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Potentials of Entrepreneurial Thinking for Planning Debates during the 11th AESOP Young Academics Conference

Lukas Gilliard, Fabian Wenner, Christian W. Lamker, Karel Van den Berghe and Jannes J. Willems

Abstract: Between 10 and 13 April 2017, the 11th AESOP Young Academics Conference took place at the Technical University of Munich on the theme of “Planning and Entrepreneurship – Planning and Public Policy at the Intersection of Top-down and Bottom-up Action”. The conference’s aim was to seek to understand (i) how planners can shape conditions so that young enterprises and innovative local activism can thrive and (ii) how planners themselves can benefit by integrating entrepreneurial thinking into their routines. The bandwidth of papers resembled the breadth of planning as a discipline gathered under the AESOP umbrella. Several bridges connecting planning and entrepreneurship became apparent, among them that (i) planning can provide an ecosystem for entrepreneurial activities that support local economies, providing a liveable environment for communities, (ii) planning approaches should succeed in incorporating the demands from market-based entrepreneurialism while creating a different and inclusive form of planning, and (iii) planners should support, and become, “hackers” and social entrepreneurs.

1 Introduction

The theme of this year’s AESOP Young Academics* conference at the Technical University of Munich was “Planning and Entrepreneurship – Planning and Public Policy at the Intersection of Top-down and Bottom-up Action”. At first glance this may be surprising, since the two terms “planning” and “entrepreneurship” are not frequently mentioned together and are oftentimes even conceived as an antagonism that is difficult to overcome (Adams, Tiesdell 2010; Alexander 2008; Buitelaar 2003). The chosen theme also differs somewhat from those of previous Young Academics conferences regarding its focus on market mechanisms. However, the conference theme aimed to reflect challenges that local planning practitioners and researchers are facing. Munich and the Munich Metropolitan Region in the south-east of Germany are among the economically most successful metropolitan regions in Europe, with headquarters of several major stock-listed companies located in the region amid a strong environment for technology start-up firms and continuously low unemployment rates. The Technical University of Munich brands itself as “The Entrepreneurial University”. Under these circumstances, planning practitioners and researchers are faced with the task to develop strategies on how the region can sustainably cope with future

growth. But in the eyes of many policymakers, planning should also become more flexible and entrepreneurial to allow the current business climate to continue. Hence, a conference dealing with the relationship between planners and the economy seemed timely and necessary.

The outline of the paper is as follows. Section 2 will build up the argument for the need for a more enriched debate concerning “planning and or versus entrepreneurship”. Referring to the four key-notes given during the conference, in this section we will argue that the “dichotomy between planning and entrepreneurship” is mostly a false one and prevents planners due to their (i) education and (ii) neglect by other public and private actors from intervening and facilitating open-ended economic development. In Section 3, we discuss the different presentations which centred on either entrepreneurial forms of planning or planning for entrepreneurship. While these two groups of papers in a way reflect “planning versus entrepreneurship”, in Section 4 we will discuss the opportunities of departing towards new interpretations. Using these, this paper finishes with an view towards promising bridges for future elaboration and consideration between research and practice.

2 Setting the scene: planning and or versus entrepreneurship?

The conference took place at a time of an ever-growing body of research on urban and spatial transformations, on cities and “the urban age” and global processes of change. Cities are economic and social incubators, sites of transformation, global nodes or hubs, as well as spaces of action for international companies and the sharing economy (Davidson, Infranca 2016; Florida et al. 2017; Glaeser 2011; UN 2016; WBGU 2016). They are sites of a (re-)democratization of our contemporary society (Metzger 2011; Hou, Knierbein 2017) and for alternative processes of collective decision-making and action, like commoning (Dellenbaugh et al. 2015). On the other hand, they also provoke struggles about a seemingly overwhelming “neo-liberal dominance” in planning and development, as well as antagonisms, conflict and oppression between actors, interests and globally interwoven processes (Brenner 2017; Merrifield 2014; Waterhout et al. 2013).

These global trends reach down towards cities, neighbourhoods and individual citizens. Most of these processes seemingly resist traditional planning approaches.

