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TOWARDS PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION FOR THE PLANNING PROFESSION IN EUROPE

On April 14, 2007 there was the AESOP (Association of European Schools of Planning) Heads of Department Meeting in Leuven, Belgium. The meeting was very successful and fruitful and this info paper would like to focus the attention on the latest development and ideas that have been taken forward and then discussed within the Heads of Departments meeting and its two working groups, based on the selection from the minutes displayed on the AESOP web site and the notes of the Slovak delegation at the meeting.

The paper "**Accreditation, what it means to member schools, and the role AESOP has to play**", written by Peter Ache, the President of Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) brings together in writing the introductory statement, which was provided for the Heads of Departments Meeting in Leuven, and some of the major conclusions of the Leuven meeting which AESOP will include further on in its agenda. The final part of this paper documents the recommendations which the past and current presidents of AESOP agreed upon in their meeting advancing the Heads of Departments meeting. AESOP will provide a forum for the further development of these ideas, will act on quality assurance, accreditation and professional standards and will provide further active support to its member schools.

The topic of the Leuven meeting, towards professional recognition for the planning discipline in Europe, has several dimensions: In Bratislava (2006) we provided the first results regarding the Bologna-Process and the adaptation of schools towards the two cycle system. Our concern here lies with quality assurance – a perspective which looks towards the inside of our schools and the education. One aspect which followed on from the discussions in Bratislava related to accreditation and the role AESOP can play in this respect, e.g. providing orientation for the elaboration of programmes or defining core qualifications which need to be achieved in individual programmes. With the new topic of professional regulation the perspective now widens to the external environment and includes also other actors, in particular other professions in the same field. We now understand the "products" we are delivering in a better way because of the investigation AESOP has done in the Bologna Survey. From the sample which was collected, it appears that the larger part of the planning schools is 'on track' with the implementation of the Bologna process. However, some questions can be asked which revolve around issues of academic traditions and diversity. The first one being that education should not simply be understood as a product which is placed in a competitive environment. Regarding the demand side the potential 'markets' change, too. In a report on the importance of metropolitan regions the OECD (2006) formulated the following view on planning: "The role of planning is not to dictate what goes where, rather, when linked to expenditure on infrastructure and to policies and programmes for SMEs, housing, education, health and

the like, flexible spatial planning strategies can help to leverage private investment and civic involvement. These challenges however are difficult, given the inherited professional specialisations in the public and private sectors that deliver space-based services and goods" The OECD calls for more flexible and strategic versions of planning, including e.g. 'public visioning under market conditions' as actually a positive venture. First of all, this quote tells us much about the still existing perception of planning in the minds of free market promoters.

Secondly however, it informs us about expectations for future professional performance as a planner which we need to prepare our graduates for: strategic thinking, visioning, multi-disciplinary teams and services. Part of this is already good practice in the education.

The quality of the product is actually difficult to measure in a generally applicable way. There is an inherited professionalism of planning practice and research in different countries. We all know the yard sticks applied to various aspects of the production system, on institutional as well as on individual level – evaluation, benchmarking, rankings in research, teaching and in terms of services to society (a more recent element). AESOP needs to learn more about the application of these instruments from member schools and exchange this knowledge. A particular new field here is that of accreditation experiences. The member schools make their first (or repeated) experiences here and as it was clearly expressed in Bratislava, AESOP is asked to play a more active but also critical role in such endeavours – not to leave it entirely to professional consultants earning considerable amounts of money with the process. As said before, one element regards research assessment and in particular the identification of journals which are important for our profession – up to the point of embracing journals as official AESOP journals (as TCPA, RTP1 and other bodies have already). Preferably and ideally, AESOP finds a multi-lingual journal – to make sure that our various languages do not lose definitional power over important societal developments in the face of an all too dominant Anglo-American publication sector.

In the opening of the Leuven meeting we discussed the potential threat (or opportunity) of a coming market regulation for the planning profession. The definition of



standards, procedures, representation rights is for sure an important issue. As we learnt, the issue is less dramatic as thought for a moment⁹. However, AESOP should not slacken on the issue.

