

Unconditional Surrender: The Gradual Demise of European Diversity in Planning

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There are two concerns, which I thought I should express at this occasion, where planners from all over West and Eastern Europe meet to do what the constitution of AESOP suggests: to promote planning education and research: The organisers have generously granted my 15 minutes to present my thoughts on an issue, which concerns almost everybody in Europe these days. For me it is a very serious concern.

Before doing so I have to ask my British and American colleagues for their understanding. They know how much I appreciate the contributions of the Anglo-American planning community to the discipline, to theory building and formation, and to the promotion of planning as an independent academic discipline. I am fully aware that my brief expose is provocative. It is deliberately provocative. hence the title “unconditional surrender”. I hope it will trigger off a debate among AESOP schools and educators and researchers in planning schools across Europe, of how to re-act to trends which already have considerable impacts on the structure and the future of planning schools across Europe and beyond, trends, which, I am afraid, are trends of no return.

I hope you will accept that my concerns are not expressed from the parochial perspective of a German university struggling for European excellence, nor from the perspective of an aging European backbencher, who is defending good old times...

1. The BA/MA Doctrine

My first concern are the implications of the Bologna Declaration of the member States of the European Union to introduce, until 2010, a European Area of Higher Education”. In Bologna, on 19 June 1999 the European Ministers of Education signed a declaration to deepen and accelerate the European integration by

- adopting a system of easily readable and comparable degrees

- adopting of a system essentially based on two main cycles (BA/MA)
- establishing a system of credits
- promoting of mobility for staff and students
- promoting European co-operation in quality assurance
- promoting the necessary European dimensions in higher education

all this, off course, as the documents states, with “**full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and university autonomy**”.

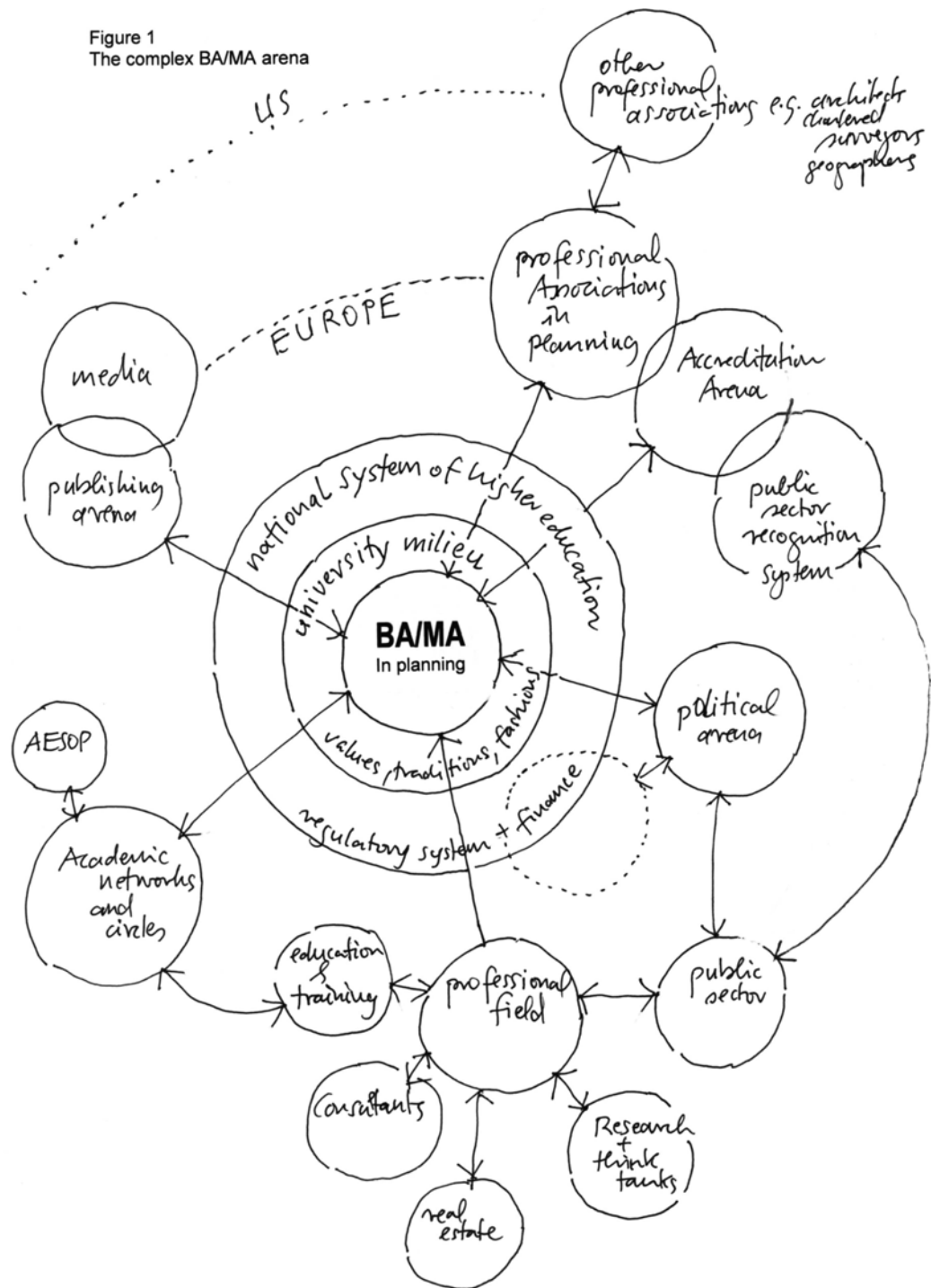
In reality, however, the underlying model is the globally successful Anglo-American system of higher education and the related forward and backward linkages with a diversity of public and private institutions of higher education, such as professional bodies, publishers or other knowledge industries, all embedded in a neo-liberal market environment (figure 1). Thereby the world known elite universities, such as MIT or Harvard, Oxford or LSE are seen as the model in mind, institutions of higher education, which offer ideal milieus for high quality pots graduate education and innovative future oriented basic as well as applied research. They are, we are told, the dominating breeding grounds and cradles for the knowledge industries of the 21st century..