* The Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP), with its 150 member schools, celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2017. Since 2003, the Young Academics Network is a loosely structured branch of AESOP. It provides a platform through which young academics in planning and related disciplines can share their ideas in an open and inclusive environment, challenging and supporting one another with support of the senior AESOP members. Besides publications, the network meets annually for a separate free-of-charge four-day conference organised by its members. The themes of AESOP Young Academics conferences are linked to the host cities’ and universities’ local challenges, programmes and strengths. Between 10 and 13 April 2017, the Chair of Urban Development at the Technical University of Munich hosted the 11th AESOP Young Academics Conference. 53 participants from universities in 17 countries presented and discussed 46 papers. The event was the first official AESOP conference in Germany since the first annual congress in 1988, and the first ever AESOP Young Academics meeting in the country.

Fig. 1: Some of the participants of the AESOP Young Academics Conference 2017 in Munich. (Source: Mohamed Saleh, AESOP Young Academics Coordination Team 2015–2017)

European societies traditionally consider planning as a justified state-led intervention to foster the public good despite being market economies, because the market's ability to protect people's health, the environment and the rights of socially disadvantaged groups is deemed to be insufficient (Klosterman 1985: 6–10). Entrepreneurship, on the other hand, is very much based on the idea of a free market, in which any individual person or any group of individuals can launch and run an activity for their own or somebody else's profit. At first glance, the terms "planning" and "entrepreneurship" represent the old dichotomy between market and government, and between private enterprises and civil society (Harvey 1989; Alexander 2008; Brenner et al. 2012).

Instead of viewing state-led interventions and private entrepreneurship as antagonism, one could ask, first of all, how planners can shape conditions so that young enterprises and innovative local activism can thrive to the benefit of many. This implies thinking about individual and professional responsibilities of planners in light of local communities. Secondly, what are the opportunities and dangers of a growing influence of corporate companies on the planning practices (for a similar discussion in economic geography, see Taylor 2016) from the perspective of both planners and private enterprises? And thirdly, how planners themselves can benefit from integrating entrepreneurial thinking into their routines, and also avoiding a shift in decision-making powers towards private consultancies. The four keynote speakers and their four tracks embarked on a journey to ponder these issues.

As regards the first point – enabling entrepreneurship through planning – shaping an ecosystem for a local economy could tackle the issues of economic stagnation, increasing social inequality and environmental change under the condition of a shift of power from local governments and stakeholders to global players. The focus of action in planning is changing from developing the new to transforming the existing, and from large-scale planning to small-scale acting (Kunzmann 2016; Sager 2016). This implies consequences for the planning agenda, for example regarding the provision of public spaces and services (Hou, Knierbein 2017). As Sabine Knierbein argued in her keynote, local governments can actively use the transformation of public space as a vehicle for wider urban transformations (e.g. renewal, densification and restructuring). Public space is thus an important resource for economic development of cities, which can help disadvantaged communities and can operate as an interface for the exchange of tacit knowledge of enterprises and as the agora of a living and lived democracy. Planning then needs to simultaneously provide reflection and take action – and learn from activism to re-politicise planning.

At the same time and as a result of global processes, cities and regions in Europe see their economic well-being more and more determined by their success in attracting and keeping knowledge-intensive activities and fostering innovation. While most planners are aware of these new challenges, their response suffers from inadequate instruments and concepts (Agger, Sørensen 2016). But is planning to encourage entrepreneurship, e.g. by setting aside land for "technology parks", incen-

tivising the agglomeration of innovative firms or attracting the “creative class” (Florida 2002; Glaeser 2011) a way forward, or will this strengthen only the already strong places, leading to further spatial polarisation (cf. Florida 2017; Harvey 1989)? If innovation and entrepreneurship do not only happen in cities but require them (Florida et al. 2017), do they also require planning?

