

Robert Home

Conference report

Planning, Law and Property Rights The Third Annual Conference of the International Association of Planning, Law and Property Rights (PLPR), Aalborg, 2009

Notwithstanding what the Association's president called the 'Aalborg in February' factor (short daylight in a grey and cold North Jutland port city surrounded by pig farms), some 80 delegates, a similar number to the previous two PLPR conferences (Amsterdam in 2007 and Warsaw in 2008), attended the Association's 2009 conference at the University of Aalborg, Denmark from 11 to 13 February. The hospitality made up for the weather and time of year: a tour of regeneration sites, a welcome reception in the eighteenth-century town hall, and a conference dinner in another heritage building, the Jens Bang house.

The University of Aalborg was an appropriate host, having a reputation for its educational philosophy of inter-disciplinary and problem-orientated studies organised around group and project work, preferring real-world problem-solving over more traditional examination-focused academic study. It also has a strong planning and surveying expertise, expanding into environmental areas such as sustainable energy management, and a strong international focus (some 800 international students among its student population of 12,000).

The PLPR Association¹ has emerged from the planning law group of the much larger conferences of AESOP (Association of European Schools of Planning) and ACSP (American Collegiate Schools of Planning), which passed the thousand delegate mark at their joint conference in Chicago in 2008 (Davoudi and Winkle, 2008). Planning law tracks have been an established feature of AESOP/ASCP conferences, and the push towards a free-standing academic association reflects the need for a large enough peer group with whom to discuss research in the area, and for a cross-national comparative perspective. Much is owed to the energy and commitment of its first president, Professor Rachelle Alterman of the Haifa Technion (Israel). The Association put its draft statutes to the Aalborg conference (and now has its own

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1 <http://planning-law.socsci.uva.nl>

logo!), while a related International Platform of Experts in Planning Law is coming into existence.²

Some 60 high-standard papers were presented in Aalborg,³ with a more-or-less equal balance of planners and lawyers (some qualified in both), and the predominantly academic focus moderated by professional practitioners. The conference was organised without the formality of an over-arching conference theme or keynote papers. Papers were organised into two parallel streams within topic areas: 'public-private co-operation', 'comparative studies', 'planning and property rights', 'property development issues', 'land readjustment', 'public participation', 'expropriation' and 'coastal protection'. Unfortunately, time constraints limited many presentations to only 10–15 minutes; the only practical solution to this problem in future appears to be additional parallel streams. Other invited topic areas in 'enforcement' and 'real estate' attracted insufficient papers to be programmed (real estate having its own European Real Estate Society⁴).

The 2009 PLRP conference papers reflected the trend towards globalisation and comparative planning and land law and the increasing inter-disciplinary cooperation between planners and lawyers. Property rights issues are of growing international interest, with the success of Hernando de Soto's book, *The Mystery of Capital* (2000), advocating land titling as no less than the magic bullet solution to world poverty. Recent UN initiatives include the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure⁵ and the Global Land Tools Network⁶ and the Commission on the Legal Empowerment of the Poor⁷ (chaired by de Soto). The large and relatively well-funded International Federation of Surveyors (FIG)⁸ operates through a structure of commissions and four-yearly international congresses, and its current president (Professor Stig Enemark) is also from the University of Aalborg. The Construction Management conference (COBRA)⁹ has also established a regular and expanding track on Law and the Built Environment (run by Paul Chynoweth of University of Salford), and the Aalborg conference also saw the launch of a book (Janssen-Jansen et al., 2009) comparing national approaches to non-financial compensation in planning and development (including transferable development rights).

Notwithstanding this globalisation process, the PLRP Association has yet to expand beyond a European and Anglo-Saxon focus, reflecting its origins. Some 80 per cent of

2 http://www.internationalplanninglaw.com/templates/mercury.asp?page_id=1509&news_id=6&offset=

3 The conference's *Book of Abstracts* can be consulted online at <http://planninglaw2009.land.aau.dk/doc/planninglaw2009-book-of-abstracts.pdf>

4 <http://www.eres.org/>

5 <http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=24>

6 <http://www.gltm.net/>

7 <http://www.undp.org/Legalempowerment/>

8 <http://www.fig.net/>

9 http://www.rics.org/Knowledgezone/Researchandreports/info_cobra_f_291008.html

those at the Aalborg conference were European, with significant representation from North America and Israel, but few from Australasia (two Australians), Africa (two South Africans) or South America (one Uruguayan). In the future, the association can only be enriched by wider geographical participation, while another trend may be increased attention to land use planning approaches to environmental and climate change issues (a trend already seen in the construction management professional and academic community).

References

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