

GLOBAL STUDENT MOBILITIES AND THE MAKING OF PLANNING CULTURES: A CONCEPTUALISATION BASED ON THE CASE OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Global student mobilities have led to different perspectives on urbanity and planning culture travelling at high speed around the globe. During experiences of mobility what is conceptualised as 'urban' changes, bringing with it alterations in discourses on planning practices and planning cultures. Such student mobilities and their shaping of local urban imaginations, as well as the effects of returnees entering local job markets, have not specifically been addressed in urban studies. This paper aims to analyse how the mobilities of students – and thus of knowledge – shape persistent or newly emerging urbanisms, planning practices and cultures. Conceptually, the paper elaborates how the production of urban spaces has to be understood in a context of the global mobilities of knowledge and ever-shifting local planning cultures. In the empirical analysis, the paper draws on qualitative interviews conducted with planning professionals in Dhaka on the (global) education and career trajectories of urban planners, and the dynamics of local planning cultures and practices.

Keywords

Planning cultures, mobilities, learning, urban transformation, Bangladesh.

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1. Introduction

In December 2012, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) hosted a 'Dialogue on Student Mobility from Bangladesh' in Dhaka. In the presence of the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Mr Md Sirajul Islam, and the Chairman of the University Grants Commission, Prof. Dr Nazrul Islam, the IOM launched a desk review study on Bangladesh student mobility, concluding 'that unlike conventional media reports about "brain drain", legal student mobility is useful for the economy of the foreign country as well as home country, especially when they return' (IOM, n.d.). This perspective positions student mobilities in a context of "brain circulation" (Jöns, 2007) and, beyond an economic focus, hints that experiences of "translocality" – as "situatedness" in multiple settings – are becoming decisive for local transformations.

"Especially when they return" is a key phrase when looking at the discipline of urban and regional planning in Bangladesh. By now, a significant part of the academic and practitioner planning community has settled in Canada, the US and Australia, temporarily or permanently. A large share of graduate Bangladeshi planners has lived abroad for at least the duration of one postgraduate degree. The urban planning departments in Bangladesh universities face serious resource constraints, given that at times more than 50 percent of their faculty is on study leave. My personal experience with student assistants who supported me during the fieldwork of my research in Dhaka between 2008 and 2010 is a case in point. They started working with me at bachelor's graduation, and within two to three years had all applied for postgraduate degrees abroad, subsequently leaving Bangladesh to become part of the globally mobile student community. Keeping in touch with them via Facebook, e-mail, and Skype, and seeing how previous debates on urban space and planning changed, consolidated my idea to critically study the effects of this temporary (at times transforming to permanent) international educational migration.

Accordingly, in this paper, I seek to integrate the themes of globalisation and cities, geographies of education, and planning cultures. I explore how mobilities of students – and thus of knowledge – shape persistent or newly emerging urbanisms, planning practices and cultures. The paper thus elaborates on how the production of urban spaces has to be understood in a context of global mobilities of knowledge and ever-shifting local planning cultures. Hence, I examine the attitudes of planning professionals who experienced mobilities – personally and/or in their job context – and who are emerging as key actors who shape the urban transformation of cities in Bangladesh. In doing so, this paper fleshes out the complex relationship between cities and mobile subjects and thus sketches a new research perspective and agenda.

Global mobilities, including the mobilities of people, policies, and knowledge, constitute a core topic currently intensely debated in urban studies. The new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006) fosters a re-positioning of cities and localities in global networks and new challenges for spatial practices and in relation to urban transformations. Three entangled themes are particularly relevant for this paper: first, the dynamics of urban transformations and the emergence of mobile urbanisms; secondly, the effects of globalised higher education as knowledge and people mobility; and finally, the implications of these mobilities for (trans)local planning cultures.

First, cities and urban spaces are undergoing transformations, which are not only triggered by local dynamics but equally by global influences. As Ong (2011, p.1) puts it, 'urban dreams and schemes play with accelerating opportunities and accidents that circulate in ever-widening spirals across the planet'. Understanding cities as emerging from mobile urbanisms departs from the logic 'that people, frequently working in institutions, mobilize objects and ideas to serve particular interests and with particular material consequences; (McCann and Ward, 2011, p.xxiv). In their compilation, *Worlding cities*, Roy and Ong (2011) bring together the "spatialising practices" in and of Asian cities and thus seek to reveal diverse pathways of "being global", beyond conceptions of the Global North.

Secondly, geographies of education have been discussed with reference to emerging global spaces of knowledge production, especially concerning the internationalisation of higher education and transnational academic mobility (e.g. Jöns, 2007; Jöns and Hoyler, 2013). Studying abroad entails a critical engagement with the conditions at the place of study and with the conditions at the place of origin – and possibly other places

of individual mobility trajectories. During experiences of mobility what is conceptualised as “urban” changes, bringing with it alterations in discourses on planning practices and planning cultures, both at the transient spaces experienced in mobility and at the place of origin upon return of graduates.

Thirdly, such student mobilities and their shaping of local urban imaginations, as well as the effects of returnees entering local job markets, have not specifically been addressed in urban studies. Linking the experiences of mobile subjects with changes and dynamics in planning cultures extends both the literature on planning cultures (Ernste, 2012; Othengrafen and Reimer, 2013) and the debate on mobile urbanism, travelling knowledge, and students as “mobile subjects”, and thus “agents” of such travelling (Sheller and Urry, 2006; McCann and Ward, 2011; McFarlane, 2011). The emerging conceptualisation can inform both urban policy making and planning education in times of global mobilities.

