planning rests then on the separation between thought and action, formulation, and implementation. The notion of goals (and mission) is central to this approach.

In the 1970s and 1980s this rational view of strategy and planning started to be criticized and an alternative view – the process school – emerged. The underlying assumptions changed: scholars started to point out that in real world individuals are not perfectly rational decision makers (Simon, 1947; Cyert and March, 1963); organizations themselves are complex social systems, largely characterized by causal ambiguity (Rumelt, 1984), acting in heterogeneous and changing environments. This leaves room to a variety of alternatives, and to different interpretations and behaviours by the actors.

Drawing on these assumptions, a less simplistic definition of strategy developed, calling for a more intriguing meaning of the notion of planning itself. Strategy is the characterization of the specific, unique, distinguishing conduct of an organization[3]. Strategy is the pattern in a stream of actions (Mintzberg and Waters, 1990), not the design; it is “what people do,” whether or not explicitly or consciously; it is the overarching internal consistency between the various components of a “business idea” (Normann, 1977) in that specific way (where the “how” is crucial)[4].

This notion of strategy implies a complex sensemaking process. Planning, then, assumes a rather different meaning compared to the design school: “Planning is a learning process in which the perspective continually shifts between visions and immediate actions [...] Man (and management) are learning and knowledge-developing systems” (Normann, 1977). Sensemaking, understanding, and learning are the basis of this approach. The designed plans will most probably fail; the realized strategy will easily (and largely) differ from the intended one, because some of the designed courses of action will drop off, and others will simply occur, or “emerge,” out of the control or even the awareness of the actors. Fully acknowledging the bounded rationality of actors, planning is then this learning and incremental process through which strategies are formed (not formulated) and made sense of, leveraging on unanticipated consequences as actions unfold, and anchoring this sensemaking to possible numbers, budgets and financial projection, conditions of action which could increase the sustainability in institutional, organizational, and financial terms. And above all, monitoring the unavoidable variations, which, more than “mistakes” are viewed as new forms of knowledge.

### **Planning and heritage**

The five papers composing this special issue explore the question of planning in the heritage field. In particular, they all focus on urban or industrial heritage settings, each one addressing specific aspects of the issue. Namely, Dewulf *et al.* (2013) addressed the topic of commitment making among heterogeneous stakeholders in five cases of urban regeneration in the Netherlands. In a similar vein, Swensen and Senbro (2013) compared several cases of urban regeneration planning of formerly industrial areas in

Norway, focussing on the variety of roles and relationships that are created in the process. Thorkildsen and Ekman (2013) focussed on one of these Norwegian cases, narrowing down the analysis on the ups and downs of a collaborative planning attempt as it unfolded in one of these urban regeneration projects in Norway. Kosmala and Sebastyanski (2013) discussed a peculiar case of artist-led urban regeneration planning process of a dismissed industrial area in Poland. Finally, Heras *et al.* (2013) shifted the attention to World Heritage urban settings, proposing a framework to develop an adaptive tool for strategic heritage planning in World Heritage cities.

Taken together, an interesting narrative emerges from this ensemble of papers. Let us briefly illustrate the most salient points.

*“Rise and fall” of top-down rational urban planning*

In the field of urban studies a similar trajectory of “rise and fall” of more rationalistic views of planning seems to have paralleled – even though hardly crossed – the one in management studies.

After a “golden age” of rational urban planning methods, criticisms to their elitist and centralized character started to accumulate since the 1980s (Kosmala and Sebastyanski, 2013). Today, urban plans are not conceived as an unambiguous guide to action anymore, but rather as the result of an interaction process, where the plan emerges from the complexities of the context and the interpretations of multiple and heterogeneous actors (Dewulf *et al.*, 2013), as a coming into being and rolling together of people and intentions, relations, technologies, and practices (Thorkildsen and Ekman, 2013).

Interestingly, this shift from top-down, bureaucratic and deterministic urban planning approaches to more open and incremental ones resonates well with the similar move from the design school to the process school that characterized the planning debate in management studies.

*Inclusiveness as the key*

However, despite the similarities in the trajectory of the planning debate between disciplines, there seems to be a distinguishing feature that characterizes the new urban planning discourse in an even stronger fashion than the strategic planning one: the issue of inclusiveness, as it manifests itself in the discourses of participative/ collaborative planning and of community engagement that more or less directly characterize the accounts of all of the papers here collected.

The authors acknowledge that inclusiveness is particularly central to planning in cultural heritage settings, due to the multidisciplinary and contested nature of this field, both because it is rooted in multiple professional logics and values (Thorkildsen and Ekman, 2013; Heras *et al.*, 2013; Kosmala and Sebastyanski, 2013), and because it typically lies at the crossroad of mutually interdependent public and private parties (Swensen and Senbro, 2013; Dewulf *et al.*, 2013).

*Who participates?*

Stakeholders’ inclusion and forms of participative planning are then the key to cope with the fragmented nature and the multiple interests of cultural heritage sites. But who are the actors that “hold a stake” in these cases of urban regeneration processes? All of these studies account for the presence of a multiplicity of public and private actors in the planning process, as opposed to previously one-way government-led plans.

Swensen and Senbro (2013) particularly focus their light on this topic, as they inquire who is really in charge of cultural heritage management in the set of urban

regeneration projects in course in Norway, and with which consequences. What they find is that all regeneration projects are run by a cooperation between public and private partners, but that the role of public parties changes according to the jurisdictional level (State, County, or Municipalities) and to the stage of their intervention in the process (as initiators or as developers). Interestingly, the cultural value of industrial heritage played a central role as a motivating and a marketing factor in any case.