In terms of accreditation and related activities, AESOP can take on different roles:

- Coordination of planning curricula;
- Facilitation, support and promotion of exchange;
- Quality assurance;
- Elaboration of standards;
- External evaluation in accreditation processes;
- Setting admission criteria (international students); and
- Seeking active involvement as professional body in coming EC Regulation

Processes

Each of these points is very valid, but some of them need a wider debate in order to determine what AESOP should do. One thing is certain: AESOP needs to take a very clear standpoint on these issues. AESOP ideally takes the position of the innovator and promoter of planning and is not content with a position as mediator or manager of an 'assembly line'.

To resume the challenges for AESOP, it is necessary to recall some of the criteria which have been defined in our Charter. Planners should develop an attitude i.e. a feeling for planning: being oriented towards solving the needs of society within a framework of sustainable development; the cultural embeddedness of the man-made environment; the value dimension of planning; and the ethical implications of planning. These are still valid points which we apply to our members in the application process and which direct our efforts to establish and promote a European planning profession. However there is the need to discuss and update these and other criteria to better reflect some of the changes which have been identified before, potentially culminating in an 'AESOP declaration' of planning. A certain number of recommendations concerning the future of AESOP, in the light of the challenges developed above, can be formulated:

- AESOP needs to develop a strategy or a policy which helps strengthening the profile of planning, communicating the value of planning, and preparing a common platform.
- AESOP should also attempt to define core (minimum) requirements for planners, but in a non-cumulative way (referring to excessive lists of qualifications).

As said at the outset, the president together with the ExCo and CoRep will cooperate with bodies like ECTP and ISOCARP on the common platform issue, will set up

various working parties on the relevant matters, and will continue the ground work (continuing the Bologna survey and research assessment).

The paper "ECTP – Professional Standards for Planners in 2010?" written by Jan Vogelij, the President of European Council of Town Planners (ECTP)

ECTP regroups the national associations of spatial planning professionals in the countries of the Council of Europe. It has 27 members, but does not completely cover the EU. However, grossly ECTP can be seen as representing the national professional organisations of spatial planners in the EU. ECTP is the connection point for the spatial planning professionals with the European Commission and the EU. It organises every two years the European Urban and Regional Planning awards, the Biennials for Towns and Town planners (supporting the permanent international working party) and other events and conferences. (sometimes at the request of the Commission)

The ECTP is in contact with DGMarket about establishing the common platform for planners since 2003 and during that period confusion about definitions of "regulation" and what the Commission wants took a lot of time. Also within ECTP, personal changes formed a handicap in terms of time. A first thing we did was to find out what the EU exactly meant by regulation, and to see what the situation in the different countries is.

The common platforms have been introduced by the EU in the General Services Directive (DGMarket) as an instrument to enable the free movement of professionals throughout Europe. Even though the urgency in terms of time pressure of a common platform for the planning profession may be relative¹², we should not underestimate the amount of work that has to be put into it. For that reason, it is important to act now.

Besides its positive effects for professional mobility, a common platform will be very important to reinforce the planning profession. A characteristic of planning in Europe (in comparison with other professions) is its fragmentation because of different national legislation, cultures of governance, institutional contexts and situations concerning planning practice as well as education. A common platform will be helpful to make planning more recognisable (as an illustration: spatial planning has many different names in different countries of the EU, unlike, for example, architecture).

The question whether we want to be regulated is another one. Planning is not regulated at the European level, there is no 'sectoral regulation' such as for architecture or medical professions. The European Commission has decided not to regulate other sectors in that way anymore. The spatial planning profession as a result, is falling under the General Services Directive.



Spatial planning is regulated in different ways in a certain number of countries. This is important, because the European Commission takes the national regulation as a starting point. They do not want to impose their regulation. As a result, the situation is very complicated and fragmented.

By working on a common platform, we can specify what planning is, and what constitutes its common core throughout the different European countries. This will allow us to reinforce the profession. As such, the process of working on the common platform is probably more important than its direct outcomes. In order to work towards a common framework, a necessary first step is to refresh the actual criteria for the planning profession. The current criteria date from 1995, and it has taken ECTP a long time to elaborate and agree upon them. Several universities refer nowadays to that Common Core of the profession and for instance the regulation office for the spatial planners in France applies the criteria.

