Between expectations and reality: self-narration of the planning profession among selected Polish groups of students and professionals. The voice from Poznań

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Abstract. Strategies for teaching and practising the planning profession have been discussed in the literature for a few decades in what looks like a never-ending story. Nevertheless, this debate is now more important than ever. It seems that planning education and the profession of planners may be a key link in stopping negative changes on the Earth in the 21st century. The article aims to recognize the self-narration of those in planning education and the planning profession in one of the educational hubs of planning in Poland, namely, Poznań. From the perspective of planners' self-narratives, during five focus group interviews, it transpires that the visions and requirements of the contemporary planning profession as presented in the literature are not always easy to implement in practice (*Note*).

Contents:

1. Introduction

The questions of who a planner is and what role a planner should play in society are not new (Wojtowicz, 1997; Sandercoc, 1999; Guzzetta & Bollens, 2003; Lorens, 2008; Grange, 2017), but they may require current, perhaps redefined answers. Not only Budge (2009) has looked at the process of developing planning skills and education as a never-ending story (Staszewska, Szczepańska, 2013). The discussion on acquiring planning competencies and building the professional identity of planners is not only interesting in academic discussion, but also pragmatically important (Słodczyk et al., 2013; Jewtuchowicz & Rzeńca, 2013). The contemporary planning profession increasingly transcends local and regional specificities, and its teaching and practice is beginning to be linked to universal values for human and more-than-human beings. The planning profession is becoming important, perhaps even crucial, to the future of humans on the planet (Low, 2020). Hence, the discussion of the profession and teaching–learning approaches (Cilliers, 2019) are becoming more relevant than ever from a global perspective. In the present world, the professional roles performed by planners in different regions of the world are connected by a network of, perhaps unconscious, common and universal contents, requirements and duties (Gzell, 2013; Blazy, 2019). Reflecting on the teaching–learning approach in planning studies and discussing the practice of the planning profession in different regions of the world has a wider, universal context, e.g. for the creation of university curricula and the setting of cross-local requirements for the roles undertaken by planners in different corners of the globe. At the end of the 20th century, Albrechts pointed out that planners should be treated "as catalysts and as initiators of change" (Albrechts, 1999: 601). However, Kunzmann drafted a "scenario of two quite different concepts of planning education: a global, more theoretical concept aiming at advancing knowledge in the field, and a regional, more professional one which strives for better local and regional life spaces in a globalizing world, dominated by global markets and a global value system" (Kunzmann, 1999: 549).

So two questions arise: what self-identification do contemporary planners have? How do they acquire such an identity?

The research and article aim, within the context of a discussion of the international literature, is to learn the qualitative views of planning students and the opinions of planning professionals on their expectations towards the education and profession of planning. This is the voice originating from Poznan,

Poland, based on qualitative research (Lincoln, & Guba 1985; Sandelowski 1995; Creswell & Poth 2019). To achieve this goal, I conducted a series of group interviews, the purpose of which was to document a kind of dynamic of changes in attitudes and opinions of interested parties in successive stages of the planningstudies. In this paper I present the views of first-, third- and fifth-year students of planning at Adam Mickiewicz University (Motek, 2013; Parysek, 2017) and practitioners in the planning profession who worked in and around Poznań.

2. Theoretical background

The discussion of the role of planners, their scope of knowledge, skills and experience, how planning students should be educated and the type of skills they should possess is well established in world literature and has continued for a long time (Teitz, 1984; Churski, 2013; Staszewska & Szczepańska, 2013; Słodczyk et al., 2013; Penpecioğlu & Taşan-Kok, 2016; Lewis & Nel, 2020).

When discussing the knowledge of future planners and their professional activities, as early as the 1980s, researchers signalled that obtaining education as a planner leads not only to traditional employment in Land Use Planning, but also opens up opportunities to work in the then non-traditional understanding of the profession in "economic and community development, environmental planning, and health." (Glasmeier & Kahn, 1989: 5). According to scholars, the planner was not so much obliged to possess technocratic and bureaucratic traits as to more explicitly develop their soft competencies, becoming a public servant, referee, advocate, social learner, social reformer or stage agent (Gunton, 1984). In the following years, this conviction was strengthened or even developed in the direction of an increasing opening of the planner to social issues and citizens as subjective partners (Dear, 1986; Beauregard, 1989). Innes, similarly to Albrechts (1999), wrote that "Planners, who are typically between the public and bureaucracy, need capabilities of boundary spanning, mediating, learning, and inventing" (Innes, 1997: 227). The turn-of-the-century planner was required to have "unique capabilities", and post-modern planning was preparing "to meet uncertainty" (Innes, 1997: 227; Thomson, 1999: 126).

