

**Keeping the flame alive:  
How planners try to retain their idealism**

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**ABSTRACT:** *People become planners for a variety of reasons. Many enter the profession via an undergraduate or postgraduate degree program at a university and at this point many express broadly idealistic aspirations to make built environments better places than they would otherwise be. Most planning education programs share these aspirations and seek to nurture them, while also equipping students with a range of practical and analytic skills and competencies. However, many graduating students that then enter the profession struggle initially to reconcile their idealistic values with the day to day realities of professional life.*

*Drawing on data from an ongoing research project that entails working with practising planners in South East Queensland, Australia, this paper explores how planners go about retaining their idealism. It describes in particular how planners explain their initial motivations for becoming planners, how their education prepared them for professional life and how they manage the often conflicting pressures they experience in their day to day work. The paper draws on Schön's notion of the reflective practitioner (1983) and his subsequent work on how they might be educated (1987). It draws also on Healey and Underwood's (1978) work on professional ideals and planning practice and on Underwood's (1980) ethnographic study of planners in London.*

*The paper concludes by reflecting on the perennial tensions in planning education and pedagogy around the inculcation of specific values and the acquisition of particular skills, and in striking a balance between the ambition to 'make no little plans' and the need to develop and demonstrate more prosaic workplace competencies.*

**Keywords:** *Planning practice, planning education, idealism*

## **Introduction**

People become planners for a variety of reasons. Many want to do good; to make the world a better place, at least in its built form. Some are in it for the money, the power and the prestige that accompanies the professional appellation. Some join by mistake, wanting really to be architects or urban designers but never quite getting round to making that subtle shift in professional focus. Of the many that want to do good and to help make the world a better place, it is reasonable to assume that they enter the profession with some degree of idealism. This idealism is not the philosophical theory of the primacy mental constructs, but a commitment to certain ideals about planning. These may be procedural ideals, such as the rational comprehensive approach to planning, or substantive, such as a belief in the benefits of walkable, mixed use compact urban forms.

Most planners now enter the profession via an undergraduate or postgraduate degree program at a university and at this point their idealism is encouraged or stimulated by their teachers. In terms of their official discourses, most planning programs share the idealism of their students and seek to nurture it, while also trying to equip students with a range of practical and analytic skills and competencies that will allow them to function effectively as professional planners.

There has long been a tension in planning pedagogy about the right balance between nurturing and developing the idealism of embryonic planners and ensuring they graduate with a set of practical skills that will allow them cope with the rigours of everyday professional practice. This tension typically manifests itself in debates about the most appropriate mix of general and specialist skills or between the development of particular values and the acquisition of specific skills.

Conversations with planners often reveal subtle shifts in their own views on the most appropriate points of balance between these positions as they progress through their careers. For example, recent graduates sometimes bemoan their lack of certain practical skills such as project management, team leadership or dispute resolution in contrast to their ability to provide a critique of neo-liberalism or to offer sociological perspectives on urbanism as a way of life. Those further into their careers may come to realise that the ability to take a broader political perspective and to articulate a coherent critique are in fact more useful than a detailed knowledge of current planning law.

This paper is concerned with these long term processes of professional change and development and in particular how (and indeed if) planners try to retain the idealism that typically characterises the early periods of their careers as they progress professionally. It considers two main sources of data on the views of planners: extensive but relatively superficial surveys of practising planners and more intensive studies of planners. It also draws on data from an ongoing research project that entails working with a small sample of practising planners in South East Queensland, Australia to explore their motivation for becoming planners, the role of their initial training in shaping their professional identity and the ways in which they cope with the ever changing pressures they experience in their professional lives.

## **Evidence from extensive surveys of planners**

There have been a number of extensive surveys of planners, usually commissioned by professional bodies, usually designed to generate broad scale data about the state of the profession. Below I describe the results of some of the more notable of these surveys from the UK and Australia.

