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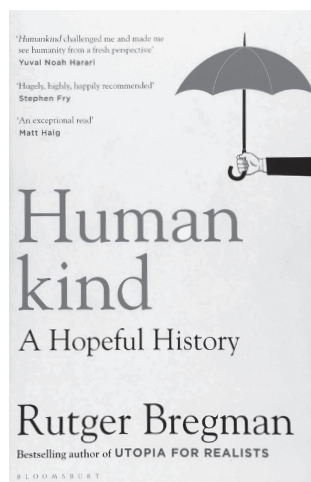
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BREGMAN, R. (2020): *Human-kind: A hopeful history*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 465 pages, ISBN 9781408898949.

### *A hopeful history of humankind – encouraging thoughts for planners?*

What if we assume that all people are decent? While the number and intensity of negative media seems to increase every day, the actual situation might not be so dramatic in many places. In fact, this grim expression of humanity might be a *nocebo* and a self-fulfilling prophecy. Counteracting this, Rutger Bregman takes readers on a more hopeful tour of his thoughts – structured in five parts and eighteen chapters. In short, he reminds us: what we believe becomes true. The work has been published in 2019 and has since been translated from Dutch into several other languages including English, French, German and Spanish. Bregman is a historian, journalist, and author; he writes primarily for the Dutch *De Correspondent*. His previous book “Utopia for realists: And How We Can Get There” (Bregman 2018) gained widespread readership with its optimistic outlook – what Bregman describes as realism – towards the future and its encouraging call to action.

After reading Jared Diamond’s (2005) “Collapse. How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive” more than a decade ago, I have wondered if we are doomed to fail as a society. Diamond presents convincing stories of past societies that have failed and collapsed. The Greenland Norse, the Maya, and the unnamed society on the Easter Islands are a few examples. Bregman’s work is a radically different reading of the decay on the Easter Islands. The Polynesian settlers unintentionally brought rats onto the island; this caused the loss of forests over a few centuries. However, society adapted and thrived until the Europeans broke the moulds of their world views (simply by their appearance) and then their health (by the poxvirus). The island’s inhabitants did not generate their environmental catastrophe themselves, but managed to thrive until external shocks hit them and overstrained their adaptive capacity.

Humans finally succeeded on all parts of earth not because of power or intelligence, but because of decency, social learning and simply our tremendous ability to copy good ideas. The major philosophical struggle lies between a doom-like picture of humanity by Thomas Hobbes and a noble counter version by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. We can translate these readings to planning as well by asking: Can transformative action by social movements, civil initiatives and urban commons ultimately work better or as well as established planning? When does xenophobia and anti-government violence overhaul such attempts in a hyper-polarised world (Davy 2019:295)? Why have we, in the richest, safest, and healthiest societies ever, failed tackle climate change (so far)? In a situation with widespread scientific, societal, and po-

litical consensus? The book uses examples from participatory budgeting, the citizen’s dividend and neighbourhood safety to war and terrorism to substantiate a hopeful message: “In reality, our enemies are just like us” (Bregman 2020:209). If this is true, we should treat everyone as a decent human being and assume the best of all of us.

Much of our daily lives do not match models of the *homo oeconomicus*, but ideas of unconditional sharing and commoning (Bregman 2020:308–319). Bregman defines us as *homo puppy*, as beings that share characteristics with domesticated animals and tries to convince us of our child-like playfulness and decency. But he highlights a puzzling turn. Since we invented private property and extended it to land, we made resources scarce and started to fight for survival. In this wake, war and conflict only became more frequent with the establishment of settlements and cities. And so, the real tragedy of humankind is that we are friendly animals with a deep feeling for our own communities, but our positive nature can be misguided and misused. The cruellest things in fact are “inspired by fellowship and incited by cynical strongmen” (p.246). However, people are also deeply tribal. I read passages in Bregman’s book in the direction that tribes are beneficial to be psychologically safe, but that constant openness and relatively fluid tribal constellations – like in times when humans lived as nomads – have proven as the best conditions to prevent conflict and violence.

