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# Teaching planning theory as planner roles in urban planning education

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**ABSTRACT**

Planning theory is often portrayed as a subject that urban planning students find too abstract and fail to see the relevance of. This paper advocates the perspective that planning theory can be made more student-friendly. This requires, firstly, that academic discussions about the relevance of planning theory for urban planning practice are integrated into the course module. If students are to appreciate planning theory, it requires that they understand how planning theory can inspire planning practice. Secondly, it requires careful considerations to the pedagogy of planning theory. The paper suggests that teaching planning theory as a variety of planner roles offers a helpful pedagogical approach for helping students construct their identities as urban planners. The paper builds on the author's own experiences of teaching planning theory in a master's urban planning programme, and has been written as part of the author's completion of a pedagogical course for university lecturers (The pedagogical course for university lecturers is a 10 ECTS course for assistant professors, which provides the participants with the pedagogical and didactic foundations for a university career).

## Introduction

Employability is one of the contemporary buzzwords of university education. As universities increasingly are forced to compete for research funding and students under neoliberal logics, priority in university education is given to what students perceive as immediately useful knowledge, skills and competencies in their future careers (Sager, 2013). Students are seeking to increase their set of skills, which they believe will enhance their capability to gain and maintain employment. Urban planning education is no exception.

In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that students tend to prioritise more 'usable' courses with a well-defined set of technical skills over courses in planning theory, where the relevance and application values are less straightforward (Friedmann, 1995). This might in particular be the case for students who do not regard urban planning as an intellectual area of study (Thompson, 2000), but rather as a matter of acquiring usable skills for practice. The general development trends in society seem to encourage students to make such judgements.

However, Campbell (2014) has recently warned against this increasing specialisation trend, arguing that planning generalists are needed for tackling wicked planning problems. These development trends raise the question of the relevance of planning theory in urban planning education even more acutely than in the past.

The relevance of planning theory for urban planning education (and planning practice) is a much-debated topic in the planning literature with special issues and debate sections dedicated to the topic in *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (1995), *Planning Theory & Practice* (2004), *European Journal of Spatial Development* (2005), and *Planning Theory* (2016–2017). The main critique of planning theory raised in the literature is that planning theory is only for the naïve (Bengs, 2005), representing utopian planning models, which urban planners have little use for in practice (Alexander, 2016; Beauregard, 1995; Sanyal, 2002). Proponents argue that planning theory will help students and planners develop a deeper understanding of their field, and encourage them to adopt a reflective planning approach, which is more appropriate for dealing with the complexities of contemporary planning practice (Friedmann, 1995, 1998). In short, proponents argue that planning theory will stimulate students to become what Schön (1983) has coined 'reflective practitioners'.

Whilst the relevance of planning theory is widely debated in the planning literature, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the pedagogy of teaching planning theory. This is surprising as specific courses on planning theory are taught in many urban planning schools across North America and Europe (Frank, 2002; Friedmann, 2011; Klosterman, 2011), and several collections of readings have been published to assist lecturers in teaching planning theory (see, for example, Allmendinger, 2009; Campbell & Fainstein, 2003, 2012; Fainstein & DeFilippis, 2016; Faludi, 1973a; Friedmann, 2011; Hillier & Healey, 2010; Mandelbaum, Mazza, & Burchell, 1996). Research into the teaching side of planning theory tends to focus on the design of curriculums and assigned readings, such as Klosterman's (1981, 1992, 2011) surveys of planning theory curriculums over three decades. So far, little attention has been paid to the pedagogical side of teaching planning theory (see Frank, 2002 for an exception).

In the literature, planning theory is often described as a course, which students tend to regard as too abstract and boring and fail to see the relevance of (Beauregard, 1995; Campbell, 2004; Friedmann, 1995). According to the literature, there seems to be at least three problems with the traditional planning theory pedagogy adopted. First, planning theory courses tend to model scholarly behaviour rather than professional behaviour, and rely largely on didactic teaching approaches structured around classroom lecturing (one-way communication) (Bolan, 1981). Second, the aim and learning objectives of courses in planning theory are often not being communicated clearly enough to students, and as a result, students fail to see the relevance of the course (Bolan, 1981; Frank, 2002). Third, readings in planning theory are often more abstract and difficult than other texts students read during their education. Students often get the impression that planning theorists just write for each other, instead of trying to communicate their messages to a broader audience (Friedmann, 1998). Indeed, the language in planning theory is sometimes unnecessarily obscure, which gives the impression of 'a small tribe of experts speaking to each other in strange tongues' (Thompson, 2000, p. 132). This has led some lecturers in planning theory to call for more student-friendly literature (Frank, 2002; Innes, 1995).