In July 2007 a taskforce of the Queensland government and the Local Government Association of Queensland launched a survey of planners in response to growing concern over significant skills shortages and problems with the recruitment and retention of planners. Responses were received from 244 planners or approximately 25% of those Queenslanders who described themselves as planners in the 2001 Census. As well as asking about working conditions and career plans, the survey also invited respondents to comment on their skill development needs, their initial education and their plans to remain in or to leave the profession (Local Government Career Taskforce, Queensland, 2007).

These planners felt the greatest need for further skill development in project management, dispute resolution, negotiation, budgeting and management practices. While the question was framed in terms of job-related skills rather than more broadly defined intellectual attributes, this list reflects an especially practical and task-oriented outlook on professional development in which there is no mention of creativity, communication or leadership – attributes that we might expect of a modern and perhaps heroic conception of planning.

Respondents were also asked why they thought there was a shortage of planners in Queensland and suggested two main factors: the complexity of the planning process brought about by the introduction in 1997 of the Integrated Planning Act and its associated Integrated Development Assessment System and the pressures associated with the development boom of the time. In other words the boom was generating more work which was more difficult to process because of the new planning regime. But third on their list of reasons was ‘lack of public recognition and understanding of the profession’. In short, planners in this sample believed that the public at large did not really understand what they did, but nevertheless had a low (but perhaps erroneous) opinion of what they thought they did. At the same time, planners described an increasingly stressful job with increasing workloads, poor career prospects and pay rates that did not offer adequate compensation. There was also a pronounced ‘grass is greener elsewhere’ disposition in which pay rates were thought to be better elsewhere, the private sector was seen to provide a more stimulating workplace than the

public sector and there were more attractive work opportunities overseas. The validity of these perceptions is however likely to vary according to the institutional setting of the respondent.

Invited to reflect on their initial professional education, which for most was an undergraduate planning degree or postgraduate program, more than half (53%) felt well prepared to do their current job, but 45% felt inadequately prepared. When asked to elaborate on this inadequacy of preparation, respondents referred to a lack of practical experience, lack of coverage of locally relevant legislation and a disconnection between their curriculum and the 'real world' resulting in an inappropriately idealistic presentation of planning and its potential to them whilst at university. We might interpret this as the presentation of the heroic potential of planning by those responsible for the initial education of planners.

Partly driven by this disconnection, a substantial proportion (45%) claimed to have seriously considered leaving the profession. Of those contemplating this because of their general dissatisfaction with the profession, the mundane nature of development assessment combined with frustration at the time taken to process even the simplest applications were cited by many, along with disillusionment with the whole process, captured well by one respondent who said simply, "The system has lost the plot". Nevertheless, the majority of those who had considered leaving the profession referred to the more prosaic combination of intolerable stress through growing workloads coupled with a failure of salary levels to compensate for these new pressures.

How do these contemporary Australian findings compare with similar surveys from earlier times and different places? Three other surveys are worth noting: Marcus' 1969 survey of UK planners; Knox and Cullen's study of senior English planners carried out in 1976 and Evans' survey of members of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) in Britain conducted in 1990. While a systematic review of surveys of planners has not yet been undertaken, there appear to be surprisingly few extensive surveys of this type.

In 1969 Marcus surveyed 211 randomly selected members of the RTPI in the UK and secured responses from 52% (112) of them (Marcus, 1971). It revealed a solidly middle class and male profile (66% of respondents had fathers who attended grammar or public schools) with slightly higher than average levels of support for the Labour party which together led him to suggest a dominant 'reformist perspective' among planners, aspiring perhaps to be

evangelistic bureaucrats. This set of planners would typically have worked in five planning jobs by the end of their career, often ending up in private practice.

Reported levels of job satisfaction were high with most saying they found enjoyed their work and expressing ‘a desire to improve the quality of the environment around them’ (quoted in Evans, 1995:83). Over 80% said they would choose planning again as a career although a majority ranked private practice more highly than working in the public sector, possibly because of a perception that private practice allowed greater freedom, although quite what this freedom meant was not explored in any more detail.

