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Conference Report

The 12th Conference of the International Academic Association on Planning, Law, and Property Rights (PLPR), Rectorate of the University of Novi Sad, Serbia, 19–23 February 2018

This year saw the twelfth annual conference of the International Association on Planning, Law and Property Rights (PLPR) return once again to Europe, and the snow. After an excursion to Hong Kong last year, the PLPR members headed to the University of Novi Sad, one of the largest universities in Central Europe, situated on the beautiful Danube in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina in the northern part of Serbia, to discuss issues around the theme of ‘Migration: impacts, law and spatial planning’. The conference was opened by the president of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, academician Prof. Dr Vladimir Kostić. The rector of the University of Novi Sad and the local organising team of the Centre for Strategic and Advanced Studies did a wonderful job of providing a busy schedule of high-quality academic sessions, social events and excursions. For the first time in the conference’s history, sessions were held over four days (Tuesday–Friday), with conference members enjoying a welcome break with excursions on both Wednesday and Thursday afternoons.

PhD workshop

For the fourth year in a row, the Monday before the conference was dedicated to a full-day PhD workshop, where nine PhD candidates, all from different universities and at various stages in their research, were given the opportunity to present their research topics and gain vital feedback from dedicated mentors. Mentorship this year was kindly provided by Dr Rebecca Leshinsky (*RMIT University, Australia*) and Dr Tejo Spit (*Utrecht University, the Netherlands*), and Dr Gabor Hamza (*Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary, full member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*) also provided some interesting insights. Feedback from the day was overwhelmingly positive, with every student praising the organisation by Andreas Hengstermann (*University of Bern, Switzerland*) and the expertise of the mentors.

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Migration: impacts, law and spatial planning

Mass migrations are becoming an increasingly familiar phenomenon across the world and as such formed the theme of this year's conference. Climate change is behind intense transformation to our environment, including sea-level rise, flooding and soil erosion, all of which are contributing to displacement of peoples. Escalating wars and conflict are forcing people from their homes, often violently. Mounting urbanisation is also causing increased movement, as rural areas are less and less likely to provide job security or social mobility. The movement of millions of people across the globe raises innumerable questions with regard to planning and the legal impacts of migrants. How are planning laws affected by migrations? How can property laws aid refugees and asylum seekers? How do we ensure social equity in increasingly dense urban areas? The conference this year provided a unique opportunity for academics to contribute to the growing discourse that seeks to answer questions of these kinds.

Keynote speeches

In the introductory plenary part of the conference, dedicated to the conference theme of migration issues, participants were addressed by three keynote speakers who all provided stimulating presentations. Dr Gabor Hamza presented on the topic 'Mass migrations in the past'. He pointed to the fact that migrations are global phenomena that last for centuries with greater or lesser intensity. He devoted special attention to migrations in Europe, comparing events in the former Roman Empire to what is happening today in the European Union. In the final part of the presentation, he noted that historical experiences can significantly contribute to a better understanding of current migrations.

Mr Mirko Stefanović, ambassador of the Republic of Serbia (Ret.) and lecturer at the Nova University of Lisbon, then delivered the second keynote, entitled 'Causes of contemporary mass migrations'. He indicated the wide number of reasons for mass migrations, including climate change, economic crises, unemployment, poverty and uncertainty. He also paid special attention to the conflicts in the Middle East, which greatly influenced the mass movement of many to Europe. It was the authentic testimony of a diplomat who spent several years at the centre of these events. In the final part of the presentation, he noted that humanity is only set to face increased mass migration in the coming generations.

Finally, Dr Martin Wickel, professor at the Hafencity University Hamburg, presented 'Spatial and legal challenges of contemporary migrations'. As a special start to the presentation, he took the audience on a visual tour through Berlin, explaining the planning issues of certain parts of the city, before relating these issues to increased migration to the city. Illustrating the problems connecting migrants/asylum seekers,

housing issues and planning regulations, he explained recent changes in German Building Codes which regulate emergency accommodation for refugees, and the possibility of the suspension of planning law. In his final remarks, he reminded the audience that planning law is in a constant interplay with property rights, which play an important role and can potentially limit it.

Parallel sessions

Over the four-day conference, seventy-six individual papers were presented at twenty different themed sessions. As in previous years, papers presented at the conference were related to issues of planning, law and property rights, many addressing the conference theme of migrations. Participants also had an opportunity to present their current research focusing on different topics circling the intersection of planning, law and property rights; such matters included climate change, the environment, floods, coastal planning, housing, public spaces, law and policy in planning, urban planning and public participation, and so on. The variety of interesting topics can be seen in the Book of Abstracts (Nikolić et al., 2018), summarising all the papers presented at the conference.¹ The parallel sessions with papers were perfectly divided according to thematic fields, enabling planners, lawyers and academics from various other pathways to exchange knowledge and ideas. Additionally, they showcased the strong international aspect of the conference, with papers presented by academics who had ventured to Serbia from as far as Australia and Canada.

The parallel sessions not only offered excellent presentations by individuals, but also afforded time for interesting discussion between participants. For example, the Wednesday morning session on ‘Coastal planning’ provided a lively discussion on the multiplicity of meanings in the PLPR discourse, a theme which was recurrent in subsequent sessions. This particular dialogue was an exploration into the use of the word ‘compensation’ with regard to the consequences of climate change for private property. Examples were offered by experts from Iran, Northern Ireland, the USA and Italy, proving once again the global reach of the association.