This message arguably leads to a modest view of what planners can affect and emphasizes not so much their professional responsibilities as much as the general and shared responsibilities all communities carry. As a result of human ability to communicate, we can set up rules and manage the commons effectively beyond state and market. Ostrom (1990) has already proven this. Planning scholars like Leonie Sandercock and John Friedmann also advocate for compassion, inclusiveness and a ‘we-philosophy’ (Sandercock 2006:66). These ideas open space to pave way for a different kind of leadership and “a democracy with engaged citizens” (Bregman 2020:19). Instead of the “survival of the shameless” (p.241), Bregman advocates for the friendly and empathic leaders. Such a leadership must be and should maintain dynamics against corruptive effects of power. He observes a huge resilience and adaptability of humankind and proposes what he calls the new realism to overcome cynicism and “a *nocebo* that paralyses us with despair” (p.136). The final chapter provides ‘ten rules to live by’. While an endeavour to follow a short list of rules can be criticised as paternalistic and simplistic, it also gives hope for planning as a way to collectively organise (the use of) space: “A better world doesn’t begin with me, but with all

of us, and our main task is to build different institutions” (p.383). This is then the weakest point of the book. It provides a captivating and motivating long-term trajectory but renders the individual reality for practical and immediate impact weak. It could be that it is not about putting into practice or implementing, as many planners would call it. Perhaps, Bregman intends for humanity to uncover and show its best side – and allow radical change to happen together.

“Humankind: A Hopeful History” shows an unexpected picture of our evolution: the survival of the friendliest and most cooperative human beings. Human history is filled with stories of friendship, mutual support, and compassion. The problem is not the lack thereof, but our distorted picture of human nature in society that is reenforced through institutions, education and even more unhelpful (social) media. As we are the only species that can blush and thereby make ourselves readable to others like open books (Bregman 2020:71), it is the comparative advantage of humans to be social beings, having kindness and cooperation in their nature as *homo cooperans* (Moor 2013). Bregman uses a lively writing style to challenge the widespread assumption that humans are selfish, self-interested and, by nature, bad. His message is clear from the beginning, further supplemented during the book that is a good and captivating read also for non-academics. It takes the reader through personal contemplations and lively encounters to deliver or encourage our hopeful story.

Though written without COVID-19 in mind or at the horizon of the pandemic, its content is even more important in 2021. As long-term consequences become clearer, can we, and should we rebuild with trust? At minimum, Bregman’s book should be read by planners and decision-makers to counterbalance our cynicism or choices to give up or believe that what is out there, is ‘just the reality’. Maybe humanity is better than you think. If you are not sure, read Bregman and then it is worth discussing again.

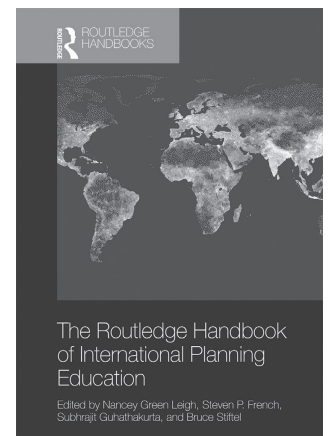
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#### *The Routledge Handbook of International Planning Education*

Since planning has become an independent academic discipline, the advocates of the discipline dispute how planners should be educated. Numerous books and articles have explored the right approach to planning education in Anglo-American or European planning cultures (e.g., Perloff 1957; Bachiller 1988; Kunzmann, von Petz, Schmals 1990; Friedmann 1996; Rodwin, Sanyal 2000; Frank et al. 2014; Kunzmann 2015; Frank, Silver 2019). Most planners in Europe are still educated in schools of architecture. However, more and more universities offer one- or two-year master’s degrees in planning or in subjects that are opening doors to planning practice and research, such as environmental planning or community development, public management, urban engineering or real estate. Only very few universities in the US and Europe offer five- or six-year combined undergraduate and graduate programmes in planning.

A new handbook offers guidance for planning schools. In their introduction, the editors promise that the handbook “addresses the interest and need for understanding how planning education is developed and delivered in different international contexts. It also informs dialogue on the mobility of planners educated under different national schema” (p.3). Regrettably, this is not quite accurate. The handbook is not really international; it clearly has an Anglo-American bias, even though the editors and some contributing authors admit that “national planning systems have to be taken into account” (p.5), referring to Europe and the many publications of the Association of European Schools of Planning. Planning education in other parts of the world, representing other planning cultures, is not really covered. Among the 42 chapters of the handbook, 28 chapters are written by authors who teach planning in Anglo-American universities. Only 12 contributing authors (4 from China and 6 from Europe) report from the perspective of other planning cultures. No French, no Italian, no Eastern European, African or South Asian voices are presented in the handbook. This has to be kept in mind when searching for guidance and inspiration from the five sections of the handbook. These sections are “Pillars of Planning Education”, “Ped-



LEIGH, N. G.; FRENCH, S. P.; GUHATHAKURTA, S.; STITTEL, B. (eds.) (2020): *The Routledge Handbook of International Planning Education*. New York: Routledge, 370 pages, ISBN 9781138958777.