To integrate the three themes sketched above, this paper takes as its starting point empirical findings of my research in Bangladesh concerning the temporality and materiality of urban transformations and attendant planning cultures, and subsequently embeds these into conceptual debates. Bangladesh, as a case study for this research, was selected as its dynamics in student mobilities are comparable to a variety of countries in Asia and Africa that experience similar modes and challenges of brain circulation. Furthermore, Bangladesh was the starting point for my ethnographic observations that triggered the emergence of this strand of research. The discussion in this paper builds on five expert interviews with representatives of institutions that hire planners, including in academia, the private sector, the government sector, and the non-governmental sector. These interviews were conducted in Dhaka during April 2015. Furthermore, it also draws on my extensive research experience in planning-related themes in the city of Dhaka (regular fieldwork travel since 2007) and additional interviews and informal discussions with planners in Dhaka conducted between 2007 and 2012. All interviews were analysed with regard to experiences with mobilities – personal as well as with those of co-workers and newly hired staff – and with regard to interviewees’ characterisations of current planning practices in Bangladesh.

Section 2 elaborates on the impact that global student mobilities have on the planning profession in Bangladesh, while Section 3 investigates the interrelations between knowledge mobilities and urban transformations. Section 4 engages with the literature on planning cultures to sketch the complex relations between global knowledge mobilities and a contextualised, situated understanding of planning practices. The paper closes with a discussion of the new perspectives offered by thinking about global mobilities and cities, considering educational migrants as mobile subjects who can potentially influence planning cultures; it further outlines an emerging research agenda for urban researchers.

2. Global Student Mobilities and Impacts on the Planning Profession in Bangladesh

Global student mobility has increased tremendously in the last decade, which has in turn triggered academic discussion on the topic (e.g. King and Raghuram, 2013). Figure 1 displays the number of students from Bangladesh studying in other countries; for many countries a stark increase is visible in the period from 2007 to 2012. For globally mobile students from Bangladesh, the main receiving countries have been Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, but also Japan and Malaysia, while Singapore and China are not included in the statistics.

The global search for higher education and accompanying university rankings and university promotion campaigns has resulted in a differentiation of the educational landscape. Old educational hubs in Europe and North America now increasingly compete with emerging knowledge centres in the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific region, potentially destabilising the long-time hegemony of the Euro-American academic world (Jöns and Hoyler, 2013). This also has implications for the new mobilities of knowledge and the emergence of urban theory and practices that seek to decentre Western cities (Robinson, 2006).

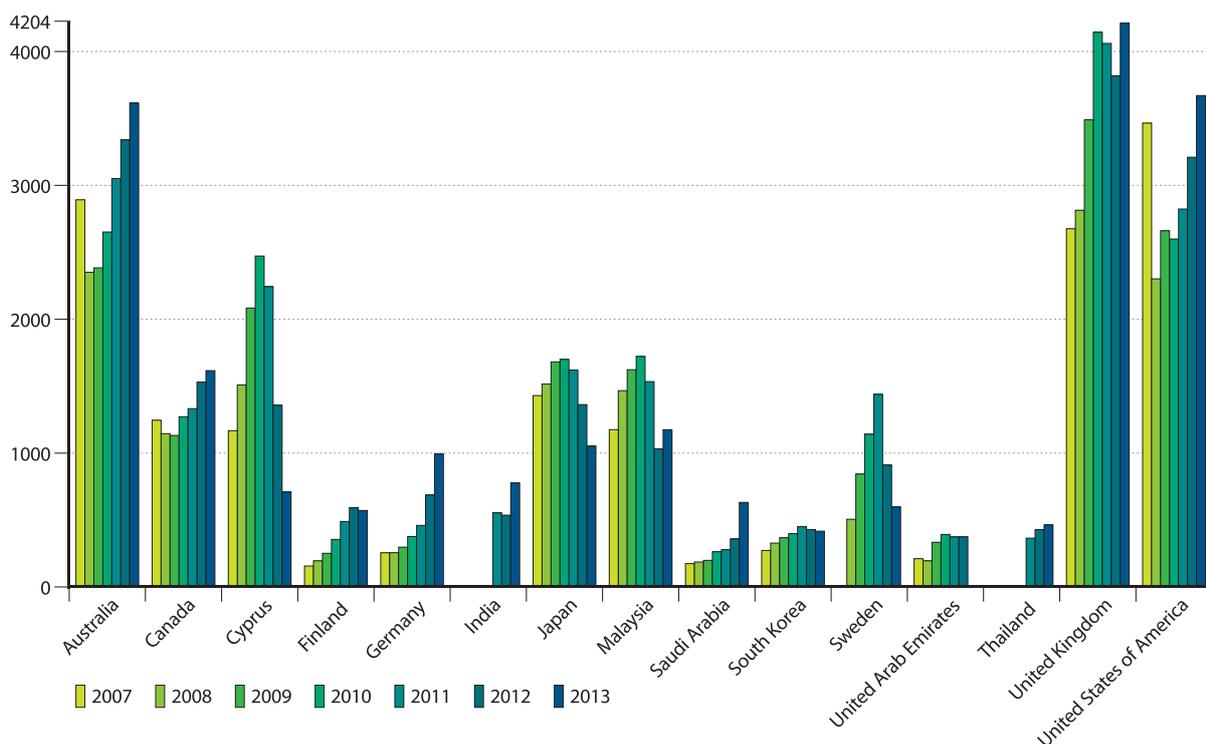


Figure 1: Top receiving countries of international students from Bangladesh, 2007-2013¹
 Source: Website UNESCO Student mobility (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=171>)
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2.1. Brain Circulation Effects for Bangladesh's Planners

