

Editorial: academic professional journals and professional practice

Article

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Editorial: Academic professional journals and professional practice

In my last editorial (Chettiparamb, 2021), I tried to briefly reflect on the relationship of planning theory and the planning discipline. In this editorial, I reflect upon the relationship between academic journals and professional practice more generally, while relating to various formats of publication that academic professional journals in general, and Planning Theory in particular, engage with. I intend to argue that academic professional journals are not just venues where academics speak to academics, but are also devices that safeguard professional practice.

Disciplines have been argued to have risen from human beings' natural tendency to observe, classify and conceptualize things, but also the need for science to take advantage of accumulated knowledge (Boisot, 1972). Regarding professions, Adam Smith's (1776) *Wealth of Nations* must be referred to, for here he associates division of labour with civilization and general economic progress. For Smith, people need to be educated/trained in specialised fields to facilitate innovation and lead to an 'improved society' (pg 3).

Such a division of labour then leads to the creation of a 'specialised individual', an individual whose knowledge in a definite realm is superior to that of a non-specialised individual. This specialised individual consequently speaks from a particular professional location. If the knowledge gains and skill gains made by this enlightened 'specialised' individual through her/his professional life is not to be dissipated over time and if the professional space carved out is to be safeguarded and enhanced, some form of institutionalisation is needed. In Western societies the 'craft guilds' or 'professional societies' carried out this function to a large extent. Elsewhere, such as in India, where I come from, the caste system was originally formulated to ensure this institutionalisation. Such professional institutions mark the individual professional in local contexts and *inter alia* serve to advance the profession.

When universities emerged to inculcate new entrants into professional modes of thought, ways to archive the accumulated knowledge in entities more than the body of ancestors or the practice traditions in a guild would have been required. We know that Professional Societies and other sponsors started publishing newsletters, books and engaged in other forms of academic publishing aimed at sharing knowledge beyond the circle of immediate acquaintances. These more enduring 'artefacts' became the repositories that tell the story of a profession's evolution and growth over time. By telling the story of professional ideas and the profession, they also invariably contribute to shaping and establishing professional vocabularies and professional identities over time. Today, 'Review sections' in journals allows for one such type of story-telling. Here the historical evolution of an idea, a concept, a practice, or a specific value/attitude central to a profession is traced over time thus making these journals repositories that trace the development of professional vocabularies so central to professional practice. The first point that I want to make therefore is that *academic professional journals contribute to a profession by being a repository that marks the development of professional vocabularies which in turn shape and embed professional identities.*

There are significant parallels in the way professions and disciplines work within academia. Aram (2004, p.380) characterises disciplines as “semi-stable, partially integrated and semi-autonomous ‘intellectual conveniences’”. The same can be said for professions. Abbott (1988) for instance argues for an ecological, systemic view of professions, wherein professions are seen as continuously evolving through a history of contested professional turf battles that are in turn linked to wider social and economic changes. One way in which professions try to defend themselves is by defining a core jurisdiction that is maintained and developed in abstract form. Abbott suggests that increasing the abstraction can serve to strengthen the profession, though over-abstraction could also weaken the professional core and thus be detrimental. Academic journals facilitate the development of ideas and theories, that may be far removed from direct sensory experience. Journals such as Planning Theory, have an important part to play in facilitating such abstractions; clarifying, contesting, and promoting them; and thereby preserving a profession’s core jurisdiction. The second point that I want to make then is that *academic professional journals serve profession communities by developing and safeguarding an abstract core jurisdiction that contribute to both developing and safeguarding the profession itself.*

Just as a discipline denotes a thought-domain that is more than a subject area, the profession denotes a practice-domain that is more than a craft. The discipline denotes a degree of rigour and wisdom that is larger than the idea of a subject area and the profession implies in addition a set of values and ethics that goes beyond the handling or manipulation of concrete objects or services. One way in which disciplines and professions uphold degrees of rigour and wisdom while promoting sets of values and ethics is by subjugating their own practices to reflexive and rigorous analysis.

Professional reflexivity is commonly realised in journals through authorship and the peer review process. These call for rigorous reflections on values, understandings, interpretations, meanings, evidence, methods, and causal claims that render a profession more than just a craft. Editorial decisions and the peer-review processes prompt depth of inquiry, reasoned argumentation and cultivate rigour in thought that can clarify the intellectual tool-kit that the profession uses. Special formats such as the ‘Comments’ section, a permanent feature in Planning Theory, does this too. Here a reader can challenge the substance of a publication or seek further clarifications from an author who has published in the journal. The author/s then engage with the critique and provide a response. Another format that facilitates this is the Planning Theory podcast series (available through the Planning Theory website), which explores a published article or a special issue in more depth through audio recorded discussions. Debates, dialogues and similar non-conventional formats can also have a similar aim. The third point that I make therefore is *the role of academic professional journals in upholding a profession by being a generator, arbiter and promoter of professional ideas, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that define it.*

Difference and change in a profession can be understood in relation to both space and time. The parameters of how a profession is understood and practiced is determined by the way it is packaged and controlled in the immediate setting of its practice. Specific theoretical ideas or methodological innovations could therefore emerge from the realities of a practice context. Within planning, for instance, distinct concepts and areas of concern are emerging

from the realities of practice in the global South (for example, interest in informality, ideas of urban and so on).

