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Navigating priorities: Assessing the challenges of curriculum reform in Turkish Urban and Regional Planning Schools

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Abstract

Planning departments in Türkiye recently witnessed a boom. In less than 20 years, the number of universities offering urban planning programs increased from a dozen to 45, most accepting students with limited resources. Urban planning education has faced many challenges over the last two decades, and offering education with limited resources carried this problem to another level, increasing concerns among scholars about the quality of the education and the learning outcomes a planner should possess at graduation. While planning schools in Türkiye deals with the issues above, global debates in planning education revolve around integrating topics such as climate change, inequality, informality, and decolonization into the curriculum. This study aimed to reveal to what extent global issues find their way into Turkish planning school agendas in an environment where more pressing matters threaten the quality of education. To look further into this issue, all documents published by TUPOB (Türkiye Planning Schools Association) since its foundation were analyzed, and seven in-depth interviews with TUPOB members were conducted. A predominantly qualitative approach was utilized. The findings suggest that the lack of resources is the most critical problem for urban planning schools, followed by insufficient teaching faculty. The curriculum updates and integration of global issues such as climate change and urban poverty come later in the priorities list. This research showed that concerns regarding resources and lack of standards take precedence over global discussions in planning curricula.

Keywords: curriculum revision, planning curriculum, planning schools' association, urban planning education

1. Introduction: The Shortcomings of Urban and Regional Planning Education

Differentiating from other disciplines, urban planning is an area of education and practice that should respond and adapt quickly to emerging urban and social problems (Cuthbert, 2016; Watson, 2016). As climate change, urban sprawl, immense population growth, and inequality become urgent matters for the majority of the world, the need for curriculum reform for the built environment-related higher education program becomes inevitable.

However, current pedagogical approaches and curriculums are not as flexible and agile. They still produce homogenized solutions without truly understanding the human needs beneath the surface and are far from inclusive (Shilon & Eizenberg, 2020; Dawkins, 2016).

Since urban and regional planning became an independent discipline and started to graduate planners, it became the target of a series of critiques that have some recurring patterns, such as lack of interdisciplinary inquiry (Johnston, 2015), strict pedagogy that does not allow the real-world problems to enter into the curriculum in a timely manner (Cuthbert, 2016), heavy reliance on quantitative methods in the expense of their qualitative counterparts (Eizenberg & Shilon, 2016) and the gap between theoretical courses and studio work (Pojani et al., 2018; Olesen, 2018).

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1.1. Planning Pedagogy

Interdisciplinarity is at the core of the planning discipline since it always requires input from all other disciplines related to the built environment and human behavior. However, the planning curriculum has been criticized for not integrating interdisciplinary work (Scholz et al., 2021) and squeezing other disciplinary inquiries into theoretical courses without making them a part of the studio work, where students are presented with some "real-world" problems. Johnston (2015) argues that planning education overlooks interdisciplinarity to the extent that it does very little to engage with the question of how to educate planning students regarding interdisciplinary inquiry. In other words, interdisciplinarity is not only ignored in how urban and regional planning is being taught but the question of how to teach interdisciplinary inquiry is also overlooked.

Current planning education often leans towards a technocratic approach, emphasizing practicality and quantitative methods over critical thinking and qualitative analysis (Eizenberg & Shilon, 2016; Dawkins, 2016). This focus may disregard the importance of social and cultural factors in urban development, hindering the ability to address complex issues like inequality, poverty, and climate change.

Moreover, the curriculum's inclination towards standardized methodologies not only fails to acknowledge the inherent subjectivity and dynamism of urban spaces (Dandekar, 1986; Eizenberg & Shilon, 2016) but also disregards the value of diverse perspectives (Eser & Koramaz, 2023). As Roakes and Norris Tirrell (2000) argues, the current emphasis in planning education on 'impersonal, objective, and systematic' procedures overlooks the richness of 'partial, fragmented, and often subjective' experiences that shape urban life (2000, p. 101). This approach homogenizes solutions, neglecting entire stakeholders' diverse needs and experiences, and fails to consider the sociocultural specificities of places (Kallus, 2001; Healey, 1997).

This critique aligns with Eizenberg and Shilon's (2016) call for a greater integration of qualitative methods in planning education. They advocate for a shift from "unidirectional and fixed relations" between environment and behavior to socially responsive and evolving planning approaches. Similarly, calls for a relational and constructivist approach highlight the need to move beyond generalized patterns and embrace the dynamic interactions between people and spaces.

Interdisciplinary inquiry is not the only aspect missing in urban planning education. Cuthbert (2016) argues that planning education, in its current form, relies on pedagogy so much that it becomes immune to the changes surrounding academia. He says pedagogy implies "an adherence to formal rules at the expense of a wider view" (2016, p.551), prohibiting planning education from cultivating a critical thinking approach. Although Cuthbert's work is primarily on urban design, it perfectly applies to urban and regional planning education since the two built-environment-related fields can co-exist and have many common courses in faculties.

