

Jannes Willems
Barbara Tempels
Caroline Newton

Conclusion

Transitions in planning: implications for
Dutch planning schools

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Contact information of the corresponding author:

- **Dr. Jannes Willems**
Urban Planning research group, Amsterdam Institute
for Social Science Research
University of Amsterdam
Nieuwe Achtergracht 166, 1018 WV Amsterdam
NETHERLANDS
Website: www.uva.nl/en/profile/w/i/j.j.willems/j.j.willems.html
Email: j.j.willems@uva.nl
ORCID: 0000-0002-3318-9706
- **Dr. Barbara Tempels**
Land Use Planning, Department of Environmental Sciences
Wageningen University
Droevendaalsesteeg 3, 6708 PB Wageningen
NETHERLANDS
Website: www.wur.nl/en/persons/bbd-barbara-tempels-phd
Email: barbara.tempels@wur.nl
ORCID: 0000-0002-0017-9341
- **Dr. Caroline Newton**
Spatial Planning and Strategy section, Department of Urbanism,
Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment
Delft University of Technology
Julianalaan 134, 2628 BL Delft
NETHERLANDS
Website: <https://carolinewton.com>
Email: c.e.l.newton-1@tudelft.nl
ORCID: 0000-0002-0537-4373

Biographical notes

Jannes Willems is assistant professor in urban planning at the University of Amsterdam. His research centres on green infrastructures for climate adaptation, and their impact on communities and ecosystems. Currently, he leads the DUT-funded research project GREEN-INC (2024-2026). He also hosts the Dutch podcast *Onder Planologen*.

Barbara Tempels is assistant professor in spatial planning at Wageningen University. She is interested in the roles of actors, communities, policy instruments, and governance arrangements in relation to flood risk management, drought risks, river restoration, and urbanization.

Caroline Newton is an architect, urban planner, and political scientist, working on the nexus of design, spatial justice, and social change. She is an associate professor at the Department of Urbanism at TU Delft and is one of the founders of TU Delft's Centre for the Just City.

>> Transitions in planning: implications for Dutch planning schools

Concluding chapter InPlanning – Transitions in Planning essay series

Willems, Jannes
Tempels, Barbara
Newton, Caroline

SUMMARY

>> This concluding chapter reflects on the implications of the transitions in planning covered in this book for Dutch planning schools. Input for this reflection was gathered during a workshop organized in collaboration with the Professors of Planning (POP) network, representing senior planning staff from the six Dutch planning schools. The transitions covered in this book concern the changing objects (e.g. mobility, energy, water) and subjects of planning (e.g. participation), as well as the planning conditions that enable these transitions and the impacts on planning education. This chapter explores the implications of these transitions on planning research (section 3), planning education (section 4), and planning's impact on practice (section 5). Subsequently, we provide a new typology of planning researchers and planning lecturers.

We conclude that Dutch planning schools will play a dual role in contemporary social and environmental transitions: on the one hand, facilitating and supporting professionals and communities with practical concepts, tools, and methods; and, on the other hand, reflecting upon (approaches to) these transitions and their underlying values through rigorous scientific work. Both roles could often work as complementary to each other, but may equally be conflicting at some points. Hence, we propose a diversification of researcher and lecturer profiles that not only accounts for the heterogeneous roles present in Dutch planning schools but also keeps the planning schools relevant for research, education, and practice.

INTRODUCTION

In this concluding chapter, we reflect on the implications of the transitions in planning covered in this book for Dutch planning schools. Input for this reflection was gathered at a workshop we organized together with the Professors of Planning (POP) network. The workshop participants included senior planning staff from the six Dutch planning schools¹. The workshop focused on the role of Dutch planning schools vis-à-vis the transitions in planning. More precisely, the discussions addressed what the transitions in planning mean for Dutch planning research, education and the impact on practice, and how Dutch planning schools can contribute to these transitions.

The structure of this chapter is organized around key areas of inquiry that emerge from the transitions discussed throughout the book. Section 2 synthesises how transitions have been explored in the different essays in this book series. The next three sections explore the transitions in planning research (section 3), planning education (section 4) and planning's impact in practice (section 5), also discussing how planning schools can influence practice and foster reciprocal relationships with practitioners. The concluding section brings reflections on the dual role of planning schools in societal transitions: facilitating practical solutions while critically interrogating the values and frameworks underpinning these changes, underscoring the need for planning schools to balance innovation with continuity, and preparing students and researchers to navigate the complexities of a rapidly evolving discipline.