The participatory turn has opened up planning in many regions of the world to bottom-up action and citizen involvement. The planning profession in many countries has increasingly become

a profession that is interactive, communicative and open to social and environmental problems (Sager, 2009; Siemiński, 2016). The following decades of the 21st century began to bring new social, political and environmental challenges highlighting the importance of planning and the role of social actors (Karki, 2017; Grant, 2019). According to some researchers, the growth of civic awareness and activity in the area of bottom-up planning at the turn of the 21st century have been accompanied by a crisis of trust in planning institutions (Swain & Tait, 2007). The literature notes that "trust is essential to the work of planners – without trust, all will collapse – and theory and observations support that claim" (Talvitie, 2011: 268).

Given the complexities of modern planning and the variety of challenges it faces (Young, 2008; McGreevy, 2017; Jon, 2019), the array of unique capabilities that the modern planner should possess is not narrowing at all. On the contrary, it can be said that the scientific and technological knowledge we are expanding, the evolving civic maturity acquired by successive social groups and the growing awareness that we are just one of many beings on this planet mean that the range of professional skills of the contemporary planner is expanding or evolving.

Additionally, the digital turn and new digital technologies have equipped both the researcher and the planning practitioner with highly accurate yet spectacular tools for collecting and analysing socio-spatial data (Batty, 2012, 2013). Perhaps the ease of obtaining certain data and information through the use of digital technologies and the spectacularity of the results sometimes overshadow the social demands of the profession, particularly in the context of the currently popular idea of smart cities (Caragliu et al., 2011; Szymańska, 2023).

Undoubtedly, the roles that the future holds for the planner are difficult to predict. Hence and Rydin (2007) notes that the contemporary planner is even a co-producer of knowledge.

The role of the contemporary planner can provoke internal tensions arising from the conflicting nature of sub-roles. A planner has to be a critical observer and a proactive participant, an independent thinker and an open-minded co-operator, a professional focused on local issues and aware of global changes, a pragmatist and a visionary. Despite these dilemmas, the planner is becoming a potentially very important link between our complex present and hope for the future on Earth, and perhaps beyond it.

However, these important postulates formulated by researchers may turn out to be idealistic visions of the planner's profession in the context of the social, political and economic specificity of particular "planning cultures". Penpecioğlu and Taşan-Kok write:

"Authoritarian and neoliberal urban policies instrumentalize planning practice, prioritize profit-oriented projects over long-term master plans, and impose legislation or use other forms of coercion to eliminate those who act in opposition, and their urban movements, protests and lawsuits" (Penpecioğlu & Taşan-Kok, 2016: 1049).

Researchers summarize their study by writing, among other things: "planners feel alienated from planning practice in several ways when they face interventions into their work and expert decisions ..." and "the young planners developed diverse feelings that confirm the alienation argument (powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement)".

In the context of these observations, I decided to repeat the questions posed from time to time by researchers (Glasmeier & Kahn, 1989; Sandercock, 1999; Guzzetta & Bollens, 2003) and look for answers in the planning community of Poznań (Parysek & Rogacki, 1996; Rogacki, 2006; Motek, 2013; Parysek, 2017).

3. Method

The empirical study was conducted in the first half of 2021. I decided to conduct qualitative research using the Focus Group Interview (FGI) method (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). I wanted to look for answers in profiled group talks. All Focus Group Interviews were conducted by me in a rented professional studio for this type of research. In total, I conducted five interviews focused on the topic of the profession and identity of the spatial planner (see Table 1). Three focus groups consisted of students of Planning at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Two focus groups consisted of professionals in the planning profession with a minimum of five years of work experience in different planning institutions. All participants were recruited by a certified external company from among those studying or working in Poznań or the surrounding municipalities. Transcripts of group interviews were anonymized and analyzed using the NViVo qualitative analysis program. In this way, all the topics discussed by the respondents and their representative quotes were selected.

