

Christopher Silver

Viewpoint *ACSP retrospective*

ACSP has thrived as an organisation largely because it has sustained and enhanced core activities from its inception in the 1970s around issues of planning education. Typically, this has required a long-term nurturing process rather than instantaneous organisational changes. In reflecting on why ACSP came into being and how it has developed over a period of three decades plus, it is the steady and methodical expansion of planning education within higher education institutions in the United States that best depicts the goals and successes of ACSP. In 2001, under the Presidency of Wim Wiewel, and following a course that had been charted more than a decade earlier by ACSP faculty, the first World Congress of Schools of Planning (WCSP) and the formation of a global network of planning education organisations occurred to increase the visibility and reach of planning and planning education, to further globalise ACSP and its member programmes, to strengthen the links between planning education and practice, and to make further headway to diversify our body. This brought into focus issues that our organisation has been dealing with for more than two decades, but which have gained especial mediacy because of current conditions in our university and college environments, because of the larger global context of urban and development concerns, and because of ongoing discussions within our national society about matters such as diversity, inclusiveness, sustainability and quality of life, all of which are at the core of how we approach our mission as planning educators.

As a historian of urbanisation and of planning, I am inclined by nature to retrospection, and I thought it would be useful to briefly re-examine our origins in the 1970s, but especially the 1980s and 1990s to see if there were any antecedents to the current discourse, and any suggestions about how we might proceed to realise our institutional agenda. I extracted this retrospective largely through the pages of our journal, the *Journal of Planning Education and Research (JPER)*. *JPER* has become a prime venue for articles on various aspects of planning issues and planning education. In contrast, the volumes in the 1980s were almost exclusively devoted to critically examining the nature, purpose and approaches to planning education. The debate was intensive and reflective of issues that resonate today, such as how planning practice can be incorporated into planning education, the links between planning education and the social science disciplines, the unique demands of internationalisation for planners, what should be in the core planning curriculum, and the role of accreditation, to cite just a few that remain hot buttons in our field. These were articles I should have read as a junior faculty member in an Urban Studies and Planning programme, but I must

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admit that the debate about the nature of planning education seemed less relevant at the Assistant Professor level, where my attention was fixed on publishing my research on planning history in southern cities. One article found its way into *JPER* in the mid-1990s. However, by that point, *JPER*'s focus had broadened beyond the education debate. It had morphed into a journal of planning research with planning education now just a small part. This was a logical and healthy move for *JPER*, and probably explains why its citation ranking has risen so substantially in recent years. While I think *JPER* should remain a broadly conceived journal of planning research, it could resurrect its role as a forum for debating the nature of planning education, since those issues animate some of us so much these days.

ACSP conferences were also very different back then. My first encounter with these was as a spectator at the famous gathering at Howard University in 1981, the one that inaugurated our conference independence. As Jay Chatterjee noted in his presidential address several years later, the decision to hold a separate conference was narrowly defeated at a 1980 Business Meeting in Cincinnati, so President Ed McClure went to the general membership and got approval by a narrow margin to hold a separate conference in 1981. From what I could tell from listening to the presentations at the Howard University conference (and from what my chair at Virginia Commonwealth University, Allen Fonoroff, had explained to me), ACSP was a small band of academics, and mostly department heads, desirous of having an annual gathering to discuss planning pedagogy. Since I was still pretty much an outsider, a historian (but with a planning masters) who happened to be teaching in a planning programme, I regarded the issues of planning education interesting, but peripheral to my main focus. None the less, I was impressed with the informality of the group and with the chance to meet many whose articles and books on planning that I had read in planning courses taken at Chapel Hill. I recognised immediately the spirit of inclusiveness that animated this group. When I offered my services for what turned out to be a substantially larger gathering in the next year in Chicago, and when they found they had a real historian in their midst, I was asked to comment on a session cleverly entitled 'history of planning'. I remember much about the Chicago conference, staying with a friend who lived near Wrigley, visiting the historically significant planned community of Pullman, and hearing live Chicago blues for the first time. But what I also remember vividly is being confronted in my first ACSP session with three of the most disparate works I have ever encountered in one grouping: one being an analysis of the design of Shajahanabad (or old Delhi, India), one being a biographical sketch of Ernie Bohn, the public housing planner and politico of New Deal Cleveland, and a third paper entitled something like 'The Artist as Urban Critic in early 19th Century America'. I do not remember much about any of the papers specifically, except that it was my chance to meet Larry Gerckens (who presented the Ernie Bohn paper) and through him to get drawn into an emerging ACSP subgroup of planning