TRANSITIONS

The essays collected in this series cover transitions in different ways, recognizing that different aspects of the planning domain might be in transition.

Three essays focus on a transition in a specific planning domain: i.e. housing, energy, and water. Levelt and Tan discuss the restructuring of the housing market in the Netherlands, and the opportunities for participation during each period. The essay by Horlings et al. is about the transition from a fossil-fuel energy system towards a renewable energy system, more specifically solar and wind energy. Janssen and Van Asseldonk consider the transition in Dutch water management, in particular the growing importance of (dealing with) periods of droughts. Together, these essays demonstrate how the **object of planning** is changing and requires new approaches.

¹ The workshop took place at TUDelft on May 27th 2024. Participants were Tuna Tasan-Kok (University of Amsterdam), David Evers (University of Amsterdam), Jochen Monstadt (Utrecht University), Patrick Witte (Utrecht University), Sander Lenferink (Radboud University), Jos Arts (University of Groningen) and the authors of this chapter.

Most essays argue that more importance should be given to citizens, and their knowledges, needs and practices. According to Beckers et al., this new outlook on participation can be regarded as a transition in planning as well (the **subject of planning**). In their essay, they cover the role of (super)diversity and multiculturalism in urban regeneration in the City of Amsterdam. Beckers et al. propose the asset-based community development approach in which residents are more in the lead. This resonates with the co-production considered in the essay by Levelt and Tan. In their essay, they describe how participation in the housing domain has shifted from technocratic government (non-participation) towards more market-based approaches since the 1980s/1990s. In the aftermath of the economic crisis in 2008, we see a framing of citizens as co-producers in urban and regional development, highlighting the capacities of citizens in driving urban and regional development (see also the essay by Horlings et al. on Citizen Energy Communities).

Regarding co-production, both Beckers et al. and Levelt and Tan stress that such perspectives assign more responsibilities to citizens which they may not always be willing to take up. Neither they may be able to take up this responsibility, because of different reasons (Beckers et al.). This claim resonates with critiques on the current Environment and Planning Act (*Omgevingswet*) that also promotes participation and co-production: participation is increasingly seen as a duty rather than a right (e.g. Korthals Altes, 2017; Stapper et al., 2020). Citizens with more resources tend to be more favourable towards taking up this duty, which could reproduce or even increase existing spatial inequalities. Consequently, in the words of Levelt and Tan, “in spite of increased institutionalization of participation, the actual citizens seem to have been served less and less.”

The essays by Horlings et al. and Janssen and Van Asseldonk discuss similar developments in their respective planning domains, but are more concerned with **setting the planning conditions right** to enable the potentials of citizens’ initiatives and knowledges. In the context of the energy transition, Horlings et al. argue that spatial planning should be able to work across spatial, temporal and administrative scales: “balance top-down goals and area-specific implementation”, bridge “long-term visioning and short-term incrementalism”, and consider “spatial impacts on multiple spatial scales”. For water management, Janssen and Van Asseldonk argue in favour of a return to historical water systems and the related “pre-industrial wisdom” that is often still present among communities (“past forward”). They propose to see heritage as an inspiration to re-develop regions in order to make them more climate-proof, while simultaneously contributing to identity-building.

The essay by Witte et al. covers **the impacts of the transitions on planning education**. In their essay, they discuss how planning studios – as one specific

form of education – can help to train students to develop more “forward-looking” and “long-term” skills and capacities, which can be used to anticipate the transitions. Witte et al. argue for the need for visioning, a skill that has been increasingly neglected in planning education. Through planning studios, students train to rethink how cities and regions *ought* to be.

TRANSITIONS IN PLANNING RESEARCH

This section discusses how the transitions in the object and subject of planning challenge planning schools to change their research, and what kind of knowledge production is needed to face these transitions. While new challenges in different planning domains require knowledge on domain-specific innovations and their spatial implications (object of planning), knowledge is also needed about how to deal with these challenges in a society that is increasingly complex due to changes such as diversification, increased citizen involvement, and political polarization (subject of planning). In this context, we consider a more “needs-based” research approach (involving communities and practitioners) and a “place-based” research approach (rooted in specific planning systems) crucial. In what follows, we discuss the importance of going back to the core principles of planning, the need to understand what planners do (the agency of planners), the link between planning research and practice, innovations in research methodologies and the importance of knowledge exchange.