Round tables

Two plenary round tables were also held this year, both working as discussion sessions for recent publications from a number of PLPR members. The first round table was held on Wednesday afternoon to discuss the newly published edited book *Instruments of Land Policy: Dealing with Scarcity of Land* (Gerber et al., 2018). The session, moderated

¹ The book of abstracts is available at the website of the organisers: http://www.plpr2018.uns.ac.rs/images/doc/PLPR_2018_KnjigaApstrakata.pdf.

by Thomas Hartmann and Andreas Hengstermann, provided space for six of the book's authors (Eran Kaplinsky, *University of Alberta*; François-Xavier Viallon, *Université de Lausanne*; Winrich Voss, *Leibniz University Hannover*; Joost Tennekes, *PBL Environment Assessment Agency*; Sofija Nikolić, *University of Belgrade*; Tejo Spit, *Utrecht University*) to review their contributions, which emphasised the range of international perspectives within the publication. It was an afternoon of great exchange, giving the panel time to explain their research with the help of some handy examples of different land categories (e.g. brownfield), and hear from the audience, who were quick to give examples of land policies used in their own countries.

The second round table followed on Thursday afternoon, chaired this time by Fennie van Straalen and Thomas Hartmann, and similarly focused on a recent publication, *Property Rights and Climate Change: Land Use under Changing Environmental Conditions* (Van Straalen et al., 2018). The purpose of the session was to begin a dialogue with a few of the authors (Edward Sullivan, *Portland State University*; Peter Buchsbaum, *formerly of the Superior Court of New Jersey*; Linda McElduff, *Ulster University*; John Sheehan, *Bond University*), and touch on some of the issues raised in the edited book. The panel were compelled to emphasise the interdisciplinary nature of the work, which covers cases from across Africa, Asia, Europe and Australia to demonstrate the impact of climate change on property rights. The round table engendered lively discussion, particularly on the problem of social inequity. Peter Buchsbaum gave the example of the Lower Ninth Ward, already one of the poorest neighbourhoods in New Orleans which was hit hardest by Hurricane Katrina, to illustrate the issues of climate injustice with city planning and property law. This is an important and contemporary theme which will be revisited at next year's PLPR conference in Texas, USA.

Excursions and visits

Two afternoons during the week were set aside for excursions around the Novi Sad region. On Wednesday afternoon, participants had the opportunity to visit the Provincial Secretariat for Urban Planning and Environmental Protection, where they were acquainted with the system of spatial planning at both a national and a provincial level. After that, the group visited the Public Utility Company for Urban Planning, Urbanizam, which gave the participants an insight into planning procedures at the local level, with a special emphasis on the case of Novi Sad. The conference members were also offered visits to Company Schneider Electric DMS NS, the Matica Srpska Gallery, the Museum of Vojvodina and the City Museum of Novi Sad. On Thursday afternoon, an excursion to the Bistrica Neighborhood was an opportunity for the participants to see a typical city area built during the socialist period. It was an example of how planning can contribute to quality of life, incorporating green spaces, places for outdoor activities and public facilities, which can all support individual and

community wellbeing. The excursion continued to the town of Sremski Karlovci, one of the cultural centres of Serbia in the seventeenth century situated on the right bank of the Danube.

In addition to the afternoon excursions, participants were also treated to evening receptions organised by some of the most important institutions in Vojvodina Province. On Tuesday evening, participants were invited as guests of the president of Matica Srpska to visit the oldest cultural and scientific institution of the Serbian people, founded in 1826. It was an occasion to present the Atlas of Settlements in Vojvodina, one of the new capital projects of Matica Srpska showing the development of the settlements in the region from 1789 to 2002. On Wednesday evening, there was a reception at the Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina hosted by the president of the provincial government, before the very enjoyable and lively annual conference dinner. Thursday evening's reception was hosted by the mayor of Novi Sad at the City Hall, before the day was brought to an end by a wonderful concert of the Symphonic Orchestra of Vojvodina in the Novi Sad Synagogue.

During the day, participants also had the opportunity to visit the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning and the Department of Civil Engineering, both at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, as well as the Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management at the Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad.

General assembly and the next PLPR

The end of the conference meant the time to elect a new PLPR Executive Committee. Richard Norton (*University of Michigan*) stayed at his position as president, and Thomas Hartmann (*Utrecht University, the Netherlands*) remained in the position of vice president. Andreas Hengstermann (*Bern University, Switzerland*) was elected a new secretary general and Lu Zhou (*University of Hong Kong, China*) is a new PhD coordinator. Appointed liaisons and also members of the ExCo are: Eran Kaplinsky (*University of Alberta, Canada*) and Dawn Jourdan (*Texas A & M University, USA*) as representatives of North America; John Sheehan (*UTS, Sydney, Australia*) and Stessa Chao (*National Cheng-Kung University, Taiwan*) as Pacific Rim representatives. AESOP PLRP theme group leaders are Leonie Janssen-Jansen (*Wageningen University, the Netherlands*) and Rachelle Alterman (*Technion, Israel*). The thirteenth PLPR annual conference will be held at Texas A & M University, College Station, USA, 18–23 February 2019. The theme is 'Preparing for climate change in the planned and unplanned city'. More details will follow this summer on the conference website (see www.plpr-association.org).

References

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