This paper discusses how planning theory can be made more student-friendly. In my experience, this requires careful introduction and discussion of the relevance of planning theory as part of the course, together with a pedagogical approach that allows students to

discover the relevance of planning theory as an integrated part of the course. The paper is structured in two parts. The first part discusses the relevance of planning theory for urban planning education. This part includes an outline of what planning theory is, how planning theory can be understood as a series of lenses, together with a discussion of how planning theory can stimulate reflection-in-action, which Schön (1983) associates with the reflective practitioner. The second part argues that teaching planning theory as a variety of planner roles offers a helpful pedagogical approach for motivating students to engage with planning theory, and help them build their own identities as urban planners to be. Furthermore, an example of how a course in planning theory can be designed, according to this perspective, is presented. In conclusion, the paper reflects on how planning theory can help urban planning students (and practitioners) to become more comfortable with the normative (and political) dimension of the planner role. This is important, as the success of the urban planner in the future might very well depend on the planner's ability to combine and balance different planner roles according to the planning situation (Sehested, 2009).

## The relevance of planning theory for urban planning education

This section discusses the relevance of planning theory for urban planning education. The core argument of this section is as follows. Planning theory (theories *of* planning) is more concerned with how to understand the nature of planning and the role of the planner, than prescribing guidelines for how to do planning. Planning theory offers a framework for thinking about planning and a set of lenses for looking at planning practice, which seek to raise students' awareness of their own theory of planning and help them reflect on their own values. Planning theory invites students to become reflective practitioners that engage with the messiness of the 'swampy lowlands' of planning practice, rather than rely on technical rationality (Schön, 1983, pp. 42–43). Planning theory is intended to help students navigate the complexities of planning practice by developing their sensitivities to particular issues and values, which can offer a helpful point of departure when planners have to take difficult decisions.

### *What is planning theory?*

Planning theory has traditionally played an important role in urban planning education. Faludi's *A Reader in Planning Theory* (1973a) and *Planning Theory* (1973b) were, for example, primarily designed to meet the educational needs of new planning schools mushrooming in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s (Faludi, 1978). The new planning programmes required an independent body of literature to legitimise planning as an independent field and academic discipline. As a consequence, a particular strand of literature developed, which was concerned with discussing the nature of planning and why it exists, thereby providing the meta-theoretical and philosophical underpinnings to legitimise planning as a profession and practice. At the same time, the synoptic and rational planning ideal was under attack, which opened up for new theorisations of planning.

In what is considered to be the first reader in planning theory (at least in Europe), Faludi (1973a) provides a helpful distinction between theory *in* planning and theory *of* planning. Friedmann (1998, 2003) has made use of the same distinction in his attempts to clarify the relevance of planning theory. Here, theories *in* planning refer to substantive theories within

the sub-fields of planning, such as 'land use, transport, urban design, regional development, environmental planning etc.' (Friedmann, 2003, p. 7). These theories are concerned with prescribing methodologies for how to do planning, or how to go about it (Allmendinger, 2009; Friedmann, 2003). Theories *of* planning address what is common to all these theories, that is, why planning exists and what it does (or ought to do) (Allmendinger, 2009; Friedmann, 2003). Theories *of* planning are thus meta-theories aiming at helping planners and students to understand planning and its role(s) in society. We might also think of theories *of* planning as schools of planning thought (Allmendinger, 2009). Examples of theories *of* planning include the five SITAR planning traditions: Synoptic planning, Incremental planning, Transactive planning, Advocacy planning and Radical schools of planning thought (Hudson, 1979). Whilst theories *in* planning can be characterised as substantive and prescriptive theories, theories *of* planning fall within the category of procedural and normative theories (Allmendinger, 2009), or as Friedmann (1995, p. 157) suggests 'normative modes of theorizing'. However, as Allmendinger (2009) notes the distinction between prescriptive and normative theories is not always helpful, as it ignores that all theories (including prescriptive theories) are to greater or lesser extent all normative.

In the planning literature, the term 'planning theory' is usually used when referring to theories *of* planning and procedural planning theories. This paper adopts the same terminology, so when the paper discusses the relevance of planning theory for urban planning education, it refers implicitly to theories *of* planning. As Faludi (1973b) has persuasively argued 'we have great need of a science *of* planning in order to determine what is science *in* planning' (p. 4 – italics in original). In other words, we need meta-theories of planning before deciding on appropriate substantive theories *in* planning. In this way, we might understand theories *of* planning as forming an envelope for theories *in* planning (Faludi, 1973b). Along the same lines, Friedmann (2003, p. 8) argues 'there is no planning practice without a theory about how it ought to be practiced'. In this way, planning theory can be understood as the foundation for the continued intellectual development of planning as a profession and independent field.

