Why It Is Important to Give Voice to Young Practitioners

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From Student to Urban Planner

For many young planners, the noble intentions associated with going to planning school seem starkly out of place in the neoliberal worlds they have come to inhabit. For some, the huge gap between the power they thought they would have and what they actually do is not only worrying, but also deeply discouraging. But for some others, practice means finding practical and creative solutions to overcome challenges and complexities.

How do young planners in different settings respond to seemingly similar situations like these? What do they do – give up, adjust, or fight back? What role did their planning education play, and could it have helped in preparing and assisting them to respond to the world they are encountering?

In this edited volume, stories of young planners from sixteen countries that engage these questions are presented. The sixteen cases range from settings with older, established planning systems (e.g., USA, the Netherlands, and the UK) to settings where the system is less set (e.g., Brazil), being remodeled (e.g., South Africa and Bosnia Herzegovina), and under stress (e.g., Turkey and Poland). Each chapter explores what might be done differently to prepare young planners for the complexities and challenges of their ‘real worlds’. This book not only points out what is absent, but also offers planning educators an alternative vision.

The editors and esteemed contributors provide reflections and suggestions as to how this new generation of young planners can be supported to survive in, embrace, and change the world they are encountering, and, in the spirit of planning, endeavor to ‘change it for the better’.

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Edited by Tuna Taşan-Kok and Mark Oranje
Dedicated to our parents Mevlüt Taşan and Tineke Oranje, who will inspire us forever . . .
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Zsuzsa Földi graduated as a teacher of geography and English language and literature in 1996 at the University of Debrecen, Hungary. She set off her doctoral studies at ELTE University Doctoral School for Regional Sciences in 1998. While completing the program, her interest turned towards urban studies. In 2002 she spent seven months at Utrecht University with a Huygens Scholarship, where – with the support of URU – in 2006 she promoted her PhD. As for her professional career, she left teaching for consultancy in regional and urban planning in 2001, and was keeping her leading consultant’s position at Terra Studio Ltd. while doing her PhD research. In 2008 she got a position as a researcher at the Centre for Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Zsuzsa gained working experience in academic environments, conducted and also coordinated research projects, attended a number of conferences, and produced over 30 publications. Being attracted to the practice of planning and the real life of the profession, in 2014 she fully returned to consultancy and presently is working as a freelancer.

John Forester is a professor of city and regional planning at Cornell University. He received his BS (1970) and MS (1971) in Mechanical Engineering and his MCP (1974) and PhD (1977) in city and regional planning from the University of California, Berkeley, USA. He has served as Director of Graduate Studies and Department Chair in city and regional planning and as Associate Dean of Cornell's College of Architecture, Art, and Planning. Drawing upon sabbatical research in the USA (twice at MIT), Israel, Holland, and Italy, Forester’s research has focused on the micro-politics of planning with particular attention paid to issues of power and conflict, negotiation and mediation, and practices of organizing, deliberation and improvisation. Forester’s best-known books are Planning in the Face of Power (1989), The Deliberative Practitioner (1999), and Dealing with Differences: Dramas of Mediating Public Disputes (2009). His recent publications include Planning in the Face of Conflict (2013), Conflict, Improvisation, Governance (with David Laws, 2015), and Rebuilding Community After Katrina (with Ken Reardon, 2016). His Beyond Plan Making (with Daniela DeLeo, 2018) is forthcoming. Forester serves as a senior editor for the international journal Planning Theory and Practice.