Table 1. Participant structure of Focus Group Interviews, and their codes

Type	Participants	Code
Group of six 1st-year students of planning (Bachelor level)	Three female and three male participants	**GI;** subsequent digits **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6** - of a particular FGI participant; declared gender status - **F, M** - Female, Male
Group of six 3rd-year students of planning	Three female and three male participants	**GIII;** subsequent digits **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6** - of a particular FGI participant Declared gender status - **F, M** - Female, Male
Group of six 1st-year Masters students of planning (i.e., 5th year)	Three female and three male participants	**GV;** subsequent digits **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6** - of a particular FGI participant Declared gender status - **F, M** - Female, Male
Group of six professionals I, 5 or more years' experience	Six female participants	**Gpro;** subsequent digits **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6** - of a particular FGI participant; Declared gender status - **F**, Female
Group of six professionals II, 5 or more years' experience	Six male participants	**Gpro;** subsequent digits **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6** - of a particular FGI participant; Declared gender status - **M**, Male

Source: own compilation

4. Results 1: Expectations as to the role of the planner and planning: the voice of students of Planning

Associations with the planning profession, awareness of distinctiveness

In many of the statements, there was a connection between planning and architecture. Architecture and the architect's profession are clearly recognized by the public. Furthermore, the architect's profession in Poland is seen as a creative, socially useful and financially interesting profession. In simple terms, the architect has a high social standing. This is likely why, very often in the discussion, students referred to the similarity of planning and architecture and built an image of a planner's work in reference to this profession:

I was very interested in spatial management, planning, and I wanted to go in that direction. My primary choice was architecture, but I didn't get in. When I graduate from planning, I will definitely still want to graduate in architecture. It's more prestigious. (GV_2_F).

Therefore, I asked how my interviewees, students of planning, described their major and future profession when talking to their friends from outside their studies and to families. The architectural narrative reappeared in the responses of students embarking on the planning adventure:

It's hard to explain to my family what I'm studying. They don't know what planning or spatial management is. I tell my relatives it's like being an urban architect.

This seems to be the most popular association and it satisfies those who ask. I am to design space in the future. (GI_2_M).

Another person from the same group of respondents confirmed the architectural associations of planning studies:

My mom still doesn't know, six months later, what exactly I'm studying. I tell her it's a combination of architecture and urban planning, with a little bit of law studies in it. "So who are you going to be one day?" Mom asks. "Architect?" "Partially yes, partially no. It's hard to say. But I guess I don't know myself." (GI_1_F).

What is also significant in the above statement is the final confusion of my interlocutor and her uncertainty as to how she should explain who the planner is and what she does. All first-year students participating in the study agreed with this observation and emphasized their great embarrassment in explaining who they would be in the future.

During the FGI with third-year students, one of them tried to explain this kind of confusion as follows:

As for the planner in Polish conditions, let me say that they have no recognition and people do not know who we are. I don't really know either. I didn't know about the existence of such a profession before, and most of my family members didn't either. In Poland, planning is still at such a stage that the planner is associated with prohibiting investment projects, banning, taking away rights. I fear that this perception of the planning profession is pejorative. (GIII_1_M).

Perhaps understandably, in the higher years of study, the narratives of the planning profession held by students change. The question arises, however, as to the direction in which this vision is evolving. Is the planner, in the opinion of older students, a visionary, an activist, a leader of change in a more holistic sense or, rather, an engineering-thinking designer of specific public spaces?

I'm always asked by my family what I'm doing at university. I say something very general, like: "Gran, you get a big plot of land and you have to design blocks of flats, shops, parks. So that you can have a good life." (GIII_3_F).

From the words quoted, it appears that planning becomes clearer during later years of studies, though it is identified with activity relating to local projects.

This vision of the planning profession is *de facto* repeated in the opinion of other third-year students participating in the research:

I give the example that someone plans to build their house in a certain place and would rather not find out in a few years, when the house is ready, that an expressway is running through the same location. Our profession is to prevent such situations. To create a strategy for the development of space so that the interests of different people do not interfere with each other. (GIII_2_M).

Fifth-year students respond with high confidence that they are planners or urban planners. It is often obvious to them that they will work in the city and shape the city space. Most often they claim that, as planners, they will either design specific places or be responsible for city systems, e.g. transport or services:

I always answer that my profession is related to space planning, city plans, building conditions and organizing the city. That's the formulation I give and it works. (GV_5_M).