Clark (1983) claims that despite internal differences, a discipline pulls together a community of interest that reaches across large territories. The same is also true of professions. They are to an extent transnational yet hybridized with difference and change inherent to their existence. Academic professional journals can be artefacts through which these difference across geographies and professional contexts are navigated. Planning Theory, for instance, promotes book reviews of books published in non-English languages to introduce professional local knowledges to the mainstream. Academic journals, through special issues, might also pull together accounts from different geographical spaces and experiences to collectively focus thought, revisit an old idea in contemporary times, address a new challenge or develop new responses to a common issue. Emerging new professional areas may thus be introduced to a practice community. Wider societal challenges to the core of the profession may also be debated in formats like the 'Essay' or 'Opinion piece' or 'Visions' that are essentially non-peer-reviewed. These introduce to the mainstream, topics that may be beyond the current core of the profession or topics that may constitute a threat to the core. The fourth and final point that I want to highlight is therefore *the role of academic professional journals in providing visibility to occurrences across geographical spaces, in hybrid professional spaces and in speculative futures.*

To summarise, I have argued that academic professional journals are not just important for the academic community. They also serve professional communities in four main ways:

- *as a repository that marks the development of professional vocabularies which in turn shape and embed professional identities.*
- *by developing and safeguarding an abstract core jurisdiction that contribute to both developing and safeguarding the profession itself.*
- *by being a generator, arbiter and promoter of professional ideas, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that define the profession.*
- *by providing visibility to occurrences across geographical spaces, in hybrid professional spaces and in speculative futures.*

Having argued for the importance of academic professional journals for the professional practice community, I must now turn to thank the generosity of our reviewers in dedicating one of their most precious resources – time – to support this journal and thus the community of planning scholars and planning practitioners. We are very grateful to the rigour and dedication they have given us so selflessly. The reviewers for 2020 were Leonidas Anthopoulos, Manuel Aalbers, Noelle Aarts, Gareth Abrahams, Hazem Abu-Orf, Henri Acselrad, Louis Albrechts, Ernest Alexander, Nurit Alfasi, Lieven Ameel, Ardavan Amini, Ben Anderson, Margarita Angelidou, Mahyar Arefi, Jos Arts, Joseph Ayitio, Ela Babalik-Sutcliffe, Pia Bäcklund, Guy Baeten, Banashree Banerjee, Tridib Banerjee, Idalina Baptista, Iulian Barba-Lata, Claudia Basta, Charlotte Bates, Mike Batty, Victoria Beard, Robert Beauregard, Yasminah Beebeejaun, Jelle Behagel, Simon Bell, Bradley Bereitschaft, Raoul Beunen, Beau Beza, Gautum Bhan, Philip Black, Ivan Blečić, William Blomquist, Camillo Boano, Luuk Boelens, Sophie Bond, Robert Boyer, Gary Bridge, Gillian Bristow, Sue Brownhill, Amy Burnett, Michael Buser, Jonas Bylund, David Byrne, Michele Campagna, Heather Campbell, Kang Cao, Keith Carlisle, Matthew Carmona, Chiara Certomà, Jeffrey Chan, Robert Chaskin,