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In July 2013, we presented a paper at the Joint AESOP–ACSP Congress in Dublin entitled “Lost, oblivious . . . and/or just ‘liking’ it? Being a planner in a time and space of contestation and challenge” in a session devoted to planning theory. The paper was an outgrowth of our shared frustration with the deeply worrying political–economic events in our respective countries (Turkey and South Africa) and their impacts on society, urban policy-making, and planning. Beyond its local roots, our paper was grounded in a wider, more generic argument: that the role of the planner in contemporary society is primarily shaped by the prevailing political–economic conditions (neoliberalism, market-led urban development, opportunism, entrepreneurialism, consumerism, etc.) and far less so by ‘the ethos of planning’ or the beliefs and teachings of planning educators. This ‘departure from the planning ideal’, we held, is both evident in and compounded by glaring mismatches between: (1) the theory and day-to-day practices of planning; (2) the stated objectives and disparate outcomes of urban development and management; and (3) the contents of planning curricula and what young planners need to know. This grim reality, we argued, not only challenges us (as planners and educators) to rethink the main tenets of planning, to reassess the passion and care with which we pursue our profession, and to review what is being taught in (our) planning program, but even more importantly to research what shakes and often undermines the confidence and ‘faith’ of our young graduates. This inadequate foundation, we held, not only produces intense inner turmoil and disillusion in many young practitioners but also induces them to abandon the ‘planning ethos’ they were taught – often very early in their careers.

To our surprise, the paper resonated with the experience of many of the delegates in our session. Several young planners, but also some older ones who took the interests of young planners to heart, were particularly responsive to our stance that planning education and theory did not provide much assistance to the young planners confronted with these kinds of challenges. They had observed similar concerns and tendencies amongst young planners...
where they were from, even in countries that were not in turmoil or going through major societal transitions.

Professor Jill Grant, who chaired the session, suggested that we consider putting together an edited volume for Routledge on ‘the experiences of young planners’. Several scholars immediately expressed interest in participating; others provided names of colleagues and friends who had done research in the field, some committed themselves to doing new research and taking part in the project of “sourcing, engaging, and making sense of the voices of young planning practitioners in a selection of countries”. Towards the end of the conference, we were ready to write a proposal for what was veering in the direction of a rather sombre book, full of our middle-aged misgivings and concerns. But then we met up with John Forester at the closing dinner. John convinced us to be more hopeful and less cynical: to open our eyes and ears to the tenacity, idealism, and resourcefulness of young planners. We are deeply grateful to him for sharing his wisdom, passion, and care. We took to heart his insistence on capturing ‘the full story’: documenting not only deep disappointment, coping and getting by, ‘just doing my job’ and holding out for better days but also holding on to what planning stands for, pushing boundaries, and taking decisive action to bring about real change.

This book would not have been compiled and published had it not been for the tireless effort and support of Jill Grant, Judith Newlin, and Krystal LaDuc at Routledge/Taylor & Francis. Special thanks are due to John Forester, Louis Albrechts, Jef Van den Broeck, Willem Korthals Altes, and Willem Salet for believing in and supporting the effort with their insight, wisdom, and dedication to planning education. Numerous planning scholars from all over the world acted as reviewers for each chapter; we cannot reveal their names due to the blinded refereeing procedure, but we owe them huge thanks for making time in their busy agendas for their role in this project. We would also like to thank Nancy van Weesep-Smyth for her editorial work on several chapters of the book. Last, but not least, both of us are grateful to all the authors of the case studies as well as to the young practitioners who participated in the research and allowed us to see the world through their window. Their enthusiasm, energy, and willingness to contribute to the debate made the project worthwhile.

We hope that the book’s content will be taken up, considered, and, where applicable, put into practice with the same concern, care, and commitment that went into its preparation.

23 May 2017, Amsterdam and Pretoria
Background

This book grew out of a simple set of questions. Their perplexing nature is perhaps as much a function of being pensive middle-aged planning educators as of projecting our own concerns and misgivings about planning practice onto the next generation. How do young practitioners experience ‘planning practice’? How does this experience fit with what they had been taught at ‘planning school’? How has the exposure to practice shaped their views on planning? And where has it left them?

Turning to theory, as those who teach tend to do, we took note of the study by John Forester (2013) on how planners respond to challenging, stressful, and messy situations. The position he derived from his groundbreaking work on planning practitioners was both hopeful and promising. While we were emboldened by his optimism, which incidentally also dovetailed with our view of planning as an ‘organisation of hope’ (Campbell, Tait, & Watkins, 2013), our own interactions with newly graduated students and young practitioners were less uplifting. Instead of triumph over adversity, far more often we encountered frustration, disappointment, and even despair. Especially perplexing was that, despite their deep unhappiness and exasperation, they stayed on and did not quit their jobs or leave the profession. At the same time, we met young planners who, in the spirit of John Forester, were not just getting by but fighting back and bringing the ethos of hope into their workplaces.