### *Planning theory as a series of lenses*

We can think of a course in planning theory as a way of introducing students to 'the complexities of their chosen profession and provide them with a framework useful for their own thinking about planning' (Friedmann, 1995, pp. 157–158), or in Innes' (1995, p. 188) words 'give them tools or lenses through which they can see planning and understand how it works'. We can think of planning theory as providing us with a range of different lenses through which we can look at and make sense of planning practice (Harris, 2000). Planning theory can be understood as our conceptual equipment through which we can see planning problems more clearly (Forester, 2004). In the words of Forester (2004, p. 244), 'planning theory provides not an abstract solution to a problem but a way of looking at it'.

Forester (1989) highlights how students already have certain values that dictate how they think about planning and what to do in certain situations. In this sense, students already have a theory of planning. So, what a course in planning theory can do is to stimulate students' thinking about planning, helping them to develop their own theory of planning and perspectives on their future role(s) as planners. In addition, planning theory offers students a vocabulary, through which they can express their values (and become aware of these values), but also become more sensitive to other perspectives.

If we think about theories *of* planning as values, or ideologies as Alexander (2003) suggests, practitioners constantly work with planning theory. Whittemore (2015, p. 82) has recently demonstrated how practitioners historically have been just 'as concerned with theories of what they do and how they do it as academics have been'. Whittemore (2015, p. 76) argues that 'practitioners theorise, too', as they respond to events and ideas in society. Here, theorising about planning constitutes a helpful activity for raising the planner's consciousness about the values driving planning practice and reflecting on them. In fact, Friedman (2011, p. 138) argues that 'it is the theorist's job to make these assumptions visible and thus help practitioners reflect on them'.

In sum, planning theory can play an important role in stimulating students' reflection on the nature of planning and the role(s) of the planner, thus helping them to develop their own guiding values for planning practice, their own theory of planning.

### *The reflective practitioner*

Proponents of planning theory argue that an understanding of planning theory will help planning students and practitioners become what Schön (1983) has coined 'reflective practitioners'. Faludi (1978) argued many years ago that the most essential ingredient of success in planning practice is reflectiveness.

> Reflectiveness allows one to see things in context, to step outside one's own situation and slip into the shoes of others, to think out possible implications of what one does, not only in a purely analytical sense but using one's imagination to supplement hard knowledge. (p. 181)

Unfortunately, planning theorists seldom provide examples to illustrate how an understanding of planning theory can stimulate reflection. In order to illustrate how planning theory can help students become reflective practitioners, Schön's (1983, p. 42) discussion of the 'rigor or relevance dilemma' forms a helpful point of departure.

According to Schön (1983, p. 42), practitioners are facing the dilemma between staying on the high, hard ground by maintaining research-based theory and technique in the centre of their work in an attempt to preserve rigour, or move down to the swampy lowlands where situations are complex and beyond technical solutions, but also of greater relevance to the larger society. Planning theory has for the last half-century sat out to distance planning from the technical rationality that characterised early theories of planning (e.g. synoptic and rational planning), as it was realised that the complexity of planning problems often were beyond technical solutions (see Schön, 1983 for a discussion of the crisis of professional knowledge and technical rationality). As a response to the shortcomings of synoptic and rational planning, a myriad of planning theories emerged, each seeking to rethink the nature of planning and the role of the planner in a time of post-technical rationality. What these planning theories have in common is a shared understanding that the planner must engage with the messy, political, value-loaded and conflictual nature of planning practice. In this sense, planning theory can play an important role in readying students to the swampy lowlands of planning practice.

Schön (1983) distinguishes between two forms of knowledge. There is the know-how and tacit knowledge that relate to particular actions in the planner's everyday work. Schön refers to this as 'knowing-in-action' (1983, p. 50). This type of knowledge relates more to the practice of planning than any theories within the field of planning (both theories *in* and *of* planning). It is the kind of knowledge that can be acquired during an internship or when

students enter their first planning job. Here, the planning agency will play an important role in shaping the planning novice's way of practicing planning (Sager, 2001). This kind of knowledge might be sufficient in dealing with the everyday aspects of planning practice. However, in what Schön (1987, p. 6) refers to as the 'indeterminate zones of practice', where situations of practice are uncertain, unique or characterised by conflict, the everyday practices of 'knowing-in-action' might not be adequate. The planner's tacit knowledge and know-how are no longer adequate for dealing with the complexity of the planning problem. As Forester (1989) illustrates, different contexts call for different strategies of action. The problem might not be well-defined, the information might be far from perfect or contested, and the actors and settings involved might be complicated by all sorts of power relations. In these situations, planning is more about muddling through than anything else (Forester, 1989; Lindblom, 1959).