Almost ten years later, a survey conducted by Knox and Cullen of sixty senior planning officers working in British local government found a profession still dominated numerically and politically by middle class men, happy to describe their professional purpose in terms of a ‘Platonic idealism involving balance and harmony’ (Knox & Cullen, 1981: 889). Driven by an altruistic desire to make the built environment a better place, they also described themselves as mediators, guardians of forces shaping the environment, managers of a political process and problem solvers who could cope with a range of particular urban challenges: a role similar to that captured in Underwood’s study carried out in the late 1970s.

The senior planners in this sample acknowledged their political role (some even described themselves as ‘political opportunists’) but nevertheless held to an ideal type which centred on a managerialist ethos in which problems were solved in a rationalist and positivist way. While the problems confronting them may have had their origins in amore messy and complex urban environment at large, they were framed and contextualised by the bureaucratic principles and institutional setting in which they had to be addressed.

Knox and Cullen developed a typology of planners from this survey, identifying four types of ‘planning personality’. The first are labelled as ‘pessimists’ because of their intense despair at the state of the urban environment and the intractability of its problems. They cope by adhering to the principle of piecemeal social engineering and rigid rule following. The second group shares this pessimistic outlook on the state of the environment but has a strong emotional commitment to solving its problems. The majority of planners (70% of their sample) fall into the other two types – urban managers and theoreticians. The urban managers see themselves as objective, unemotional and practical people, committed to and capable of solving problems in a rational manner, while the theoreticians also believe in the potential of planning to intervene for the good, but are much more inclined to improvise and bend or

ignore the rules of the game. The contemporary relevance of this typology can be questioned but Knox and Cullen's conclusions are nevertheless useful in analysing the perceptions and performance of planners in contemporary South East Queensland. They suggest that despite the subtle differences between different types of planner, the dominant characteristic of the group as a whole is planners as managers, who rationally compartmentalise the problems they face in order to deal with them in an ordered and analytical way, but who retain an unashamedly utopian view of towns and cities as places that can be made better through the efforts of planners.

Finally, in 1990 Evans carried out a survey of 500 chartered town planners in Britain and received responses from just over 250, of whom 80% worked in the public sector and 20% in private practice (Evans, 1995). The class composition of his sample was again solidly middle class, although a substantial number described themselves as 'no class', perhaps signifying a decline in the perceived salience of class in planning or in British society at that time, while women continued to account for only a small fraction (7%) of respondents and of the population of planners at large.

The majority described their core skills as planners in general terms, referring to their ability to co-ordinate, to synthesis, to negotiate and to organise. This prompted Evans to reconsider a criticism of planners common at the time that took them to task for assuming the role almost of a 'super-profession', believing themselves able to manage and coordinate the activities of anyone and everyone, without actually laying claim to any specific professional expertise. This position had been taken up forcefully by Reade (1987) in his critique of the lack of any meaningful theoretical underpinning to planning practice and indeed in Scott & Rowe's (1977) critique of conventional planning theory. However, for Evans, as British town planning approached the end of the 20th century it had succeeded in constructing a professional edifice, albeit on shaky epistemological grounds and had maintained this status through symbolic statements and vague commitments to urban idealism and a somewhat heroic professional self identity. While showing some signs of professional imperialism, British planners in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not appear to have become reflective practitioners in Schön's use of the term.

The planners in Evans' sample were less critical than him of their profession as a whole and more comfortable in their own position. They were relatively well paid, although around half of those working in the public sector had considered moving into the private sector in search of new career challenges, higher salaries and a perceived freedom from political interference.

Many of those working in the public sector articulated a clear view of public service and around 80% of all those surveyed felt optimistic about the future of planning. By this they meant there were emerging issues associated with a growing environmental awareness that promised new challenges for planners and placed new responsibilities on them as custodians of an efficient and orderly urban environment.