Francesco Chiodelli, Brett Christophers, David Clapham, Angela Connelly, William Conroy, Richard Cowell, Stefano Cozzolino, Neil Crosby, George Crowder, Austin Cummings, Tijana Dabovic, Ayona Datta, Mark Davidson, Anna Davies, Simin Davoudi, Benjamin Davy, Gert de Roo, Jill Desimini, Steven Devaney, Charles Devellennes, Patrick Devlieger, Ryan Devlin, Mark Dobson, Jago Dodson, Nicolas Douay, Marc Doussard, Kim Dovey, Stefanie Duhr, Martijn Duineveld, James Duminy, Paul Dumouchel, Efrat Eizenberg, Geraint Ellis, Beatrix Emo, Zeynep Enlil, Aftab Erfan, Harley Etienne, Fikri Zul Fahmi, Susan Fainstein, Andreas Faludi, Mona Fawaz, Tommy Firman, Daniel Fitzpatrick, John Forester, Lillian Fougere, Linda Fox-Rogers, Andrea Frank, James Fraser, Richard Gale, Daniel Galland, Matthew Gandy, Lasse Gerrits, Bruce Goldstein, Robert Goodspeed, Stephen Graham, Kristina Grange, Jill Grant, Marius Gronning, Kai Gu, Enrico Gualini, Michael Gunder, Philippe Hamman, Philip Harrison, Thomas Hartmann, Susanna Hecht, John Henneberry, Leon Hermans, Jean Hillier, Charles Hoch, Randall Holcombe, Meg Holden, Ståle Holgersen, Robert Hollands, Lorens Holm, James Holston, Robert Home, Lewis Hopkins, Philipp Horn, Margo Huxley, Andy Inch, Daniel Inkoom, Chris Ivory, Yosef Jabareen, Fayola Jacobs, Stephen Jay, Thomas Jefferies, Ihnji Jon, Martin Jones, Phil Jones, Arendt Jonkman, Nina Jorgensen, Vesa Kanninen, Tej Kumar Karki, Nikhil Kaza, Marie Kennedy, Rob Kitchen, Daniel Koch, Philippe Koch, Regan Koch, Henk-Jan Kooij, Milos Kosec, Maros Krivy, Neema Kudva, Rama Kummitha, Arnoud Lagendijk, Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos, Lawrence Lai, Alan Latham, Mickey Lauria, Lucie Laurian, Crystal Legacy, Helena Leino, Mick Lennon, Ferdinand Lewis, Sandra Liebenberg, Laura Lieto, Helen Liggett, Gunilla Lindholm, Francesco Lo Piccolo, Melanie Lombard, Nicholas Low, Andres Luque-Ayala, Gordon MacLeod, Ali Madanipour, Christine Mady, Christopher Maidment, Sandra Mallet, Babak Manouchehrifar, Raine Mäntysalo, Alan March, Steve Marotta, Tim Marshall, Hanna Mattila, Igor Mayer, Cameron McAuliffe, John McCarthy, Katie McClymont, Derek McCormack, Michael McGreevy, Joel McKim, Paula Meth, Jonathan Metzger, Faranak Miraftab, Stefano Moroni, Janice Morphet, Tiffany Morrison, Frank Moulaert, Chandrima Mukhopadhyay, Lucy Natarajan, Zorica Nedovic-Budic, Michael Neuman, Saul Newman, Mee Kam Ng, Joshua Nichols, Ambe Njoh, Rizvi Noordeen, Richard Nunes, Nancy Odendaal, Kristian Olesen, Eduardo Oliveira, Stijn Oosterlynck, Mark Oranje, Natalie Osborne, Esin Ozdemir, Sara Özogul, Antoine Paccoud, Kathy Pain, Nipesh Palat Narayanan, Gavin Parker, Darren Patrick, Mark Pennington, Nihal Perera, Nicholas Phelps, Edgar Pieterse, Fenne Pinkster, John Pløgger, Venda Pollock, Alenka Poplin, Libby Porter, Juval Portugali, Urs Primas, Mark Purcell, Parvati Raghuram, Urmila Rajadhyaksha, Ward Rauws, Jane Rendell, Tim Richardson, Danielle Rivera, Andrea Roberts, Nikolai Roskamm, Yvonne Rydin, Lake Sagaris, Tore Sager, Leonie Sandercock, Bish Sanyal, Federico Savini, Andrew Sayer, Jan Schreurs, Lisa Schweitzer, Glen Searle, Pablo Sendra, Ceren Sezer, Joanne Sharp, Edward Shepherd, Paulo Silva, Joar Skrede, Eirini Skrimizea, Aleksandar Slaev, Bjorn Sletto, Janet Smith, Neil Smith, Nick Smith, Martin Sondermann, Jung Won Sonn, Andre Sorensen, Eva Sørensen, Yannis Stavrakakis, Bruce Stiftel, Emma Street, Amy Swiffen, Malcolm Tait, Gokboru Tanyildiz, Tuna Taşan-Kok, Zack Taylor, Miriam Tedeschi, Mark Tewdwr-Jones, Huw Thomas, June Thomas, James Throgmorton, Manuel Tironi, Vincenzo Todaro, Alison Todes, Sasha Tsenkova, Kelly Turner, Karen Umemoto, Robert Upton, Dave Valler, Kristof Van Assche, Bert van wee, Alberto Vanolo, Niraj Verma, Segio Villamayor-Tomas, Lei Wang, Vanessa Watson, Brian Webb, Martin Westin, Patricia Wilson, Tanja Winkler, sharon wohl, Johan Woltjer, Cecilia Wong, Stephen Wood, Ian Woodcock, Weiping Wu, Peter Wyatt, Arata Yamamoto, Claudia Yamu, Yung Yau, Oren Yiftachel, Gregory Young, Sherif Zakhour, Juliana Zanotto and Christian Zudeima.

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