Similar to Cuthbert, Sletto (2012) also raises some concerns about how planning is being taught and how it impacts the act of planning in the real world when students graduate. He uses his study of Los Platanitos Santo Domingo as an example of how the outcomes of planning education are being implemented in a real-world scenario and argues that the planning educators' interventions "may reproduce instead of challenge the structures of engagement that serve to keep places like Los Platanitos in conditions of dependency (2012, p. 230). Other than being confined to the limits of the pedagogical approach, the learning and teaching are also highly traditional, and the use of technological tools is quite limited (Pojani et al., 2018).

1.2. Planning Theory

An important part of the current planning education curriculum, Planning Theory received its share of critiques for being too abstract for the students (Pojani et al., 2018; Olesen, 2018) or too descriptive (Eizenberg & Shilon, 2016) or for being unable to bridge the gap due to language differences between practice and theory (Kunzmann & Koll-Schretzenmayr, 2015) or not providing any useful guidance on how to actually practice planning (Gunder, 2002).

Planning theory and how it is being taught has always been a contested field. The reason that it is referred to be too constraining to understand and implement is that it is too hard to understand and implement (Olesen, 2018) for students and does not provide enough guidance to do the "actual planning" in a field that was not seen even as an intellectual area of study or a pure science (Thompson, 2000). Critiques go as far as discussing that if planning theory is for the naive (Bengs, 2005). It is not seen as practical knowledge (Olesen, 2018) and, again, not applicable enough while engaging in a real-world situation, as planning students are expected to be ready to work when they graduate. However, they lack the mental and technical tools to solve the problems they are presented with at work. The critiques also point at the university for not including more professional training in their curriculums, potentially preparing the students for the upcoming challenges after graduation (Pojani et al, 2018).

1.3. Outdated Worldviews

Since urban planning has a legacy of being used as a tool for neoliberal policies, unjust resource distribution (Nnkya, 2008), colonization (Watson, 2014 & 2016; Odendaal, 2012), and reproducing the dominant power relationships (Sletto, 2012; Phiri, 2010), the ways in which the curriculum is organized, and the ideas penetrated the teaching are being criticized by many progressive scholars around the world. Scholz et al. (2021) argue that due to institutional problems, urban planning fails to address the current curriculum in urban planning education; it does not effectively respond to the challenges of the Global South, such as climate change, rapid urbanization, or urban poverty.

Odendaal (2012) argues that the current planning system in African cities is the heritage of the former colonial governments. Her critique is twofold. The first one is that the tools and frameworks of the colonial period are top-down and out of touch with how African cities are organized, as these systems used to have a different agenda. Second, she says that today's African cities require solutions that cannot be produced by the modernist planning approach that originates in mid-20th-century planning theories. The master plan approach used in planning schools is irrelevant to the challenges they go through (2012, p. 175). Similar to Odendaal's argument, Nnkya (2008) highlights that in some regions of Africa, the practice goes to an extent to which urban planning is exploited to benefit the elite and fails to solve the actual problems of the cities and the training of urban planners are not tailored to actually address the issues of urban poor (Phiri, 2010).

Another embedded problem that exacerbates the inefficiency of planning education is that the curriculum has been following the British tradition of planning in many regions of the world, which has not deviated from the WWII-era British planning approach. Also, it is argued that the post-war era is when the Northern concepts dominated the concept of planning around the world (Scholz et al., 2021). This "Western bias" inhibits planning schools and educators from focusing on local values (Phiri, 2010, p. 2) and modes of knowledge generation and reproducing the "hegemonic discourses of development" (Sletto, 2012, p. 230).

2. Research Background: Assessment of Urban and Regional Planning Education

The lack of a comprehensive discussion on whether planning education agendas worldwide are mirrored in planning curricula in Türkiye is a critical issue. While these new agendas are referenced in the course and studio contents, they have yet to be the subject of academic discourse. (Akçakaya Waite et al., 2021). This underscores the urgent need for more literature on planning education in Türkiye, especially in comparison to the abundance of journals and special issues dedicated to planning education on a global scale.

In 2017, the Planning Education and Research Journal editors conducted an exciting study that revealed the changing trends in the urban and regional planning field. The editorial board analyzed the titles of the articles submitted to the journal and used the word cloud method to see if there had been any changes in the past 40 years since the journal was established. They saw clear

demarcation lines between trending topics before and after the 2000s when the world underwent global transformations.

The research showed that there had been a significant, almost clear-cut change in keywords that appeared in the journal's published articles after 2000—that is, almost 20 years after the journal's foundation. Between 1980 and 2000, the main interests of the authors who submitted articles to the journal were "change, education, practice, teaching, and theory." However, a directional shift was observed after 2000. The prominent topics became climate change, community, food, sustainability, and transportation (Andrews et al., 2017). Aligned with Andrews et al. 's research, Odendaal (2012) stresses that the common problems of developing countries are climate change, urban growth, housing, and economic disparities.

Not only have priorities shifted in urban planning research and education, but planner roles have also changed over the course of the 21st century. Planners are expected to emphasize partnerships and collaboration (Shilon & Eizenberg, 2020) and be responsive to urban areas' challenges.