### **Evidence from intensive studies**

It is clear that extensive surveys relying on relatively simple questions cannot explore issues and concerns in any great detail and it may be that the somewhat crude characterisations of planners' dispositions and values revealed in them simply missed the subtlety and depth that actually existed. We might expect, therefore, an equivalent number of more intensive studies designed to explore in much more detail the views of planners.

However, relatively few intensive, ethnographic studies of planners have been conducted over the last four decades, although valuable lessons can be learnt from studies of other professions (eg Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Flood, 1981; O'Connor and Dalglish, 1986). Underwood (1980) and Healey and Underwood's work on planners in the London Borough of Haringey (1978) and Hoch's (1994) work with American planners are among the few cases that focus specifically on the work of planners and also provide valuable lessons for contemporary studies. Healey and Underwood found outward signs of confidence among planners in London during the 1970s, a period in which planners were assuming a much greater and wider role within local government, but below the surface a set of anxieties about their skill base and ability to cope in this expanding role. It was not so much that any youthful idealism was being crushed, but that having achieved more responsibility they now realised the enormity of the task facing them in practice.

Hoch concludes his excellent study of American planners by describing how both 'skepticism and hope' permeate his practice stories (1994: 320). He argues persuasively against a tendency to fall back on inappropriate dualities in which technical competency is set against political commitment in framing the professional disposition of planners. He shows how planners bring a 'breadth of moral and political imagination' to their work and how all planners combine 'moral vision, technical expertise and adversarial politics' in their everyday professional practice.

Some of the conclusions from these earlier intensive and extensive studies have been brought to bear on the data generated from a pilot study of the everyday lives of planners in South East Queensland conducted in 2008-2010. This involved one or more face to face interviews with a small sample (16) of planners working in two locations in South East Queensland. Most worked for one of two large local government planning bodies but a small number worked in private practice. The pilot has since been extended to include a further round of interviews (not included in this analysis) and forms the basis of a current application to the Australian Research Council to support a larger study in South East Queensland and possibly beyond. Table One summarises the basic characteristics of this sample and the numbers attached to each of the following illustrative quotes refer to the ID number in the table.

The earlier studies suggested a number of themes that have a bearing on the changing state of planners' idealism as their professional careers develop. Three of these themes are used to structure the following analysis: how they became planners; how they see their future as planners and how they see the future of the profession.

**Table One: Basic characteristics of sample of planners in SEQ**

ID	Location		Gender		Field		Experience			Seniority		
	A	B	Female	Male	Strategic	DA	Little	Some	Lots	Junior	Middle	Senior
1		X		X	X			X			X	
2		X		X	X			X			X	
3	X			X	X				X			X
4	X			X	X			X			X	
5	X		X			X	X			X		
6	X				X			X			X	
7	X				X				X			X
8		X		X		X		X			X	
9		X		X		X		X			X	
10		X		X		X		X		X		
11		X		X		X		X			X	
12		X		X		X			X			X
13		X		X	X				X			X
14		X		X	X				X			X
15		X	X			X		X			X	
16		X	X		X				X		X	

*Becoming a planner*

The planners in the pilot sample were each invited to reflect on how they came to be a planner - what motivated them to embark on this professional path and what were their expectations before joining the profession? From the interviews, four distinct routes into the profession emerged: accidental; to achieve a change of focus; to contribute to social and environmental justice; and design and creative motivations. Of course in some cases the respondents mentioned more than one of these routes but a dominant motivation was nevertheless typical among the sample.

Although it may seem contradictory for planners to be doing something in an unplanned manner, many of the sample said they became planners by accident rather than design: they are referred to as ‘drifters’. They drifted into planning rather than setting out on a well defined journey in which a career in planning was the clear destination.