As Schön (1987) remind us, problems are framed and situations of practice are constructed according to the planner's existing knowledge base (see also Schön & Rein, 1993). So, what is needed in the 'indeterminate zones of practice' is a higher level of reflection, which can facilitate reframing of problems and construction of new situations of practice. Schön (1983, pp. 54–59) terms such processes 'reflection-in-action'. Thomas (2011) argues that 'reflection-in-action' is really about developing sensitivities to particular aspects of the world. Different planning theories (or different lenses) help students (and practitioners) to develop sensitivities to different aspects of planning practice, e.g. issues of race and gender, or how collaborative planning processes might unintentionally serve neoliberal ideologies. Here, planning theory can be helpful for looking at a problem from a different angle or through a different lens. As Forester (1989, p. 12) argues: 'good theory is what we need when we get stuck'. We need theory to move beyond know-how and construct new frames and situations of practice. In this sense, theory can sometimes be very practical (Jensen, 2004).

As planning theory offers many different lenses for looking at planning practice (Harris, 2000), planning theory can facilitate construction of new frames of understanding and reframing of planning problems (Schön & Rein, 1993). As planning theories hold a strong normative dimension, planning theory encourages students to see the 'right' (and often difficult) problems, instead of just being preoccupied with the easy problems to solve (Verma, 1995). However, as Sager (2013) reminds us, there is no simple translation from planning theory to practical guidance:

> The responsible planner cannot let decision follow directly from theoretical precepts without further reflection. However, with a theoretical foundation to draw on, the final judgement that the planner has to make may look less frightening, less impossible, closer to problems the planner has dealt with before, and therefore less paralyzing. (p. 272)

In this way, planning theory invites students (and practitioners) to step down into the swampy lowlands of planning practice and pay attention to the problems that really matter. Planning theory evokes students' sensibilities to a range of different issues, which might help them make better judgements when navigating the messiness of planning practice.

## Planning theory pedagogy: teaching planning theory as planner roles

Whilst the first part of the paper discussed the relevance of planning theory for urban planning education, in essence why teach planning theory, this part of the paper discusses the pedagogical aspect of how to teach planning theory. First, the advantages of teaching

planning theory as a variety of planner roles are discussed. Second, an example of how planning theory can be taught as planner roles is presented.

### *Teaching planning theory as planner roles*

Despite significant debate on the relevance of planning theory, planning theory pedagogy is rarely discussed in the planning literature. The variety in assigned readings found by Klosterman (1981, 1992, 2011) suggests that lecturers often adopt their own approach to teaching planning theory (compare Forester, 2004 and Friedmann, 1995 for two very different perspectives on how to teach planning theory).

The planning theory course I teach has in many ways been designed in a conventional manner. The course is structured around different schools of planning thought (see, for example, Allmendinger, 2009, but also Sager, 1995). Whilst this way of approaching planning theory has been criticised for being too universal for bringing out the particularities of local planning practices (Gunder, 2002), it does offer two important advantages. First, approaching planning theory as schools of planning thought offers an opportunity to map out the landscape of planning theory and emphasise the multiple perspectives co-existing within the field of planning (see Friedmann, 1987; Thomas & Healey, 1991). In my experience, this provides a helpful (although very simplified) framework for students' first encounter with the complex landscape of planning theory. It allows you to teach planning theory in a structured (although rigid) framework, rather than as fragments of a complex field (Sager, 1995). The framework can also be combined with a historical perspective, emphasising the evolution of planning thought through time (Fischler, 1995). Guided by Harris (2000) metaphor of planning theory as a lens, I present the different planning theories as a variety of lenses through which we can analyse and make sense of planning practice.

> Planning theory conceived of as a series of lenses enables us to think more clearly of different theories as an array of useful and relevant instruments for analysing the diversity of planning practices today. In response to this, our ambition as planning theorists should be to craft, maintain, and teach a diverse series of lenses through which to interpret and understand practice. (Harris, 2000, p. 313)

Second, approaching planning theory as schools of planning thought allows you to create very explicit links between planning theories and planner roles. As Connell (2010) finds in his comparison of different schools of planning thought, it is often the envisioned role of the planner that stands out as the defining feature of each planning theory. Whilst some planning theories are very explicit about the role of the planner, such as advocacy planning, other planning theories are more concerned with critiquing other schools of planning thought and are perhaps less explicit about the envisioned role of the planner, e.g. agonistic planning. In the latter case, there is a need for some translation to bring the role of the planner into the centre of the planning theory (see Table 1).