historians. The one thing I do remember stating in my commentary, which was about as absurd as the grouping of papers itself, was that I saw some common links between all three papers. Clearly, I had found my niche in planning academia as a historical spin meister, and ACSP has another loyal convert. Wisely, in my judgement, the ACSP adopted a process in the late 1990s to utilise subject specialists from among our ranks to create cohesive and intellectually legitimate sessions for our conferences. Having had the opportunity to put together the programmes for the Cleveland and Baltimore conferences, and to reflect on how the process has changed since our beginnings, it is now obvious how much we benefit from this effort.

It is not the tenuous state of our early mandates or somewhat unevenness of those early annual conference sessions that is my point here, but to demonstrate how rapidly over the next two decades the awkward infant organisation matured into a formidable and highly capable voice of academicians in planning. As Jay Chatterjee was able to proclaim in his presidential address printed in the Autumn 1986 volume of *JPER*, ACSP had already evolved from a 'fairly informal and modest level activity to a viable organisation with unique potential for the future'. The annual conferences and *Journal of Planning Education and Research* were the mainstays of the organisation in its first decade. *JPER* was launched in 1981 by Chatterjee and David Prospero at the University of Cincinnati, not without some expressions of concern from others in the academy who questioned whether this might dilute the value of the *Journal of the American Planning Association (JAPA)*. Like the move to set up a separate conference, the initial vote for the journal was defeated, but Ed McClure used his presidential prerogative to authorise Jay to go ahead anyway. Jay and the other proponents of *JPER* pushed for a new journal in response to 'a need for additional publication outlets within the planning profession' for planning educators, especially younger faculty, to meet the expectations of university promotion and tenure processes. The other rationale was for ACSP to articulate through the contributions of its academic practitioners, through articles, essays and commentaries, the evolving state of planning education. During the 1980s, there were ominous signs that planning programmes, many of which had been created in the late 1960s and 1970s, were confronting challenges from competing needs and powers in universities. There was a vigorous debate within the ranks of the ACSP about how to respond to this threat. Future ACSP President Don Krueckeberg warned in a 1984 *JPER* article that it was necessary for planning education to offer more than just another social science degree, but to find a way to dig deeper into the practice of planning (but without abandoning the broadening benefits that had come from extending beyond design and law in the planning curriculum). He suggested the need to look beyond just a masters-level education, to give greater attention to planning at the undergraduate level, in order to bring professional practice into university curricula. Eugenie Birch, another future ACSP president, argued in a *JPER* commentary entitled 'Battle for the Profession'

that planning education must be very explicit in its notion of what a core curriculum for a professional programme should be, that the growing number of planning PhDs (which were proliferating in the late 1980s) should be doing dissertations that advance explicitly the theory and practice of planning, and that rigorous accreditation standards should lead ultimately to professional planning licensure that is recognised and respected in city halls, legislatures, and better understood in our communities. 'If we want to be a profession', she asserted, 'we have to do what other professions do. We have to be more rigorous and focused about defining our expertise, more assertive in defending it, and more assured in carrying it out' (p. 195). The Planning Accreditation Board, of which we are a part, has been the instrument to further those objectives, and the result has been both a broadening of the scope of planning education as well as clarification of standards that make up the core of planning education. And yet, planning programmes are no more secure within university/college environments than they were when Don, Genie and many others issued their warnings in the 1980s, as evidenced by the significant challenges currently facing some of our members. We have not been entirely successful, as Genie put it, 'to make planning a fact of life'. Norm Krumholz noted, in a slightly different context but with obvious relevance to these sentiments, that 'the world of the university and the world of the city planning practice are very different, characterised by conflicting values, language and rewards' (1986, 63). Krumholz's observation goes to the heart of a challenge we face today as planning educators to link what we do to the world of practice, since we are creating the next generations of planners, but also to play a pivotal role within the world of the academy. ACSP remains the forum within which we can work out that dilemma, and ACSP's vitality is essential to sustenance of strong professional practice.