*I was a bit of drop-out at high school and then a careers advisor said you could be a surveyor or a land economist or a town planner. I was good at geography and social sciences but not very good at maths, so I chose planning! [11]*

*I didn't really have many expectations of planning; I just sort of drifted into it..[10]*

It was also not uncommon for accidental or serendipitous factors to be significant:

*I didn't really know what to do when I left school, maybe a policeman or something but a professor of planning lived down the road and he persuaded me that planning would be a good thing. [8]*

A number (referred to as ‘converts’) began studying in a different but often related field and during the course of their studies or even subsequent employment realised that planning had more to offer. Sometimes this took the form of a Paulian conversion on the road to Damascus while for others, the realities of the labour market and career opportunities were important.

*I thought about doing architecture but chose planning...because it was focused on landscapes [5]*

*I studied environmental sciences but graduated into a recession and saw there were (job) opportunities for planners. [3]*

A third group (‘do-gooders’) had built a positive view of planning without necessarily having a clear picture or any detailed knowledge of what it entailed in practice. Often this came through studying geography at high school. This tended to be associated with a general disposition to ‘doing good’ in environmental or social terms.

*I realised that there was a direct connection between cities and the quality of life and I saw that planning had potential. [6]*

*I had a bit of a romantic view of cities [11]*

The final group, referred to as ‘creatives’, were drawn to planning by its creative and design potential, often describing a long standing interest and ability in one of the graphic arts.

*[I] always liked arty things and design and wanted to be an architect, but a friend of my father said it usually led to doing boring things like designing sheds and porches. [4]*

*I wasn't sure what to do, maybe something arty...[9]*

*I chose to study planning, architecture and urban design at xxxx because it's beneficial to have a design element in your training [5]*

The views of the ‘do-gooders’ and the ‘creatives’ are entirely consistent with the hypothesis that young people are drawn to planning by strongly idealistic imperatives, by saving the

world (or at least the small patch over which they have jurisdiction) from environmental ruin, playing a part in redressing systemic inequalities or by making plans for monumental developments. This is not to say that the drifters and converts, if pressed, would not have been willing to articulate a more grandiose description of their early ambitions, but unprompted their outlooks were much more modest and attuned to the everyday realities of life as a planner.

The absence of an explicitly idealistic outlook reflects also a pronounced tendency to drift into the profession without a clear let alone heroic view of its nature or potential. There may well be a more general association of design skills with high professional status in contrast to a more bureaucratic conception of planning as urban managerialism, but this does not necessarily suggest a lack of idealism.

#### *How they see their future*

Once they have entered the profession, planners have the choice of staying or leaving and there is ample evidence in contemporary Australia of a tendency to leave, although not necessarily for good (PIA, 2008). But for those who chose to stay, there is a second choice: to pursue professional advancement and career development with vigour or to adopt a more relaxed approach, taking opportunities when they arise but not necessarily seeking them out. Planners in my sample exemplified each of these choices.

Some had their eye constantly on career opportunities, looking for the chance to develop and to grow professionally,

*I'm always thinking about future possibilities and career enrichment..[9]*

*(You've got to..) keep moving and maybe go and work at State level, they do higher order policy work which would be interesting. [11]*

Others were more content to remain where they are and to bide their time,

*I'll probably leave at some point, but it would have to be for a very good job. [14]*

*I've hit the roof and I don't really want to go any higher, maybe sideways? [8]*

Interestingly the lure of the private sector is often tempered by a clear appreciation that anticipated benefits come with costs,

*I could go and work in the private sector if I wanted, it would probably be more mentally challenging and you'd get a greater sense of completion of projects [1]*

*The private sector has some appeal but I imagine it might be difficult working in an environment where the client is always right, even if they're not! [15]*

Some but not many of the sample had a clear career plan and were looking forward to the next stage of their career; seeking out appropriate opportunities to move forward. Others were content with their current position and expressed no ambition to move on, while others described a more contingent position: happy to remain unless certain situations arose or remained unresolved.

