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Conference Report

Online Conference of the International Academic Association on Planning, Law, and Property Rights (PLPR), Online Sessions 1–25 February 2021

Last year saw the annual conference of the International Association on Planning, Law, and Property Rights (PLPR) return in a different format than usual. For the month of February, online sessions dedicated to a range of exciting and academically inspiring topics were organised. These sessions were supported by the German Akademie für Raumentwicklung in der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft (ARL). PLPR President Prof. Thomas Hartmann (*Wageningen University*) welcomed 330 registered participants from 52 countries representing five continents. The many new faces attending this year's session was a welcome side effect of the online format. The conference attracted on average fifty participants per session. The organising committee was able to deliver an outstanding conference, that – despite the online format – sparked much debate and discussion among participants. A special thanks goes out to the session chairs who played an important role in moderating these discussions.

PhD workshop

The 15th of February was dedicated to the first ever online PLPR PhD workshop, where 12 PhD candidates from different universities and at different stages of research were given the opportunity to receive mentoring from experienced researchers. The session began with an introductory plenary session, which was followed by two breakout sessions on research questions and publishing strategies. In the session about research questions, Dr Linda McElduff (*Ulster University*) provided insights on how to articulate a good research question and challenged the participants to critically assess their own research questions. In the session on strategies for publishing, Prof. Thomas Hartmann provided tips and tricks for academic publishing in the field of PLPR. Participants were able to exchange the difficulties they have experienced

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when publishing research. In the second half of the PhD workshop, participants were divided into two groups. In these groups, participants were asked to summarise their projects in three minutes, while the other participants provided feedback using an online whiteboard. PhD candidates were challenged to reflect critically on their research project, hypotheses, research questions and methods.

The feedback from the PhD candidates reveals that the workshop exceeded their expectations. The participants stressed the great atmosphere during the workshop and were happy to get to know other researchers within their field of study. They stated that they found it extremely valuable to openly speak about the obstacles they are facing in their research projects and joked that the workshop almost served as a therapy session. The opportunity to discuss the difficulties of doing empirical work during the coronavirus pandemic was also appreciated. This successful workshop would not have been possible without the efforts of Dr Sofija Nikolić Popadić (PhD coordinator, *Institute of Social Science, Belgrade*) and Dr Andreas Hengstermann (secretary general, *Bern University*).

Video statements

Unlike previous years, no keynote speeches were organised. Instead, prior to the conference three video statements were released in which various PLPR members spoke about the importance of studying the intersection of planning, law, and property rights, and about the relevance of comparing these topics internationally. Several PLPR members addressed the importance of allowing countries, localities and municipalities to learn from each other, to identify best practice in the face of common problems, and to understand better how planning systems work embedded in specific cultural settings, and urged academics to reflect on their own cultural values. Some of the relevant topics mentioned included housing, jobs, culture, informality, public-policy instruments, the erosion of local flood planning, impulses of international law on local and national planning law, climate change adaptation, big data and planning-law education.

The online sessions

During the online sessions, participants had the opportunity to present their current research, focusing on the intersection between planning, law and property rights. A total of 11 online sessions were divided into eight themes, demonstrating the wide scope of PLPR and its members' research. The eight themes were 'affordable housing', 'climate change', 'the recentralisation of planning', 'land policy instruments', 'informality', 'value capture', 'property rights in agricultural land' and 'blockchain technologies'. The sessions were scheduled to allow for attendance from all over the globe, as they

were taking place at 2 p.m., but also at 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. (CET). A total of 65 papers from all over the world was presented, including Israel, the USA, Australia, the UK, South Africa, China, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Brazil and India. While some papers came from a planning perspective, and others came from a legal perspective, all papers focused on the relation between planning and law. As always, presenters critiqued, questioned and explored both innovative and more traditional legal and institutional approaches to land policy, and introduced new research questions and ideas.

The online sessions not only offered researchers the opportunity to present current research, but also provided time for interesting discussion between participants. The discussions in the online sessions proved once again the value of the global reach of PLPR. In the session on property rights in agricultural land, participants from Germany, India, Slovenia and Serbia discussed how the competing demands on agricultural land –for example, flood protection, tourism and the sustainable-energy transition – are embedded within the legal framework of these countries. Research on informality in Indonesia, India, South Africa, Australia, Germany and China allowed for an in-depth discussion on whether planning and property rights can be reframed in order to accommodate alternative views on the informal. Questions on the possibility of integrating accountability and environmental responsibility in property rights to address complex issues such as climate change adaptation were raised in the session on climate change, based on presentations of research from Ireland, the Caribbean, Czechia, Portugal and Serbia. Research from Israel, Greece, Turkey, the Netherlands and Belgium exposed the different forces of recentralisation, centralisation and decentralisation, leading to a fruitful discussion of the role of democracy in planning. As in previous conferences, different types of land policy instrument were discussed extensively in many of the sessions. Presenters dealt with a variety of instruments, including building obligations, land value capture, land readjustment and zoning, in different local and national contexts. This showed the importance not only of exchanging experiences between different countries, but also of thinking about the values and ideologies behind land policy.

Many participants were positively surprised by the lively discussions taking place over Zoom. The chat function proved a useful medium for participants to pose questions and respond to each other. In all sessions, this chat function was used intensively and provided fertile ground for moderated discussion after the presentations. In many cases the discussion continued long after the scheduled ninety minutes. In these informal parts of the online sessions, new connections and potential collaborations were formed.

Flag ceremony and next PLPR conference

After the last online session, the PLPR flag was digitally handed over to the organiser of the next PLPR conference, Prof. Hans Leinfelder (*KU Leuven*). Prof. Leinfelder introduced that the 15th PLPR annual conference which will take place from 4 to 8 July 2022 in Ghent. The conference will be jointly organised by KU Leuven, Ghent University and HoGent. The theme, ‘With or without Limits’, refers to possible organisational limits due to the coronavirus pandemic, but simultaneously to many important topics, such as urban sprawl and planning compensations. More details can be found on the conference website (see www.plpr-association.org).