Bangladesh has witnessed an enormous increase in outbound student migration. While in 1999 only 7,000 students went abroad for higher education, the year 2012 saw almost 22,000 students leaving the country (United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture [UNESCO], 2015). Students who graduated from urban and regional planning undergraduate courses in Bangladesh frequently move to the European Union Member States, the United States, Canada, and Australia, or to Asian educational hubs, such as various universities in Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Bangkok.

The trend in increased international student mobility over the last 15 years has also impacted planning graduates in Bangladesh. One of the interviewees, a university lecturer, observed that within two years, most of the bachelor's graduates from the discipline of Urban and Regional Planning have gone abroad:

I'm surprised that the majority of our students are not in Bangladesh after five years. Very few remain in Bangladesh. And, returning back has not yet been started. So, I mean, we are proud that our quality [of teaching] is good. Otherwise how would so many students get abroad in such short span of time? [...] Within two years [after graduation] they get out, most of the students go abroad for higher study. So, teaching, or academic-wise, we are quite on par with international standard. But in practice... what I would say is that those people who are staying in Bangladesh, most of them... There are two kinds of planners who are now staying in Bangladesh. One, those who are not ambitious enough. They have the quality to go abroad, but they are not ambitious enough to go out. And the other kind, they are ambitious, but they are not good enough (university lecturer in Bangladesh, April 2015).

¹ This figure displays all the countries where more than 250 students from Bangladesh studied abroad at some point between 2007 and 2012. For India and the UAE, the 2007 to 2010 datasets are missing; for Canada the data is from 2012. For China and Singapore, no datasets are available from UNESCO, although it can be assumed that the numbers of Bangladeshi students in both countries must be considerably higher than 250 per year. The high number of Bangladeshi students in Cyprus is surprising, and needs further investigation. However, Cyprus is neither an established location for urban planning education nor the related studies at the heart of this paper.

This excerpt from the interview raises two observations about the situation of the planning educational environment and profession in Bangladesh. First, of the planning graduates who venture abroad, few of them have chosen to return to date; secondly, employers express a lack of confidence in locally trained planners who do not go abroad. The university lecturer associates global mobilities with personal ambition and the acquisition of better planning skills, both of which would contribute to advancing the planning practice in Bangladesh. However, increased opportunities for global student mobilities result in a persistent “brain drain”, rather than in balanced knowledge circulation for planning practice in Bangladesh. Prospects of permanent immigration, for example to Canada and Australia, mean that a large number of Bangladeshi planners do not return to work in the planning profession in Bangladesh after achieving their postgraduate degrees abroad. The immigration policies in both of these destination countries are considered relatively relaxed for highly skilled postgraduate Bangladeshis; moreover, they have existing social networks and communities that they can capitalise on in these countries. At the same time, the prospects of working in the planning profession in Bangladesh are considered less attractive for reasons that will be discussed in the next section. This has also led to a considerable number of returnees venturing out of the planning profession and into the development sector.

2.2. A Professional Environment that Deters Postgraduates from Return

The decision to return to planning practice in Bangladesh is highly influenced by individual and subjective assessments of the situation at home and a comparative abundance of preferable alternatives. The planning environment, encompassing the shared assumptions, values and cognitive frames of the profession, and its general aims and objectives (Othengrafen and Reimer, 2013), deters postgraduates from return. The discussion here focuses on the particular economic, institutional and socio-material conditions – characterised *inter alia* by organisational structures, working conditions and the general valuation placed on planning.

First, the planning environment found “at home” does not motivate returns due to the economic conditions in Bangladesh, which are considered sub-par to opportunities abroad, and the specific working environment for planners in Bangladesh. In addition, the permanently fragile political situation in Bangladesh since the caretaker government in 2007 and 2008 and the subsequent two periods of Awami League government may have had an influence on individuals’ decisions to stay abroad or return (however, for this paper, the opaque and complex political environment and its impact on student mobilities and planners’ career trajectories has not been investigated). Those planners who returned often did so because they had taken temporary leave from government jobs in Bangladesh. The following quote from an interview with a planner in a statutory planning agency illustrates how job security prompts potential return:

For example, it was not necessary for me to come back to Bangladesh from Germany. From there, I could have gone to America. [...] As I was working under a [Bangladesh] government organisation [on leave], there was a sense of security. It was a reason. And I was also motivated to watch the changes in Dhaka city over the past 20 years as previously I had worked with the planning issues of Dhaka city. I wanted to observe the situation and rate of implementation of existing plans, and I also wanted to discover the problems. My wish was to work with these issues. Therefore, I came back. But it is not as easy for others because each person wants to improve their economic condition and to ensure security for the future. In this case, it is really very tough to motivate someone (planner working in a Bangladesh government agency, April 2015, translated from Bengali).