*I came here for the lifestyle so I need to get a reasonable work-life balance and I don't really want to climb a lot higher. [8]*

*If some of my projects are shelved then I might think about giving up and moving on. [2]*

A number spoke somewhat wistfully of the inevitability of moving away from the substantive content of planning as their careers developed, both in the sense of taking on more managerial roles and by becoming project managers for work carried out by consultants.

*All the interesting LAP [Local Area Plan] work goes out to private consultants; we just end up as project managers but with a planning background. I don't actually do much planning myself, I just review the work of others. [1]*

Here we can see the strongest signs of a professional outlook that changes over time, but this change is as much to do with a move from 'pure planning' or spending most of one's time working directly on planning matters, to a more managerial position as it is (again) with moving from the heroic to the prosaic. The more senior the planner, the more likely it is that they will describe their role in terms of managing a large operation that strives to deliver good outcomes. Senior planners inevitably are less engaged in hands-on planning than their more junior colleagues and while it may take time for some to adjust to this changing role, others retain a clear sense of the importance of what Peters and Waterman (1982) famously described as 'steering not rowing'.

It will be interesting to explore further the extent to which senior planners become comfortable with a role in which presiding over the wholesale reform of a planning system (a planning scheme and its operating principle and practices for example) is the zenith of professional ambition rather than master-planning a major new city in a greenfield location: in other words as guardians of a distinctive process rather than of any particular substantive knowledge base.

### *How they see the future of the profession*

Perhaps the most pressing issue to come up in all interviews and one reflected also in much press coverage and professional debate at the time covers the related issues of pressures of work caused by a booming development sector and the recruitment and retention of staff. This was well captured by one respondent in describing a significant consequence of work pressures,

*We need more staff in order to help turn ordinary [development] proposals into award winners. [10]*

Those with staff management responsibilities, spoke directly of the problems of staff turnover, recruitment and lack of experience,

*We go through staff like fresh underwear. [15]*

*Bright young things can rise very rapidly at present without getting the breadth of experience...then the Peter Principle kicks in. [13]*

*We're creating little monsters, they come in and after a couple of years are complaining because they haven't been promoted to supervising planner! [15]*

The recent global economic and financial crisis has had a profound impact on this overheated labour market (Burton, 2010) and there are now reports of significant reductions in turnover as well as substantial redundancies in private sector planning firms. Australian planners today face rather different pressures to those they faced only two years ago

On the question of who planners should be serving, most subscribed to the traditional notion of being responsible to the elected councillors and through them to the people,

*Who is my client? The people of [xxxx] of course...[12]*

But a more subtle position was also evident, in which planners are described as having an obligation to educate the public and relevant politicians about planning issues as well as serving them in a more straightforward manner,

*We have a responsibility to educate the public about the benefits of good planning and urban design. [4]*

*It's important to educate Councillors, they have gut feelings which we need them to express, but they have to learn also to explain and justify these feelings, to support them with decent arguments. They need to learn a vocabulary about urban issues. [4]*

Recognition of the diversity of clients is likely to be something that develops over time and the more senior planners in this sample clearly did have a more subtle and sophisticated appreciation of this diversity and its consequences for their day to day practice.

On the wider question of the fundamental purpose of planning and its potential to ‘do good’ in respect of the built environment, a diversity of views was evident, ranging from the positive,

*You take the small wins but learn how they fit into the bigger picture.*

through the random,

*Good outcomes can be the product of serendipity and accident [7]*

to the negative,

*Good outcomes are neglected at the expense of a preoccupation with processes of engagement. [15]*

*Regulation doesn't give you good outcomes, you can only set up frameworks that provide a context. [7]*

For many, the pace of current legislative and policy change, at least in South East Queensland, is a cause of some concern, not so much because of any fundamental opposition to change but because of a more pragmatic concern with the problems of planning in a time of uncertainty and trying to manage the inevitable delays that this policy turbulence will cause,

*The concept of performance based planning is good, but planning schemes developed under IPA haven't worked well in practice. Drafting of more detailed performance criteria should help [16]*