Bringing the envisioned role of the planner in the centre of each planning theory is helpful, as it allows the student to see the relevance of planning theory more clearly. Then planning theory becomes about how you as a planner would understand a problem or act in a certain situation, if you adopted a particular planner role, that is, committed to the values of a particular planning theory. In this way discussions about planning theory are turned into discussions about the role of the planner, which might or might not resonate with students' own theories of planning and imagined planner roles constructed through

**Table 1.** Overview of the planning theories introduced in the course – presented as planner roles.

| | The rational planner | The incremental planner | The advocacy planner | The communicative planner | The strategic planner | The neoliberal planner | The transformative planner | The agonistic planner |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ideal of planning | Implementation of politics (separation of policy-making and planning – ends and means) | Plan as you go along (disjointed incrementalism) | Planning is an expression of values | Planning is a social (communicative) process | Planning is partly implementation of politics and partly policy-formulation | Planning is a constraint on the freedom of the market, only necessary to deal with externalities | Planning is normative, empowering and therapeutic; pluralistic (culturally sensitive) | Planning as agonism (not antagonism) |
| Methods and techniques | Methods for plan-making, surveys, spatial analyses (theories in planning) | Analysis of the current (political) situation, bargaining, negotiating, the science of muddling through | Working from the values of the group in question to make an alternative plan | Participation, dialogue, consensus building, storytelling | Tools for effective decision-making, tools for future thinking: SWOT-analysis, scenario-building | Combination of centralised state power and rules, and local autonomy, working with the business community and developers | Working with people, communicating in diverse ways, learning from stories, less focus on creating documents | Participation, dialogue, storytelling, but not necessarily consensus |
| Planning process | Planning is plan production, the planning process ends with the plan, focus on producing (physical) results | A process of push and tug – aimed at reaching agreements | The production of rival plans for different interest groups, democratic process where everyone can question rival plans, the 'best plan wins' | Planning is about learning about others' everyday lives | Planning is about effective decision-making and implementation of political goals | Driven by economic interests, 'efficiency' is key | Open, communicative and democratic | Planning is an agonistic process, which has a potential to embrace different views and perspectives in a non-consensual way |
| Role of the planner | The planner should take a non-ideological and objective stance as an expert | Coordinator: bureaucrat working towards viable solutions, getting things done | Subjective, working for disadvantaged groups outside local government; a critic of mainstream plans; troublemaker; educator | Providing information, engaging in deliberation (i.e. facilitating, mediating, moderating debates, synthesing, etc.) | The planner works towards realising political goals and acts as political advisor | The planner as an 'enabler', working with economic interests to meet their needs | Change agent: the planner should work with people, especially the weakest groups, to empower them | The planner should be aware of that some views are being suppressed in a planning process |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Goals of planning | Planning is related to the power of experts and their technical, objective abilities, physical goals | Focus on short-term goals and only a few alternatives | Planning should improve urban democracy and the lives of disadvantaged groups | Communication, building trust and relationships for further collaboration | Planning is related to the power of politics | To help economic development and to alleviate its externalities | Helping people live together in a multicultural society, alleviating fear of the 'other', and transforming society | Democratic decisions that are partly consensual, and partly accept unresolvable disagreements (agonistic pluralism) |
| Values | Are decided by politicians | Are decided by politicians (important stakeholders), defined along the way | Planning should work with disadvantaged communities and change society, working from personal values | The ideal speech situation, openness to the better argument, communicative rationality | Are decided by politicians | Belief in the market and its freedom | Democracy and openness; plurality, diversity, difference | Belief in conflict/strife (agonism) as a productive thing for planning and democracy. Critical of neoliberalism as a hegemonic discourse. |
| Scientific philosophy | Empirical-analytical (positivism). Planners should act much in the same way as research scientists in search for the best methodology | Pragmatism | Phenomenological/social constructivism – planners should try to understand the lives and values of others and work from this understanding | Phenomenological/social constructivism – planning is managing co-existence (shaping places in fragmented societies) | Empirical-analytical (positivism). Analyses are used to support (legitimise) political goals and visions | Empirical-analytical (positivism). Planning should consist of rules and consistent rational methods, which are understandable to outsiders | Social constructivism/phenomenology – learning from people's stories, no single 'right' solution | Scientific philosophy: Social constructivism, post-positivism. Political philosophy: radical left, neo-marxism |

their planning education. Table 1 illustrates how each planning theory is translated into a planner role.