Tom Galloway, then Dean at Iowa State University, made that point in a *JAPA* commentary in 1992. As he stated, 'the future of the planning profession depends on the vitality of its educational programs'. 'In general', he continued, 'planning has been taught in American universities at the graduate level in quasi-freestanding units in relatively small professional programs. This position, so carefully crafted by educators of the past, may now be threatened as several forces sweep through the university' (p. 229). He cited factors behind the change, namely a shrinking student base, financial constraints (growing out of this shrinking base), a growing crisis in public confidence, and internal power struggles related to gender and race. While the shrinking student population projection has not come to pass, and in many public and private universities the clamouring for entry has been even more intense in the past few years, the financial constraints have hit again, precipitated by shrinking public revenues that have forced most to cut budgets drastically. In terms of playing a role in public endeavours, there has been an across-the-board expansion of university engagement in public affairs, and in many places this has been led by faculty and students in planning programmes.

While many of the conditions Galloway identified in 1992 are not directly applicable to 2003 and beyond, significant challenges persist for planning education that speak to the essential role of the ACSP. At a one-day Education Summit sponsored by the APA, an attempt was made to engage the leadership of the professional organisation in a broad-ranging discussion of how to structure education for today's professionals, as well as how to link practice and education more closely. It was a most fruitful day of discussion, if for no other reason than because the handful of academics who engaged with practitioners found our practitioner colleagues eager to work constructively toward a common end. Yet it was the keynote speaker for that event, Fritz Steiner, who most succinctly articulated an even graver challenge than the sometimes frosty relations between academics and practitioners when it comes to defining how and what to teach planning students. He noted that 'the stand-alone master's degree in planning', which is so common a model in our field, 'appears to be especially vulnerable' because they are lodged within schools or departments that are small by comparison to other units and limited in their ability to increase enrolments by our own Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) criteria of a student–faculty ratio of 10:1 that yield student enrolments of between 20 and 50 students, and that makes these units vulnerable. Adding services courses at the undergraduate level, creating planning minors, and offering bachelors degrees in planning are ways to integrate our programmes more deeply in the academy. Positioning our programmes strategically within our colleges and universities was his message, and one that ACSP should support.

Our Association has and continues to play an absolutely pivotal role in the positioning of our programmes to compete for legitimacy with other professional and academic disciplines. We have been leaders in the push for internationalisation of higher education. As early as the late 1980s, and also in the pages of *JPER*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Bish Sanyal issued a call for planning programmes to adjust to their growing international student bodies, especially those from poor countries. This was part of a larger effort by Bish and others to move our curricula beyond the parochial interests of purely domestic planning. This has been nurtured in the ASCP initially through an ad-hoc group interested in internationalising the curriculum, and accelerated by the establishment of the Global Planning Education Interest Group, organisation and execution of a First World Congress of Schools of Planning held in Shanghai in 2001, and the establishment of a world planning schools organising committee to further interactions and to plan the next congress for 2006. It is not without meaning that when ACSP President Wim Wiewel called for volunteers to participate in several task forces he created two years ago to advance the global agenda in ACSP, 33 individual members of ACSP schools stepped up to assist. While the work of the task force and interest groups go on, the Global Planning Task Force has drafted an ambitious set of recommendations for curricular and programme

initiatives that warrant serious consideration over the next few years. The Task Force has set forth recommendations for ACSP, for the Global Interest Group, as well as for individual programmes. For ACSP, the challenge is find ways to interact with other national and regional planning associations to better understand global urban conditions (and appropriate planning responses). We must also work through PAB to consider ways to expand our notion of a core curriculum in planning to enhance an international outlook beyond just a single dedicated course on the subject. At the same time, ACSP should work through PAB to assist individual planning schools and national organisations abroad to develop core curricula that enhance global understanding of planning.

