

Planning and Publics – On Sustaining Shared Futurities in a Planetary Era

London Workshop, 26-27 June 2025, at NYU-London (joint with LSE & QMUL)

265 Strand, London WC2R 1BH. Room 344

The rippling awareness of planetary-scale phenomena has layered onto existing socio-political challenges a raft of new concerns about knowledge-making, institutions, and the adequacy and durability of arrangements capable of sustaining and improving life in common. Organized around two pivotal ideas—planning and publics—this research project seeks to foster a wide-scope collaboration on a set of practical concepts and tools for better articulating and engaging with our shared futurities. These concepts and tools include infrastructure, resilience, scale, repair, the planetary, law, futurity.

‘Planning’ has received less attention in contemporary thought and practice than it warrants—partly due to associations with high-modernist hubris and central-planning diktat. Yet, structured thought and deliberation about the future—and ways to organize just transitions and sustain life in fast-changing complex environments—all form sophisticated attempts to plan. Planning is a necessary and widespread process, involving imagination, speculation, prefiguration, negotiation, and contestation over future possibilities. It need not be technocratic, or a hierarchical power system; it can be participatory, deliberative, and decentralized. In this sense, planning is multivocal, multimodal, multiscalar, and more-than-human—it encompasses not only state strategies and urban development, but also legal reasoning, climate modelling, material maintenance, repair practices, grassroots organizing, and other aspects of knowledge-making. Infrastructures necessarily involve planning, and vice versa. Planning, then, is not only a human act of foresight but a materially embedded process shaped by physical and digital infrastructures, ecologies, and more-than-human agencies that co-produce the conditions of possible futures. We hypothesize that law often serves as a form of planning, and this role of law should be understood and debated expressly.

‘Publics’ are brought into being by existing institutional forms—such as a national or city public—or in response to external stimuli or concerns affecting persons who may otherwise not be aware of commonalities. Some publics take on more robust forms—as associations, assemblies, or political communities. But in less organized forms, a public is those affected by a specific activity or institution external to them. In some cases, the public forms itself to mobilize, resist, or refuse; in others, it seeks a role in governance, or to have its interests—unified or divergent—taken into account. In democratic governance, institutions and legal or political actors have duties of ‘publicness’—to take account of those they affect, give reasons for actions or inactions, and in some situations to be responsive or accountable, particularly for harms. Publics and publicness are part of the basis on which it is possible to be and to act in common, and to imagine doing so. This relational view of emergent publics signals how collective agency is forged or foreclosed in the making of shared futures. Law plays a major role in these processes. Publics also arise in relation to infrastructures and their maintenance—often not well aligned, spatially or temporally, with the legal arrangements for publics.

The ideas of planning and publics are intricately and inextricably linked. Each is dependent on views and practices of scale and scaling—the kinds of tensions encapsulated in phrases such as ‘place and planet’. The simultaneity of multiple spatiotemporalities is grappled with in all of these human processes. At any moment, planning, publics, law, and infrastructure each involves accounts of the past and the imagined future, buttressed by the ways of knowing and of projecting that are available to people at that moment. Resilience is given a positive valence (‘build back better’) for many people in prosperous societies, but in other contexts it brings to the fore what is implicit in much of the practice of future-making—continuing deferral of progress, surviving and making do, plans unrealized and eventually unmade.

Our project brings together scholars from several disciplines—including law, history, sociology, finance, geography, oceanography, climate modelling, and earth systems sciences—to work on these themes together. We aim to develop deeper collaborations and to produce new cross-cutting work on these issues about the making and possibilities of our shared futurities.

Thursday 26 June:

10am – Opening remarks

10.15am: Planning, Resilience, and Futures

Introduced / moderated by Alejandro Rodiles (ITAM)

- Surabhi Ranganathan (Cambridge University)
- David Chandler (Westminster University)
- Kasia Mika (QMUL)
- Jan Groos (Kiel University)
- Sam Tabory (Harvard University)

12.15–1.15pm: Lunch

1.15pm: (Non)publics, Infrastructures, and Futures

Introduced / moderated by Dimitri Van Den Meerssche (QMUL)

- Jan Eijking (Oxford University)
- Gavin Sullivan (University of Edinburgh)
- Victoria Adelmant (Oxford University)
- Andrea Leiter (University of Amsterdam)

3.15-3.45pm: Coffee

3.45pm: Planetary Publics and Collective Infrastructures

Introduced / moderated by Marie Petersmann (LSE)

- Luis Eslava (LaTrobe)
- Paula Serafini (QMUL)
- Elsa Noterman (QMUL)
- Yousaf Nishat-Botero (City University of London)
- Timo Zandstra (EUI)
- Andreas Buser (FU Berlin)

5.45pm: End of first day

7.30pm: Dinner at The Ship Tavern

Friday 27 June:

9.30am: Shared Futurities – Going Forward

Introduced / moderated by - Benedict Kingsbury (NYU)

- Stephen Humphreys (LSE)
- Andreas Folkers (University of Erfurt)
- Laura Mai (Tilburg University)
- Angelina Fisher (NYU)
- Andrew Hurrell (Oxford University)
- Megan Donaldson (UCL)
- Pavlos Eleftheriadis (NYU)

12.00am: Concluding remarks & future work

12.15pm: Lunch