Faludi (1973b) argues that the planner's (and planning student's) challenge of understanding the nature of planning is just as much a challenge of constructing an image of himself/herself in the role as a planner. Students often have an (at least implicit) idea of what it means to be a planner or what kind of planner they would like to be. However, they might not have realised the values and rationalities that underpin their preferred planner role (and planning theory). Here, planning theory can provide the language for students to express and reflect on their values and rationalities, and help them develop a planner role (and planning theory) of their own. In this way, planning theory can assist students to develop and redevelop their identity as a planner.

Planning theorists and lecturers in planning theory might feel that it is too constraining to teach planning theory within this framework. However, in my experience, students find it helpful to bring abstract and complex planning theories down into discussions about planner roles.

### *An example*

Let me give an example from my own teaching. The planning theory course I teach is placed on the second semester of a two-year MSc urban planning programme. The urban planning programme is an engineering education with a strong emphasis on group-based project work and problem-based learning. Through project work students are trained in identifying and formulating a problem (research question) and through analysis come up with a response/solution to the identified problem. The urban planning programme is international with students coming from a range of mainly European countries. The class size is relatively small, consisting of 10–20 students. Some students have already had their first encounters with planning theory, whilst others (probably the majority) have none prior knowledge of planning theory. For many students planning theory represents a new way of looking at planning practice, which is not always easily compatible with the urban planning perspective of the engineer. The second semester is based on the theme 'power in planning', and in their project work students are asked to analyse a planning process and come up with a strategy for improving the process according to the identified problem (e.g. exclusion of certain interests). The course in planning theory plays an important role in helping the students to think about how planning processes can be designed differently and (hopefully) improved.

The course in planning theory consists of an introductory lecture, eight lectures each introducing a different planning theory, and ends with a 1.5-day workshop. The introductory lecture discusses the relevance of planning theory for urban planning education and practice with a point of departure in the discussion outlined in the first part of this paper. The remaining lectures (3.5 h each) are based on traditional lecturing introducing a planning theory (origin, key proponents, core ideas, role of the planner, critique, etc.), student group presentations of a reading (usually a case study which helps to contextualise the planning theory), and a seminar discussion based on a core reading representing the planning theory in question. The assigned reading is accompanied with a reading guidance, which points out the key elements of the chapter or paper, and helps the students to focus their reading in the preparation for the lecture. For many students, a reading guidance makes an abstract text

much more approachable. In general, the framework of the course and the division of the field of planning theory into schools of planning thought resonate well with the engineering students' structured approach to learning.

After having introduced students to a range of different planning theories, the course ends with a 1.5-day workshop. In the beginning of the workshop, all planning theories introduced in the course are summarised and translated into distinct planner roles (see Table 1). Hereafter, students are divided into groups, and each group is asked to act as a consultancy and prepare a bid for a real-life harbour regeneration project. In addition, each group is given a designated planner role and set of values (planning theory) that are keys to their consultancy. One group will be rational planners, others advocacy planners, communicative planners and so on (see Table 1). Students are asked to take on these planner roles, complying with the parameters in Table 1, and stay in role throughout the workshop. During the workshop the students will come up with a vision for a new town district and outline the planning process for realising the vision. The workshop ends with presentations from each consultancy and a panel discussion, where representatives from each consultancy are asked critical questions about their proposed project (still staying in their role). Here, the rest of the students are asked to act as residents, business organisations, NGOs, etc. and ask critical questions to the consultants.

The workshop has been designed around a few pedagogical principles. First, the students get an opportunity to 'try on' a planner role and experience what it feels like to be, for example, the communicative planner in a simulated planning exercise. Students often experience their designated planner role as a straightjacket, being uncomfortable with the rigid framework they are asked to work within. This is an important reflection, as it forms a helpful point of departure for discussing, whether planners have to stick to one set of values, or whether they can adopt multiple roles, acting as hybrid planners (Sehested, 2009). Second, the students learn to appreciate how each planning theory leads you to ask different questions about the same planning case. They experience that it is possible to act within all planner roles, that is, all planning theories are relevant and have something to contribute to planning practice. This is an important reflection, as it hopefully prevents students from developing tunnel vision by overcommitting to a particular normative perspective (Ferreira, Sykes, & Batey, 2009). Instead, students learn to think according to different schools of thought within the planning discipline.

Finally, the workshop is designed to be 'fun' and to activate students' creativity through role-play. The workshop creates a creative space for students to engage with planning theory, without being constrained by the academic practices usually associated with teaching planning theory, e.g. referencing and use of academic concepts. Students (hopefully also the less academic inclined) will experience that planning theory can be interesting and thought provoking.