*The review of IPA must remove the shackles and change it from a developer-led system to one in which we propose high standards and look to keep raising them. [4]*

While for others it is important for planners to realise that planning is about more than saying ‘no’,

*It used to be that if everyone hated you – the public and developers – you must be doing a good job. We used to go out of our way to find reasons to say no. [12]*

The division between those who thought their primary purpose was to limit development and those believed in working with prospective developers to achieve the best possible outcome (however defined) was significant and corresponded broadly with the level of experience of the planners in question. In some cases the shift in appreciation along this dimension constituted an almost epiphanic moment which, paradoxically, opened up new heroic possibilities for those previously trapped in a prosaic environment of negative regulation.

## Conclusions

It was suggested at the outset that most planners enter the profession, or at least commence their training to enter the profession with some degree of idealism. They want to do good and to use their professional skills to make the world a better place. They see planning as a means to achieve this end and typically believe that a built environment regulated by planners is better than one that is unregulated and unplanned. Of course not all will subscribe to these ideals and some will do so with only a minimal degree of conviction, but most feel able to express at least some idealism of this nature. Some may also join the profession to seek fame and fortune, but if so it is likely they will be rather more disappointed than those driven by more altruistic motives.

The most common transition in perceptions of planning and its potentials relates more to its scale and scope than to any abstract diminution in idealism. Practising planners in the public sector come to realise that much of their professional life entails the regulation of development at a relatively small scale rather than the preparation of large scale development blueprints. Whether this rather modest realisation is evidence of planners becoming 'reflective practitioners' is debateable, but as both Schön (1987) and Underwood (1980) concluded, there is considerable scope within most professional paradigms for adopting very different value positions, including on the nature of basic professional ambitions.

Few planners are able in practice to follow Burnham's famous dictum and 'make no little plans', most are part of much larger teams that either make comparatively 'little' plans or regulate development in accordance with such plans made by others. While most planners in Australia still work in the public rather than the private or commercial sector, planners in private practice are (paradoxically?) more likely to have opportunities to prepare large scale plans with reasonable prospects of implementation than their public sector colleagues.

There is little evidence from extensive surveys or more intensive studies that planners spend much time reflecting on their idealism. This is not to say that they cannot be idealistic, or that they do not espouse values that some may describe as idealistic. Rather they do not typically devote much of their professional time worrying about these matters. Often this is simply because of the volume of work they have to manage and the pressures they face in their professional lives. Somewhat paradoxically, at least from a researcher's point of view, it is only when invited by a researcher to take time out from their busy everyday professional lives to talk about being a planner they find the time for these more philosophical reflections.

Without these external promptings it can be difficult to find the time to be a reflective practitioner.

In conclusion, it would be wrong to assume that most planners enter the profession full of youthful enthusiasm and idealism only to have it gradually seep away as their career progresses. To be sure many planners develop a different view of planning over time and this may involve a more sceptical or at least circumscribed view of what they can achieve as professional planners. But this could be described more as a transition from naivety to maturity than from idealism to scepticism.

As planning educators we can learn from studies of the everyday lives of planners and incorporate this into our curricula and into our pedagogy. While we should always welcome and nurture enthusiasm and idealism of our students, we would do well to recognise that some are more idealistic than others and that some who drift into the profession grow up to become enthusiastic and successful planners. In stimulating and challenging the idealism of our students we would do well to remember the words of the cultural historian Jacques Barzun,

*“Idealism springs from deep feelings, but feelings are nothing without the formulated idea that keeps them whole.”*

As planning educators we have always struggled find an appropriate balance between providing our students with substantive knowledge and procedural capacities; or with particular value sets or the capacity for moral reasoning. That is not to say that we have failed in this struggle, merely that it remains a challenge. Mature, reflective planning practitioners are likely to have succeeded over time in harnessing their idealism with a developing set of skills and capacities which allow them to realise their own plans, not matter how big they are. Their stories will emerge from the next phase of this research.

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