The findings by Dewulf *et al.* (2013) from urban regeneration planning processes in the Netherlands confirm this wide participation of an array of public and private actors, but stress the existence of varying possible patterns of interaction even more. These seem to vary not only by whom the initiating actor is, but also by the identity of the key stakeholders involved and by the nature of the relationship – formal/informal agreement, or type of cooperation.

Kosmala and Sebastyanski (2013) move the attention to the role of a group of “stakeholders” that are not considered among the public and private actors of the official participative planning discourse in the case of a shipyard regeneration project: a collective of artists occupying some of the spaces of the shipyard. This reminds us that there may also always be other actors who participate *de facto* in the regeneration (planning) process of certain areas, even when their voices are silenced or simply not acknowledged.

#### *Variety of tools and approaches*

Even if sharing a similar discourse of inclusiveness, the papers reflect a variegated picture of how participation can be achieved (or at least pursued) in planning, ranging from more formal to more informal approaches.

At one extreme, Heras *et al.* (2013) propose a highly formal planning and monitoring tool (the Value-Based Monitoring System) that is supposed to serve participative and sustainable World Heritage urban planning, by posing heritage values at the core, and by being grounded on information processing and assessment by several stakeholders, according to a user-driven approach.

At the other extreme, Kosmala and Sebastyanski’s (2013) case of artists that, through their artistic production, explored the identity of an old shipyard, translated it, and engaged the public in the heritage and developmental values of the site, can be ascribed as an extreme case of *de facto* informal urban regeneration planning, parallel to the formal process led by the public and private partners involved.

In between lie the findings by Dewulf *et al.* (2013) (well resonating with the ones by Swensen and Senbro, 2013; Thorkildsen and Ekman, 2013, as well), concerning several ways to align the conflicting values of heterogeneous stakeholders: from formalized collaborations, such as joint ventures, to informal cooperation agreements. Whether formalized or not, successful cooperation among diverse stakeholders seems to be possible only when a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities is developed.

#### **Concluding remarks**

All in all, these papers attest that something has certainly changed and that a participative trend in planning practice in the heritage field has indeed gained momentum. Several thematic conclusions and directions for future research can be drawn.

Although these papers share the merit to have attempted an exploration of how forms of “open planning” happen in practice in several concrete cases in the heritage field, whether these forms of planning actually “work” remains in part an open question that could be further explored.

Moreover, despite the similarity of a pervasive participatory discourse, a variety of contexts and practices emerges from these cases. Namely, a different attitude toward the trade off between economic exploitation and conservation is found. For example, the land speculation factor in Poland is striking when compared to the more “ecological” attitude of the Norway’s cases. Even profit seeking projects could find sustainable ways of dialogue in public private partnerships in the latter, compared with the sense of overexploitation of the former (where economic development is basically destroying the remains of the past). Unfortunately, understanding the “hidden” processes that drive similar basic differences is not that easy, and risks to be set outside of the picture of any narrative.

Besides, the obsession with participation and community involvement risks becoming a new mainstream, linking heritage, and democracy in ways that can be questioned under a variety of points of view. First, the central notion of communities is never defined or problematized. In a discourse of political correctness, whatever communities express is “good” and “right” almost by definition: this ignores the fact that sometimes local communities are among the main threats to heritage preservation, due to their speculative, political or even criminal interests, in some extreme cases. Second, not all the world is characterized by democracy, and here the risk of another example of the Iraq syndrome to export democracy could be addressed. Third, the risk of mystification between declared and pursued policies is striking: participatory practices are always referred to, although real and crucial decisions are then taken out of this picture (the case of Istanbul Historic Peninsula, Shoup and Zan, 2013, is just one of the countless examples that any of us have experienced in our professional life).

Finally, in any case understanding and monitoring the impacts of similar issues on the internal consistency of the initial projects is desperately needed, if one draws on the notion of “business idea” and “business model” as developed in management studies (the internal consistency, the element of uniqueness characterizing any project, its configurational patterns). It is not only a “stakeholders” point of view that is necessary, but also an understanding of the impacts of any stakeholder’s desire in terms of the internal consistency of the project (and its levels of risk), and of trade off between different willingness of various stakeholders for the sustainability of the projects. This would weaken the ideology of stakeholders rhetoric, making the discussion of ways and forms of sustainability much clearer. While acknowledging the process of social construction of reality, this addresses the issue that not all aspects of any project can be changed: some aspects cannot be negotiated above certain levels, and need to be “protected.” In other words, even before an issue of sustainability, an issue of consistency of the project is here called for.

## Notes

1. The final selection of the papers, based on a double blind review, only partially reflects our original “radical” wish of disciplinary pluralism: no papers at all were submitted by management scholars; no papers survived with a museological and archaeological focus.
2. For space reasons, we are not dealing here with the evolution of management before this period and before the American influences based on the business school model. For an overview see Zan (2005).
3. In the neoclassical economic framework firms are atomistic entities, “price takers and quantity adjuster,” with dynamics driven by the invisible hand of the market: rational actors (firms) will all behave the same way, there is no space for a variety of conducts, and thus there is no need for a concept like “strategy.” Only if we assume possible variations, and

power relations within identifiable actors (what Chandler would refer to as the “visible hand” of companies and corporations), different conducts will emerge, in parallel with the need of a concept such as strategy to qualify/distinguish possible alternative conducts.

4. Interesting enough, such a meaning of strategy is also different from what is common in sociology, where a behaviour is “strategic” when taking into account other’s behaviour. In (strategic) management, we need to make sense of the specific conduct of a firm, before thinking of how the actors are anticipating other’s reactions.

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