Mulling over their disturbing stories, wishing them more fulfilling lives, and discerning a trickle of hope in their actions, we realized that we simply knew too little about how young planners cope and needed to do some research. From this decision to investigate the matter came the presentation of a paper on the subject at the 2013 AESOP Conference in Dublin, Ireland. To our surprise the paper met with considerable interest in the discussion session and a suggestion was raised to write a book – and this is it.

When conceptualizing this book, we were cautious about making generalizations, ever mindful that planning occurs in a complex field of play, that
behaviour is contextual, and that the same professional may act in very different ways in similar situations. We also recognized that championing hope and safeguarding the public interest would call for more than technical knowledge and routine action. Instead, passion and the desire to make a difference are often the unseen drivers of progressive planning decisions and schemes – small, individual victories in highly unequal political-economic contexts and within corporate-led dynamics. Closer work with practitioners revealed how much creativity it takes for a planner to have any impact in a sea of bureaucracy, often entailing political choices, proactive roles, or even becoming a short-circuiting activist in the machine (Taşan-Kok et al., 2016). In contrast to the elitist, self-centred view of many a modernist planner, effective contemporary practitioners recognize the importance of collaboration, co-production and negotiation with public- and private-sector actors and social groups. On the flip side, these progressive actions, constructive and effective as they may be, tend to mute the planners’ individual stories of endeavour and hope and mask the role these individuals have played in hard-fought victories.

By producing this book we sought to make a small contribution to breaking that silence by unearthing and revealing ‘what is inside’ and exposing what goes on behind the scenes. It is about giving young practitioners a voice; aside from in a few recent studies with that particular aim, their voice is rarely heard (Fox-Rogers & Murphy, 2016). To that end, the book presents a series of case studies that look into the minds and souls of young planners, documenting how they experienced, battled with, and responded to circumstances in which they found themselves. While its scope is modest – adding a layer in the almost empty vessel of empirical work on young planners’ experiences of and responses to the world of practice – the book also pursues a bigger ambition. Through an emphasis on agency, it seeks to enrich the small body of studies that have focused on the planner as a person, as a human being with feelings, fears, beliefs, disappointments, and passions, some of which are shaped and fuelled by, caught up in, called upon, challenged by, and often required to function within the workplace.

The book also speaks to planning educators. Each chapter explores what might be done differently to prepare young planners for the complexities and challenges of their ‘real worlds’. The aim is not only to point out what is absent but also to offer planning educators an alternative vision. These ideas were generated through: (1) engaging critically with the young professionals’ experiences chronicled in this volume and (2) inviting distinguished scholars to ponder avenues for coping with, querying, and overcoming the many challenges young graduates face. By highlighting omissions in planning curricula and suggesting innovative solutions, we believe that the book will be of significant value (and utility) in courses on planning theory and professional practice.
Contemporary Context of Planning Practice

Economic, social, environmental, and political crises, coupled with the contradictions created by neoliberalization, financialization and the unabated privatization of state functions and responsibilities, have produced the highly challenging context in which planning practice takes place. The economic crisis has also drawn a blind on and limited the development of alternative visions of urban life (Brenner, Marcuse, & Mayer, 2009). In some cases, the limitations have created boundaries for planners, often ruling out meaningful public involvement or inclusionary planning practices and projects; in others, exclusionary forms of urban development have been spawned by collaboration between large private companies and the state. Most of these new forms are foreign to the progressive ethos taught at planning school. Furthermore, the values, principles and standards that planning education endeavours to cultivate and enhance are often at odds with planning students’ cultural and religious norms and values, clashing with the views and standards fashioned by the highly unequal world they find themselves in. Young planners’ expectations, ambitions, values, and interests frequently play a far greater role in shaping their values, perceptions, and behaviour than their formal education does. The result is a continuous, often tense negotiation between different value sets, in which ‘planning norms/principles’ often lose out to deeply ingrained value sets ‘from home’, on the one hand, and more recent value sets developed in response to ‘the world we are living in and encounters in the workplace’, on the other.