Regarding the second aspect – opportunities and threats of corporate “smart city” strategies – the growing importance of (and access to) data must be taken more seriously by planning. On the positive side, open data, crowdsourcing, open source urbanism, civic data and many local initiatives open up data and break longstanding monopolies of private or public entities, thereby laying ground for more inclusive, democratic and accountable decisions (Jiménez 2014; Kitchin et al. 2015). On the negative side, large players establish themselves in new powerful positions or even as monopolists without necessarily taking on their responsibility for a shared community agenda (Grossi, Pianezzi 2017). Furthermore, discussions arise regarding how much quantification of our social lives is desirable (Mau 2017).

Increasingly, technology companies also present themselves as parties who can solve urban problems. Yet, Richard Kingston argues that these companies often do not completely understand how cities operate, as seen, for instance, in their use of concepts such as smart cities. The private sector tends to view cities as just physical structures upon which they can add sensing and information technology. Whereas if these companies make their big data available for public planning purposes, planners have the opportunity to drive smart city developments with civic engagement and their expertise across multiple working domains. Technology will not take over the role of planners, but rather free up time for planners to make better, well-informed decisions as part of a collaborative decision-making process.

Openly available data is, however, a prerequisite, so that local communities can engage equally with smart technologies. But they also need to be able to handle the data and the necessary analytical tools. Following on from Ignacio Fariás, who spoke in his keynote about “technical democracy” and brought forward the “right to infrastructure”, the use of participatory planning systems can lead to a democratisation of expertise in which citizens can actively participate. Citizens can disrupt expert planners in the way they think about technology and its implementation in cities, a shift he referred to as “expert sensitisation” instead of public participation, thereby blurring fixed boundaries between planning professionals and local citizens for a “sustained form of democracy between technical experts and laypeople”. Instead of cultivating a dialogue about technical solutions defined by experts, experts should be pushed towards hands-on experimentation in cooperative environments

with citizens. Revolutionary practice should today target the infrastructure, or “hack the existing” (Jiménez 2014).

Regarding the third aspect – the integration of entrepreneurial thinking in planning – Klaus Kunzmann’s keynote stressed the importance of knowledge on the functioning of the economic system within planning education. Planning routines can then benefit from a better understanding of a world that is increasingly characterised by the financialisation of all aspects of life, and the continuing retreat of the public sector to the benefit of market actors. As cities are increasingly competing for a highly-skilled workforce, many disciplines enter the domain of cities – but in the absence of planners. It becomes crucial to understand economic processes and be able to interact with economists, if planning wants to avoid marginalisation by other disciplines. Against this background, Kunzmann warned that redistributive policies to avert polarisation become almost impossible, and appealed to the audience to be passionate in their work.

On the other hand, scepticism towards planning and government interventions, also on behalf of both local and global businesses, has led the planning discipline in crisis. Entrepreneurs, in the form of both commercial and social initiatives (Biddulph 2011; Frenken, Schor 2017; Wagenaar et al. 2015), are sometimes filling the void that planning leaves as a result of the dismantling of the welfare state. Technological innovations are further accelerating social change, sometimes replacing formerly public functions. The relationship between institutionalised urban planning and these initiatives and trends is often undefined, at best. How should planning and public policy react to these developments, should they confront, embrace or even become part of them? How can planners become more responsive and flexible while still being accountable, just and democratic? Do we need ever more inclusive governance or more rigid government again?

3 Entrepreneurial planning and planning for entrepreneurship

The 46 presentations in four tracks can, in broad terms, be distinguished in two ways of dealing with entrepreneurialism: entrepreneurial planning and planning for entrepreneurship – which can be and often are at odds with each other. A third strand of discussion circled around alternative ways to bridge these often perceived paradoxes.

3.1 Entrepreneurial planning

Presentations concerning entrepreneurial planning examined an “entrepreneurial turn” in planning leading to private-led development which does not necessarily represent the public interest. As Enora Robin put forward, if cities can be seen as the reproduction of dominant societal orders (Harvey 1989),

this in turn raises the question: what will happen when actors from the private sector increasingly lead urban transformations? Several presentations critically reviewed such changes and argued around a marginalisation of planning at the expense of others. To illustrate, Sara Özugul demonstrated that although the municipality of Toronto aims to promote local entrepreneurship, local entrepreneurs in the deprived Jane and Finch neighbourhood are actually hampered by the entrepreneurial planning style of the municipality. In regard to the public sector, public organisations were said to address and mitigate (potential) inequalities. Yet, their role was relatively weak: the public sector was fragmented and has limited flexibility to anticipate entrepreneurial developments. This relatively weakened position is further challenged by private parties being able to offer, amongst others, higher wages to attract better-skilled planners. As such, public-led planning can no longer become the main repository of planning expertise.

