A Vision for Planning Education in Thailand:
An Educator's Perspective
วิสัยทัศน์เพื่อวิชาการด้านการผังเมืองในประเทศไทย: มุมมองจากผู้สอน

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Abstract

Planning education should be developed in parallel with planning profession. If the curriculum is well-constructed, the profession will be sensibly strong. The other way round, the more the professional scheme well-acknowledged the more the academic knowledge gradually developed. Unfortunately, in Thailand, it seems that there has been a misinterpretation not only of planning, planners, but also of the learning modules.

The mismatch between planning in theory and practice prompts this paper to study the planning educational sector in Thailand. The author examined the learning modules for undergraduate students in Thai planning schools by comparing them with other international-based planning schools. This is to learn that whether or not those modules respond to development paradigm and meet requirements of various social actors. Finally, the author also contributed a vision for Thai planning education. However, it should be noted that this paper paid particular attention to the Urban Environmental Planning and Development Programme (UEDP) at Thammasat University. Moreover, it was written as a speculative assessment based on working experience, rather than an in-depth study.

บทคัดย่อ

วิชาการและวิชาชีพด้านการผังเมืองควรได้รับการพัฒนาควบคู่กันไป หลักสูตรการผังเมืองที่ดีย่อมผลิตนักผังเมืองคุณภาพซึ่งจะช่วยเสริมสร้างวิชาชีพในภาคปฏิบัติให้เข้มแข็ง ในทางกลับกัน เมื่อวิชาชีพการผังเมืองได้รับความน่าเชื่อถือและเป็นที่ยอมรับ องค์ความรู้ต่าง ๆ ในภาควิชาการก็จะเพิ่มพูนขึ้นตามไปด้วย แต่สำหรับประเทศไทยแล้ว ความเข้าใจของคนทั่วไปที่มีต่อวิชาการผังเมือง นักผังเมือง หรือแม้แต่หลักสูตรการผังเมืองกลับดูจะผิดแผกไป

บทความฉบับนี้เขียนขึ้นจากมุมมองและประสบการณ์ของนักวิชาการด้านการผังเมือง ซึ่งมีความเห็นว่าการพัฒนาด้านวิชาการและวิชาชีพยังไม่ได้เป็นไปในทิศทางเดียวกัน ผู้เขียนมีความสนใจจะศึกษาหลักสูตรการผังเมืองระดับปริญญาตรี โดยมุ่งความสนใจไปยังหลักสูตรการผังเมืองบัณฑิต คณะสถาปัตยกรรมศาสตร์และการผังเมือง มหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์ เพื่อวิเคราะห์ว่าหลักสูตรมีความสอดคล้องกับกระบวนทัศน์ของการพัฒนา และตอบสนองความต้องการของคนหลากหลายกลุ่มในสังคมหรือไม่ และในท้ายที่สุด ผู้เขียนจะได้นำเสนอวิสัยทัศน์เพื่อการพัฒนาวิชาการด้านการผังเมืองสำหรับประเทศไทย

Keywords (คำสำคัญ)

Planning Education (วิชาการด้านการผังเมือง)
Planning Curriculum (หลักสูตรการผังเมือง)
Values in Planning (คุณค่าของการผังเมือง)

1. Introduction to Planning

Planning is essential for people and environment. According to Alexander (2009), the definition of planning has been shown. He stated that the meaning of it was described and gradually adjusted according to trends of development, for example, rational choices that produce optimal outcomes by Davidoff and Reiner (1962); enabling decisions about future actions by Faludi (1987), Harris (1996) and Alexander (1998); an aspiration to control the future by Wildavsky (1973); and a form of governance consisting of the processes of regulation, coordination and control by Healey (1998) and Alexauder (2009, p. 234). However, the simplest notion can be explained by So (1998). He says that *"planning and plans are common to life, business, and government. To most of us, planning conveys the idea for the future or getting from here to there"* (So, 1988, p.10).

Equally important, it is worth noting that planning professional practices and its approaches, especially the primary focus on physical plans, for instance: development control, development plan with some landscape and urban design, infrastructure provision, and other activities closely related to the land use and physical core role, have undergone profound change in the half-century. At present, the focus of planning has moved to areas such as community planning, regeneration and sustainability (Rodwin & Sanyal in Frank, 2007).