There is a large body of literature on how neoliberalization has influenced planning theory and practice (Fainstein, 2010; Günder, 2010; Jackson, 2009; Purcell, 2009; Sager, 2009; Taşan-Kok & Baeten, 2011; Waterhout, Othengrafen, & Sykes, 2013); on how changing political contexts affect the context in which planners work (Knox & Schweitzer, 2010); how ethics and values of planning are influenced by external factors (Campbell, 2012); how planning practitioners are affected by the changing political and economic conditions of urban development; and how planners take decisions in conflicted situations and find practical and creative solutions (Forester, 2013). While this material provides useful angles for exploring the world of young planners, it does not help us understand their daily struggles or ‘the planner as person’.

Some two decades ago, amidst a growing concern about the ascent of the New Right and the decreasing effectiveness of welfarist policies, Louis Albrechts (1991) called for a paradigm shift ‘from planning for capital’ to ‘planning for society’. He advised planners not to become entrepreneurs and to avoid merely attempting to ‘steer economic forces’. The call went largely unheeded; planners became facilitators of entrepreneurial, for-profit activities.
and developments. This turn toward the market has meant that planning schools champion the idea of planners as change agents, future-makers and shapers, community heroes, justice distributors, deliberative or reflective practitioners, dreamers, and so on. Meanwhile, young graduates discover, often to their deep dismay and disgust, that their actual role turns them into bureaucrats and/or technocrats, badly positioned to fend for the poor, and often on the wrong side of the public interest (Taşan-Kok et al., 2016). This realization, as we illustrate in this book, leads to consternation and confusion amongst young professionals. More importantly, they lack the mental, emotional, and legal-technical preparation for this world, a hiatus that prevents them from taking on progressive roles even when the opportunity does arise.

Over the last couple of years, the critical literature has highlighted the way in which neoliberalization and neoliberal urban development dynamics have impacted the work of planners. Some scholars have suggested that planners are practicing in environments that are increasingly ‘for profit, not for people’ due to the repositioning of cities within increasingly volatile and financialized circuits of capital accumulation. At the same time, theoretical work on strategic, communicative, and/or participatory planning has repeatedly posited that the planner has the mandate, the power, and the ability to play a leading role in multi-actor governance structures. However, the practitioner’s role falls far short of this ideal: it is prone to high levels of political and economic pressure, sometimes inducing planners to skirt the edges of what is regarded as ‘ethically sound’. In some cases, their behaviour borders on ‘corruption’. This growing contradiction between theory and practice, the gap in the literature on planners’ views of their activities, and the role and place of the planning profession in ‘today’s world’ are recurrent topics in this book and together form its guiding theme.

**Context of the Book**

The book was born from our observations during research into the worlds of young planning practitioners in South Africa and Turkey. That groundwork has been enriched here with the observations, research, and experience of planning scholars from around the world regarding young practitioners in 14 other contexts – Sweden, Bosnia Herzegovina, Israel, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Brazil, Finland, Germany, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, and Taiwan. In-depth interviews on the reflections, views, and beliefs of young Black planners in South Africa revealed serious doubts about the continued relevance of planning’s original call for ‘a better life for all’ and an equally strong dose of doubt about its ability to deliver on this promise. Strong sentiments, often highly sceptical and cynical, were
expressed in both regards. Instead of challenging the world ‘as it is’, most of the interviewees indicated that they were ‘simply going with the flow’, ‘staying out of trouble’, and enjoying their new-found middle-class status. They voiced stronger concern with the immediate, with the ‘me’ and the ‘we’ (i.e., the nuclear and extended family) than with ‘the future/longer term’ and the ‘us’ (i.e., the total South African population or humanity as a whole). Their concern with ‘moving on and up’ in the world that their parents were barred from often found expression in a desire to simply enjoy what post-Apartheid South Africa had to offer and to show off their newly acquired symbols of wealth and status. Many young planners noted that planning enabled them to enter the new Black middle class and enjoy everything that goes with that status, and they expressed a distinct fear of falling back into poverty.