Reinvigorating core principles

While we celebrate the innovations and new topics that have emerged over recent years, there is a need to return to the fundamental principles that underpin effective spatial planning. There is a call to embrace the core elements of planning – land-use (change), functions and systems, and their development, regulation and coordination through norms, zoning, etc., across multiple planning domains, such as mobility, housing and energy. Planning is an instrument in the redistribution of resources and capital, and should be approached as such in research. The essay by Witte et al. also reflects this sentiment but extends it by stating that the future-oriented nature of the planning discipline seems to have been eroding over the years. While Witte et al. problematize this in the context of education, we could also ask the question to what extent our research produces insights and knowledge that allow us to critically assess what could and should be.

Understanding the agency of planners

Equally important is the recognition of the diverse roles that planners play in shaping our environments. Planners work in different domains, for different parties (public, private or civic) (Tasan-Kok et al., 2016) and often combine and balance different planner roles according to the planning situation (Ferreira,

Sykes & Batey, 2009; Olesen, 2018). The workshop participants emphasized the need to examine the agency of planners – who they are, what they do, and how their varied backgrounds influence their approaches to problem-solving. This is especially relevant considering that planning practices are highly place-based, as planning practices are rooted in specific planning systems, with their own local history and institutional embedding.

Similarly, Janssen and Van Asseldonk made a call in their chapter for re-valuing pre-industrial land use and historical water structures as a means to cope with a changing climate. These historic structures are now often considered cultural heritage, and came with a set of specific planning practices. Fostering exchanges between the fields of planning and cultural heritage could trace these practices, and, subsequently, they can be (re-)introduced for current planning challenges.

Bridging research and practice

Historically, planning research has emerged from planning practice. As Salet (2014, p. 294) puts it: “The close relation between theory and practice is not evident in the domain of sciences but for spatial planning studies it is an essential and characteristic feature.” But as planning has matured as a scientific discipline, planning research has become its own ‘world’, with a focus on the wishes of funding bodies and specialized research groups and niches across Dutch universities. As such, planning research might have lost its mutual relationship with practice. Workshop participants, argue for an explicit link with practice through practice-oriented research and toolsets. Involvement of communities and practitioners could support a closer connection to the needs of society. As highlighted by scholars such as Patsy Healey, the future of planning research lies in its ability to be practice-oriented, developing tool sets that can be directly applied to the challenges faced by planners in the field. One way this ambition has materialised is through the growing number of academic projects organised as ‘urban living labs’, where researchers collaborate with practitioners. While these initiatives demonstrate promising forms of co-production, they also bring challenges, such as administrative and coordination burdens. Another well-documented limitation is the ‘pilot paradox’: living labs seldom scale up and often remain ad-hoc initiatives.

Embracing interdisciplinarity and new methodologies

To effectively address the complexities of urban environments, planners must draw from diverse disciplines – environmental sciences, economics, design, and engineering. By incorporating a range of theories and methodologies, we can create a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing spatial dynamics.

The interdisciplinary nature of planning endeavors also implies that different methodologies are needed to understand them. First, quantitative research

should be reinstated to provide overarching insights into spatial dynamics. At the same time, artistic and creative methods, storytelling, and participatory design can provide fresh insights and foster deeper community engagement. The integration of these diverse methodologies can enrich planning research, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of urban development.

Reaching out to practitioners

Finally, the workshop participants emphasized the necessity of involving practitioners through new academic platforms that facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange. By creating spaces where academics and practitioners can engage in dialogue, we can ensure that planning research remains relevant and responsive to real-world challenges.

We see a paradox here: on the one hand, to go back to the core of planning, while at the same time reaching out to others. However, the call to return to the fundamentals of spatial planning is not merely a nostalgic longing for the past. By recommitting to core principles, fostering agency among planners, bridging research with practice, embracing interdisciplinarity, and actively involving practitioners, planning research can provide insights that support a better spatial organization to deal with the most pressing current and future challenges. At the same time, this combination of expectations places considerable demands on researchers, as they are asked to navigate multiple responsibilities. One way to respond to this challenge is by adopting different roles depending on the context, ranging from observing and reflecting on ongoing planning processes to developing and testing new tools to engage more directly with ongoing planning processes.