However, it is interesting to note that also the graduating students, during longer and more open conversations, admitted after some time that they were still confused and hesitant about their professional background. One respondent said:

Even now, I'm not sure I made the right choice. Why planning? Because I wanted to expand my abilities and horizons. SM seemed like the most attractive of alternative to me, but in my fifth year I feel more confused than confident. I don't know if I have broadened my horizons of knowledge. (GV_3_M).

His words immediately provoked another FGI participant to elaborate on the theme:

We have broad, albeit superficial knowledge. I had a lot of different subjects at university, but I can hardly say that I am an expert in anything. I think that I still don't feel what planning is. Not that I can't do anything, but it's so very broad. We need to have knowledge of transport, know what green systems look like, how local government works, economic science, social science. This is super complex. It involves the collaboration of multiple professionals. What lies ahead is not a one-man job.

It's a team effort, an exchange of ideas. These different perspectives need to come together. And my share? Well ... not exactly ... Being in the third year, I was starting to feel that planning is a huge subject area. I felt like I fell into a deep ocean and I don't know what's going on. (GV_1_F).

On the one hand, in the quoted words there is a noticeable professionalization of thinking about the planning profession; on the other hand, there is still apparent perplexity and confusion in identifying the object of professional interest.

Usefulness of knowledge learned at university

During interviews with third- and fifth-year students, a particularly sensitive topic was the usefulness of the knowledge they were acquiring during their education. Studying planning allows one to explore different areas of knowledge and have intellectual encounters with different academic disciplines. How did my interviewees comment on their experiences with different subjects and courses? One participant in the study summed up her three years of study:

The first year was typically theoretical: sociology, law, economics. The second was practical, but on the technical side, i.e. computer programs, urban drawing. I remember spending my entire second year in front of a computer. In the third year, there were only subjects such as property management, planning at the local level; ones that make sense. And it wasn't until the third year that anyone understood what planning was all about. Then, we learned about these professional subjects. I preferred subjects that were concrete, that taught something. Such areas of knowledge as sociology, philosophy, psychology are not very concrete and not very useful things in planning. It's such a "what if" ... (GIII_4_F).

The statement leaves no doubt as to what my interviewee is most interested in. The most expected subjects are very specific and give tool-like knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, e.g. creating a specific plan for a specific public space, using a specific computer program, acquiring practical knowledge about real-estate management.

In a meeting with fifth-year students, the topic of academic or social knowledge also came up. One respondent noted that:

Humanistic or social knowledge is intriguing, but in my opinion, for us planners, it is completely unnecessary. (GV_5_M).

This statement was expanded on by other FGI participants:

Apparently, we should know how people behave, but that's not really in our purview when it comes to planning. (GV_3_M).

They also noted that they see a gap between academic knowledge that often relates to general, generic issues and pragmatic actions that come down to specific places:

I remember that during many subjects we talked about relationships, theories, concepts, and actually in planning we do such ordinary everyday things and these theories are unnecessary. There is a gap between these theories and correlations and our actions. (GIII_2_M).

In this case, in the interviews conducted with third- and fifth-year respondents, there was a singular voice that was quite different:

In my opinion, for example, philosophy should be among the most important subjects, and not only in planning, but in every university. It may not have a direct bearing on decision-making or space management, but to understand what you're doing, philosophy is essential. (GIII_5_M).

On the other hand, this person, noting the role of, for instance, philosophy, in shaping something of the intellectual spine of the future planner, stated that the course in glaciology was a big surprise and probably useless knowledge:

These general developmental basics sometimes turn out to be misplaced. I still remember the 10 types of glaciers we had to learn by heart. I'm afraid I won't use it. (GIII_5_M).

However, it must be acknowledged that this last statement and the bringing up of the topic of the environment caused an immediate reaction in the group:

Environmental protection, architecture, city planning, green design or economics. These seem to be essential topics for us as planners. (GIII_2_M).

Job prospects after graduation

My interviewees in the focus groups had vague beliefs about what they will or would like to do after college. Research participants recruited from the first year outlined very broad perspectives:

> I thought I was going to work in an office somewhere after SM. Maybe it's my temporary belief that this major will open many doors and opportunities for me. You can do a lot after 3D modelling. If I learn it, maybe it will be some way. (GI_1_F).