In Turkey, young planners who found jobs in the public sector soon lost their enthusiasm for and faith in planning, as they were constantly confronted with political agendas that forced them to act in ways that contradicted their principles. These deep-seated feelings of discontent and unease have accelerated in the increasingly authoritarian political framework, which ironically derives much of its economic power from privatization and speculation in the urban land market. Within this framework, the positions of some planners, especially those in the public sector, have become very fragile and risky. Some of them, especially those who oppose the current government, have lost their jobs (as did one of the young planners we profiled in the book) based on decrees issued under the State of Emergency after the failed coup d'état of 15 July 2016. Thus, contrary to the expectation of being ‘the conductor of an orchestra’, a metaphor commonly used in Turkish planning education to teach planning students what their role in urban development will be, young planners soon realize that their position is rarely influential in policy-making. Their opinions are not asked, they cannot negotiate with stakeholders, and they often end up as ‘the technical instrument’ effectuating already determined policy. The luckier ones – including those at special planning agencies like the office that Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality established as a private company to prepare metropolitan development plans – end up disappointed because their efforts are consistently overruled by powerful actors in government, especially under current political conditions. As elaborated elsewhere, authoritarian state involvement in urban development overrules local planning legitimacy and principles, especially in places with high land value and speculation (Eraydin & Taşan-Kok, 2014). Young planners in the private sector are divided between those who work for the booming property-development sector and those in ‘classic’ urban planning offices. In both cases, confrontation with the contradictions of neoliberal planning occurs on a daily basis and, like the experience of South African planners, ‘a better life for all’ rings hollow in these settings. However, within this relatively
depressive environment some hopeful voices can be heard as well. After the
Gezi Movement of 2010 against the authoritarian entrepreneurial state inter-
ventions (Eraydin & Taşan-Kok, 2014) in urban space, the collective spirit
continued among young practitioners who, in their private and professional
lives, face the authority daily. Although the democratic processes to fight
against the authority were heavily influenced by the July 2016 ‘military coup
attempt’, the latest studies show that young practitioners continue their
struggle by joining forces through activism, social movements, or professional
networking and lobbying (Taşan-Kok et al., 2016).

Both in South Africa and Turkey, many of those interviewed pointed to a
serious tension and even disjuncture between the values taught in planning
programmes and those prevailing at the workplace. Some dealt with the
dilemma by ‘switching off’, a tactic that, as a few ruefully noted, had put them
in a state of ‘moral numbness’. For most interviewees, the tension had led
them to question the values of planning. This value-probing exercise was
given further impetus by the perceived powerlessness of planning in the face
of corporate and political actors and by a general lack of plan implementation.
Most expressed the view that the issue of power was either shrugged off in
planning curricula or dealt with in an admonishing, intellectualist, and/or
ideological way, without providing any real guidance on how to deal with it.
Underlying these sentiments was a deeply cynical view of the value and
usefulness of social and planning theory in practical settings where serious
moral issues were at stake. This lack of guidance from ‘school’ often resulted
in a return to and reassertion of the values taught ‘back home’, with a
tendency to fall back on ‘home truths’ for answers, and far less so on social or
planning theory.

Although the South African and Turkish case studies paint a rather gloomy
picture, this book does not dwell at length on the negative aspects of being
a young planning practitioner in contemporary cities. In fact, our ongoing
research shows that even in the darkest political-economic times, young
practitioners find ways to cope (Taşan-Kok et al., 2016). Besides presenting
accounts of hardship, we highlight how young planners from 16 countries
rise to the occasion re-energized by the challenges. In subsequent sections,
the readers hear from planners who are: (1) lost/broken/fallen; (2) ambivalent/
oblivious/non-caring; or (3) provoked/re-energized/boundary-pushing.
Regarding types of experiences to include, we asked the authors to select
stories that fall into the above categories and to define the ‘planner profile’
they wanted to cover in their chapters. Obviously, planners usually embody
multiple identities, so their opinions are seldom black and white. Constraints
and opportunities go hand in hand, and each professional profile presented
here has both a dark and a bright side. As such, the young planners chronicled
in this volume rarely have just one identity and exhibit densely interwoven,
sometimes overlapping, often conflicting ways of coping with (and over-
coming) constraints. Each case study in this book offers a glimpse of young
practitioners in the field through the lens of an experience, a reflection (dis-
appointment, not caring, or pushing the boundaries), or a mixture of these.