The definitions, professional practices and approaches of planning as stated above logically link to the characteristics of planners. New roles for the planner are recently summarised in the 'Future Planners: Propositions for the Next Age of Planning' by Bradwell et al. (2007). He states that *"future planners needs to be able to negotiate, mediate, communi-cate, collaborate, think in scenarios, and be indepen-dent in order to understand people in communities"* (Bradwell, 2007, p.14). As a result, planning education should be constructed in accor-

dance with such descriptions. Notably, educators should also realise that despite the architectural school in origin, the disciplinary foundation of planning is based upon the integration of geography, sociology, law, and economics as well as physical design.

In Thailand, overall aim of planning in accordance with the Planning Act B.E. 2518 is intended as a tool to coordinate the development of urban communities, and to assure that urban development is socially and economically appropriate to all levels. Unfortunately, in practice, the focus of planning is still the physical planning of urban communities which aims at preparing and designating the location of various activities. It pays less attention to the issues of manpower, capital, and participation. Thus, the majority of learning modules are conventionally based upon the establishment of policy for urban development and structure of the city, the designation of land use plans, transportation infrastructure and public utilities, and the proclamation as a ministerial regulation of enforcement.

2. Planning Education in Thailand: History and Its Current Dilemma

Planning schools in Thailand are under the supervision of The Faculty of Architecture. In 1976, the first programme was opened at Chulalongkorn University. Notably, planning programmes during the mid of 1970s to the beginning of 2000s were established for the bachelor graduates in all majors. Such a circumstance is similar to the current planning education in Brazil. Costa, H. and Costa, G. (2007) said that *there were no undergraduate degrees in planning. Moreover, there were no accreditation of planners and planning schools. In Brazil, planning had been structured by The Graduate Programme in Geography, for instance, The Federal University of Minas Gerais. Importantly, students from*

geography, architecture and urbanism, history, economics, social sciences, biology, geology and tourism could enter the programme (Costa, H. & Costa, G., 2007, p. 391).

Nonetheless, since the late 2000s, three planning programmes for undergraduates have been established: The Urban Architecture Programme at Chulalongkorn University, The City and Urban Design Programme at Mahasarakham University, and The Urban Environmental Planning and Development (UEDP) Programme at Thammasat University. It is interesting that despite the same focus on planning, each school shows its specialisation through programme titles. While the first two programmes pay particular attention to spatial arrangement and design, the final one emphasises the existence of built environment and development in wider social context.

The affiliation of planning departments under the roof of architectural schools and the particular emphasis on **design** attached to the title of the programme can provide the students with common misconceptions about planning studies. The author has experienced such a circumstance when conducting the interview with new students entering the UEPD programme at Thammasat University. It is interesting that the students can express the enthusiastic attitudes of young-blood planners to the questions 'why are you interested in planning?' and 'why planning is important to a city?' In contrast, they show disappointed responses to the question 'do you know that planning is not a design-based programme?' As a consequence, some of them decide not to enter the programme and some leave the programme after the first year. They said they were satisfied with learning how to design, rather than how to approach the meaning of planning and how it is applied in development.

The author does not blame Thai students and their ignorance about socio-economic context of the city. On the other hand, the author is concerned with the subtle roles of The Department of

Public Works and Town and Country Planning (DPT) as well as other professional planning organisations. It seems that they are not strong to speak for their own interests. In addition, it seems that the government has not yet imposed the professionalisation of planning professions. More importantly, the author is concerned with planning educational sector, especially the failure at distributing the contents of planning to public. It is interesting that despite the establishment of planning schools for more than three decades, Thai people do not exactly realise what planners do. Presumably, planning curriculum may not be well constructed to make the Thai society acknowledge the significance of planning.

As a consequence, the characteristics of good planning curriculum together with the roles of planning educators will be focused on through these following items.

- **Good Planning Education:** How to define and shape good planning curriculum.
- **The Focus on UEPD by TU:** Is the curriculum well constructed?
- **A Vision for Planning Education in Thailand:** How planning schools can mediate different interests and requirements in the society, then, create positive attitudes to the discipline.