4 TRANSITIONS IN PLANNING EDUCATION

As societal challenges evolve, so too must the education systems that prepare planners to navigate these complexities. In recent years, planning education has undergone significant shifts in both its structure and pedagogical approaches, reflecting the need to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for addressing increasingly urgent urban and regional issues. These changes are driven by the demand to balance long-standing disciplinary knowledge with new and emerging methodologies, all while adapting to broader societal, economic, and environmental challenges.

In this section the key transitions in planning education are explored, clustered around four aspects. First, we examine the shifts within studio education and curriculum content, where the integration of 'futuring' and 'visioning' exercises marks a return to the substantive roots of planning while also posing challenges for one-year master's programs. Second, we discuss cultural and methodological preparedness, emphasizing the importance of cultural literacy

and the expansion of methodological training to better equip students for working in diverse and complex planning environments. Third, we consider the interdisciplinary and international dimensions of planning education, recognising the value of cross-disciplinary collaboration and the inclusion of global perspectives, while also addressing the challenges of integrating these into localised planning contexts. Finally, we discuss the influence of external factors, such as market demands and educational policies, which shape curricula and create tension between fostering critical thinkers and preparing students for immediate professional roles.

Increased attention for visioning in studio education and changing curriculum content

One of the most notable shifts in planning education is the growing emphasis on 'futuring' and 'visioning' exercises in planning studios. These exercises encourage students to envision long-term possibilities and strategise responses to uncertain futures. This trend may signal a departure from the 'communicative turn', which emphasised dialogue and participation, and a re-emphasis on the substantive roots of planning, where visioning exercises focus on shaping future urban and regional environments in response to pressing societal challenges like climate change, housing shortages, and migration. In their essay in this volume, Witte et al. emphasise the critical role of studios in cultivating future literacy and imaginative capabilities among students, which are essential for addressing these transitions effectively.

These forward-looking methodologies have been well-established in planning education programs at technical universities, who offer two-year master's programs. Schools with longer, more technically oriented curricula have traditionally incorporated comprehensive future and scenario planning exercises, leveraging their expertise in interdisciplinary approaches and design thinking. Students in these programs are often immersed in a curriculum that allows for a deeper engagement with visioning practices, given the extended time to explore both theoretical frameworks and practical applications.

The integration of foresight and visioning into studios is putting considerable pressure on one-year master's programmes in planning, where essential planning skills also need to be developed within a limited time frame. This challenge is compounded by the reduction of more specialised courses, such as legal aspects and planning methods, in favour of more general or integrative approaches. Witte et al. (p. 13-14) caution against this trend, noting that the erosion of long-term visioning risks compromising the ability of students to engage deeply with critical and future-oriented planning methodologies. While a broad curriculum may offer flexibility, it risks reducing the expertise students need, especially for professional positions that require specialised knowledge.

The main challenge for planning education is to strike a balance between offering a comprehensive, integrative education and equally ensuring that students are adequately prepared for the technical requirements of their future jobs.

In addition, planning education often prioritises practical applications at the expense of a strong theoretical foundation, leaving students insufficiently prepared for the complexity of real-world challenges. A more balanced approach is needed - one that integrates theoretical insights with practical experience. By embedding practice in theory and having theory tested through application, students can develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed in the planning profession with its rapidly changing and multifaceted demands.

Cultural and methodological preparedness

Planning education must address both the gap in cultural literacy and the limitations in methodological training that leave students underprepared for the complexities of modern urban challenges. Planners increasingly work in diverse communities, yet their education often lacks the social-cultural insight needed to engage effectively with different social groups. Introducing content that enhances social-cultural literacy is crucial for fostering inclusive and equitable planning practices. In their essay, Werner et al. stress the importance of intercultural competence, particularly in multicultural neighbourhoods, where planners must negotiate/overcome cultural differences and facilitate meaningful engagement. Using the example of involving residents in decision-making during redevelopment projects in the Bijlmer, they demonstrate how cultural literacy plays a central role in fostering effective participation.