Nothing is wrong with that. However, there are relative winners and losers of this Paneuropean race. The winners are those, who successfully comply with the academic rules and rituals of the Anglo-American university system. The losers, in turn are those, who, for whatever reasons, cannot easily adapt to the global model, or who refuse to throw 100 or more years of local academic tradition over board.

What is the problem? It is not just the way how higher education is organised in BA/MA or MSc courses. And not the loss of traditions and academic rituals which, in the end, have become hollow and sclerotic. A sequence of undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate education makes sense. All Continental European higher education systems had a more or less established rational sequence of courses. That is not my point. My concern is rather that the market oriented Anglo-American model of higher education and university cultures with all the social and economic dimensions and implications is pulled over the rest of Europe, without considering the likely cultural losses.

We all know that the systems of higher education in France, Italy or Spain in Austria, Germany or Switzerland differ in various ways from the Anglo-American system. Most universities in these countries have been established by enlightened governments or the church, certainly not by market forces. Until today, in most European countries, the majority of these institutions is still under the control of national or regional governments, whether we like it or not. Gradually, all over continental Europe, more so in Germany, though less in France, the public sector pretends to withdraw from its benign supervisory role by granting more and more real or not quite so real independence to the universities. In reality, however, there remains a dense regulatory framework, which makes it extremely thorny and time consuming to introduce the new BA/MA system overnight.. It is a complex socio-

Figure 1
The complex BA/MA arena



political and professional system of higher education and professional accreditation, which has to be altered and adapted to the Anglo-American model. Such traditions are for example

- the way quality in university education is controlled
- the structure of secondary education and the procedures of getting access to higher education

- the image and the standing of university staff in the society
- the rules of mobility between universities, for both staff and students,
- the established system of recognition and accreditation of university courses
- the academic recruitment rituals of universities
- the ways university graduates find their way into the profession
- the regional research traditions outside universities
- the regulatory framework of civil servant recruitment and promotion in a country
- the power, established academic disciplines exert
- the role of alumni organisations in university promotion
- the attitudes of the private sector towards universities
- the traditions of further education and career promotion
- the ways research findings are documented and published
- the structure of the academic book market
- the role of scientific academies in academic networking.....

.. and many more!

All of us are aware of such and many other dimensions of a complex relationship of higher education and professional practice, which reflects a rich diversity of national and cultural traditions.

Under the flag of European mobility, praised in Bologna, all these national or regional traditions are under attack and will sooner or later disappear or end in a kind of European stew. The aim is to replace them by the Anglo-American model of higher education, which has proven its excellence and superiority, et least when measured in economic terms, attractivity to students, Nobel prizes etc. And in fact, the rest of Europe has **unconditionally surrendered**, though some universities and disciplines still revolt , trying to stem against the stream. There is **no point of return**. The model has to be applied. Those who are not prepared or willing to follow the mainstream model, will be marginalised sooner or later. For planning schools in Europe the consequence is serious.

Most planning schools on continental Europe are now struggling, some more and others less, to introduce the BA/MA system, until 2010 latest, to introduce BA programs of three years and MA programmes of two or one year. This has far reaching consequences for the planning profession in our countries as for planning education at our universities. I guess, all over Europe, within and outside our universities, a plethora of committees are presently discussing how their planning programmes can be adapted to the new structure.

What are the challenges?