Since 1995 society and the planning profession have evolved a lot. Therefore the ECTP initiated a large discussion among the European planning associations about planning policy objectives and planning principles in order to meet the requirements of the city of the 21st century. The resulting 'New Charter of Athens 2003', the ECTP's vision for cities of the 21st century, promoting the concept of "the Connected City, has been agreed upon in October 2003. For this new document, the reference to the 'classical' Charter of Athens was used to illustrate that this 'new' charter is a real break with the past. The ideas of what planning should be in the current society are very different from the ones on which the 'classical' Charter of Athens was built (then mainly by architects). There now is a new and fundamentally different charter underlying the activity of spatial planning.

This New Charter of Athens 2003 is a good starting point for the AESOP action to refresh the criteria which define the profession of spatial planning, because it has been unanimously approved and adopted by all the national associations of planning professionals.

In order to proceed with the platform, the ECTP is investigating the existence of barriers between countries. A first survey has been carried out. The outcomes of this survey, which need to be refined, will be taken further in order to provide evidence of the existence of barriers for mobility of planners between European countries.

DGMarket has explicitly asked us to provide them with an assessment of the actual situation with regard to the free movement of professionals. ECTP has already agreed upon the definition of what a spatial planner is (spring 2006), one of the other requirements of the EC DGMarket

But these are only first steps, and we should really not underestimate the work that is required for the elaboration of a common platform for the planning profession. The fragmentation mentioned above really is an important handicap.

What AESOP can do in that respect is to provide, from the planning education point of view, a reflection upon what planning is and establish what the minimum requirements are (the common core of the actually extremely different educations in planning).

On top of that it is necessary to analyze which extra requirements the topical planning practice, according to the New Charter of Athens 2003, sets for educating planners. The documents Dominique Lancrenon prepared for the common platform contain a first formulation, which resulted from work in the ECTP done by Robin Thompson and Paulo Correia. The requirements should be formulated in terms of competences of planners, as outcomes of the education and not in terms of input.

The results of such an exercise, which we hope AESOP might provide on the basis of an investigation among its members, can be an important input for the platform.

Then efforts can concentrate upon establishing the compensating measures for working in a country different from the country of one's education. These activities can very well coincide with the ones which AESOP envisages for its quality assessment. ECTP really wants to take this further and thinks that it is very important to do this in collaboration with AESOP.

The paper "**Professional recognition of planners in Europe and its impact on planning Education – state of art, issues at stake**" written by Anna Geppert, the Vice Secretary General of Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) focuses on the possibility that there would be a European directive, planned for 2010 which would define the planning profession. This appeared not to be true, so there is no immediate necessity to engage in the elaboration of such a directive.

Because planning is not a regulated profession at the European level, it is up to us to decide whether we want to, and on which terms we want to engage in such a process. Initially, the directive mentioned a deadline for this procedure (October 20th, 2007). Today, it appears that this deadline is no longer binding. However, working on a process of recognition of the planning profession at the European level may appear as a great opportunity to strengthen the value both of the profession and our diplomas. The presentation enlightened:

- The context: what are the European rules for professional recognition?
- The procedure to follow if planners want to engage in a process of recognition
- Pros and cons: some reflections on constraints benefits of such a process



The context : European rules for professional recognition

The European directive « Bolkenstein » (DIRECTIVE 2005/36/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of September 7th 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications aims at:

Improving mobility of European workers (freedom of establishment):

The guarantee conferred by this Directive on persons having acquired their professional qualifications in a Member State to have access to the same profession and pursue it in another Member State with the same rights as nationals is without prejudice to compliance by the migrant professional with any non-discriminatory conditions of pursuit which might be laid down by the latter Member State, provided that these are objectively justified and proportionate.

Facilitating crossborder service provision:

In order to facilitate the free provision of services, there should be specific rules aimed at extending the possibility of pursuing professional activities under the original professional title. In the case of information society services provided at a distance, the provisions of Directive 2000/31/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 June 2000 on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the Internal Market, should also apply.