If power, politics, and social-cultural biases are not explicitly addressed, or if the contestation of knowledge is depoliticized, there is a risk that unequal power relations are reinforced rather than mitigated (Turnhout et al., 2020). As Levelt and Tan show in their essay, large groups with below-average financial, social and creative capital still lack a voice in decision- and plan-making in cities like Amsterdam or Groningen. For these groups the term 'participatory planning' feels paradoxical, as wider societal dynamics like gentrification and housing market liberalization have pushed them out of the city. Therefore, educating future planners should go beyond teaching participatory methods in a technical sense; it should also cultivate awareness of power, interests, socio-cultural differences, and the deeper roots of marginalization or empowerment within transformative change. Planning schools remain key places for critical reflection in training, thinking and writing.

At the same time, expanding the methodological repertoire to include both quantitative and qualitative approaches, as well as newer, more innovative

techniques (such as participatory action research or storytelling), will better prepare students to tackle the multifaceted challenges of urban and regional planning.

Interdisciplinary and international perspectives

Interdisciplinarity is a well-established feature of planning education, yet its potential remains underutilised. Integrating knowledge from environmental science, economics, design, and engineering can better equip planners to address urban environments' spatial, social, and economic complexities. Additionally the integration of international perspectives in planning education is crucial, especially in light of the growing diversity of cities around the world. Drawing on experiences from around the globe enriches planning practices by offering alternative approaches to addressing issues like rapid urbanisation, social inequality, and environmental degradation. These perspectives are relevant in global contexts and increasingly crucial for addressing the complex realities of our own diverse urban environments. Incorporating such international viewpoints ensures that planners are equipped to engage with a broad range of cultural and socioeconomic challenges, making their work more inclusive and globally informed. For instance, comparative work, such as the chapter by Horlings et al. who reviewed citizen energy initiatives in Portugal, The Netherlands and Wales, could benefit planning education: students learn about experiences elsewhere and can relate them back to what they witness in their home country.

At the same time, the rising number of international students brings both opportunities and challenges to planning education. International students often enter with a high level of ambition and strong academic preparation, contributing fresh ideas and perspectives. However, integrating these students fully into the learning environment can be hindered by language barriers and difficulties in adapting to local planning contexts.

Influence of external factors

Finally, planning education does not exist in a vacuum – it is shaped by broader educational policies and market demands. There is an ongoing debate about the extent to which planning curricula should be oriented towards practical, market-relevant skills. While there is a need for graduates to be employable and responsive to market needs, it is equally important to ensure that education remains rigorous, backed with theory and comprehensive, equipping students with the critical thinking skills necessary to challenge existing structures and propose innovative solutions, not merely meet existing demands. The challenge, as Witte et al. (p. 21) highlight, lies in maintaining the integrative role of studio education within the curriculum while ensuring students remain knowledgeable of societal needs and transitions and are encouraged to explore how to address these.

5 TRANSITIONS IN PLANNING IMPACT / PRACTICE

This section will discuss how planning schools can create impact for and with planning practitioners. Echoing the historic close ties between planning theory and planning practice, we argue for an ongoing mutual relationship between planning schools and planning practice. Accordingly, knowledge transfer becomes a mutual responsibility of academics, practitioners and students, requiring a close involvement between the three (Van Karnenbeek et al., 2022). We would like to emphasise that this does not simply mean that planning schools operate purely at the service of society. Instead, we argue that planning schools can influence society by educating agents of change (see section 4) and initiating critical, groundbreaking research that questions the status quo (see section 3).

We will first explore the relationships between academics and practitioners, for which the NWO-led 'Recognition and Rewards'-scheme (Erkennen en Waarderen) is valuable. This scheme was embraced by all Dutch universities and proposes to diversify academic career paths, of which one concerns 'impact'. However, most universities have not (yet) defined a separate impact profile, because they argue that "academics should always generate impact in the domains of teaching and research" (e-magazine Recognition and Rewards, 2023). Some universities, though, have already developed distinct impact profiles for researchers and lecturers, which Dutch planning schools can use for inspiration. To illustrate, the Utrecht UMC typology makes a distinction between three types of researchers on a theory-practice continuum. The first type is a researcher that "addresses fundamental, translational or clinical questions in the field and is mainly curiosity-driven", seen in a strong track record of international academic publications and both individual and collaborative research grants. These researchers generate new theories, concepts and methodologies. The second type systematically studies the application of this knowledge, bringing knowledge into policy and practice domains: how do these fundamental theories, concepts and methodologies work in "real life conditions"? This researcher typically works more in collaborative research consortia with a transdisciplinary element. This type advances and refines theories, concepts and methodologies. The third type is concerned with the validation of knowledge, i.e. "to utilize the results in society at large" and provide reflections, evaluation and inspiration. This work is transdisciplinary by nature and involves a close alignment with the public and private sector, and civil society.