They also considered that planning does not have to be their future profession:

> I'm not wondering if I'll be working in the profession after completing this major. I didn't have a strongly defined direction that I wanted to go in. I wanted to go to university and graduate in something. If something doesn't work out for me along the way, I won't worry about that either. It's hard to determine if I will work in this profession. We'll see! We have great opportunities after completing this major. (GI_3_F).

One would expect that in subsequent focus groups, among older students, visions of the profession would be more defined. However, even in these conversations, one could feel the dilemmas of my interlocutors. The split of the respondents resulted, on the one hand, from the fact that they encountered the everyday reality of the planning profession and the negative image of specific activities or tasks during the internships:

> In my third year, I had some vague and unclear idea. As I was talking to a colleague who was doing an internship in a smaller town and he was used by the ladies in the office to pick up strawberries from the street market. I have such a not-so-pleasant picture when it comes to small towns and jobs in this profession. In Poznań, it is completely different. I went there to arrange the internship and where I was, it all looked so professional. (GIII_3_F).

On the other hand, they confronted their knowledge gained at university and their ideas about certain professions with the experience of older colleagues who had already worked in the profession:

> A year ago, the idea of facility management came to me, but recently I talked to some friends who had graduated from planning and were real-estate agents

and I changed my mind. Now again I have no idea. (GIII_2).

Participants in my interviews who are graduating from the university were still unsure about their professional future, but they also looked back on their college years with summative reflection. On the one hand, they drew attention to the multiplicity of specific fields of planning activity in which they had not fully acquired a specialization:

> Planning is huge, it's about transport, logistics, the environment. Because of this, maybe we don't feel very confident, because we don't have any specialization, any place where we feel more confident than in other planning categories. (GV_5_M).

On the other hand, their conversations during the study evidenced an internal split between their desires to work in teams with the potential to influence the direction of social development, and the day-to-day administrative work they were likely to end up in:

> I thought that after college I would be a visionary and shape new space. I'd love for it to be that way, but after university, it looks ordinary. Daily administrative decisions. I feel that what we are taught at university is a delusion, an ideal or wishful image. On the one hand, one would like to do things one enjoys, that make life better, that change the modern world for the better, and on the other hand, it's nice to have money in your wallet to live on. And you choose to work in an office. I would like to set up a foundation or an association and work on improving the quality of space and life in the city. (GV_1_F).

5. Results 2: Expectations of the role of the planner and planning: the voice of the professionals

Associations with the planning profession, awareness of distinctiveness

When asked about associations with the planning profession, the respondents pointed out that in Poland it is a somewhat unrecognised occupation among the public and that it certainly cannot be considered a profession:

> We, of course, can think of associations with the planner. We practice this profession. However, among the public, this occupation has neither ethos nor recognition. The closest thing to it is an architect. It

is not a profession that is recognized at all. Although the footprints in space are everywhere. (GPro_2_M).

Perhaps, according to what was said in the discussion, it is even a term that can have a pejorative connotation:

The direct role of the planner is very minor in the life of the average resident and, if anything, they will remember him as a clerk. Most often as an official who forbids something and restricts social activities. It is a representative of the authorities. (Gpro_3_M).

According to the interviews, in the vast majority of cases, the contact between the resident and the planner is related mainly to the situation when a citizen comes to the city office and applies for the issuance of development conditions or other permits for activities in the public space. Another, much rarer case of contact with the planner is in the situation of new developments and related public consultations. According to my interlocutors, this may result either from unfamiliarity with the planning profession or from the conviction that the planner is a representative of the authorities, administering an area on their behalf. As a result, if a resident already associates the profession of the planner with anything, these associations are rather negative.

One of the female interlocutors pointed out that due to such "clerical" connotations, this occupation does not enjoy social trust.

There is widespread thinking that planning is not a profession of public trust. I think people believe the planner takes something away from them rather than creating space for them to live in. (Gpro_4_F).

In the opinion of my interlocutors, top-down and constantly changing legal regulations and the practice of this occupation limit it to an uncreative and clerical role:

The occupation is unappreciated due to constant changes in planning and building regulations, most often in line with the thinking of the current political arrangement. This diminishes the role of planners and treats them as clerks. Their factual knowledge is irrelevant in practice because decisions are often off the mark. (Gpro_3_F).