3. Good Planning Education

Planning curriculums, especially in UK and other European countries, perform the characteristics of multi-disciplinary programmes. Moreover, the curriculums are closely associated with the analysis of socio-economic development issues. The three-phase paradigm shift (as shown in Table 1) proposed by Zetter (1996) illustrated the relationship between planning paradigm and various urban policies. He said *the concept of modernisation paradigm had been replaced by the concept of growth management and market enablement, consequently. These changes also directly influ-*

enced the model of urban planning and management. Zetter's article also indicated that land use regulations and controls together with physical products of strategic and action plans were less important than good governance. Nowadays, managerial techniques, for example: land management, financial and resource management, and coordination between partnerships, became major constituents of current planning and management models.

As a consequence, education and training approaches gradually change due to new development paradigms and models of urban planning and management. Zetter (1996) also emphasised three categories of an indicative knowledge base: urbanisation process, land issues, and urban planning and management. He underlines that those issues should be included in learning modules.

Firstly, one of the most dramatic changes in the developmental paradigm in the last decade was the re-conceptualisation of cities as a leading sector of developing economies. Planning education should firstly explore the discourse on development and the connection to the process of urbanisation and globalisation (Zetter, 1996, p. 64). This is because socio-economic dimensions of development finally translate into the spatial outcomes and physical products of uncontrolled urbanisation.

Secondly, for land market issue, dynamics of urban land market, land market management, land use control and code, and institutional instrument are key constituents of the curriculum. Planning schools should provide students with the interaction between land development and land use planning together with the experience of community-initiated mechanisms.

Table 1. Development Paradigms

Development Paradigm	Urban Sector Policy	Urban Planning and Management Model	Education and Training
Modernisation	*None*	Control *(Master plan, land use regulation and control)*	Plan making *(Limited demand, standard pedagogy, cultural collision)*
Growth with Equity	City in crisis *(Poverty alleviation, shelter interventions, informal economy, community development)*	Reactive *(Project intervention, land delivery, action / strategic planning)* physical products	Land use professionals *(Expanding demand, conventional modes of pedagogy)*
Market Enablement	Efficiency and growth *(Infrastructure servicing, land policy, public / private partnership, market supply)*	Managerial skills *(Coordination and management, environmental education, land / finance / resource management)* good governance	Professional diversification *(Education for coordination and implementation, variety of professionalism, and of levels / modes / pedagogy / locations)*

Source: Modified from Zetter in Hamdi, 1996, p. 59

Thirdly, to understand the urban management and good governance, students must know the principle of resource allocation, planning as co-ordination and as enablement. This is because knowledge and skills of agency-networking, budget formulation, risk analysis and urban finance will strengthen the competency of planning professions.

Interestingly, the enterprise skills along with entrepreneurship are recently promoted as one of the essential parts of this module (Frank, 2007). Original ideas of social and environmental entrepreneurship tend to be significant criteria for employability. Generally speaking, such issues are important in that they construct creative thinking and widen the attitudes of planning students who find employment in a variety of roles and sectors, ranging from planning control to managing large development project, from education to research. According to Albrechts (2005), he also points out that *"planners must learn to think (more) creatively"* (Albrechts in Frank, 2007, p. 636).

In planning schools, entrepreneurship concerns not only investment opportunity, but also a lesson of networking, negotiation and management. Hawkins (1998), who has long advocated for planning education to incorporate basic management theory and skills, says that *"an awareness of general business concepts, including cost control and maximisation of services / performance vis-a-vis tax revenue seems paramount today in both public and private sector"* (Hawkins in Frank, 2007, p. 642). He added that *if the insights into business thinking and enterprise could be developed, planners would be very able to interact and negotiate with business leaders. In addition, planners would shape policies accordingly*. The optional modules, **'Enterprise and the Environment'** and **'Creativity, Innovation and Change'** by the Open University are examples of modern courses. They are parts of the curriculum for a Master in Town and Regional Planning offered jointly by The University of the West of England, South Bank University London, Leeds Metropolitan

University, and The University of Dundee (Frank, 2007, p. 642-643). Importantly, it is worth noting that planning schools can efficiently develop entrepreneurial skills through the arrangement of projects, workshops or mock consultancies. This is because those kinds of practices help encourage experiential and problem-based learning.