The typology developed above is used in the remainder of this chapter and translated to define three types of researchers and lecturers that could be adopted by Dutch planning schools.

For the relationship between planning researchers and planning practitioners, we can translate the three types of researchers to the planning domain (Table 1).

The first category are **exploratory researchers** who are working on “blue sky” research projects, developing new planning theories, concepts and methodologies. These researchers are firmly embedded in either the social sciences, design and architecture, or the environmental sciences, or a combination of them, depending on their affiliation. They manage larger research groups of junior and senior researchers, for which they obtain individual or collaborative research grants coming from, for instance, ERC, Horizon Europe and NWO. They have a strong track record of single-authored (or as first author) academic publications and books, and are considered leading voices in planning research (e.g. seen in conferences such as AESOP and RSA, or journals such as *Planning Theory and Environment and Planning*).

The second category are **implementation researchers** who apply the insights from the first category to “real life settings”. Here the mutual relationship between theory and practice prominently returns: theories, concepts and methodologies are used to understand, explain and support practice, while practice can refine theories, concepts and methodologies - or in some cases even debunk them. Such relationships are typically established in collaborative research consortia in which practitioners from the public and private sector participate, such as Horizon Europe, the EU DUT-partnership and NWO-KIC projects. Through this mutual relationship, new knowledge is advanced and validated. This type of researchers publish often in collaboration with others in high-quality academic publications.

The third category are **valorisation researchers**. Valorisation researchers are more embedded in practice, and they feed planning research into practice. They often start with questions from planning practice, either because they are (part-time) practitioners themselves, or because they have close ties with practitioners (public sector, private sectors, and/or community initiatives). In this category, planning research must have a direct value for further planning practice. As a consequence, valorisation researchers work on an equal basis together with practitioners in settings such as Urban Living Labs or related experimentation spaces. Valorisation researchers could also be involved in (formal) evaluations and advisory work. Instead of aiming at academic publications, this type of researcher is more likely to publish policy briefs, plan proposals, reports and evaluations that target a specific professional audience.

TABLE 1
Three types of planning
researchers.

	Exploratory researcher	Implementation researcher	Valorisation researcher
<i>Profile</i>	Fundamental, curiosity-driven planning research	Application of planning research to “real world settings”	Feeding planning research findings into planning practice
<i>Relationship with practice</i>	Practitioners at a distance, although research can be informed by planning challenges and practitioners	Practitioners collaborate with and inform research projects	Practitioners and researchers work as equal partners
<i>Examples</i>	Individual and collaborative research projects funded through ERC, NWO, Horizon Europe	Collaborative research projects funded through Horizon Europe, DUT Partnership (JPI Urban Europe), NWO-KIC, and EU Interreg	Urban Living Labs, consultation and advisory work, evaluations

For the relationship between planning educators and practitioners, planning schools should educate (public) planners that – following Tazan-Kok et al. (2016) – “float like a butterfly [and] sting like a bee”, who are “change makers, ideologists, community heroes, justice advocates, deliberative or reflective practitioners, dreamers” but equally “well-equipped bureaucrats or technocrats of some sort”. Similar to research, we make a distinction between three types of planning lecturers that promote different forms of impact (Table 2). This distinction is based on a continuum between more research-informed and practice-informed teaching.

First, **research-informed lecturers** help students to acquire theoretical and analytical concepts, as well as methodological skills that are required for the planning discipline (compare Alexander, 2001). Although Fainstein and DeFilippis (2016) observe that planning practitioners typically do not see the merits of planning theories, theory-heavy courses develop a critical and constructive attitude among students that helps them to scrutinise underlying assumptions, values and needs in planning practitioners. Furthermore, methodology-heavy courses help students to independently conduct scientific research and either explain or understand contemporary planning phenomena. Lecturers who provide these research-informed courses are generally speaking firmly embedded in research, therefore well-able to share theoretical concepts and methodologies first-hand.