Students are allowed some flexibility when adopting the role and values of the planner (planning theory) in the workshop. Students are encouraged to be creative when thinking about how certain values can be put in the centre of the planning process and their vision of the new town district. During the workshop students realise that the planning theories do not prescribe how planning should be done in practice (as discussed in the first part of this paper), and that their task in the workshop is not simply to implement a planning theory. The students realise that they have to look at the workshop case through the lens they have been given and adopt the values associated with the lens, and bring these into the centre of

their work. The intention with the course is not that students should learn everything worth knowing about planning theory, or know every theory in detail. Instead, the aim is that students realise how planning theory can be relevant for planning practice and to motivate students to engage with planning theory in their education, e.g. by selecting planning theory-driven research questions for their master's thesis. The course is evaluated through an essay exam, which seeks to evaluate students' understanding of the course material, as well as students' reflections on how planning theory can be relevant for them as future planners.

In general, the course has been very well received by students. In the official course evaluation conducted by the university since 2012, the course has continuously been ranked by students as one of the best courses in the urban planning programme.[1] As illustrated in Table 2, the majority of the students states that they are either very satisfied or satisfied with the course in the evaluation. The author acknowledges that student evaluations are often subjective, and are not necessarily the best indicator of whether concrete learning outcomes have been achieved. However, in this case the particular pedagogical approach has been developed just as much with the aim of sparking the students' interest in planning theory, with the philosophy that if students become interested – they will learn.

The interest in planning theory has definitely been sparked. In fact, several students comment in the evaluation that the course has been the best course they have attended during their planning education. Students highlight that the structure of the course was helpful to facilitate learning and that the interactive parts of the course made planning theory a less boring subject. Furthermore, some students mention that the course helped them to reflect on their own values and alerted them to the difficulties and complexities of being a planner. This is illustrated in the student comments below:

> I thought that the planning theory module was the most useful for my future career and through the readings, seminars and lectures I felt that I learnt a great deal. There was a logical flow to the progression of the module which helped a lot. (Student, 2013)

> The module and lecturers are very well organised, the materials and the interaction make planning theories a less boring thing :) (Student, 2015)

> I think this course makes students reflect on their own values as planners and also the conflicts that can arise between a planner's values and goals of strategies. (Student, 2015)

> This theoretical angle was something which made me understand planning better but also made me aware that it is so […] difficult and complex to be a planner. (Student, 2016)

The author acknowledges that the statements above are not necessarily evidence of a successful course in terms of students' learning. However, the statements do indicate that students have found the course useful, and that they believe that it has helped them to understand planning better. The evaluation results might suggest that the author and colleagues have been very lucky to teach a class of students very receptive to planning theory. However,

Table 2. Student evaluation of the course 2012–2017.

|  | Very satisfied | Satisfied | Neutral | Less satisfied | Not satisfied | Don't know | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2012 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| 2013 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| 2014 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| 2015 | 12 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17 |
| 2016 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| 2017 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |

other comments in the evaluation suggest that the lecturers in the course have been able to turn around a few sceptics as well. As one student noted in the course evaluation:

> At the beginning, I was sure that this course will be painfully boring, but the lecturers proved me wrong! It was a pleasant disappointment :) (Student, 2015)

A few students have commented that even though they enjoyed the course, they still maintain a (healthy) scepticism towards planning theory's usefulness for them as future planners.

> This was very fine. I could question how useful the content was for a future planner, but the way the course (lecture, reading seminars, etc.) worked, was brilliant. (Student, 2016)

> I found it difficult to relate this [planning theory] to "the real world". Maybe this should be a bigger focus in the future? I know it is 100% theoretical, but if we should understand theory, we should be able to understand it in a context and not just on paper. (Student, 2016)

As indicated in the last comment there is still room for improvement, and the course could be developed further with a focus on bridging planning theory and planning practice. In general, the course has received very little critique over the years. Some students critique the workload and the amount of readings for the course, whilst still acknowledging the reading guidance as being helpful. However, compared to the experiences of other students attending courses in planning theory (Beauregard, 1995; Bolan, 1981; Frank, 2002), the pedagogical approach described in this paper seems to have some merits, at least when it comes to motivating students to engage with planning theory.