Planners have been cast into divergent fields of play by institutional
transformation. In each context they tend toward optimism, in line with the
definition of the profession given by a young practitioner: a ‘swing between
hope and hardship’ (Kimyon, 2016). The swing is most apparent in cases
from transitional countries like Hungary, Poland, and Bosnia Herzegovina,
where an abrupt regime change and institutional transformation influenced
the way planning is taught, implemented, and challenged. Disappointment
and unhappy narratives – or the ‘pessimistic shadow over the hopes and
expectations of young people’, as in the Polish study – may set the tone in
these cases. Other chapters show how passionate young professionals seek to
redefine their profession and make something good of it. Countries like
Turkey, Italy, Brazil, Israel, South Africa, Italy, and Taiwan have been facing
increasing (and visible) political and economic pressure, especially within
the framework of privatization, market- and property-led development, and
informalities. Daily challenges, institutional uncertainties, and asymmetric
coercion by political and economic stakeholders may put practitioners
into stressful situations and at times make them question their profession.
Yet some of them have been actively seeking ways to cope with and even
overcome the problems. Planners also seem to find themselves playing
technocratic roles like deal- or contract-making, consensus-seeking, and
negotiating with stakeholders to an extent that is criticized by scholars as
leading to new forms of ‘technocracy’ (Raco & Savini, in press) and making
them instruments of the system. In Poland, for instance, young planners
indicated that this technocratic position made them feel like ‘small lawyers’.
Also noted in more institutionalized contexts like the Netherlands, Germany,
Sweden, Finland, Australia, the UK, or the USA, but definitely not uncommon
in the other case study areas, the technocratic role gives practitioners a feeling
of certainty and comfort. Nonetheless, being technocrats does not necessarily
prevent planners from getting close to the society or micro-communities that
they are dealing with. In highly institutionalized contexts, activism, critical
thinking, and social action become part of everyday planning practice, as
described in Israel, Taiwan, or Turkey.

In addition to the many features already set forth in this introduction,
these practitioners often embody competing personas such as a technocrat
and activist or a fighter and a dreamer, almost like the 19th century fictional
character Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Mee-Kam Ng (2014) refers to these
incompatible positions as the system-maintaining and system-transforming
roles of intellectuals involved in the production of space. Similarly, John
Jackson’s case study of Australian planners refers to these conflicting identities as a ‘bipolar distribution’ between ‘systems-orientated managers’ and those that endeavour to make planning more accessible through ‘social engagement’, as described in this volume. Elsewhere, capturing the tension inherent in the field, Taşan-Kok et al. (2016) admonished planning professionals to ‘float like a butterfly, sting like a bee’. Likewise, using the perspective of Berman (1983) regarding the dualistic nature of modernism, Oranje (1998) previously called the two faces of the profession ‘planning as adventure’ and ‘planning as routine’.

The cases presented in this book correspond with this dualistic view and illustrate the impossibility of defining planners solely as technocrats or as agents of change. Even in countries with strong spatial regulation such as the Netherlands, where a technocratic approach to planning could be expected, the opposite is true – practitioners there join informal professional networks to share ideas on the challenges of an increasingly market-driven playing field. By highlighting the scope for action in these grey areas, as well as discussing a range of tailor-made coping strategies, the book gives pointers on what education could include to prepare graduates for their ‘bipolar, dualistic existence’ in the world of planning practice.

Contents and Structure of the Book

The book showcases some ways in which young planners from a wide range of countries read the changing political-economic context of planning and respond to its challenges. Arranged in three parts and consisting of 22 chapters, the book was intended to answer three broad questions:

- To what extent does planning education address the mismatch between the substance of planning and the contemporary context of urban development?
- To what extent do planning schools prepare students for dealing with potential mismatches and to which coping strategies do they expose them?
- How do the encounters of young planners with ‘the real world’ influence their perspectives of planning practice and the profession?

