

Clearing a path between planners, planning policy and academics:

Perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of planning research (February 2019)

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One of the main objectives of the 2019-21 RTPI Research Programme is to address the needs of the various stakeholders involved in advancing knowledge or enhancing the design and implementation of planning research. Underlying the view that our own research ought to speak to a variety of audiences and that planning research in general ought to be both inclusive and relevant to multiple actors, is the objective to strengthen a three way collaboration between planning professionals, academics and policy-makers. In other words – one of our main objectives is to reinstate the Praxis at the heart of planning research and to link it back to both policy-making and theoretical concerns.

1. Introduction: planners, politics and the academy

By virtue of its direct involvement with people and their day-to-day activities, planning inevitably has strong practical and political overtones. However, although planning (as a profession) was established to deal with an activity that sits firmly within the realms of politics and the polity, the relationship between planners, politicians and academics is notoriously complex (see for instance Dyckman 1986).

One aspect of the argument against professional planners is that, as the profession matured, some planners became entrenched within the day-to-day practice of processing applications and many forgot their purposes as planners (see Silver 2014: 103). As Williams puts it:

‘A preoccupation with process seems to have emerged in the last decade or so, at the expense of attention to substance. Planners need to develop and communicate a coherence of purpose, and not become overwhelmed with complexity and procedures’ (2014: 114).

One can question whether this preoccupation with process and procedures arose out of choice or out of necessity. Surely, a majority of planners would agree that the purpose of planning is to protect the public, to plan for sustainable development and fairer and inclusive communities – but many planners may have become worn down by the