Despite job security being an enticing reason for return migration, planners on temporary leave can also resign from their posts once they reach the maximum leave period. Therefore, the second reason for return highlighted in this quote proves more significant. The interviewee paints the career trajectory chosen as one guided by individual aspirations to observe and participate in the long term changes affecting the planning profession in Bangladesh. Job security, which is available only in government and academic jobs, combined with a strong individual wish to contribute to change, prompts the desire to return. Nonetheless, many interviewees added that low salaries and the absence of social security schemes discourage their return migration.

Secondly, the institutional conditions of the planning environment deter planners from returning. In further reflections on mobilities and the planning profession, the same government official explained how the

professional environment created by the government – to which the planners would return – encourages the globally mobile to remain abroad:

Australia is a heaven for the planners. After completion of a master's, all of them migrate to Australia or New Zealand. [...] The sector [in Bangladesh] is very small and there are no places except [a few]. But, the LGED [Local Government Engineering Department, one of the statutory authorities that is involved in planning] uses consultants rather than planners to do their work (planner working in a Bangladesh government agency, April 2015, translated from Bengali).

The quote specifically hints at the low institutional appreciation of planners in government offices, and hence rare opportunities to take permanent positions in government as planners. Being a relatively young discipline, what prevails in government institutions is the employment of civil engineers or of Bangladesh Civil Service holders with diverse non-planning backgrounds in positions for which urban and regional planners would be highly qualified.

Thirdly, the low institutional appreciation of planners is reflected in the socio-material conditions of the planning environment. One of the interviewees who previously worked in an international consultancy firm (based in Dhaka) described his transition to a government job as a shock. He attributes this to two reasons: first, the lack of knowledge amongst colleagues and seniors towards planning, and secondly, the material conditions of his job:

So, I had a very nice and fancy office [in the international firm] [laughs]. But when I got the job in [the municipality]... it was a huge shock for me, because nobody knew about urban planning, what it is? What is my expertise? What can I do? There was lots of confusion among them. And also from my side... I used to work in a very international environment, very nice and fancy office, logistics, everything is very organised. But there was no sitting place for me [at the municipality], there was no desk for me. So, it was really a huge cultural shock and I thought that I should come back to my previous job. And one week I could not sleep (planner now working for development cooperation, April 2015).

Nonetheless, this planner decided to see his municipal posting as both a time to familiarise the municipal environment with the interdisciplinary thinking of planning and a time for self-development. He continued the interview saying: 'maybe technically I didn't learn anything but I learned the way of work'.

To sum up, today's global student mobilities result in a low rate of return of Bangladeshi planners to planning-related jobs in Bangladesh. This highly unbalanced brain circulation is caused by both the lure of more attractive working conditions outside of Bangladesh and a lacklustre professional environment at home for young planners. As a result, planning practice in Bangladesh is shaped by a small group of non-migrant planners, along with returnees from abroad who are driven by their convictions and biographies to contribute to planning practice in Bangladesh. They in turn engage with a larger group of "non-resident planners", who enter debates at home via social media and social networks comprising of classmates, friends and colleagues.

3. Knowledge Mobilities and Urban Transformations in Bangladesh

Referring to the gaps in research on international student mobilities, King and Raghuram (2013, p.136) argue that there is 'scope for a much richer understanding of the role of international students in producing and spreading knowledge, and of recasting this role in narratives of international student mobility'. In line with this, this paper approaches international students as mobile subjects who engage in the constant assemblage and re-assemblage of places by way of their everyday activities and performances (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p.214). Globally mobile students assume multiple roles and pursue multiple motivations; thus the diversity of professional, educational and personal experiences gathered in times of mobility matters. Those involved are not only education-seekers, but also family members, workers, and perhaps refugees, and their study location choice may be informed by work opportunities and immigration policies (Raghuram, 2013; Findlay, 2011; King and Raghuram, 2013). Accordingly, individual everyday life practices and experiences (Ho and Hatfield, 2011)

and related knowledge mobilities produce and reproduce diverse urban imaginaries and are resources that inform planning practices and attendant urban transformations.

Secondly, beyond the individual level, there is a wider global trend where policy mobilities facilitate the transfer of planning ideas and concepts from one place to other places. To date, urban studies and approaches to urban development in the cities of the Global South have been influenced by the metropolises of Europe and North America. Along with the recognition that for too long urban theory has prioritised “Western models” and neglected the contribution of other cities around the globe, came a reorientation of cities in the Global South towards models that are less “distant”. This has prominently been brought forward by Robinson (2006), who demands the framing of “ordinary cities” to arrive at a postcolonial urban theory. Similarly, Roy (2009) establishes a view on the twenty-first century metropolis which can be found as much in Mumbai as in other places; she argues how looking at informality as a mode of the production of space can enrich a global urban theory. Adding to this, Bunnell et al. (2012) and Roy and Ong (2011) explore how specifically Asian cities are placed in relation to global urban theory. For South Asian cities, other Asian cities such as Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Dubai, Singapore, or Shanghai among others, have become new reference points for urban development (see, for example, Lowry and McCann, 2011; Chua, 2011; Goldman, 2011). Thus, McCann and Ward (2011, p.xix) press for attention to ‘how – through what practices, where, when, and by whom – urban policies are produced in global-relational context, are transferred and reproduced from place to place, and are negotiated politically in various locations’. Both the individual perspective on knowledge mobilities and the larger scale travelling of ideas or concepts will be discussed and conceptualised below.