First, all over Europe the transition from the established to the new BA/MA system will eat-up much time. It will take at least around 10 years until the new graduates enter the professional field. Obviously this time will be taken away from other activities, essentially from research, and from hunting for research money, another European battlefield, where small university departments tend to

loose out to consultants. The time factor has to be mentioned, though time has become a scarce resource any way in a market dominated globalised society.

Second, given the fragile status and insufficient recognition of interdisciplinary planning schools within their universities in a neo-liberal socio-political context, planning schools will be further weakened and slimmed down. Most likely to specialised one year master programs for graduates from “real” disciplines such as architecture, civil engineering or geography. Consequently, the number of students will drop. The viscous circle in the harsh struggle for inner-university status will be reinforced. This in turn could mean the end of independent schools of planning within our universities. Experience shows that such schools will then be curtailed into small institutes or teaching units with little inner-university status and power, attached to a more important and less socially minded schools of architecture or geography.

Third, and this is a fundamental concern, the divide between theory and practice will widen. In a one or two years programme, students cannot be prepared for planning practice (just imagine a one year master degree for biologist to become medical doctors...). What will happen in such schools is that the courses taught will focus on the contents the responsible staff, with reference to mainstream accreditation standards will or can offer, drawing on books rather than professional experience. Projects, studios, charettes, all indispensable didactic forms to prepare for professional practice, will gradually be sacrificed to lectures and seminars. The professional dimensions of the young planning disciplines will be weakened. The fragile bridges between planning theory and planning practice will be torn away.

What to do?

Is there any chance to stem against the tide? I regret to say, not really, though the schools should be aware of the multiple dangers. At least we should

- be aware of the wider dimensions of the BA/MA concept to planning schools and to the profession, and not surrender the battlefield to higher education bureaucrats, who are not aware of the wider consequences;

- fight for a less rigid and more flexible framework leaving space for solutions, which are more appropriate to certain academic fields, such as planning,.

- search for allies in other academic fields, who have similar concerns;

- ask the AESOP presidency to assist the schools by formulating a brief policy paper and disseminate it to professional organisation

- sensitise the professional organisations such as ECTP, ISOCARP or RTPi and ask for their support;

- strengthen the undergraduate education in planning, as, without good four year undergraduate programs, planning as a distinct discipline sooner or later will erode

2. Language

My second concern is language. English has become the means of communication, the lingua franca of Europe. And again, there is no way of return. An Association European Schools of Planning relies on the capability of its members to communicate in English. Papers are presented in English, and debates are in English even in France. English has replaced Latin, French in diplomatic milieus, and German in certain academic ones. Though Spanish and Mandarin are spoken by more and more people around the globe, even in the US, English has become the language of academia, of the knowledge society. Those who want to be heard around the globe, have to express their thoughts in English, orally and in written form. What is wrong about that? In principle, this existence of a lingua franca is a wonderful thing. No translations are required. No interpreters have to be paid. However our academic lingua franca has some consequences, which many of us experience in their day-to-day work.

- For two reasons planning schools are more and more forced to teach classes in English (hopefully not bad courses in bad English? First, due to the growing pressure for a better consideration of the international dimensions of planning, graduates have to demonstrate their intercultural competence. This cannot be achieved without communication skills in English. Second, schools, which wish to attract and host foreign students, will have to offer courses taught in English.
- Planning literature has become an English domain. English textbooks gain more influence over books written in the regional language. Regional book markets for planning literature will gradually lose their influence and economic rationale. In the end we will experience a two tier system, where the upper tier is a real or virtual English language market dominated by a few global publishers and their pet authors, and the lower tier is a diversity of regional markets with limited impact in the field.
- More and more so, due to the mechanisms of the academic market planning as theoretical field is published in English only. Thoughts about planning, which are published in another language are lost, second class anyway, just not taken serious, unless, 15 years later Habermas or Beaudrillard other thinkers are finally officially translated, when Anglo American publishers have realised that their messages to the discipline cannot longer be overlooked or suppressed.
- Planners who wish to be promoted in their academic career have to publish in refereed English journals or write their books in English, with all the consequences such requirements have for the profession. and the relationship to the regional socio-political environment, such as alienation from local milieus, little influence on local development. On the other side authors, who do not quote mainstream English publications are seen as not being up-to-date in academic terms.
- Obviously, the best young planners will strive for the international dimension of their career. They will consume the English literature to be competitive in the market and to prepare for the academic career assessment exercises. This in turn

will alienate them from the local planning environment.. Culturally embedded local and regional planning theory will be discredited academically. There is another consequence, the brightest brains will deal with mainstream international topics. Local concerns, which may differ from the international planning research agenda, will be neglected and left to the less mobile and less communicative local bureaucrats. The gap between (international) theory and (regional) practice will unavoidably widen. And this is vicious circle.

