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Editorial: Making Space for Hope: Exploring its Ethical, Activist and Methodological Implications

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This volume is a special issue with contributions that stem from the collaborations of the 2018 AESOP PhD workshop, held 5-8 July at Tjärö island, Sweden. The overarching aim of the workshop was to establish inclusive spaces for dialogue and collaboration between PhD students across countries and continents on issues that pertained to the AESOP's 2018 congress theme "Making space for hope". Furthermore the PhD students got the chance to learn from the invited mentors with long experience from the academic planning field. The theme drew from a recognition of the severe challenges facing the world at present, for example, challenges coupled with the climate crisis, growing social inequalities, rapid population growth in urban regions and de-population trends in peripheral regions. Planning, considered broadly, is an activity that is striving to create better futures. It is an activity for maintaining predictability and stability whilst responding to societal challenges. Yet, it has been pointed out by policy makers as well as by researchers that planning is unable to effectively respond to these challenges with its traditional sets of approaches, calling instead for new and innovative planning methods. But this conference call asks not only for innovative approaches, but also for a more "hopeful research agenda" that challenges the "dystopian" views on the world that is represented in much research, in which cities are "...depicted as dark and dysfunctional places wrecked by endless capitalist crises and social-ecological catastrophes" (Prakas, 2010 in Pow, 2015, p. 464; cf. Torisson, 2015). The AESOP congress local organising committee argued that:

"...planning **should** contribute to making space for hope [and we] need to go beyond mainstream politics, negation and cynicism. Instead planning debates ought to "excavate" the hidden and submerged desires for better future by exploring hope and optimism" (AESOP bid 2015, emphasis added).

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Following this proposition, innovative and hopeful approaches are thus not enough to respond to these challenges, planning should search for precedents and inspiration in previously neglected spaces, insurgent movements and other peripheral practices. So, if planning *should* contribute to such hopeful and optimistic accounts of the world through such submerged practices, what implications does this proposition have on planning research and practice?

These large - and perhaps elusive - questions were elaborated on between the PhD students and the senior researchers during the workshop through the interrogation of the three interrelated themes: ethics, activism and methodology. The theme *ethics* addressed issues that concern planning responsibilities (cf. Gunder & Hillier, 2007). This included exploring the responsibilities that the planning research community has in making space for hope and interrogating what it means to carry out “responsible planning”. In whose interest is planning taking place and for whom is research about planning carried out? How can we as researchers engage with and challenge dominant societal models and their associated terms and concepts, or should we at all? The second theme, *activism*, concerned dilemmas, roles and functions of planning research and practice in making space for hope in the boundary between research on societal change and activism? Often, new forms of urban social movements and different modes of activism are brought forward as particularly hopeful sets of practices from which planning can learn (cf. Wright, 2008). Learning from social movements includes thinking about the ways in which planning research agendas can join up with or be influenced by activism, or whether it should at all? Finally, the third theme concerned thinking through the *methodological implications* of research projects that aspire for hope generate. What are the epistemological challenges that optimistic research approaches on hope face? How can hope-related language be used to develop new methodological approaches and how can one formulate a research project that addresses hope and positive accounts of the world without losing rigorous critical scrutiny?

With this backdrop, this thematic issue comprises four papers. Two contributions are written by mentors, and two contributions are co-written by doctoral students in new group constellations emerging from the workshop. These contributions are also truly collaborative pieces that directly stem from the group sessions during the workshop and have since then developed through an active learning process, in which the PhD students have also been engaged as peer reviewers on each other’s work.

Both the papers written by doctoral students are centered around the analysis of activism in research, based on insights and experiences from their own work. Both papers delve into different forms of methods and forms of analysis, and critically scrutinize these from the perspectives of researchers as well as participants, emphasizing both knowledge claims and power relations. In the paper “Activist researchers: four cases of affecting change”, the authors, Megan Sharkey, Monica Lopez Franco, Lara Katharine Mottee and Federica Scaffidi situate activist research in planning in the theoretical understanding of Action Research, including examples such as living labs, co-design, or participatory action research. Emphasizing the positionality (stance and role) of the researcher they analyze and discuss the position of the researcher as an insider/outsider to processes at hand, as well as if the contribution is to theory or to planning practices by using a self-reflexive assessment of their own research. In this endeavor they highlight a range of engagement practices undertaken by activist researchers, as well as discuss the critical and/or constructive aspects of the knowledge produced and opening up for future research. In the paper “How power relationships are involved in research methods”, Koen Bandsma, Lena Greinke and Danielle MacCarthy explore power relations in what they describe as both traditional and emerging methods in research on activism, and as such they focus on six different research methods

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applied by planners to study activism. The analysis includes three more traditional methods (Participant observations (PO), interviews and surveys) and three more activist methods (Community-Based Participatory Action Research, Participatory Action Research and Virtual Reality). In order to analyze the power relations inherent in these methods John Forester's (1988) power perspective is applied and the six methods are discussed from the four aspects comprehensibility, sincerity, legitimacy and truth. In their interpretation, the activist research methods are "more able to enhance the agency and capacities of activists", compared to the more traditional methods. As such, they also urge for planning scholars to take power relations in consideration when selecting methodologies, as well as also being bolder in their choices.

In addition to the collaborative work of the doctoral students, this thematic issue also includes commentaries by two of the mentors, Tore Sager and Tuna Tasan-Kok. Their articles are partly based on their plenary sessions during the workshop. In Sager's piece "Activism by lay and professional planners: types, research issues, and ongoing analysis", he reflects on his research on activism in planning. Through his review of current practices and theorizing, he elevates the importance of proper classification and opens a number of questions for future studies on activist planning. Here he presents four different types of partisan modes of activist planning, but he also introduces the idea of "activist communicative planning" to suggest a notion of non-partisan modes of activist planning. In her commentary "Exploring critical constructive thinking in planning studies", Tuna Tasan-Kok explores the planning community's responsibility in providing constructive planning solutions whilst sustaining a critical approach. Taking the neoliberal implications on spatial governance as a point of departure, she analyzes how 'radical critical thinking' and 'critical constructive thinking' frame the challenges of spatial governance differently. In developing her argument, she urges us to seek new avenues of analytical and empirical research, exploring and theorizing on the potential to develop critical constructive approaches in planning studies.

Summing up, all papers relate to the overall themes of activism, ethics and methodologies, albeit with emphasis on different parts of the conceptual triad. They open up spaces for hope by taking the question of ethics face on by exploring what activism is or could be, as well as theorize on the methodological implications of being critical - yet not cynical and of being hopeful - yet not naive.

Notes on the PhD workshop

The workshop gathered 35 PhD students from different parts of the world which opened up for unique possibilities to collaborate with and learn from peers with experiences from very different planning contexts, enabling for students' to contextualise their theoretical as well as empirical understanding of planning. The workshop also created possibilities for nurturing existing contacts and to develop new potential partners for future research collaborations. Most importantly, the collaborations didn't stop after the intensive workshop-days at Tjärö, but continued through a process of joint writing and thinking about shared research interests. The contributions in this issue very much demonstrate successful results from this collaboration. This reflects the importance of organising events like the AESOP PhD workshop, but also the importance of instigating processes for collaboration and dialogues, that enables young researchers across countries and continents to join up in writing and reasoning about planning.

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