In addition, other presentations demonstrated that local communities have limited power to challenge private developers. Relying on self-organisation and bottom-up actions alone may deepen inequalities and lead to greater injustice in cities, e.g. through “cherry-picking” by powerful actors. Communities must share a long-term commitment, as well as have the skills and resources to understand developments caused by entrepreneurial planning. In reviewing such developments, a critical role is required not only from academic research, but also from the media. They play a key part in the framing of urban and rural transformations.

3.2 Planning for entrepreneurship

Multiple presentations on planning for entrepreneurship introduced new forms of planning to stimulate (local) entrepreneurship. Planning then fosters the local, temporary and flexible by addressing local initiatives, self-organisation and direct actions. Much of such forms are the result of self-organising communities which launch often local, small-scale, sometimes temporary initiatives that “fill in” gaps that the current planning system leaves. For example, Stephan Schwarz showed how local communities in Berlin started to organise themselves to address the housing problem, leading to new alternative ownership structures. These initiatives can stimulate urban innovation, for instance in public spaces. At the same time, according to the presentation by Daan Bossuyt, public planning agencies (in his case: municipalities) continue to play a crucial role as facilitators or stimulators of such developments.

Planning can also become part of promoting whole entrepreneurial ecosystems. Public governments, in general, seem to welcome such initiatives and seize the opportunity to connect them with public ambitions. For instance, the Munich Metropolitan Region aims to become more fertile with regard to startups in the technology sector by cre-

ating specific hubs (as incubators) in the city. This is far from easy, as policies to create these hubs have to be context-sensitive, fitting within existing cultures. To illustrate, Andreas Marx argued that hubs in Berlin and Munich cater for different interests (culture-oriented versus high-tech companies). However, these shifts also mean a new complexity for researchers working on the temporary, as Robin Chang demonstrated along the line between tactical programming to strategic planning.

4 Bridges across the paradox

Pursuing either entrepreneurial planning or planning for entrepreneurship leads to changing roles for planners. Whereas entrepreneurial planning seems to ask for a strong public counterpart emphasising the “traditional” administrative planning role, fostering entrepreneurship might ask for planners actively approaching communities and the private sector to start new initiatives. Following on from Christian Lamker’s presentation, depending on the situation and even in similar institutional settings, planners can adopt different leadership roles.

Many presentations offered clues as to which new roles there could be for planners. Firstly, several presentations put forward the idea of planners as social entrepreneurs, in which planners operate as a connecting force to bring different groups together. This requires gaining community-based knowledge in order for planners to work *with* communities (instead of just working *for* communities). Shelly Hefetz provided examples from Israel about challenges in incorporating community-based knowledge into the traditional roles of planners – how this form of planning can be carried out is still underrepresented. Secondly, a more critical stance can result in planners operating as representatives of minorities echoing advocacy planning (cf. Davidoff 1965). Some presentations even went one step further, arguing that planners should be activists “fighting for” the public interest (cf. Sandercock 1998). Given the increased importance of planners in the private sector, the social responsibility of private planning actors was also stressed. For instance, in relation to the construction of international mega-projects, Clarissa Rhomberg’s research dealt with practicing German architects in non-democratic countries and their lack of non-economic values in such projects.

Regarding the changing role of planners, the implications for planning research are that actors and their social networks matter. To illustrate, in the presentations a distinction was made between internal and external knowledge, and the effect external knowledge can have on local communities or planning systems. Great potential also lies in mapping stakeholder networks through social network analysis. Furthermore, it should be noted that planners might have difficulties in changing their role due to processes of institutionalisation.

Their traditional role can work as a rigid factor, hindering new initiatives or being unable to react to entrepreneurial, market-led forces. From that perspective, the planning profession should be aware that it should not be rooted in the past, neglecting current and future developments. In that respect, as also argued by Klaus Kunzmann, planners should gain more knowledge in the field of economics to understand entrepreneurial forces and how to deal with them.