The research also noted that the planning profession had a specific and positive ethos in Poland in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. At the time,

socialist authorities were careful to publicize large housing projects, and architects and planners were the focus of socialist propaganda:

In my view, the planner is associated in Poland with the grand designs of the communist housing estates of the 1960s. At the time, the profession also had an ethos. They were people who changed the world for the better and made a difference in the lives of residents. Large housing projects were publicized on the radio, in the press, and later on television. The planners were said to have created a housing development for thousands of residents. People associated the planner with this activity. (Gpro_5_F).

Usefulness of studies in the planning profession

For the respondents working in the profession, university was a rather distant memory. In their conversation with me, they did not refer to specific subjects or detailed knowledge but summarized a period of studies in their lives from a more generalizing perspective. One focus research participant (a planning graduate) noted that this was a very disappointing time in his life because it was dominated by vocational subjects:

University in general for me was the downfall of my ideals. It alone changed my perception of the planning profession. I thought university would be a total explosion of my growth. My knowledge would expand into all sorts of other areas that I had been curious about. It turned out that I actually gained more information on my own than I did during my studies. Now, years later, maybe I would think about history or architecture but not planning. Planning studies stripped me of my imagination and tried to force me into practicing the profession. (Gpro_3_M).

This was quite a characteristic opinion for the FGI participants who were recruited from among planning graduates. In the group of women, too, the discussion of this topic triggered vivid memories.

Right after university, I was going through a huge crisis of my professional identity. Everyday life turned out to be gray, and work was a limbo between the implementation of the authorities' decisions and the residents' resentment. (Gpro_1_F).

Another participant in this meeting elaborated on the theme of disillusionment after the studies:

Yes, I had the same. For me, the first few years after university were very disappointing. I felt very disappointed because the studies were interesting, developing and gave us very specific detailed knowledge, and when I started working, everyday life and professional life was a shock. It's not that inspiring or interesting. Multiple administrative decisions and the work of an official. (Gpro_2_F).

In this context, the statement of the research participant who graduated from a non-planning-related university was quite different. The man entered planning after studying history and planning courses taken in the UK. After returning to Poland, he took up planning professionally and set up his own company. He said:

I'm currently comfortable with what I'm doing and passionate about it. I have a say in where and how things are built. I am really humble. My professional planning knowledge is more limited than that of someone graduating with a specialist degree in planning. Especially in terms of different tools. But my knowledge of history, urban development and societies plus my knowledge of management and leading a team of planners provide opportunities to shape the future. (Gpro_2_M).

6. Conclusions

The expectations of the planner sketched on the basis of the introduction and my discussion of the literature appeared to be that the planner should be a leader and protagonist of their time, implementing requirements important from the perspective of the future of humanity and the planet. At the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, we already know that these requirements were not exaggerated. The modern world requires much more care than we expected a few decades ago, and the planning profession can provide that care and promote it in society (Churski, 2013; Tobolska, 2013). The above-mentioned attributes of the planner become not only a scientific vision of practicing the profession but a necessity. The discussion of educational pathways for planning and the daily work of the planner is becoming an important topic of international scientific debates, especially in the context of environmental changes and threats (e.g., climate) and consequent social changes (e.g., migration).

The focus group interviews I conducted and the statements selected and quoted lead, on the one hand, to regional or local conclusions describing an example of "planning culture" in a still developing society. On the other hand, however, they may provoke general conclusions and reveal the pitfalls hidden in the teaching–learning approach and the implementation of the planning profession in general, in a global context.

What observations come out of my research? The planner's educational development trajectory and type of professional and social identity, sketched on the basis of the group interviews, differ quite markedly from the image presented in the theoretical requirements in the literature (see Table 2).

This conclusion consists of the following observations:

- The period before undertaking planning studies among my interlocutors can be called a time of practically complete ignorance about planning and the professional role of a planner. This conclusion comes both from conversations with first-year students and from opinions expressed by older students and professionals. On the basis of these conversations, it can be concluded that planning and the planning profession are "socially invisible" in the Polish reality.
- The first year of studies, in the opinion of the respondents, is a time of hope and expectation that vocational and tool-related subjects will appear in the following years of studies. My interlocutors developed the feeling that general subjects about society, law or economics are an interesting way of filling the time of their studies, but also that they are not very useful,
- The third year of studies is when my interlocutors acquire concrete, tool-like skills for operating graphic programs, architectural designing or building spatial development plans. This experience begins to create in them a belief in the very practical and operational nature of the planning profession. At that time, they also become convinced that their future work will be connected with functioning in administration at various levels, from local and self-government to central and supra-national, e.g. in EU insititutions.
- The end of the studies sees, on the one hand, the conviction about the professional and usually clerical character of the future profession, and on the other hand, opinions showing the dilemmas related to the usefulness of this profession.