What Bish's committee discovered in their assessment of our own programmes is that there remains a notable reluctance among member ACSP schools to enrol international students, that planning faculty often lack international exposure, and that many schools lack linkages with comparable programmes abroad that could contribute to better understanding of global issues. One way to address this is through good old-fashioned peer group pressure, by using our graduate and undergraduate guides to identify those of us with international programmes, and through this mechanism to encourage those who have not jumped in to identify ways to do so. Support for focused regional gatherings of ACSP members on international topics would be another means to expand interest. I believe that the extent to which ACSP member schools, departments and programmes are able to engage in the internationalisation will better position us in educational institutions where interest in internationalisation is so pervasive. At the same time, I also believe we have the opportunity to lead our planning practitioners into a global milieu, to demonstrate that international understanding and comparative assessment can be a boon to what we are doing to plan our own communities.

What I have attempted to demonstrate through this somewhat meandering trip through our past is that we have constructed an organisation that is fundamental to the survival of professional planning education and that professional planning education is integral to the goal of making planning an integral part of our society's ethos. Our Association, ACSP, is no longer just an affordable alternative to other professional organisations where the dues of faculty are paid as a capitation charge to their home departments and where our conferences provide good conversation, and lots of food and beverage at below typical conference rates. ACSP has become absolutely essential to the survival and hopefully the expansion of planning programmes in universities and colleges. *JPER*, through a succession of extremely dedicated, talented, and selfless editors, has become one of the top venues for peer-reviewed articles in our field. It has become much easier now (as compared with the 1970s and 1980s) for our faculty to secure promotion and tenure on the basis of the appearance of their scholarship in *JPER* as well as *JAPA*, several other planning journals such as the *Journal*

of *Planning Literature*, the *Journal of Architecture and Planning, Environment and Planning*, and the *Journal of Planning History*, produced by our members. Through ACSP, the well-mentored faculty not only has a journal that publishes 30–35 articles per year, but an annual conference which provides a tremendous opportunity to showcase new research that often finds its way into the growing array of planning journals. What is amazing and so special about ACSP conferences is that they have grown from the modest gatherings of the 1980s into a sizeable annual gathering fuelled by a continuous new stream of aspiring academics in PhD programmes, new assistant professors, and even some practitioners, while retaining the allegiance and affection of those cohorts of academics who are deep into their careers. This means that for the new folks, as it was for me in Washington, Chicago and New York in the 1980s, it is possible at our conference to walk with and talk with those who have shaped our planning discourse.

In addition to annual conferences, the journal, the administrators conferences like this one, support for PAB, and the growth of international efforts within our programmes and through linkages with other planning associations, ASCP has added other core functions, including supporting our PhD programmes through an annual summer workshop (now three years running) and support for our junior faculty through collaboration with *JAPA* on a workshop for advanced PhD candidates and assistant professors to hone their research into publishable products. We are considering new mentoring programmes, efforts to achieve our goal of planning programmes whose student and faculty bodies fully reflect the diversity of our society, and sustained opportunities for integrating innovative practice into our educational experiences.

All of this requires an organisation that never loses sight of its core functions to support its member institutions, which are in fact all based within larger academic environments. Yet it must also work with its former students, the planning practitioners, to build a stronger constituency for the values of planners that we hold in common. As Genie Birch put it, ‘we, the professional associations’ (in which she included APA, AICP and ACSP), ‘must make planning a fact of life. We must haunt legislatures and city halls, inserting ourselves where opportunity affords.’ And we must also, in my judgement, inject ourselves into the mainstream of the educational system within which we are sustained, as administrative leaders when the opportunity presents itself, but certainly as contributors to the core education of citizens in the twenty-first century. ACSP can help our members to accomplish this grand but doable task. And why not, given how far we’ve progressed in three decades.

References

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