Second, students learn to employ theoretical and methodological concepts, tools and competences in real-life settings, for which **theory-practice lecturers** are crucial. These lecturers are able to link the theoretical and methodological debates with the grand societal challenges. In their courses on contemporary issues such as climate change, rising inequalities and the housing crisis, students learn to relate and apply those concepts to real-life cases and challenges. At the same time, students learn in these courses about existing planning frameworks that condition the sphere of action. Accordingly, they develop a better understanding of planning implementation and they develop competences that allow them to operate in complex, sometimes contradictory legal settings (Buitelaar, 2024). For instance, the most notable current example entails the execution of the Dutch Environment and Planning Act, which has been formally enforced since January 2024. Developing this ‘implementation competence’ cannot simply be achieved through desk research, but requires close involvement between students and practitioners to let students experience the problems first-hand. Finally, as the essay by Joks Jansen and Van Asseldonk underscores, planners have to be aware of the historical morphological and institutional structures that have led to the current situation (in their case the Dutch water management system).

Third, **practice-informed lecturers** help students to gain direct planning practice experience in various ways, as demonstrated with current studio work conducted by students at different Dutch planning schools (see the essay by Witte et al. for an overview). This form of education can be agenda-setting: new visions or plans developed by students can raise attention to certain issues and underscore the urgency. As research-by-design projects have shown, sometimes only years later such exercises return in actual planning projects of governments and consultancies. Furthermore, students can produce support to both ‘planning-literate’ and planning-illiterate communities. To illustrate, communities and NGOs that lack planning skills can gain from interacting with planning students, who can provide legal support and write plans. Another example are thesis hubs, in which master theses are brought together and translated into concrete advice for (local) actors. By doing projects such as master thesis research in collaboration with professionals in practice, students can also create new relationships between stakeholders that may be continued after the project has ended.

Taken together, the three types of planning lecturers help planning schools to deliver students that are able to navigate fragmented governance landscapes and apply deliberative and communicative planning skills. Planners do not merely strive for consensus, but act as agents of change. Consequently, the new generation of planners should have mastered the skills of good judgement (*phronesis*), i.e. the thoughtfulness and ability to express the collective interest (Alexander, 2001). More specifically, they should be able to do so with a clear

future orientation (a long-term, strategic outlook) in which future developments are taken into account, most notably climate change (Pelzer, 2021; essay Witte et al). For this, several authors have pleaded for more visioning exercises (e.g. Hemel, 2021; Buitelaar, 2024; and see section 4).

TABLE 2
Three types of planning lecturers.

	Research-informed education	'Theory-practice' education	Practice-informed education
<i>Focus in planning education</i>	Theoretical and analytical concepts; methodological tools and skills	Courses on societal challenges (e.g. climate change, mobility, energy, housing); courses on planning frameworks and practical settings	Learning that is based in practice (also referred to as 'Society-based education', 'challenge-based learning')
<i>Relationship with practice</i>	Showcasing how theories, concepts and methodologies help to understand planning practice	Mutual relationship between theory and practice: application of theory, and practice informing theory	Real-life examples; commissioned work; production of visions, plans etc
<i>Examples</i>	Planning theory courses, methodology courses.	Domain-specific courses on e.g. mobility, housing, infrastructure, climate, participation	Studio work; Projects commissioned by external 'clients' (public or private parties, community groups, NGOs, etc); Assignments (visioning, plan-making)

6 CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIONS

The aim of this final chapter was to synthesise insights from the essays in this series, which explored the role of planning in societal and environmental transitions, alongside reflections gathered during a workshop with planning professors from the planning schools in the Netherlands. Together, they revealed three shared themes that not only frame the current state of the discipline but also present some takeaways and directions for its future.

The essays collectively emphasise the **interplay between continuity and change**, underscoring the need for planning to innovate while retaining its core competencies. Innovation is essential to tackle pressing challenges such as climate adaptation, housing crises, and energy transitions. At the same time, planning must preserve fundamental skills like spatial coordination, stakeholder engagement, and strategic visioning. Planning is traditionally

concerned about the spatial redistribution of resources and risks. Nowadays, the foregrounding of values such as equity, inclusivity, and sustainability is increasingly important in both planning practice, research and education. Planning schools are uniquely positioned to operate at the intersection of technical expertise and value-driven decision-making.

However, this balancing act is challenging. Transitions are not merely procedural or technical adjustments; they demand a fundamental rethinking of societal values and readiness for change, which underscores the inherent political nature of planning. Similarly, these transitions demonstrate the critical need for long-term visioning (see also the essay by Witte et al.). Long-term perspectives ensure that planning does not merely react to immediate crises but instead anticipates and prepares for systemic change. Embedding long-term visioning into education requires planners to critically interrogate values – such as justice, equity, and sustainability – and align these with strategies for a future that is resilient and inclusive. Without such visioning, transitions risk being reduced to short-term fixes that neglect the deeper societal transformations required.