Those aforesaid education and training approaches can potentially build the good structure of planning curriculum. At present, planning lessons focusing on application techniques, for examples: forecasting, data analysis and plan making, are lagging behind. The curriculum at present must be interactive with urban policies. In addition, it should pay more attention to a lesson of communication and entrepreneurship. Such modules become considerable managerial skills essential for negotiating and managing conflicts in a city.

Unfortunately, within the context of Thai society, the author realises that there are a few profound difficulties in shaping the ideal planning module like what Zetter (1996) proposed. First, centralisation is a major constraint in constructing the sophisticated knowledge of urban management and local governance. If the policy of decentralisation has not yet completed, planners cannot be conversant with resource allocation, budget formulation as well as good governance. Second, legal structure to enforce land utilisation and tax collection, for instance, seems to be weak. This shows a failure at plan implementation. Despite the production of plans and regulations, the actors involved in planning legislation cannot put any action into operation. Finally, the entrepreneurship cannot work if the government still lacks supporting this idea.

4. The Focus on the UEPD by TU

The UEPD programme is the first undergraduate planning course in Thailand established in 2002. Professor Horayangkura, the founder and

the former dean, realised that planning education has not produced real planners who can create sustainable built environment. He addressed that *the two-year Master's degree programmes which were developed since 1970s generally attracted staff in public sector who want promotion. When they graduated, their opportunities to apply planning skills seem to be limited because of their conventional tasks* (Horayangkura, V., personal communication, 2003). This is a common issue of rigid work structures that require the practitioners to conform, rather than be innovative.

Thus, it is reasonable for the educational sector to contribute the fundamentals of planning to students since they are undergraduates. Interestingly, Horayangkura's idea is very similar to Davidoff (1996) who once notes that *"training urban planners might require both longer graduate study and development of a liberal arts undergraduate programme affording an opportunity for holistic understanding of both urban conditions and techniques for analysing and solving urban problems"* (Davidoff in Campbell and Fainstien, 1998, p. 319).

The curriculum of the UEPD B.E. 2552 (2009) consists of a 30-credit general training module and a 114-credit planning module. Planning module is divided into six groups.

- Fundamental course is the 18-credit module. It consists of communications and perceptions in planning, information technology for planning such as GIS, statistical analysis, history of world architecture and planning, and technical terms.

- Principle core course is the 48-credit module. The main subjects are four workshops on planning and development, three lectures of theories and concepts in planning, site and urban landscape planning, special problems and seminars.

- Planning techniques and technology is the 12-credit module. It provides principles and techniques of tropical design, infrastructure and transportation planning, and land use models.

- Supportive course is the 21-credit learning module consisting of research design, urban economics, planning laws and regulations, EIA, demography, and social and political factors. Moreover, it requires students to participate in an internship and a workshop in a foreign country.

- Free Elective course is a six-credit module. Students may attend urban management, property and housing development, or urban conservation, according to their interests.

- Students also do a nine-credit thematic paper in their final year.

Generally speaking, comparing the UEPD to the three categories of an indicative knowledge base proposed by Zetter (1996), the programme has been developed the right way. The above structure proves that the programme provides some fundamental courses relevant to visual perceptions and spatial design in large scale, rather than architectural design. To establish the core contents of planning, the programme sets a module of theories and concepts along with many socio-economic lectures in order to build a rational standard for interpreting and contextualising urban space. Students can also attend courses that logically concern planning techniques, for instance: transportation, EIA and property development. On the other hand, to encourage planning in practice, the programme organises four studios which promote not only deep learning along with experiential and problem-based approaches, but also skills of presentation and communication. The internship gives them chances to work and express their ideas creatively. Conducting thematic papers also practices them to study their areas of interest systematically. Interestingly, students in the second year are encouraged to attend a workshop in foreign countries[1]. This is a great opportunity to widen planning experience.