Trends in planning education, ethical dilemmas in the profession, and the position of young practitioners are analysed in the first part of the book. The first two chapters following the editors’ introduction (chapter 2 by Taşan-Kok, Babalik-Sutcliffe, van Huyssteen, and Oranje; and chapter 3 by Van den Broeck) succinctly describe the gap between planning theory, education, and practice. These authors examine the first of the three questions
set forth above through the lens of the literature and an analysis of the case study chapters. Specifically, chapter 2 describes how young planners define and evaluate this gap and deal with the challenges facing planning education on a global scale. Then chapter 3 narrows the focus down to how one experienced academic sees the challenges of planning practice and the profession confronting young professionals and describes the conditions under which they can intervene. In the second part of the book, the case studies reflect on the other two questions. Each chapter recounts the experiences and feelings of diverse types of planners about the practice, the constraints they face, and coping strategies they have developed, both in turbulent cities that are constantly running into unanticipated challenges and in cities that are confronted with ‘regular’ challenges and recurrent situations. Throughout the book there are take-home messages for planning educators coming directly from the practitioners and scholars who have written about their experiences. The third part of the book is a compilation of recommendations on how to push the boundaries through improvisation (by John Forester) and critical debate (Louis Albrechts). The book concludes with a rejoinder by the editors in which they formulate proposals for improving planning education.

Within this framework, the book offers scope to expand on the simple questions set forth at the outset and to pose some more fundamental ones. Is it possible to change the rules of an existing system? If so, how fast can practitioners act as change agents? Do planners seek to understand the system and its levers? Do they move outside the system, do they change it, or do they give up? What can practitioners do to expand the range of ‘surprising possibilities’ (Forester, 2013) available to them? How do they feel about what they do? The list of questions is endless and the experiences are diverse. To comprehend them, we looked for patterns in these undertheorized reflections of young planners on their profession, and we asked esteemed scholars to comment on these reflections. We believe that the outcomes of this engagement will appeal to planning educators (especially those who teach planning theory), planning professionals, students, and to all who are intrigued by ‘the mind of the young planning professional’.

By selecting both experienced and emergent authors from academia as well as from practice, we sought to produce a volume that will be academically sound but hopefully also fresh and thought-provoking. The diverse mix seems apt, considering the wide array of young planners who have not internalized the values, principles, and standards taught in planning school, largely because their values were set in pre-planning school days and/or have been and are still being shaped by other (more important) influences. Others, after just a short spell in practice, have come to the realization that the planning values, principles, and standards they were taught lack validity in ‘the real world’, primarily because the planning agenda is being set by other actors and
priorities. These newcomers often lose their faith in planning and turn to whatever principles and norms fit the situation, or else they succumb to a mindless legal-compliance mode. And finally, despite the mismatch between taught principles and practice and withstanding the pressures created by economic, political, or social realities, there are planners who are provoked by challenges, infused with passion, and driven to push the boundaries and find innovative solutions. While all three of these profiles are covered in this book, examples of planners pursuing creative solutions predominate, not just because of the authors’ hope that such planners would still ‘be out there’ but because, as it turns out, there actually are many young practitioners out there who are still doing just that!

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Why It Is Important to Give Voice to Young Practitioners


Mismatch Between Planning Education and Practice


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Challenges of Planning Practice and Profession


A Spider in the Web or a Puppet on a String?
Good Intentions, Deep Frustrations, and Upward Mobility


Breakfast at Tiffany’s


Confronted and Disappointed?


In Search of a Place


Things Can Only Get Better


The Door Is Now Half Open

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A New Role for Young Planners in the Netherlands


Deregulation of the Spatial Planners' Profession in Poland and the New Inconsistent System


Planning Pedagogy and Practices in Transition


A Quest for a Critical Debate and New Ideas


Editors’ Reflections and Conclusions


Afterword


