



---

## **Research assessment in planning schools a possible role for AESOP**

Alessandro Balducci  
Head of the Dept. of Architecture and Planning  
Milan Polytechnic

Bratislava, Head of Department Meeting  
17 March 2006

# The assessment of the scientific productivity of planning schools

- In many European countries there is some form of research assessment at the national level: UK, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy... and the number is growing.
- But also within each university the distribution of resources is frequently done through some kind of internal assessment.
- Sometimes the two levels are strictly linked sometimes they are not

# 1. Internal assessment: some examples

Milan Polytechnic (engineering, architecture and planning)

- The most important resources are distributed following a simple model :  
50% students – 35% scientific productivity  
– 15% research contracts
- This 35% doubles in weight (70%) to distribute research fellowships, PhD fellowships and in general research money

# Milan's case

How is assessed this 35% or 70% ?:

- every Dept has to gather all the scientific production of its members. This contributes to produce a Dept. Indicator which for every year cumulates the last three years
- this is based upon the consideration of a selected number of published material

# Milan's case

<b>Products</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>International</b>
Books author	2,5	3,5
Books editor	1,0	1,5
Chapter in a Book	0,6	1,2
Articles in scient. journals	0,5	1,4
Papers in conferences proceedings	0,2	0,4
Patents	0,6	1,5

# Milan's case

A lot of conflicts:

- How to equalise ISI journals with non ISI
- Why to consider patents and not relevant projects in urban design and architecture
- Why not to consider relevant research reports
- About the weighting of books vs articles

# University of Amsterdam AME

<b>Product</b>	<b>Value</b>
Dissertations	10
Articles in Scient. Journals A	7
B	4
C	2
Books International Publ.	5
Chapter in books Intl	3
Paper Internat. proceedings	3
Abstract Internat. Proceed.	1
Articles in National Journals	3
Books national	4
Chapter in books national	2
Article professional journals	2
Research reports	2

# Vienna University of Technology

After the attempt to compare the incomparable they have decided to distribute resources internally on the basis of more objective indicators

# Some general remarks

Conflicts arise for similar reasons:

- due to the extremely reduced number of ISI journals in our field;
- due to the relevance of books vs articles
- due to the linkage with the world of practice which changes the very conception of “excellence”

## **2. Research assessment at the national level**

In many countries a process of research assessment at the national level is nowadays into place with different functions:

- to rank universities and departments as a form of accreditation;
- to distribute resources;
- to decide about research and teaching institutions on the American model

# Research Assessment in UK

- In the UK it has been done for quite a long period of time: 1986, 1989, 1992, 1996, 2001 and now there is an ongoing process which should be concluded in 2008
- In 2001 for the first time Town and Country Planning has a separate panel

# Res. Assessment in UK 2001

“The main purpose of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is to enable the higher education funding bodies to distribute public funds for research selectively on the basis of quality. Institutions conducting the best research receive a larger proportion of the available grant so that the infrastructure for the top level of research in the UK is protected and developed. The RAE assesses the quality of research in universities and colleges in the UK. It takes place every four to five years. Around £5 billion of research funds will be distributed in response to the results of the 2001 RAE”.

# Res. Assessment in UK 2001

- The panel of 13 members includes 9 senior academics and 4 senior professionals
- The panel in its criteria emphasised
  - the quality of research outputs
  - doctoral completions
  - peer-reviewed research income levels

# Res. Assessment in UK 2001

(J.Punter)

- RAE has been effective in increasing the quantity and quality of planning research but it is discriminatory toward new universities with a teaching role
- The peer review process reinforces the discipline but does not resolve the tension between professionally useful and academically rigorous research
- The system is driven by a physical science model of research that may be of less utility for applied professional disciplines like planning

# Res. Assessment in UK

- It is worth discussing the impact of RAE in UK planning school system for its long tradition, and also other national research assessment
- The main problem seems to remain that of the political use of results
- If on the end the indicators are used to discriminate between a small group of research oriented universities which receive the vast bulk of public and private research funding, does this respect the planning schools aspirations for a multi-mission professionally engaged schools ?