3.1. Learning and Translations: The Making of Individual Knowledge Mobilities

Knowledge mobility has been discussed in migration research, for example with reference to highly skilled transnational elites (Beaverstock, 2005), and more recently in research on talent migration (Yeoh and Huang, 2011). Over the course of time, there has been a considerable shift away from analysing only the transnational elites through global economic and corporate logics towards seeing highly skilled mobile subjects as ‘embodied bearers of culture, ethnicity, class and gender’ (Yeoh and Huang, 2011, p.681). The authors within the Special Issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* edited by Yeoh and Huang (2011) argue that transnational highly skilled knowledge elites are not ‘knowledge nomads’, but become part of the spaces they move through, participating in contesting imaginaries of these spaces and the very ‘politics of place’ (Yeoh and Huang, 2011, p.683). Thus, rather than the assumed placelessness of a global consultant industry and its advisors, it is each person’s embeddedness into everyday life and its places and spaces (Ho and Hatfield, 2011) that make migration and mobilities an experience of learning and knowledge formation.

The mobility of knowledge is therefore deeply embedded into everyday “learning”. In *Learning the city*, McFarlane (2011) establishes learning as always being a process of translation. Such learning takes place outside of the classroom in the spaces of everyday urban encounters, as illustrated in the following quote, where the planner interviewed relates his observation of an excursion conducted as part of a postgraduate studies programme in a German city:

At that time, we saw one gentleman was coming down wearing torn jeans and a T-shirt. [...] He was the manager. He is very powerful in [the city] and pays a huge amount of tax and is very wealthy. But he lives in a small house with trees, nice lawn, there are four to five dogs and a swimming pool. His home is very luxurious but small. Then I asked him ‘In what way are you rich?’ He said ‘I bought nature’. So the definition of the rich is different there. In [city name] Germany, the definition of rich is that they come to the hill-top and live in a natural setting with birds chanting, okay! And the dormitory of the students is prefabricated, catter, catter [mimicking repetitive addition of blocks]. These are actually not bad looking, rather good. [...] It seemed to me ‘I am in a fantastic place’. [...] What I am saying is, the dimension is changing. The issue depends on the mental setup, who wants what where? However, ultimately space is a dominating factor. It is very important to see who has occupied how much space. For example, why is so much space needed in *Bongobhobon* [the government quarter in Dhaka] to accommodate [high ranked government officials]? (planner working in a Bangladesh government agency, December 2012, translated from Bengali).

To this planner, the lifestyle choice of the wealthy German man is translated to a lesson for planning practice in Bangladesh. By positioning translation as a key process, McFarlane (2011, p.16) acknowledges ‘the importance of intermediaries in the production of travelling knowledge’ and goes on to argue that ‘the spaces and actors through which knowledge moves are not simply a supplement to learning, but are constitutive of it’. Globally mobile students become such intermediaries who translate the knowledge from studies abroad, and from everyday life and urban encounters, into lessons that travel and which can bring about change to planning practice in Bangladesh.

Learning and translation experiences not only constitute an individual’s personal beliefs, but can also be shared. For example, in Bangladesh there now exists a network of German-trained Bangladeshi planners who collaborate more easily because of their shared training experiences abroad:

It has become easy. Before preparing the plan according to the demand of government, we have to prepare a proposal. Colleague A [anonymised] is involved with the committee under the [specific Government authority] which is working to approve those proposals. While working, we discuss this and then we mitigate because we can communicate in the same language. We understand each other. But our bosses cannot communicate among themselves. It is an advantage for us. [...] So, it is very easy for us to communicate, to keep a dialogue, because we have the same planning background and German orientation. Other planners cannot do this because they do not have that holistic tuning [based on the German curricula of planning studies] (planner working in a Bangladesh government agency, April 2015, translated from Bengali).

Here, global student mobilities centred on an educational destination produce common experiences that can be utilised by a new community of “German-oriented planners” in Bangladesh. However, this is not a simple policy transfer, but a process of translation of individual biographic experiences resulting in circuits of knowledge mobilities. It is not a group of elite transnationals that takes knowledge from elsewhere to a new place and triggers a certain mode of the production of space. Instead, it is mobile intermediaries who establish a translocal planning culture and practice based on individual experiences.

Nevertheless, the view of planners from inside Bangladesh towards the globally mobile planners who return paints a different picture. Two planning consultants interviewed were critical of the benefit of knowledge mobilities, and assessed these benefits as personal gains rather than impacting positively on local planning culture. They see a mismatch between knowledge mobilities and local realities. On the one hand, Bangladesh does not offer what young, globally mobile, and highly educated returnees are looking for, and thus rather than working in the planning profession in Bangladesh, plans for immigration become more relevant. On the other hand, the two consultants spoke of a non-preparedness of planning practice in Bangladesh for ideas from abroad. They expressed how the learning from elsewhere cannot be absorbed at home, where a planning environment persists that is not ready to translate this mobile knowledge to the local urban context. As evident from the same interview, this is also due to competing visions of how planning should be practised, and encompasses societal relations of hierarchies and seniority:

Students who came back [to Bangladesh] share their ideas. They try to implement those. But we never worked at that level. [...] We have to do the basic things first. But these students are sharing their ideas. They are telling us what they have learnt. But we are not capable of accepting this (planner operating a planning consultancy firm in Dhaka, April 2015, translated from Bengali).