Sehested (2009, p. 257) argues that the future of the urban planner might very well depend on the planner's ability to combine and balance different planner roles according to the planning situation. Former top-down and physical space-centric approaches no longer translate into 21st-century urban areas and are not seen as responsive or collaborative. This shift sparked a discussion between groups that advocated tailored contextual approaches and one-world planning education at the beginning of the 21st century (Frank, 2006). Following those debates, the late 2010s clearly showed that there is a need for decolonization of higher education and research in general (Watson, 2014; Odendaal, 2012), involving local knowledge and values more in the decision-making processes rather than applying universalistic solutions (Shilon & Eizenberg, 2020).

In an effort to bridge the gaps in Türkiye's responses to ongoing global discussions, This paper aims to understand how TUPOB is working to modernize urban planning education in Turkey. It focuses on to what extent TUPOB addresses pedagogical shortcomings that hinder planning schools from being innovative and equipped to tackle 21st-century challenges and beyond. The research questions of this study are as follows:

a. How does TUPOB view the current state of planning education in Türkiye? What is their approach to fostering greater innovation and responsiveness within planning schools?
b. In what ways are TUPOB member schools revising their curricula to incorporate courses that address the critical urban and social issues of the 21st century?

3. Institutionalization of Urban and Regional Planning Education in Türkiye

In Türkiye, Urban and Regional Planning has been taught at universities as a 4-year bachelor's degree since 1961, started At Middle East Technical University In the capital of Türkiye, then sprawled Into Istanbul, the most populated city, by the 1980s. However, Türkiye's encounters with urban and regional planning date back to the foundation of the Turkish Republic, that is, to the very beginning of the 20th century. The urban projects were being undertaken by the architects, or foreign urban planners, invited by the then government to generate plans to solve the problems of a war-torn new country. But it is 40 years later that Turkish planning schools have an association to address the issues of all the planning schools across the country (Tekeli, 2011).

Currently, Türkiye has 71 planning schools, 6 of which are private, and the rest are public (YÖK, 2024). Some of these departments are still on paper, namely, not accepting students or providing courses. The rest vary regarding the number of faculty members and the courses they provide. Also, some of these schools only accept first-year students as they are still not "fully established".

3.1. The Scope and Objectives of TUPOB

After its establishment in 2004, TUPOB held its first coordination meeting with the participation of the Chamber of Urban Planners, including nine urban and regional planning departments in long-established schools with longstanding architecture faculties, such as Middle East Technical

University, Istanbul Technical University, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, and Yıldız Technical University (TUPOB, 2005-2).

TUPOB's 2009 vision document, also referred to as the initial certificate of association, outlines the main principles and goals of the association, which were "ensuring coordination among national urban planning schools providing education at undergraduate and/or graduate level, continuously improving the quality of the education process and the planning profession, establishing a structure in line with international standards, and thus increasing the legitimacy and effectiveness of the planning profession.

TUPOB assumes a unifying role in communication and interaction between planning schools, to carry out joint and coordinated studies on the improvement and restructuring of the training programs of planning schools by taking into account national and international criteria, to organize the studies on the determination of minimum common standards in planning education and training provided at the national level (TUPOB, 2009).

What makes this vision even more important is that higher education in Türkiye has been regulated by the governmental body Council of Higher Education (YÖK), and there are no other independent organizations involved in establishing standards in urban and regional planning education. TUPOB aimed to provide a space for planning schools to monitor each other and their own progress, evaluate their curriculum, share their problems, and receive feedback. However, since they are concerned about setting standards among universities with varying needs and capacities, their evaluation became more quantitative rather than qualitative. It limited their ability to look further than what is quantifiable.

3.2. Current Problems of Türkiye's Planning Education in Literature

TUPOB has been publishing annual reports and organized educational sessions on planning as part of the program of the World Urbanism Day Colloquium, though inconsistently trying to give problems of urban planning schools a voice. However, the themes usually revolve around the quantifiable needs of planning schools that need to be addressed by YÖK or university administration.

In the 2010s, the agenda of the planning schools included issues such as the accreditation process, institutional discrepancies, establishment of a national accreditation framework, improvements on curriculums, the challenges of unexpected and sharp increase in the number of planning schools, determining minimum requirements for opening new undergraduate programs based on optimum numbers on academic staff, and discussions about the "success ranking requirement" in the higher education exam (first 300,000) and "program admission quotas" (Başaran Uysal et al., 2021).

However late, to address this agenda, in 2020, The Urban and Regional Planning Education and Accreditation Foundation (PLANED) was established as a secondary organization. PLANED explains the purpose of its establishment on its website as follows: "The Urban and Regional Planning Education and Accreditation Foundation is based on the pioneering work of the Association of Planning Schools of Türkiye (TUPOB), which was established in 2004. It consists of the heads and representatives of the Departments of Urban and Regional Planning in Türkiye, which provide undergraduate education in Türkiye intending to improve the quality of education. In 2020, with the commission's work established within TUPOB, preparations for the association's establishment began. The Association of Urban and Regional Planning Education and Accreditation (PLANED) was established in July 2023 with the founding membership of the commission members of the association. (PLANED, 2024).