Nevertheless, this paper found a few critical points. First, the author believes that three continual

lectures of theories and concepts in planning have not yet completed the notion of planning. The contents of them mainly concentrate on substantive theories explaining how urban works, rather than theoretical and ideological evolution of planning agenda. Thompson (2000) said that *theory taught in planning schools was an accumulation of theory drawn from many sources and then applied to town planning. Procedural theory showing the evolution of the act of planning is ignored* (Thompson in Campbell, 2000, p. 130). As a result, students lack an understanding of logical thinking or thoughts that change planning models. Moreover, they are bored with listening to repeated lectures on central place theory and rank-size rule, for instance. This is because such topics are in theory class as well as urban economic class. Or maybe the students do understand that the assumptions of these models do not make them relevant to Thailand. There are not alternatives to such kinds of western theorising in the context of Thailand, or Southeast Asian societies.

Next, according to the promotion of entrepreneurship, if planning educators agree that such a skill provides students with advantages, basic business concepts and managerial skills may be added as considerable elements of the urban management module. The module should focus not simply on the institutional structure of planning authority and governing system. They should also focus on the topics of resource and financial allocation, management skills, and flexibility and a propensity for opportunism (Frank, 2007, p. 643). Although some may argue that such contents are for political science and business management, the author would argue that they provide planning students with many advantages. For students aiming to work in public sector, entrepreneurial skills help them support business investment with appropriate strategies, then, shape policies accordingly. For students aiming to work in private sector, especially self-employment business, such skills help them

create the businesses with less barriers and time consuming.

Finally, since the UEPD pays less attention to designing, one can argue that the programme ignores students' requirements. In some worse cases, employability of graduates without the skill of architectural design may be limited. Thus, the coming part will focus on a reflection on the vision of planning education. It aims to approach the way in which planning schools mediate different interests and requirements in the society, then, create positive attitudes to the discipline.

5. A Vision for Planning Education in Thailand

It is interesting to learn the philosophy of planning schools, particularly the way in which they form planning curriculums that mediate different interests and requirements in the society. At present, planning schools, especially the UEDP programme, are in dilemma. Whereas the school aims at attracting a number of students (who are eager to learn design), the school need to follow planning paradigm which depends upon socio-economic and environmental movement, for instance: participatory planning and sustainability.

From my viewpoint, the former objective seems less important than the latter one. This is because it is a marketing issue, rather than a substantive issue of the curriculum. Therefore, planning schools should remain steadfast in its core discipline. Thereafter, any special practices may be added to satisfy student's requirements. For the case of UEDP, the focus on the skills of visualisation and presentation is appropriate.

Equally important, the schools should build connections with professionals. This paper strongly agrees with Percival (2005) and his statement which noted that *there clearly needed to be more interaction between academic and practitioner communities* (Percival in Campbell, 2005, p.138). Broadly

speaking, planning educational sector should act as a mediator between policy and practice in local. Despite the major task in providing knowledge and planning skills to students, the schools are required to offer academic activities to practitioners or local staffs. This is because they lack of some complicated knowledge, for example: the concept of collaborative planning, skills of public communication, and the notion of social changes and globalisation influencing local/regional economic.

In a wider scale, planning schools should establish a strong collaboration with The Department of Public Work and Town and Country Planning (DPT) in order to develop the educational structure. Similar to UK, The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) helps planning schools shape the policy statement on initial planning education. The institute re-defined fundamental of planning as spatial planning aiming to establish the recognition of place making and space mediation. It also suggested the guidelines of effective planning schools. For instance, it noted that planning programme should structure the combination of spatial planning and specialist planning education. While the former refers to study modules that promote integration of knowledge, skills and values in planning, the latter copes with the area of specialism[2].

On the other hand, the DPT as well as other agencies taking part in planning professions should help promote the significance of planning and planners. This paper realises that such an action has been carried out. First, The Division of Information and Public Relations has been established in order to encourage plan implementation and public involvement. Second, there have been a few considerable movements to address planning as a national agenda. In 2005, Tantisunthorn, the senator, noted that *public participation, and an effective monitoring and evaluation systems were essential elements of planning*. He pointed out that *education sector should take a crucial part in contributing knowledge and planning skills to*

local government units (senatorial letter number 1938/2548, dated 10 March 2005). In 2009, Professor Bunkham proposes his idea concerning the promotion of planning. He suggested that *The Commission of Human Settlement and Planning was required as a functional agency encouraging land planning and sustainable development in long-term. The commission should be established by The National Assembly. Notably, it would coordinate with The National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), The Bureau of the Budget, and The Office of the Civil Service Commission. This would strengthen the governing system of the country* (personal letter, dated 9 September 2009).