Knowledge mobilities thus not only need intermediaries – globally mobile students as individuals with specific biographies, in this case – but they also need structures to make use of their knowledge, be it by absorbing, distancing, or transforming practices. The professional environment’s preparedness for change in the field of the current challenges analysed in Section 2.2 and after critical debate is crucial for enabling translations to transform local planning practice.

3.2. Mobile Urbanisms: Transforming Knowledge Mobilities in Bangladesh

Beyond the individual processes of translation, cities in Bangladesh have for a long time been subject to policy transfers and mobilities. As in many other South Asian – or more generally former colonial – cities, planning

in Dhaka started by following ideals from the West. Accordingly, the Scottish biologist and pioneer town planner, Patrick Geddes, developed the 1917 Master Plan for Dhaka as a future Garden City, thus making early references to Ebenezer Howard's concept of the Garden City. Even today, Howard's vision remains a strong mobile urbanism, informing much of what Singapore has established as its brand (Chua, 2011), although it does not have much relevance to Dhaka today. Long-term inhabitants of Dhaka, though, refer to their city as having been the "Venice of the East", before water channels were built over by rapid urbanisation and largely uncontrolled growth. The 1917 Master Plan – to a large extent informed by public health challenges (Baumgart et al., 2011) – was the starting point for a master planning approach to guiding urban development, following British colonial planning laws that still persist today. Subsequent master plans were put forward by the city region's planning agency, RAJUK (*Rajdhani Unnayan Katripakka* – Capital Development Authority), the last one being the Dhaka Metropolitan Master Plan, with its respective elements gazetted between 1995 and 2010. To date, however, no master plan has proven successful based on its outcome, i.e. in guiding and controlling urban development. Neither has any plan been a success in terms of the plan preparation process. Significant public debate or public participation has not been characteristic of any of the plans. The plans that emerged were bureaucratic-political instruments prepared by contracted private consultancy firms rather than citizen-driven democratic plans (Hackenbroch et al., 2016).

Planning practices in Dhaka have thus been long dominated by a textbook master planning approach – a very widely spread "travelling urbanism". The instrument of the master plan has been questioned due to its rigidity and non-flexibility (Watson, 2009, p.2262), as it is often based predominantly on technical rational evidence (Davoudi, 2015). In its rigid approach it has not been successful in guiding urban development, and by now Dhaka – and other cities in the country – have a history of failed master plans, overtaken by rapid urban development. Knowledge mobilities and mobile urbanisms have for a long time reproduced what was state of the art elsewhere, making Dhaka subject to a typical policy transfer. This was and still is additionally pushed forward by global consultants offering their services, as well as by development cooperation agencies kick-starting the designing of new master plans for municipal corporations. Nonetheless, while there have always been mobile subjects who travel with and translate specific planning practices from elsewhere, a change in engaging with translations can be observed. The planners interviewed spoke of the necessity to "localise" mobile knowledge:

We have to build a best practice. It is at a very preliminary stage because we are not sure that they [local representatives] will accept this. Mayors of the cities are interested in doing this. But, the problem is they already have built their symbol [referring to a prestige project]. The mayor wants to make a new symbol rather than modify the existing one [of his predecessor] because it will not be beneficial for him [laughs]. So, we have to motivate him to modify the old one. Construct a new one but also modify the old one [laughs]. If we totally oppose him he will fire us. So, we are learning. I have learned it from Germany, but I am implementing it here. Before they [employees] do these things, I need to learn. Our background in Bangladesh is complex (planner working in a Bangladesh government agency, April 2015, translated from Bengali).

The quote indicates how this planner seeks to translate knowledge carefully from elsewhere, and how this is, on the one hand, informed by an assessment of the local conditions and, on the other hand, by the degree of transformative capacity of actors at the receiving end, in this case local politicians.

One translation of a mobile urbanism that a globally mobile group of former students brought into urban planning in Bangladesh was a new form of citizen participation. In a disaster management plan for a city likely to be affected by both earthquakes and flooding, the governmental planning agency decided to put particular emphasis on children and mothers as subjects of planning. This triggered a series of children's art competitions, a mobile concept of citizen participation also exercised in other cities. However, what came up in Bangladesh can be regarded as a translation rather than a simple policy transfer. It emerged simultaneously from outside as a concept of citizen participation practised elsewhere and travelling to Bangladesh, and from within, by a circle of previously globally mobile government planners translating the methods locally and adapting their application. Thus this new planning practice denotes a translocal moment, a floating concept that becomes re-territorialised by embedded subjects who make their own choices when implementing it in a specific societal environment:

From day one, we were going to have our target: child and mother. Actually both of them are the real custodians of this plan. [...] But are we telling them how the city is going to be after 20 years? Where will be their place for living? When a mother knows about the location of a playing field, she will prevent the government or private developers who will try to grab that field. Children will also go with their mothers [to prevent/protest]. Then the fathers will automatically come [laughs]. [...] So, we have excluded the fathers [during the citizen participation] [laughs] (planner working in a Bangladesh government agency, April 2015, translated from Bengali).

Perhaps even more important in terms of newly emerging planning cultures was the aim of the government planner in charge to bring about long-term change to planning practice. This was emphasised by building on internal government-appointed planners and aiming at in-house capacity development. This meant simultaneously moving away from the practice of hiring private consultants for planning, while only carrying out the preparatory work in-house:

Previously, consultants were employed for doing this work. Now we are trying to do this on our own. Consultants only do the work and only give us a report and a drawing. And then they leave. Then it is no longer carried on. So, we are trying to carry out most of the work on our own. The main benefit of this is that the fresh young planners, who come from different educational institutions, are gaining practical knowledge as they have learned only theoretical knowledge in their institutes. A person gains his experience from practice. So, they are sent there [to the cities to work as planners]. They make mistakes and then they learn (planner working in a Bangladesh government agency, April 2015, translated from Bengali).