A second recurring theme is the **importance of looking beyond borders** in the broadest sense. Geographically, international perspectives in education enrich planning practices, exposing students to diverse approaches and methodologies. Interdisciplinary collaboration fosters a more holistic understanding of complex urban and regional challenges. Yet, in a political climate marked by inward-looking tendencies, maintaining an outward orientation becomes increasingly difficult – and even more essential. Additionally, integrating community and local knowledge, as well as working with people from various backgrounds, challenges the traditional boundaries of (technical) planning expertise. This requires planners to adopt participatory approaches that co-define sources of knowledge and expertise, and subsequently co-create solutions with communities. These (again) value-driven approaches may be politically uncomfortable but are indispensable for fostering inclusive and transformative planning.

A third observation is the ongoing call to **bridge the divide between practice, research, and education**. While practice often demands actionable solutions, academic research takes a more critical and reflective stance, offering the necessary space to explore values and question established paradigms. Planning schools must embrace this dual role: facilitating transitions in practice while simultaneously reflecting upon and challenging the status quo. Education serves as a crucial link in this ecosystem. It not only prepares planners to address immediate practical challenges but also integrates new insights from research to ensure relevance and innovation. Collaborative approaches that engage communities and practitioners strengthen this link, ensuring education

remains grounded in societal needs while retaining its academic responsibility to the long-term.

These three observations lead to two broader reflections on the state and future of the planning discipline:

The evolution of planning reflects its **maturity as a discipline**. In its early stages, planning was predominantly practice-driven, with a focus on immediate applications. Over time, incorporating academic and critical debates has allowed the discipline to broaden, reflected in the diverse profiles among educators and researchers we find today (cf. Table 1 and 2). This diversity reflects the discipline's capacity to address both practical transitions and critical scientific inquiry. Dutch planning schools now have the opportunity to define their unique approaches, balancing these roles and demonstrating the discipline's adaptability and relevance to address the challenges brought forward by the transitions. Yet, after the abandonment of the Dutch Ministry of Spatial Planning in 2010, we have seen a lot of "soul searching" among planning researchers and practitioners. What makes spatial planning a distinct discipline from other professional and academic disciplines that work on the built environment is the integrative character of linking land-use claims with each other, combining substantive knowledge and procedural expertise. We consider it especially important to highlight this position and by doing so, claiming back a seat at the table. This is especially important now that also politically, the role of planning and the spatial future of the Netherlands is again a priority, illustrated by the re-establishment of the Ministry.

A final reflection relates to the concept of "**transitions**", which risks becoming a buzzword, detached from the complexities it embodies. True transitions are not linear or reducible to simple steps; they also demand engagement with societal values and an ongoing dialogue about how to prepare for systemic change. Not every change qualifies as a transition: it requires shifts that challenge existing structures, practices, or norms. We must be careful with labelling all forms of change and developments as a transition. Overusing the term can dilute its meaning and create unrealistic expectations. By reserving the label for changes with significant societal, institutional, or relational implications, planners can maintain clarity about the extent and implications of changes and how to respond to them.

We conclude that the Dutch planning schools will play a dual role in contemporary social and environmental transitions: on the one hand, facilitating and supporting professionals and communities with practical concepts, tools and methods; and, on the other hand, reflecting upon (approaches to) these transitions and their underlying values through rigorous scientific work. Both roles could often work as complementary to each other,

but may equally be conflicting at some points. Hence, we have proposed a diversification of researcher and lecturer profiles which does not only account for the heterogeneous roles present in Dutch planning schools, but also keeps the planning schools relevant for research, education and practice.

Considering the variety of transitions in the Netherlands presented in this book, we can conclude that transitions require investment in planners' way of knowing and working, looking back and looking forward, in a context where long term change is necessary and inevitable. Whether this investment in knowledge and capabilities is done in planning schools or in practice through learning-by-doing, the field of spatial planning continues to adapt to the new challenges our society faces. The case studies in this book illustrate that the Netherlands is not in a "final planned stage," but a dynamic system where people and the landscape interact continuously, (re)shaping, managing, and adapting it over time.

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