For this purpose, regulated professions may establish a general system of recognition of qualifications:

In the case of the professions covered by the general system for the recognition of qualifications, hereinafter referred to as 'the general system', Member States should retain the right to lay down the minimum level of qualification required to ensure the quality of the services provided on their territory. However, pursuant to Articles 10, 39 and 43 of the Treaty, they should not require a national of a Member State to obtain qualifications, which they generally lay down only in terms of the diplomas awarded under their national educational system, where the person concerned has already obtained all or part of those qualifications in another Member State.

As a result, it should be laid down that any host Member State in which a profession is regulated must take account of the qualifications obtained in another Member State and assess whether they correspond to those which it requires. The general system for recognition, however, does not prevent a Member State from making any person pursuing a profession on its territory subject to specific requirements due to the application of professional rules justified by the general public interest. Rules of this kind relate, for example, to organisation of the profession, professional standards, including those concerning ethics, and supervision and liability. Lastly, this Directive is not

intended to interfere with Member States' legitimate interest in preventing any of their citizens from evading enforcement of the national law relating to professions.

The planning profession is a regulated profession in several member states. Therefore it may be considered relevant to the Directive. However, in many other member states, planners are not regulated. Therefore, by today, no official work has been undertaken at the European level in order to establish a recognition of the qualification of Planner.

The procedure for a possible recognition:

The European Community has no wish or competence to harmonise or standardise a profession. Its only concern is to see whether there are legal barriers, preventing people to work in other countries. As a result, a first thing to do if we want to engage in European harmonisation, is to prove that there are barriers between the countries hampering mobility. If this cannot be proved, the issue of professional recognition is not part of the competencies of the EU.

If such barriers exist, stakeholders (professional organisations of any kind, for example ECTP or AESOP) can come to the Commission with the proposal for a "common platform". Such a common platform consists of two things:

- Minimum standards (core requirements): what should a planner have to be entitled to work as a planner in Europe. These minimum standards list items such as the minimum level of education, professional experience, etc.
- Compensatory measures: more demanding countries are allowed to ask more than the minimum standards. Compensatory measures list these additional competencies that a person coming from another country has to fulfil to work as a planner in such a country. This concerns things such as additional education, ...

It is important to bear in mind that minimum standards and compensatory measures cannot be "made up". They have to be the actual prerequisites in at least 2/3 of the member states (18 countries). There is no place to develop an "ideological", or even ideal, definition of what the planning profession should be. The approach is necessarily pragmatic and evidence-based. Therefore, our state of knowledge based on recent surveys of AESOP and ECTP is not sufficient and would have to be completed in order to elaborate such a platform..

In next stages, a proposal of a common platform has to be:

- Completed in cooperation with the European Commission (DG Internal market);
- Sent to all member states, where it is assessed by national experts (so if we engage into this procedure, it is strategic to be prepared to provide national experts).



- Negotiated by the European Commission and the member states.
- Formally approved through the EU decision making procedure (co-decision,

involving a proposal by the Commission and a double approval of European Parliament and Council of Ministers).

The whole procedure takes circa three years.

When a common platform has been established, it becomes mandatory in all member states. This means that it has strong effects both on the profession and on the educational systems which have to take on board these concerns. As a comparison, it might be good to keep in mind that the Bologna statement was only a recommendation, and thus was not mandatory (yet was quite efficient in producing effects...).

ECTP is willing to engage these works towards a recognition of Planners at the European level and considers AESOP as a major partner for such a challenge.

Should we go for it?

Some reflections on pros and cons:

My personal opinion is that pros are much more numerous and significant than cons. Actually, there is only one "con" - meaning both "contra" and "condition": taking this path does mean an important commitment and a real work. The pros are on two levels. The first is "lobbying", in the sense of taking an active role in the recognition of the role of planners. The second is to deepen our own knowledge of European planning education (deepening works which already have been started in AESOP), in order to be able to promote planning education and role of planners.

On the "lobbying" side, this question has provided an opportunity to establish a very positive contact with the European Commission : let's not loose it. Although there is no urgent necessity to work towards a common platform, we must keep in mind that the process is open to all representative bodies. If we do not do it, others might do and AESOP would loose the initiative. Therefore, it seems appropriate to keep on track in order to "keep the lead".