The idea behind the course is that by exposing students to different theories or lenses that co-exist within the field of planning (different planning theories), students will be able to frame situations of practice in different ways in order to construct an appropriate problem setting to manage the complexities of planning practice. However, students will also experience that some values (theories of planning) are closer to their heart than others, which will help them to develop a theory of planning of their own and an identity as a planner, without feeling constrained by a particular normative perspective. In this way, planning theory can help students understand and become more sensitive to their values, and how they can work with these values in planning practice. As one student argued when reflecting on the relevance of planning theory in an essay for the course:

> Exploring the different theories has helped me understand that no planner acts in a value-free vacuum. Even the technical-rational planner, often seen as apolitical, represents their view of how the world works through their choice of planning methods. It has been useful to explore what my own values are in relation to planning and society – and to better understand contexts in which these could help me as a planner, but also where they could present difficulties. Crucially, it has been helpful to understand how and why people's views are different from mine. Hopefully, this will help me avoid, or at least manage, some of the potential conflicts with other planners and planning styles I may encounter. (Student, 2013)

Teaching planning theory as planner roles offers a helpful framework for engaging students in discussions about planning theory and for helping them to reflect on their roles and identities as planners to be. Here, it is important to note that the different planner roles as outlined by different schools of planning thought rarely exist in their raw form in practice. However, they form a helpful point of departure for discussing hybrid planning styles and planner roles, which are more likely to be found in practice (Sager, 2001; Sehested, 2009).

## Conclusions

Planning theory does not have to be a boring and abstract subject that students only tolerate as a diversion from learning how to do planning. Planning theory can play an important role in shaping students' understanding of planning and building an identity as an urban planner. However, it requires that lecturers communicate the relevance of planning theory to students as an integrated part of the course. Furthermore, it requires that lecturers develop a pedagogical approach that enables students to experience the relevance of planning theory as part of the course. The approach outlined in this paper is to teach planning theory through a variety of planner roles, but there might be other (more imaginative) ways of teaching planning theory. Teaching planning theory can involve role-play in workshops, where students get an opportunity to experience what it feels like to act as a stereotype planner. The most important thing is that students see a course in planning theory as an opportunity to sharpen their own thinking about planning and their identity as an urban planner. By putting these few pedagogical principles in the centre of teaching activities in planning theory, there is a chance that students will be more receptive and motivated to explore planning theory's important role in advancing ones thinking about the role of planning in society and the role of the planner. This is an important step towards becoming what Schön (1983) has termed the reflective practitioner.

In planning education, it is important to recognise that not all can be (nor should be) taught within university walls. The agency and the planning culture, within which the planner is working, will have a strong influence on the planner's preferred planning style and identity as a planner (Sager, 2001). What a course in planning theory can do is to expose students to a landscape of different values and perspectives on what planning ought to be about.

It is not uncommon for the urban planner to experience a mismatch between his/her own values and the planning style of the agency within which he/she is working (Grange, 2013; Inch, 2010; Sager, 2009). Inch (2010) has found that planners often 'solve' this mismatch by putting away their own values and adopting a neutral planning role. Proponents of planning theory argue that urban planning education is more than about educating urban planners to work within the system (Campbell, 2004). Planning theory should evoke urban planners' 'better selves' (Forester, 2004, p. 243) and encourage them to change things for the better. This is a constant struggle for the urban planner, as seeing things differently sometimes will be interpreted as inconsistency and lack of coherence (Burton, 2004). However, the alternative is that planners are turned into a 'silenced profession' fearful of speaking their minds (Grange, 2016).

Planning theory teaches students that there are several alternatives to the neutral and apolitical planner role, and that the planner to a large extent holds the fate to decide which role to adopt where and when. As Grange (2013) persuasively argues, the planner plays an important role in co-constructing his/her own identity through the ways in which he/she seeks to legitimise the ability and authority of the planner, essentially the role of the planner. So, by adopting a particular planner role, the planner also holds the power to co-construct his/her identity as a planner. Sehested (2009) has, for example, shown how Danish municipal planners increasingly co-construct their role as network managers and metagovernors, assuming more hybrid and political roles. She argues that the success of

the planner in the future might very well depend on the planner's ability to combine and balance different planner roles according to the planning situation.

It is outside the scope of this paper to investigate whether graduated planning students have found the framework outlined in this paper helpful for navigating planning practice in their first years as professional planners, and to what extent planning theory has been helpful for negotiating the action space of the planner (Grange, 2013). However, exposing urban planners to debates about the role of the planner during their educational training will hopefully make them more alert to the multiple roles they can adopt during their professional career.

## Note

1. The official course evaluation is conducted by the end of the semester. Students are emailed an online questionnaire in SurveyXact. Besides indicating how satisfied the students are with the course, there is also an opportunity to provide additional comments in a textbox. As indicated the class size is fairly small (10–20 students). The response rate to the online questionnaire has varied significantly over the years from 50 pct. in 2013 to 89 pct. in 2015.

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