Along with this seemingly local effort, international agencies and international planning consultancies continue to be at work in Bangladesh, and alongside with, or in parallel to, government plans, create and re-create what has been successful elsewhere. This is obvious when looking at how visions for cities are re-created by McKinsey and others (e.g. McCann and Ward, 2011), or how Singapore markets its planning expertise around Asia and beyond and is repeatedly inter-referenced (Chua, 2011; Hoffman, 2011). Similarly, a UN-Habitat publication, *Urban planning for city leaders* (UN-Habitat, 2012), reproduces non-localised standard planning knowledge, and runs the risk of reinforcing standard policy transfers. Thus applied, translations of mobile urbanisms to other local contexts bring with them questions of power relations, as McCann and Ward (2011, p.xxi) warn: 'the insertion of new best practices from elsewhere into specific cities can empower some interests at the expense of others, putting alternative visions of the future outside the bounds of policy discussion'.

4. The Making of Planning Cultures in Times of Global Mobilities

Through everyday life experiences, learning, translation and mobilities, students become intermediaries in a globally mobile urbanism. Globally mobile students as mobile agents engage in a multitude of space-making processes. These manifest in the socialities and materialities of everyday life and contribute to larger processes of learning, where learning triggers the translation of travelling knowledge. They therefore engage in reassembling the urban by entering into discourses and debates, translating travelling models to local contexts and potentially disrupting established compositions of planning cultures.

The debate on planning cultures originally emerged in Europe, when researchers and planning theorists observed how, despite quite similar rules and regulations in planning, outcomes in space were more diverse than a seemingly rational approach to planning would explain. Cultural context and traditions, flexibilities and "unconscious routines" (Othengrafen and Reimer, 2013) seemed to matter more than the technical approach to planning of the 1970s had anticipated and acknowledged. In line with the considerations of the cultural turn, this brought up a thinking of planning as a cultural process, and thus of planning cultures.

The culturalised planning model builds on 'collective modes of thinking and acting of "built environment professionals", stemming in particular from a shared professional ethos but also from more general societal values' (Othengrafen and Reimer, 2013, p.1274). Three analytical dimensions are identified, namely *planning artefacts*, the *planning environment*, and the *societal environment*, building on Schein's model of levels of culture

(2004, quoted in and adapted by Othengrafen and Reimer, 2013). Table 1 illustrates these three dimensions and provides specifications and examples for their understanding (Columns 1-3).

Table 1: Elements of Planning Cultures

Analytical dimension	Definition	Specifications/examples	Impacting factors on the making of planning cultures in Bangladesh
Planning artefacts	Visible planning products; structures and processes	Planning law, planning institutions, master plans, layout plans, participation strategies and instruments, spatial structures of land uses as results of planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master planning • Integrated planning • Children as future users/ participants in planning • ...
Planning environment	Shared assumptions; values and cognitive frames that are taken for granted by members of the planning profession	Institutions (norms, rules), contents of planning, organisational structures, power relations, aims, objectives and principles including Leitbilder, traditions, standards in planning education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigid plan vs user perspective vs reality • Quality of education • Brain circulation (absentees and returnees) • Economic conditions • Socio-material environment • ...
Societal environment	Underlying and unconscious; taken-for-granted beliefs; perceptions; thoughts and feelings which affect planning	Self-conception of planning, people's respect for and acceptance of plans, social efficiency or moral responsibility, fundamental philosophy of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Societal relation principles of seniority, hierarchies • Low appreciation of planners in government administration, belief in engineers and consultants • ...

Source: Othengrafen and Reimer, 2013, p.1275 for Columns 1-3; additions in Column 3 based on Levin-Keitel and Sondermann, 2015 in specifications/examples; Column 4: author's draft

How do mobile subjects then impact on urban spaces, possibly transforming city spaces and shaping discourses within and beyond local spaces? Mobilities of people, ideas, concepts, information, and materials may affect all dimensions of the culturalised planning model and thus can potentially trigger larger transformations. Knowledge mobilities can affect *planning artefacts* in the form of travelling models, such as the ever-travelling Garden City concept or the travelling Singaporean housing policies. Secondly, they can affect the *planning environment* in that the aims and objectives that guide a planning profession change, or in that the biographies and motivations of individual planners are affected. This can also be triggered by travelling models, such as sustainable urban development, which themselves carry certain sets of aims and objectives. Finally, mobilities can affect the deeper layer of the *societal environment*, and change the reception of planning ideas in a society more holistically. Such larger societal changes, however, take much longer than a circuit of international higher education and are empirically difficult to capture (see Table 1, Column 4).

As the discussion with planners from Bangladesh has revealed, knowledge mobilities – emanating from mobile subjects' everyday life experiences and respective processes of learning and translation – impact most directly on the dimension of the *planning environment*. The economic and material conditions experienced by planners in Bangladesh are reflected in the planning environment; returnee “youngsters” exhibit their new ideas and contest older ones; and senior planners may seek to re-establish previously negotiated aims, objectives, and practices of the profession. The networks of the globally mobile materialise as new organisational structures in the *planning environment* that enable or disable, push or hinder, the evolvement of specific *planning artefacts*, i.e. a change of planning outcomes, models of citizen participation and plans. Planning cultures are thus being assembled and reassembled by diverse mobilities, reaching far beyond the territorial dimensions of planning systems inscribed into national laws.