At the same time, the contact with the European Commission may provide us support in putting down the barriers planners experience in some countries – such as the reservation of some activities of our field to engineers, for instance in Italy or in several eastern European countries. As a matter of fact, it is necessary to work at the European level to overcome national barriers. The reason is that the European Union has no right to intervene in the definition of a profession for itself (this is a national competence). BUT, if the national frames create unjustified barriers hampering the mobility of professionals from one member state to another, the the European Commission is

entitled to act, including to sue the case at the European court of Justice.

As an example, if a French planner who wants to work in Italy is refused because he is not an architect, that decision can be challenged in the European court. A positive decision of the court would then have the same consequences for Italian planners – and increase the value of our diplomas.

Engaging this process also leads to improve our knowledge of European regulations and of European planning education.

First, it is of interest to mention that the sketch of a common platform (combination of minimum standards and compensatory measures) is likely to fit the situation of planning practice and education in Europe, because it does leave sufficient place for the diversity of the profession, to which AESOP is attached. So the vehicle is a good one for taking further the work already done by AESOP.

The necessary complementary work that has to be done in order to elaborate a common platform would lead to develop an in-depth knowledge of professional accreditation rules in the member states and education systems (duration and contents of studies). This knowledge is necessary for a formal recognition of planners at the European level.

However, the same knowledge may also be used for other purposes:

- promoting our common values, for instance by setting an AESOP "label". Today, new members are assessed according to AESOP's core requirements defined in 1995. The example of APERAU14 shows that a label policy may have very strong positive impacts when carried on.
- providing us with a set of criteria (refreshing and getting further into details of the core requirements of 1995) if AESOP intends to take an active role in accreditation / assessment of planning programs (as RTP1 does successfully in the UK).

Results of discussion groups by Roelof Verhage, AESOP Junior Vice-President

Two parallel group discussions were organised during the afternoon of the AESOP HoD meeting in Leuven. Each group was asked to elaborate a limited number of key observations and reflections and key action points for AESOP concerning three central issues:

- Professional standards and core-requirements;
- Accreditation experiences and potential role of AESOP;
- Common platform and professional recognition at EU level.



During the discussions, the elaboration of separate action points for the three issues did not appear to be useful. Therefore in the synthesis below, the different reflections are presented separately, and then the action points for AESOP are taken together.

Observations and reflections

Professional standards and core-requirements

The first question that has to be raised is: why should AESOP want to engage into a procedure of fixing professional standards and core-requirements? Two possible answers were given to this question. The first one is a 'defensive' one: if AESOP does not engage in this procedure, other organisations might do so, in which case AESOP would lose the initiative. It is in the interest of the planning schools to proactively engage in the procedure in order to keep things in their own hands.

Even though the validity of this 'defensive' answer was widely recognised, it was not seen as very satisfactory. It would be better if AESOP seized this opportunity in a positive way. There are good reasons for this, for example reinforcement of the profession, quality assurance of planning schools, stimulating reflection upon how to improve planning education.

In a general sense, engaging in the elaboration of professional standards and core requirements was seen as a necessary activity for AESOP. But it was also mentioned that we really need to be clear upon why we need a common platform, because it might also work as a fence around our discipline, which is not what we want. To summarise the discussions, the general answer to the question whether AESOP should engage in the process towards professional recognition is: YES BUT:

- cautiously and actively support the activities leading towards EU professional recognition;
- understand this should be gradual (and long-term) process; and following from that
- take control over the speed and character of the process.

Some elements that will probably be of increased importance in planning education in the future, and that should be part of the "core of planning" have been mentioned:

- fluid borders between planning and other disciplines (architecture, landscape design & planning);
- more integrative jobs;
- emphasise problem definitions;
- shift from government to governance, which requires mediating/negotiating or moderating planners;
- sustainability approach;
- uniqueness of place.

In trying to define the "core" of the planning discipline, it is important to take into account that the planning

profession, or at least the activity of planning is very much "context dependent". As a consequence, core requirements cannot be static, as planning evolves with the context. Also, when trying to define the core requirements for a planner, it should not be forgotten that many countries have their own requirements (issued for example by APERAU in France, or by RTP1 in the UK), which work perfectly well. AESOP should not aim at reinventing these existing mechanisms.