In sum, the two forms of planning challenge (public) planners: it is a paradoxical balance between mitigating the effects of entrepreneurial planning and fostering local initiatives and entrepreneurship. Planners need enhanced knowledge about economic mechanisms (in their education), to be better equipped to deal with new participatory methods and big data analyses, as well as to find ways to facilitate local community and bottom-up initiatives. New technology can help find this balance, as well as tip the balance. Both Susanne Baur and Kirsten Hackenbroch showed how an app such as *Pokémon Go* can be a disruptive element in public spaces (in both a positive and negative sense). New technologies and developments related to “big data” can lead to improved modelling, predictions and decision-making. Consequently, they can reinforce the role of planners (or their legitimisation). Irene Luque-Martín, for instance, presented how innovative planning support systems potentially result in a better inclusion of local communities. Other presentations demonstrated how better modelling can improve the integration of land-use and transportation flows. Planners can take an active role in searching for unconventional ways to obtain new forms of data, as Fabian Wenner argued in his presentation. Phrased differently, in a more activist spirit, why can planners not become “hackers”?

5 Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, planning and entrepreneurship are still widely perceived as at odds with each other, and many discussions (at least in academia) between planning and the economy still follow old dichotomies. The bandwidth of papers resembled the breadth of planning as a discipline gathered under the AESOP umbrella. At the same time, several bridges potentially connecting planning and entrepreneurship became apparent:

- Planners should support and also become law-abiding “hackers” and social entrepreneurs: They should break data monopolies for the common good, both top-down and bottom-up;
- Planning can provide an ecosystem for entrepreneurial activities that support local economies, providing a liveable environment for communities;
- Planning approaches should succeed in incorporating the demands from market-based entrepreneurialism while creating a different and inclusive form of planning;

- Planners become increasingly conceptualised as flexible and active actors (sometimes even activists);
- Dissent can be a positive force in creating space for discussions and learning to create spaces by and for users.

These possible ways forward still entail parts of the basic dichotomy of entrepreneurship as a positive supporting force or containing a problematic notion. To further uncover the whole potential of entrepreneurial thinking in planning, researchers will also have to cross three boundaries. First, geographical boundaries by looking further than the Anglo-American world. The conference also revealed important lessons from China, but the perspective has to be further extended to Asian, African and Latin-American countries. Second, methodological boundaries have to be crossed. Building on thoughts from actor-network theory (ANT), planning might sometimes be just about problematising instead of solving, about activating or shaping conditions instead of controlling. Given the high demand for urban and spatial transformations, this is challenging for both researchers and planners working in practice. And third, going beyond disciplinary boundaries is ever more important. The papers revealed a highly diversified picture of what can be called “planning” and who can be called a “planner”. Following this path, the conference theme provided a strong call towards revisiting our own mindsets and engraved dichotomies to work towards common goals. Only by challenging ourselves, can we then challenge planning.

The intense and multifaceted discussions emerging in and between the four tracks led the track chairs to award four Best Paper Prize Awards. The selection condenses the important next steps in the debate around entrepreneurial thinking for planning in its geographical, methodological and contentual dimensions. The winning papers were *Deconstructing Chinese entrepreneurialism in urban regeneration programmes: A case study in Shanghai and Hangzhou* (Xueying Chen), *Developing a planning support system towards a collaborative planning practice. The case study of “Intramural Process” in Jerez de la Frontera (Spain)* (Irene Luque-Martín, Jorge Izquierdo-Cubero), *How media shape the perception of temporary uses. A qualitative media analysis on vacancy and temporary uses in Vienna* (Agnes Matoga) and *Professionals of the unplanned – An emerging expertise* (Camilla Guadalupi).

The entrepreneurial forces are just one of the key sources of change planners have to deal with. Next year’s conference, hosted by the Faculty of Spatial Sciences at the University of Groningen, will delve deeper into how planners can navigate change (e.g. environmental, political or demographic) and develop approaches to anticipate such changes.

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