On the other hand, the problems of planning schools in Türkiye are more complicated and are not limited to accreditation issues or quantitative deficiencies in both human and infrastructural resources. Updating curriculum to address current urban issues, essential learning outcomes,

critical thinking abilities, the necessary toolkit and skills that planners are expected to have at graduation, managing expectations, and influencing the practice is rarely given a seat at the table.

Unfortunately, less than a handful of studies in Türkiye have examined these issues in depth. A study by Cömertler (2018) also criticized the sudden increase in the number of universities. It noted that this decision of YÖK is especially problematic because the funding that is allocated to these universities is far less than the optimal budget a new-established department should have.

In a recent study, Aksümer (2022) found a deep disconnect between academics and practitioners. The practitioners find academics too theoretical, even though theoretical courses are rarely prioritized in universities in Türkiye. Over 80% of planners find theory impractical and irrelevant to navigating public approval processes and regulations and "ignore conceptual discussions" (2023:238). However, Aksümer's study (2022) also revealed a paradox: while a strong theoretical background is not considered a desired skill in planners, planning graduates often face criticism for their inability to apply technical findings to practical planning strategies effectively. This criticism underscores the practical implications of the disconnect between theory and practice in planning education.

On the other hand, another study (Özkazanç & Korkmaz, 2019) argued that planning education's problems are more deeply rooted than the superficial theory-practice tension. The dated hierarchical small-to-big-scale approach, placing design and beautification issues at the center of education, and disregarding the decision-making processes that usually undermine planning efforts are suggested as more prominent problems that must be addressed.

Penpecioğlu and Tasan-Kok (2016) also emphasized a different side of the discord between planning education and the profession, looking into the mental states of young planners. Planners who graduate with high hopes and idealistic agendas quickly face the powerful push of the market interests that drive planning decisions, which leads them to disenchantment and, in time, alienation.

All these studies focusing on the different parts of the pipeline of planning education reveal that the dissonance is so deep that planning education is far from satisfying the needs of any of the parties involved, that is, academics, students, and practitioners. This highlights a nationwide issue in Turkish planning education, where theory struggles to bridge the gap to real-world practice, planning graduates lack the skills that are required by the profession, and the young professionals are mostly disappointed as they see no room for self-improvement or solving urban issues that they have been taught at the university.

4. Methodology

To find out how TUPOB approached improving urban planning education in universities across Türkiye and how they address the criticisms planning education receives, this research took a direct and indirect approach. The direct approach involved asking the current and former members of the association how they structure their agenda, aims, and goals for the upcoming terms using semi-structured, in-depth interviews between March and August 2023 to understand their points of view and experiences, which differed from the documents produced by the association. The interviews were conducted with seven people and consisted of 15 questions sent to the respondents before the interview. The questions were mostly used as a guideline to keep the interview focused; however, the respondents mostly led the conversation.

The respondents were selected with the purposive sampling method (Robinson, 2014), and the main criteria of the selection are that they contributed to the development of the curriculum in their own institutions, or they are either active members or previously served in Education Committees in their own institutions. For this purpose, the members of the TUPOB and its spin-off organization PLANED (Urban and Regional Planning Education and Accreditation Foundation) were reached via snowballing. At the end of each interview, they were asked to refer another person they thought might be suitable for the topic.

All respondents were asked questions about the TUPOB's priorities in planning education, the goals, and objectives of the association, and if these goals have been reached over the course of 15 years since the association was founded, the institutional agenda, the common and different courses that different schools have in their curriculum, the current challenges they are facing (if they are former members, they were asked to evaluate the current situation), the measures their schools have been taking to address these issues. The final question asked the respondents to understand what actions they think need to be taken in order to make urban planning education more responsive and reflective of social and urban problems of the 21st century.

All interviews were recorded with the interviewees' consent and then transcribed. All interviews were conducted via Google Meet, as all members live in different cities. The reports were downloaded to be analyzed, and since they are public and open access, there have been no complications in obtaining them.

4.1. Data Analysis

TUPOB has published four reports (2007-1; 2007-2; 2011-2; 2018) and six miscellaneous documents (Vision Document; Foundation Protocols 2009; 2010; 2011; 1st Coordination Meeting Leaflet & a Panel Transcript in 2005) over the past 15 years. While not all documents contain comprehensive information about the association's annual meeting outcomes, they provide valuable insights into its goals and objectives. All obtained documents of TUPOB were meticulously analyzed using the inductive content analysis and co-occurrence (a method to analyze codes that frequently emerge together throughout the text) methods to reveal the frequently mentioned phrases and words regarding the improvement of urban planning education and urban planning schools across the country. The names of the reports and their mission and goals sections were used as a guide to generate codes and their respective categories. Using Atlas.ti, all documents were coded and re-coded until the recurring themes were saturated. In the analyzed reports, tables and figures were excluded from the content analysis to ensure the integrity of the analysis.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in Turkish via Google Meet and recorded separately by an audio recorder. The recordings were transcribed with the AI-based app Transkriptor and then reread to correct mistranscribed words and sentences. First, a descriptive content analysis is used to categorize the answers of the different scholars to understand the common tendencies of the group. As all respondents have varying opinions and perspectives about the future of urban planning education, a thematic analysis was applied to reveal recurring and overarching themes that refer to common concerns and solutions for improving urban planning education. The codes and quotes were then translated into English for reporting.