Accreditation experiences and potential role of AESOP

RTP1 and APERAU show clear examples of how self imposed quality assessment can be successful. This shows how accreditation can be valuable. The question of the advantage of having an AESOP 'label' or quality mark of planning accreditation can nevertheless be raised. The answer to this question seems to contain two central elements:

- Such a label would have an important symbolic value in a certain number of countries where the planning profession is not very strong.
- It would allow graduates in planning to move more easily across Europe.

By way of example, some ideas for the types of criteria that could be used for accreditation were mentioned:

- density of activity;
- balance;
- staff activities (theory, practice and teaching);
- report between theoretical and practical education;
- core vs. specialisation; and
- social, economic, environmental aspects.

In a general sense, it was mentioned that any assessments should mainly be based on "learning outcomes", and not on input. In other words, the focus should be on competences, not on how these can be achieved.

There is a limit to this type of accreditation at a European level. Planners operate in different (national) planning systems and cultures. A system of accreditation at the European level can harmonise education, but not the planning systems and cultures. Moreover, we need to be aware that strong and rigid criteria for planning schools may exclude some schools, or even some regions of Europe.

Common platform and professional recognition

European accreditation and directives mainly concern professions which are regulated, such as medical professions or architecture. The question is to see whether this is also necessary for planning. The ECTP survey seems to show that some sort of regulation is necessary, because planners cannot move freely in Europe. This, however, needs to be worked out further.



The elaboration of a common platform for the planning discipline in Europe would have a certain number of advantages. Many of them have already been mentioned:

Its existence would make it easier for graduates in planning to find a job throughout Europe; it would guarantee the comparative quality of planning education; it would increase the professional status of planning; and it would enhance the position of ECTP and AESOP as representatives of the planning discipline in Europe.

However, the drawbacks of a common platform should not be ignored. The existence of such a platform might weaken the position of non-standard patterns of education (combination of generic pre-graduate plus planning master; baccalaureate in planning only, etc.), and it might jeopardise some regions and even some countries that have no local opportunity to educate EU-recognised planners. In addition, it can be questioned whether a common platform, with its core requirements in the form of 'minimum standards' is the right place for a real reflection upon the future of planning education. The development of a 'vision' of the future of planning education should probably be separated from the establishment of 'core requirements'.

In any case, we need to keep in mind that a common platform for the planning profession does not aim at standardisation. It aims at enabling mobility between European countries. If for that reason standardisation is required, than we have to do that.

In this delicate balance of pros and cons, AESOP has to define its strategy and accordingly its actions.

AESOP strategy and actions

The general feeling is that AESOP should move forward towards standards for professional recognition of the planning discipline. However, it should avoid doing that only for defensive reasons. It is important that AESOP defines a proper policy in this field. In order to do so, simultaneous action on two tracks is necessary:

- Identification, analysis and synthesis of what exists in terms of definitions/descriptions of the planning discipline, and of core requirements (e.g. ECTP, ISOCARP, EU, AESOP, APERAU, RTPI, ...)

- Development of a policy document setting out precise objectives that AESOP wants to obtain via a process towards professional recognition (e.g. creating an identity for planning where this does not exist; removing barriers for professional mobility between countries; give support in accreditation procedures in different countries; increase the status of planning, ...). The central idea should be to support schools in particular countries to improve their planning education, respecting national profiles of planning profession and planning education

There is a momentum created by the Bologna process. This should be used in order to further reflect upon our position. To profit from this momentum, it is important not to lose too much time in ideological debates, but to be pragmatic: the objective should not be how to protect our position, but how to promote it. The process towards professional recognition is a good opportunity to launch a shared reflection upon the future of the planning profession in Europe, and the contribution of the planning schools to this. The occasion to have a large consultation among the AESOP members should be seized. The overall aim should be to establish criteria that would help to 'climb the ladder' rather than restrict and exclude.

To summarise, AESOP needs to define a strategy or a policy which aims at strengthening the profile of planning; at communicating the value of planning; at defining core (minimum) requirements for planners (in a non-cumulative way). The issue of the establishment of a common platform at EU level should be addressed in this wider policy. Concrete action points in order to elaborate this policy are the following:

- set up a working party with ECTP;
- include other organisations (ISOCARP)
- invite for participation and further debate
- continue the "ground work" (continue Bologna, continue research assessment).