Table 2. Development of professional self-identity among researched group of students and professionals: comparison between the FGIs results and the requirements presented in the global literature

Perception of planning profession by FGI's participants	Theoretical requirements by literature	First year of planning studies (bachelor degree)	Third year of planning studies (bachelor degree)	First year of planning studies (master degree)	Professionals About time after graduation	Professionals about time five years and more after study
labels of profession	initiators of change	socially invisible	pragmatic solutions and tools	mentally resigned students of last year of education	disappointed graduates	Professionals In-between;
attitudes	ready to meet uncertainty	open for scientific journey and ready to meet knowledge	ready to specialize and focus on pragmatic tools	full of hesitations and doubts about his own professional identity	disappointment of ordinary jobs	natural conformism: between expectations of the authorities, politicians, investors and citizens
attributes	• unique capabilities, • leader of change, • visionary, • open for action, • understanding of planning as paradigm of social, political and eco changes	• hopeful, • having the unspecified • different expectations, • without clear image of planner profession	•turning to planning tools, •urban design planning, •planning specific investments on a micro scale		• meaninglessness, • vulnerability, • indecisiveness,	• pragmatism, • links with the interests of the authorities, • clerical and administrative duties, • local micro scale designing

Source: own research

Conversations with the planners working in the profession bring further conclusions. According to them, professional activity in planning leads to the following reflections:

- The time of transition between the period of planning studies and the reality of practicing the profession is more a period of crisis of professional identity than the next stage of a planner's development as a leader and innovator efficiently influencing the surrounding reality. After graduation, there is a shock connected with the fact that the actions of a planner are very limited by the decisions of the authorities and the existing and constantly changing law.
- Cognitive dissonance is reported between the knowledge and skills acquired at university and the uncreative and administrative nature of the work,
- It is pointed out that the planner is very often entangled in cooperation with the authorities and representing the interests of those in power, thus becoming a helpless executor of certain decisions rather than the author of ideas improving the quality of life,
- According to the respondents, the public perception of the role of the planner among people who can recognize this profession is characterized by a lack of trust. In the course of social contacts, a planner is perceived as a person who can take something away (e.g., land) or prohibit (e.g., construction) and who issues administrative decisions.

In the words of my interlocutors, the planner is an occupation not only lacking social ethos or social recognition but even characterized by negative associations – a person who makes decisions against the will of the public or against social interests. It is an activity entangled in political relations. Finally, it is a profession associated more with clerical decisions about space than a job with an impact on social, economic and environmental development in a broader context.

The views and opinions expressed by the participants of the group interviews lead to the conclusion that the educational path and the performance of the professional role of the planner may provoke the formation of many identity deficits. In different regions of the world, the pragmatic role of the planner may diverge from the demands placed on the profession in the academic literature, as well as the challenges of the modern world (Low, 2020). The requirement "think globally, act locally" (Geddes, 1915; Collier, Löfsted, 1997), which has

been known for decades and was very popular in the 1990s (Geddes, 1915; Collier & Löfstedt, 1997), may in different regions of the world still have insufficient influence on the teaching–learning approach in planning. Sometimes a clear shift in the narrative of the profession is needed so that students and practitioners of the profession can coherently answer the question of who we are – social leaders, urban designers or vulnerable planning clerks influenced by politicians (Lorens, 2008; Karki, 2017; Matamanda, 2021). The answer to this question now has a very global context, and planners and planning have many common challenges.

Note - Study Limitations

The article is a qualitative study. The perspective adopted in the study is a sociological (largely phenomenological) look at the expectations and realities of practicing the planning profession in the context of the international literature. This is one of the possible research perspectives, but not the only one. The text should be a voice in the discussion. Qualitative results are intended to highlight certain issues. The aim of the article is not to make generalizations. The proposed topic and perspective can be and, in my opinion, should be developed in other qualitative studies (IDI and FGI), but also in quantitative studies (e.g., questionnaire survey) and from the perspective of other Polish research centers.

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