Unfortunately, the policy is always beyond practice. More importantly, the professionalisation of planning professions has not yet seriously imposed by the government as well as plan implementation and public participation. As a consequence, planning schools are still confronted with difficulties. Although those policies have been popularly promoted, many practitioners are still familiar with producing the traditional one-way presentation of physical plans and designs. This is because those kinds of works are tangible and impressive. They could easily attract people's interests. Therefore, when planning students graduated and start working in professional world, their attitudes could be re-shaped by that aforesaid tradition.

Lastly, there is another constraint that planning schools always experience. It is the bureaucratic process of curriculum accreditation. Although the schools are eager to adjust and strengthen learning modules, such action is obstructed by many groups of actors getting involved in such process. The board of the faculty, the board of the university, and the committee of planning professional, take part in considering the principles and the essences of the proposed curriculum. After that, The Commission on Higher Education would take part in final decision making. Such bureaucratic

processes take time for two years approximately. Undoubtedly, the CENDEP (1993) once pointed out that *"planning education, training and professional capacity has always lagged behind the presenting problems of urban growth and policy making perceived at higher levels"* (Zetter in Hamdi, 1996, p. 60).

6. Summary

Planning education should be constructed in accordance with current definition, professional practices and approaches. Planning curriculums normally perform the characteristics of interdependent discipline, despite the architectural school in origin. In UK and other European countries, education and training approaches have been changed according to development paradigms and models of urban planning and management. Finally, the curriculums are ideally consisted of these three core components: urbanisation, land market issue, and urban planning and management. Notably, the entrepreneurship is recently promoted as a module enhancing managerial skills and employability of students.

Nevertheless, within the context of Thai society, planning education has been obstructed by many underlying factors. First, the professionalisation of planning professions has not been seriously imposed. Second, the governing system of the country is still centralised. It obstructs the action to manage local places. Third, planning legislation, especially plan implementation, seems to be weak. Those aforesaid factors are associated with

traditional planning modules which are based upon physical plans and the establishment of policy for urban development.

At present, planning schools seem to be in dilemma. While they are based on planning principles relevant to socio-economic and environmental movement, they have to be concerned with the marketing issue influenced by the policy of autonomy. The schools need to attract a number of students who may not be imbued with planning. The Urban Environmental Planning and Development (UEDP) Programme has been confronted with this circumstance as well. As a consequence, the programme encourages the skills of visualisation and presentation, rather than design. Most importantly, it remains steadfast in core discipline. It provides the students with many concepts helping to interpret and contextualise urban space. It also organises local and international workshops together with the internship in order to widen students' attitudes to planning.

In summary, planning schools should remain steadfast in its core discipline, particularly the critical analysis and the integration of geography, sociology, law, and economics. Thereafter, skills of visual perception and presentation are required to fulfil the competency of the students, rather than design. More importantly, the schools should strengthen a connection with local practitioners as well as the planning authorities in national level, particularly The Department of Public Works and Town and Regional Planning (DPT). On the other hand, the DPT and other agencies taking part in planning should help promote the significant of planning and planners as well.

Notes:

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[1] In 2004, the first international workshop was organised. The UEPD students have visited Ritsumeikan University, Japan, and attended a two-week workshop with Japanese students.

[2] Examples of spatial planning education are an analytical framework through social science, the interplay between land use and transportation, design and the realization of place, economic issues and development, environmental challenges, and legal institutional framework. Besides, specialist planning education refers to modules that engage in theoretical and practical debate at the forefront of the special area, and that demonstrate understanding of the relationship within a multidisciplinary context.

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A Vision for Planning Education in Thailand: An Educator's Perspective
Suwadee T. Hansasooksin, Ph.D.

71

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