4.2. Limitations

There are two main limitations during the research process. The first one is reaching out to people for in-depth interviews, as they are busy scholars with overpacked agendas and need to undertake different roles in their institutions, especially the ones in smaller universities. Therefore, even with the snowballing method and references from their fellow TUPOB and PLANED members, getting interviews was one of the major obstacles in the fieldwork process.

The second obstacle was to create meaningful code categories from the published documents of TUPOB that would provide deeper insight into the curriculums of different member schools. First, the reports were inconsistent; not every annual meeting was turned into a published document that summarized the problems faced, actions taken, and future goals, which complicated the analysis process as there was not enough data for comparison. Second, mostly the reports were focused on quantifiable data, such as the scores of the students, the number of studios or teaching faculty, etc. This quantitative focus stripped the reports of meaningful insights from each member university about the problems they face while trying to improve their curriculum.

5. Findings

At the end of the data collection, nine published TUPOB documents (three reports and six miscellaneous documents) were analyzed using content and co-occurrence analysis, and the in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The content analysis showed that there had been ongoing concerns about the standards of urban planning education across new and old departments, and quality is one of the highest-mentioned words in the analyzed documents (=358). Interestingly, all efforts about standardization and quality evaluation were directed toward accreditation, and the high frequency of the word shows that this is one of the major challenges of the TUPOB member schools over the years. The interviews provided a deeper insight into the concerns, challenges, and limitations of urban planning schools across Turkey and painted a picture of the major obstacles hindering the teaching faculty's efforts to update and reform the planning education curriculum.

5.1. TUPOB Reports

The most frequent words that appear repeatedly in almost every document are “accreditation” “international,” “quality,” and “standards” of urban planning education. The word accreditation is mentioned 486 times since two lengthy reports are dedicated to discussing the accreditation situation of urban planning schools in Türkiye. Here, it is important to note that these numbers do not include the repeated use of the same word in the same sentence and in the tables and figures to reduce noise.

Interestingly, the word quality is mentioned 358 times across all reports, followed by Europe (346) (Table 1). However, what it means by the quality of education is not thoroughly explained in any documents, suggesting a potential area for further research and understanding. The word quality is used throughout the reports to loosely describe the education and the students, but its precise meaning remains elusive.

In the co-occurrence table, the codes “quality” and “accreditation” often appear together. In 85 occurrences, these words are used together, usually followed by the word Europe (42 times).

When the reports were produced, accreditation agreements were being made with the European accreditation boards in compliance with the Bologna criteria; therefore, the references usually mention Europe more than the United States of America.

Other important words that repeatedly appear in the documents are competence and qualification. In some parts of the documents, these words are accompanied by the word “professional,” such as professional competence and professional qualification.

Qualification and competence are usually mentioned when describing the goals and objectives of the TUPOB; however, again, it is not entirely explained what it means to be a qualified and/or competent urban planning professional. One reason for this is that the published reports include merely an account of the completed works of the previous term rather than a discussion of the process.

Table 1 Energy TUPOB Reports Content and Cooccurrence Analysis

	World	America	USA	Asia	EU	Europe	Bologna	international	accreditation	accredited	equivalent	quality	standard	competence	pro. competence	proficiency	competition
World Gr=201		11	0	2	3	27	2	18	24	2	16	24	11	0	1	6	23
America Gr=85	11		0	10	1	36	3	10	17	4	0	3	4	0	0	0	2
USA Gr=3	0	0		0	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asia Gr=21	2	10	0		0	8	2	3	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
EU Gr=87	3	1	0	0		5	2	1	2	0	0	4	1	1	0	6	1
Europe Gr=346	27	36	4	8	5		19	20	36	6	4	42	7	0	11	13	8
Bologna Gr=60	2	3	0	2	2	19		2	3	0	0	12	2	0	1	1	2
international Gr=213	18	10	0	3	1	20	2		47	1	14	32	20	0	4	5	11
accreditation Gr=486	24	17	1	2	2	36	3	47		24	7	85	25	9	13	10	3
accredited Gr=35	2	4	0	0	0	6	0	1	24		0	5	2	0	0	0	0
equivalent Gr=42	16	0	0	0	0	4	0	14	7	0		6	4	0	0	0	8
quality Gr=358	24	3	0	0	4	42	12	32	85	5	6		29	1	10	14	6
standard Gr=82	11	4	0	2	1	7	2	20	25	2	4	29		0	0	7	2
competence Gr=57	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	9	0	0	1	0		2	15	0
professional competence Gr=39	1	0	0	0	0	11	1	4	13	0	0	10	0	2		31	0
proficiency Gr=114	6	0	0	0	6	13	1	5	10	0	0	14	7	15	31		0
competition Gr=40	23	2	0	0	1	8	2	11	3	0	8	6	2	0	0	0	

5.2. The In-Depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews with the current and former members of TUPOB provided more insight into the reports, inner workings, and accreditation process that have been ongoing for the past decade. At the end of the coding process of responses from the interviews, a total of 113 codes in 11 categories were found. The overwhelming majority of the themes were related to the concerns about the current situation of urban planning schools, learning outcomes, and the students' future

opportunities. Some categories overlap with the questions asked during the interviews. However, most of them emerged from inductive and repeated coding. Following is a brief deconstruction of the categories and some quotes from respondents. The names of the respondents are anonymized, and they are given codes such as R1, R2, etc., for identification.