The discussion of planning practices in Bangladesh has indicated that a person's individual biography is central for understanding the influence that s/he exerts on the *planning environment*. An emphasis on subjects can be found in the actor-centred and action-theoretical approach to planning cultures (Ernste, 2012). Ernste (2012, p.89) puts forward the individual and asserts their considerable influence, noting ‘individual persons, their specific biographical background, skills, knowledge, attitudes, talents, motives, and competences [and the influence these] may have in the success and failure of spatial planning’. The knowledge mobilities of globally mobile planning students are a case in point, constructing individual agency beyond larger frames of (local) planning structures. Davoudi (2015) conceptualised planning as a “practice of knowing”. This places the individual (planner) within multiple forms of knowing, interlinked to one another, dynamic and in contestation, eventually building up an individualised understanding of the complex planning environment that enables ‘practical judgement’ (Davoudi, 2015, p.8). It is the situatedness of planners’ “practical judgement” that is increasingly negotiated in circuits of global knowledge mobilities.

I am well aware that planning cultures are more than what planners contribute to them, they are rather a reflection of broader societal relations. Nevertheless, looking through the eyes of planners to see the changes to a profession and the results for urban transformation represents an important starting point to understand larger urban processes. Furthermore, the process of “learning the city” (McFarlane, 2011) not only transforms the places where globally mobile students came from, but similarly triggers re-assemblages of the urban in the places of study – and potentially elsewhere. Mobile subjects’ everyday lives are made-up of translocal practices, where various experiences beyond-the-local shape how city spaces are experienced and produced. Hence, city spaces are characterised by various engagements, both from a distance and on the spot. Returned mobile subjects contribute to debate, as do those who stay in places distant from home but continue to engage with home, especially via social networks, media, and academic channels of communication. The active discussion fora of Bangladeshi urban planners are a case in point; these are platforms where what is happening in Dhaka is discussed from both afar and within.

Given the constant learning and translation of experiences of mobilities, we can no longer speak of local planning cultures, but we need to put emphasis on translocal planning cultures embedded in a global-relational positioning of cities and actors. A translocal and relational lens on planning cultures would acknowledge the interaction and interconnectedness between places, institutions, actors, and concepts across (multiple forms of) borders (Freitag and von Oppen, 2010; Verne, 2012; Brickell and Datta, 2011; Söderström, 2014).

5. A Research Agenda: Mobilities, Planning Cultures and the City

This paper has investigated global student mobilities – one of the dynamic international migration processes within Asia and beyond – and how these knowledge mobilities relate to the condition of the planning profession and urban transformations in Bangladesh. Knowledge mobilities were found to impact most directly on the *planning environment* and thus change shared assumptions, cognitive frames, and the organisational structures of the profession. Further research for an enhanced understanding of planning cultures in times of global mobilities specifically needs to follow up on two perspectives offered in this paper.

First, processes of learning and translation emerge as key to understanding how knowledge mobilities potentially change planning cultures. Here, further research should focus on the how and when of individual and collective learning and translations, and how these become continuously embedded into individual action and agency. Conceptually, following up on the complex interrelations between knowledge and action in planning provides a starting point, focusing planning research on “normative ethics and judgements” (Campbell, 2012) or “practical judgement” (Davoudi, 2015), both oriented at planners’ imaginaries of ‘looking to the possibility of how things might be otherwise’ (Campbell, 2012, p.144). Methodologically, biographic interviews which seek to explore trajectories of global mobilities and everyday (professional) practices and which enable these to be linked to individual circuits of knowing and learning for “practical judgement” could help to consolidate such a framework for planning cultures.

Secondly, knowledge mobilities trigger the emergence of translocal planning cultures. Mobile urbanisms can either come as “alien” to local settings and remain in stark contrast to local realities, or as internalised and contextualised changes in the *planning environment*. Mobile urbanisms and planning practices’ relationality across time and space puts emphasis on how global knowledge mobilities facilitate both processes of territorialisation and de-territorialisation (McCann, Ward, 2011). Again, biographies, individual convictions, and subjective assessments of a context are significant in understanding the ability of local agency to absorb, distance, or transform practices based on knowledge mobilities. Söderström (2014, p.28), in his comparative analysis of Ouagadougou and Hanoi’s trajectories of globalisation and diverse narratives of generating urban change by transnational relations, concludes: ‘when we observe what it is that relations generate, we are inevitably confronted with institutional strategies and human agency that territorialize these relations in often unpredictable ways’. In view of translocal planning cultures, this underlines the importance of individual agency (Ernste, 2012; Davoudi, 2015) and the multidirectionality of knowledge mobilities, learning and translations, enabling for example a conscious “seeing from the south” (Watson, 2009). Further research on the discourses and storylines of specific planning projects would add to understanding of the contestations and transformations of the planning environment and the emergence of a self-conscious and translocal

planning culture. Thus, finally, a (postcolonial) engagement with global student mobilities – or more generally knowledge mobilities – and urban transformations from a global-relational perspective can bring cities of the Global South back on the map of urban theory.

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