# Res. Assessment in UK 2008

- The separate panel has been kept
- [Panel H](#)
  - UOA 30- Architecture and the Built Environment
  - UOA 31- Town and Country Planning
  - UOA 32- Geography and Environmental Studies
  - UOA 33- Archaeology
- The process is going on

# Res. Assessment in Italy 2006

- In Italy too in the last two years a research assessment process has been completed its name is CIVR
- Planning is subdivided into two panels  
Civil engineering and Architecture  
Governance
- This makes it difficult to recognise the positive effects at the disciplinary level, while the uncertain negative aspects are the same
- Panels are only made of national and (some) international academic

# Res. Assessment in Italy 2006

- The assessment is done upon “products” in a fixed proportion of the number of staff
- Products which are admitted are:
  - Books and chapters
  - Articles in scientific journals
  - Patents
  - Projects, compositions, drawings
  - Performances and exhibitions
  - Piece of arts and prototypes
- It is not clear how it will be used, it may substitute a performance indicator for funding

# National research assessment and internal assessment a possible role for AESOP

- It is important to understand what is going on in this field in general: the impression is that it is more and more important and that this touches some deep aspect of planning identity
- In any case it is al too evident that we do not have to behave defensively we need to develop a strategy

# Elements of a strategy

- We need
  - to compare or discuss the different assessment processes
  - to examine the kind of indicators that are used in the different processes
  - to elaborate a specific statement for the assessment of planning scientific production

# Issues to be discussed

- Should we try to fit into the measurement methods of the majority of other fields ?
- Or we have to reaffirm our specificity and to define what is scientific relevance and “excellence” in our field?

# Issues to be discussed

- Very few journals in the field of planning are listed in the ISI system: should we encourage a general application for this ?
- Should we try to define and approve a list of journals which are accredited by Aesop as high profile scientific journals in planning ?

# **The AESOP list of the 47 journals for the Best Paper Prize**

- **European Planning Studies, Belgium**
- **Urbanismus a uzemni rozvoj, Czech Republic**
- **Byplan, Denmark**
- **Espaces et Societes, France**
- **Odile Saint-Raymond, France**
- **Etudes Foncieres, France**
- **Metropolis, France**
- **Revue d'Economie Regional, France**
- **Urbanisme, France**
- **Villes en Parallele, France**
- **European Journal of Regional Development (EUREG), Germany**
- **Informationen zur Raumentwicklung, Germany**
- **Raumforschung und Raumordnung, Germany**
- **Raum Planung, Germany**
- **Stadtbauwelt, Germany**

- Critica della Razionalita Urbanistion (CRU), Italy
- Planning Theory Newsletter, Italy
- Territorio, Italy
- Urbanistica, Italy
- Kart og Plan, Norway
- Plan, Norway
- European Spatial Research and Policy, Poland
- Sociedade e Territorio, Portugal
- Journal of Property Research, Scotland
- Regional Studies Scotland Urban Studies, Scotland
- Ciudad Y Territorio, Spain
- Scandinavian Housing and Planning Review, Sweden
- Dokumente und informationen zur Schweizerischen Orts-Regional und Landesplanung (DISP), Switzerland
- METU Journal of Faculty of Architecture, Turkey

- City, UK
- Environment and Planning A, UK
- Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design, UK
- European Urban and Regional Studies, UK
- Urban Design International, UK
- International Journal of Urban and Regional Res., UK
- International Planning Studies, UK
- Journal of Environmental Planning and Management, UK
- Journal of Urban Design, UK
- Landscape Research, UK
- Local Environment, UK
- Local Economy, UK
- Planning Perspectives, UK
- Planning Practice and Research, UK
- Planning Theory and Practice, UK
- Town Planning Review, UK
- Cities, USA

# Issues to be discussed

- The example of the Best Paper Prize could suggest a larger use also of other prizes like Excellence in teaching or Best Congress Paper
- Could we recommend a certain panel composition ?
- Could we recommend ways to measure the policy relevance of our activity:
  - Contracts completed
  - Recognition of major research reports
  - Recognition of plans and projects as relevant “scientific products”

# How to develop the strategy if we agree on a possible role for AESOP

- Bratislava March 2006 first open discussion
- Draft of a policy statement
- Mexico 2006 and Naples 2007.....