5.2.1. The Limiting Perspectives in the Planning Departments

The respondents mention that a group of faculty members are stuck in past experiences, the ways in which planning has been taught in the past, which usually thwart the curriculum reform discussions. Furthermore, it is argued that the dominant school of teaching, in other words, the qualities that the schools identify themselves with, play a major role in these discussions, inhibiting a thorough examination of the curriculum. A couple of respondents refer to some interpersonal relationships, sensitivities, and resentments that sometimes surface during the meetings that cause a change of course in the discussions.

"All these years, it has always come to this: This professor is retired. Who will teach this course? This has been one of the major determinants of the curriculum, not the learning outcomes or the needs of the curriculum." (R7)

"The discussion mainly revolves around a professor who used to teach that course and how we should revive it exactly as it was, like 20 years ago. We rarely discuss if we actually need that course anymore." (R3)

"There are established approaches: the academic does this, the urban planner does that. They even try to teach this to every newcomer. There is no effort or desire to go beyond or question that." (R2)

5.2.2. The Gap Between Practice and Education

The common concern among participants is that there is a growing gap between planning education and planning practice, which causes planning students to feel frustrated and disenchanted with their futures. Most respondents agree that planning practice should be more in accordance with planning education, and the latter should guide and direct the former. However, the participants state that the current tendency of the planning schools is the opposite. They also mention that the feedback loop between planning education and planning practice is broken, obstructing a healthy exchange of ideas and experiences to find lasting solutions that benefit both sides.

"We need to correct the practice, not reconsider education to fit it into it. Today, planners are expected to be technical implementers, but this is not what a planner is or should be." (R7)

"When we prepare curriculums, we say things like, let's add this tool or this skill; it will be needed when they become practitioners. We let these market-led concerns direct the curriculum." (R3)

5.2.3. The Dominant Approaches in Planning Education

Another concern the participants raise is that, similar to the limiting approaches in the planning departments, there are some dominant teaching perspectives ingrained in the practices of the faculty. The need to produce physical master plans that focus on land use and the implementability of the plans is seen as an obstacle between the current situation and a potential change. The respondents also mention that this approach favors the "technical planner" role over others, another theme that surfaced during the interviews.

"The dominant approach is producing a physical plan as an end product. Most faculty expect the students to develop an implementable physical plan by the end of a semester. However, we have seen over the years that this is no longer relevant and not the best way to approach the space. Physical plans alone cannot achieve success." (R1)

"Planning should go beyond comprehensive planning. I am not sure how we make it more up-to-date, but we try different approaches and move between scales. I believe this is very important for

a planner to truly understand what scale is. Comprehensive planning alone does not give that perspective." (R5)

5.2.4. Planner's Toolkit and Planner Roles

The planner's role is seen as one of the most contested themes in the planning society. Since the group of planners who believe that more technical skills must be included in the curriculum represents the dominant approach, the respondents say that other roles and skills are overlooked, such as being a critical thinker, not being afraid of opposing mainstream solutions and approaches, prioritizing ethics and public good, and having agency.

"They graduate without fully developing any skills. They can learn some of them later in life, but we must teach critical thinking before all else." (R1)

"It is important to know what we mean when we talk about critical planning theory. Being critical does not mean criticizing everything and not appreciating anything. It is about questioning our own methods and actions. We are still teaching rational planning without looking at it critically. We are just accepting it as it is. [. . .] This is not what a planner should be." (R5)

"We always talk about a planner profile. We fetishize that profile and burden it with all sorts of responsibilities and actions. We determine the content of our education by assuming that every planner will work in the market and worrying about what kind of planning they will do. We try to teach "skills" we assume they would need in the private sector but with little to no context. And then worry about why planning graduates are so disenchanted and unhappy." (R3)

5.2.5. The Lack of Ground for Discussion

The participants see the lack of ground for discussion as a major setback preventing the planning departments from growing and adapting to the present conditions. Especially the lack of theoretical/conceptual discussions is seen as the culprit of a better curriculum that would prepare the students for future challenges. Some participants argue that even if these discussions find their way into the meetings, their unstructured nature causes the discussions to fail to reach a fruitful conclusion. One last concern raised by a couple of participants is that the critical stance some faculty members take is seen as cynicism rather than progressiveness.

"One of the main reasons why we cannot move forward is that we cannot talk to each other. There is a lack of communication between faculty members. Today's academic environment does not provide fertile ground for these issues to be discussed." (R7)

"It is like there are certain topics that a planner cannot discuss. When someone raises an issue, the response immediately, "That is not a planner's problem, that is a social policy issue." or "That is a design issue," and the discussion is over. Those who look and think more critically face some issues. This has even turned into a veiled threat like "Don't shake the boat." (R3)

5.2.6. Global Discussions

Most respondents agree that there is a paradigm shift in urban planning and other scientific research areas regarding urban space. Schools in Türkiye are seen having difficulties keeping up with the conceptual changes and refusing to change their own convictions about how urban planning should be taught. The participants see this as a country-wide problem affecting many areas of education and practice, and the faculties are being affected by this flawed approach.