- There is still another aspect: As most planning theories are based on empirical findings in a region, it is taken for granted that the market-oriented Anglo-American model of spatial development is similarly valid for all other cultural milieus. Obviously this is not the case, though it seems that nobody really bothers. The base of comparison is always the Anglo-American context, where the majority of authors have got their education and socialisation.

English has become, whether we like it or not, the language of research., whereas the language of practice (French or Italian or Polish) remains to be the local language. Public participation in Austria or Spain cannot be done in English. The consequence is that theory and practice will further drift apart. Planning theory becomes Anglo-American, and planning practise regional, be it French or Swedish. A chief planner in Florence will not read an English language planning journal, nor does a planner in Munich to deal with planning appeals. If narratives are important in planning, as it has been suggested, the stories have to be told in a local language, not in English. Consequently the path from practice to theory is much shorter in the Anglo-American working context, as it is on other cultural environments, where English is not the language of regional communication.

There is another aspect of this language driven planning theory development. The knowledge about urban and regional planning traditions, about approaches to urban and regional development in other cultural environments, will be lost when local languages are suppressed by the use of English as the means of theoretical discourse. Both the French and Italian discourse traditions are extremely rich, though due to language borders, they are not read in other countries. And I know that efforts of French authors to get their books published by English or American publishing houses have failed, as they are not a part of the networks, which exist between publishers, editors, referees and universities in the Anglo-American world. Look into an average paper about planning in an international journal, and you will realise that 90 and more percent of all quotations are from English papers, while Italian, Portuguese or Austrian writers do read, with due respect, English planning literature, most British and American authors don't, for reasons which we know. They do not need to learn another language, and they do not need to read what they may consider as less relevant to the field. Recently I experienced in a multi-disciplinary national evaluation mission to Sweden, that academic papers written in English in refereed journals are counted for academic excellence, even if they are second class, while papers written in Swedish are not, even they are more innovative..

If one consults the most recent marketing brochure of Blackwell in Britain, just to take one example, Routledge. Less than 5 percent of the 83 books advertised in the brochure are written by authors not based in English or American institutions.

To be fair, the editors would certainly tell me that, they would accept manuscripts submitted to them, with pleasure, yet that such manuscripts do not find the way to their desk. However, why do such manuscripts not show up on their desks. A very simplistic answer is the following. Ask the planning community in Britain to write a book in Italian, French or German, to be read in the respective universities and by the respective practitioner in city or region planning departments, and you will have the answer, They cannot do it, and they do not see any need to make the effort. Nobody in England will read a book about planning in London in French, written by an English author. Here is the problem.

Off course, one could claim that the planning discourse in other countries is not as sophisticated as the more advanced Anglo-American one, though I doubt that the literature written in other languages is just second rate, at least in international academic terms. Nobody would assume that planning literature written in Italian is bad or irrelevant, because it is written in Italian only? One could blame planners in all these other countries for their inertia and inability to submit their thoughts to journals and publishers, though I could return the ball and ask for more papers submitted by British authors to French and Italian or German journals, which I know does hardly happen.

I know, all this sounds extremely parochial and backward looking. It is a grim and provocative view of what is happening in the world of planning in Europe these days. I am afraid the facts are there. However, being a planner I am interested to explore ways and means and strategies of how to cushion the consequences of globalisation on planning as a discipline, and to cope with the language issue, which is an important dimension of it. At least we have to think about the consequences of a planning world , where theory and practice are divided by a language, where cultural diversity is disappearing .

Again I would like to bring forward some suggestions, well knowing that the hegemony of English language in academia. cannot be stopped.

- One could suggest to editors of international journals to prioritise papers submitted by authors from non-English speaking countries, though I feel they do it anyway to make their journals more international.
- AESOP could be encouraged to find sponsors for a foundation, which will promote activities addressing the issue and lobby with publishers for more inter-cultural awareness.
- One could promote a system of academic good fathers assisting planners working in practice to contribute their knowledge to international academic arena;
- The South-South inter language transfer for ideas in planning could be promoted, to facilitate for example the communication between Greece and Portugal, or Sweden and Spain.

This, however, are just a few minor efforts to save the local language for planning as an academic discipline. France may have already lost the battle for French as a global language, if the language would even lose its importance as a regional academic discipline, the discipline will lose.. Maybe we have just to be patient and wait for a next generation of young planners across Europe, who does communicate in English more easily, than the old guard of mainly architect planners does, a generation, which may be more realistic and has given up the dream of cultural regionalism in a globalised world.

There is one utopian hope. Maybe, one day, Chinese software specialist will develop a chip which we can implant in our ears, chips which link us to global language translation centres, and enable us to use much advanced language translation software for person-to-person communication. Then the mayor of Grenoble could benefit from speaking to an academic planner in Poland, and an Arab planning theorist could address a Finnish class of gender mainstreaming with ease. The likely contributions to planning theory of such intercultural communication, bypassing English as the interface, would enormously enrich the Anglo-American discourse.