"The planning agenda changes constantly, but not for the reasons you might expect, such as addressing current global issues. It usually revolves around some pressing matters. Even if it does address global issues, the discussions develop and ripen in the West, and only then do we start to include them in our agenda." (R4)

"We rarely discuss planning in a broad sense. I mean the whole economic life created in the city, production, consumption, distribution, etc., or actor collaboration, social context, and human rights

inequality that truly affects urban space. Even if all those concepts are almost always transferred from the West, let us say localized, they never get included in the discussion in planning discipline in Türkiye." (R7)

5.2.7. TUPOB's Priorities

The participants find TUPOB important for ensuring the continuity of knowledge and think the association offers a space for educators to share their concerns and experiences. However, they also mention that the unstructured nature of the meetings and the lack of moderation usually lead to digression and dilution of the important topics. Moreover, the participants mention that TUPOB, in its current form and capacity, can only solve so many problems, and the urgency of the situations is usually what dictates the agenda of discussions; in other words, high-priority problems such as the lack of the number of teaching faculty, teaching space or materials, or increased available places for each university take center stage as they are deemed more important than the theoretical discussions.

5.2.8. Comparison Cycle

Respondents indicate that schools tend to focus on quantifiable aspects of education rather than non-quantifiable ones, which creates an optimization illusion but does not lead to a lasting change. Most assessment and evaluation criteria consist of factors such as the number of teaching staff, available studios, the number of courses that should be included in the curriculum, or the students that chose that specific university - which respondents say becomes a determinant for many things for the departments and many aspects of urban planning education are design to increase the preferability of the university.

"Evaluation and assessment are predominantly focused on quantifiable data, overlooking most other tissues regarding the quality of education. Our education system is at the point of comparing everything by the number and determining one's superiority over the other." (R5)

"Planning department debate over things like "What is the ranking of the students who chose urban planning?" Instead of focusing on quality and learning outcomes, we find reasons such as "This happens because we don't offer enough courses in English." People do not feel the need to look elsewhere for the answer. They look for quick fixes." (R3)

5.2.9. Interdisciplinarity

While raising concerns about the lack of teaching capacity in newly established departments, the participants drew attention to the lack of elective courses. Some of the participants point to the lack of interest in the faculty members toward other disciplines, such as social sciences, which became a contributing factor to the decreasing number of elective courses in departments. Additionally, limiting the number of electives that can be taken from other departments is also a common practice among old and new departments, which in turn limits the interdisciplinary thinking urban planning education requires, and it is also thought to hinder the collaboration possibilities among departments.

5.2.10. Curriculum Reform

Another highly contested theme on which the participants expressed varying opinions is curriculum reform. Most participants described the discussions around curriculum reform as "a field of struggle." All participants agreed that space concept itself and the act of planning are political and should not be diminished to a strictly technical subject. Therefore, the current focus on physical planning derived from the 20th-century planning schools should be left behind.

However, what to include in the planning curriculum is up for debate. Some participants argue that pressing issues such as climate crisis, overpopulation, and urban poverty should have their own space instead of being mentioned in various courses; other participants advocate that these are tangential themes not directly related to planning education.

5.2.11. Localization / De-localization / Decolonialization

The last theme that emerged in the interviews is the localization of urban and regional planning concepts. All participants mentioned, in one way or another, that the concepts and approaches ingrained in urban planning education are almost entirely imported and rarely address the problems Türkiye's cities face.

"We always take concepts from outside, somehow integrate them into us, and glorify them as if they are suitable for us whether in terms of terminology or concepts which makes it difficult for us to understand them. We don't question if it is suitable for our conditions or our society." (R5)

Some participants raised concerns that it is common practice to copy not only the curriculums of schools in the developed world but also the new departments implementing older departments' curricula almost verbatim, reproducing the same problems, usually due to the lack of time and resources. Participants agree that the source of knowledge should become diversified and mentioned that the urban planning departments need to develop a Türkiye-specific approach that would focus on different regions' problems and refrain from directly translating theories and concepts that do not apply to Türkiye's problems.

"Because the education language is English, we can always give sources in English. I still put one or two Turkish sources I have written myself or others I know, but I can't hold anyone responsible. Therefore, now that we are talking about Türkiye, how many resources can you provide the students? You have very few resources in Turkish." (R4)

"There is a futile endeavor in which we idealize what is better than us and strive to reach it rather than learning from the experience of those like us. We have a preconception about planning education in the West, in America and England, that it is very good. We say, "Let's take inspiration from there." No, we have to realize our reality, our current context, that we are among the countries of the Global South, and learn from there." (R7)

Findings show an ongoing concern about ensuring the quality of urban and regional planning education. However, the reports show that the quality is measured by a series of quantitative criteria. On the other hand, the interview findings suggest that there are deeper issues that need to be solved in order to change the dominant pedagogical approaches that guide planning education to this day. The lack of interdisciplinary teaching methodologies, the pressure of the job market, the technical planner role ingrained into the "planner perspective," and the lack of ground for discussion in urban planning departments are considered fundamental problems of the planning schools across the country.

6. Discussion

This analysis of TUPOB reports and in-depth interviews with TUPOB members showed that there are a series of challenges inside the planning departments that need to be overcome in order to update the urban and regional planning curriculum to address current challenges. The interesting outcome of the study is that the findings of the TUPOB report analysis and the in-depth interviews revealed two different paths to achieve this and set different sets of priorities for urban planning schools in Türkiye.

While reports suggest that the basic needs, such as studio space, the number of teaching faculty the optimization of credits of the existing coursework, should be prioritized and the Bologna criteria should be met in order to achieve an international level, the in-depth interviews suggest that there are other issues that prevent urban and regional planning departments graduate planners who are able to address the important issues of the 21st century, and Bologna criteria could only be a stepping stone in this long road.

The findings of the interviews also painted a contrasting picture to the common perception about the shortcomings of planning education. Planning education is usually blamed for being too

abstract and too theoretical for a discipline in which graduates are expected to be "ready to work" the minute they leave school (Pojani et al., 2018), Interestingly, all participants argued otherwise that the conceptual, wider understanding of the major issues affecting the urban and social space is lacking in the current planning curriculum.

Closely related to this, the planner's role is no longer seen as a "technical" problem-solver concerned with merely physical issues of the urban space. Since the late 20th century, the cultural turn and shifting perspectives in social sciences have shown that the future planner should be more reflective rather than technical (Schön, 2017) The findings also suggest that being a critical thinker (Pojani et al., 2018), 'inviting different political and social values' (Sehested, 2009, p. 250), possessing a good knowledge of socio-cultural context and global political agenda, and prioritizing ethics and public good (Filion, 2021) are stated as the most desirable skills in the future planner's toolkit. Findings are also in line with the existing approaches in the literature about the ways in which knowledge is generated and structured in planning education, such as better integration of theory and methods in primary research (Johnston, 2015), learning interdisciplinary methodologies to structure knowledge in different ways and bridge epistemological differences across disciplines (Bradbeer, 1999), and using planning theory to generate different perspectives (Innes, 1995; Harris, 2000; Allmendinger, 2002) to be able to plan with the other (Healey, 1997; Shilon & Eizenberg, 2020).

The shifting priorities suggested by the findings made a curriculum reform in urban planning schools inevitable. However, it is easier said than done due to the shortcomings of the planning departments in terms of teaching faculty and agency (Filion, 2021). In fact, TUPOB originated from the need to address these issues; however, the sharp and unforeseen increase in the number of newly established departments turned this into a moving target and altered the course of the discussions, and the priority became to at least maintaining the standards of the education across schools before diving deep into a curriculum reform.

Last but not least, the lack of openness and ground for discussion are found as one of the major obstacles to achieving a curriculum that is better equipped to address issues such as climate change, urban poverty, access to shelter, and safe and sustainable transportation.

7. Conclusion

Urban and regional planning education remains a relatively unexplored field, particularly within the context of Türkiye. Since this discipline is seen as an applied science, this perspective causes scholars to overlook the theoretical and pedagogical needs of the discipline.

However, since the number of urban and regional planning departments increased, so have disenchanted graduates whose prospects of finding a job or shifting fields have grown immensely vague. Findings of other studies indicate that there is a discrepancy between the practice and education of the field and suggest a series of solutions to reduce the gap. However, no one-size-fits-all approach can be applied to all urban planning schools across the globe to eliminate this problem.

Therefore, this study uniquely focuses on the approaches of the only institution in Türkiye concerned specifically with urban planning education (TUPOB) towards this problem, highlighting its significance in the field. This study unequivocally demonstrates that structural change and curriculum reform are not just desirable but inevitable. Merely adhering to the Bologna criteria and aiming for accreditation is insufficient to propel urban planning education to the next level, necessitating immediate and comprehensive changes.

Despite only a few published documents and a small number of participants, the study provided deep insight into the discussion surrounding urban and regional planning education. It was able to draw a roadmap that would hopefully help future curriculum-building efforts of scholars in the field.

Drawing on the findings of the analyses, the recommendations of this research are as follows. First, the curriculum needs to be redesigned to incorporate more interdisciplinary inquiry and elective courses to address the increasing number of problems of 21st-century urban space. The overall pedagogical approach should be reviewed not to accommodate the needs of the planning practice as it is now but to influence and transform it. There is also a need for a functioning feedback loop between planning practice and education to remove the current friction. Also, the current studio course design should integrate the global agenda more extensively among critical thinking and collaboration skills.

Last but not least, rather than a direct translation of concepts and approaches, a localized knowledge generation method is needed to provide solutions for the pressing problems of rapidly urbanizing Türkiye. These suggestions are meant to provide a framework for future studies, which are needed to deconstruct the curriculum further and offer more tailored solutions for schools with different qualifications.

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