

# HUMAN DIGNITY: IS THERE A PLACE FOR IT IN PLANNING?

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(Received 31 December 2018; revised version received 3 October 2019; final version accepted 29 October 2019)

## Abstract

Although human dignity has caught the attention of scholars in many different fields, planners remain unresponsive. Three reasons may be given for planners' neglect of human dignity: (1) so far, nobody has inspired planners to cherish human dignity as a planning value or goal; (2) planners respect and protect human dignity, but do not use the term; (3) planners distrust values that are not too complex for laypersons. Two cases illustrate the possible consequences of 'planning for dignity' – the case of the knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp (Cape Town), and the poor door controversy of 2014. The most important conclusions are that planners, in order to align their plans with human dignity (or ubuntu), must co-produce their selves within local communities affected by their plans. Moreover, planners must recognize the tension that exists between social justice and human dignity: A plan that is socially just can still be humiliating.

### *Keywords*

*Human dignity, housing, poor doors controversy, social justice, spatial injustice, planning theory, ubuntu*

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## Planners as Dignity Laggards

### A Sad Observation

'Spaces of Dialog for Places of Dignity' – the motto of the 2017 AESOP (Association of European Schools of Planning) congress in Lisbon sounded very promising. The motto reflected Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000/C 364/1) which declares that '[h]uman dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected.' Would European planners be eager to share their ideas as to how they think that planning can fulfil this ideal?<sup>1</sup> When I started with the preparation of my presentation, I already knew that planners are less interested in human dignity than, for example, scholars in the fields of political philosophy, human rights law, and health care. But then I learned an even gloomier truth: Planning literature is a dignity lacuna; planners hardly 'do' dignity.

Let me demonstrate by a simple word count what I mean. Admittedly, word counts are imprecise and of limited use. Results need to make an outstanding statement. Otherwise, the results cannot be accepted as based on evidence. In July 2017, I searched in two databases: Taylor & Francis Online (T&F) and SAGE journals. T&F publishes *Planning Theory and Practice* (PTP) and the *Journal of the American Planning Association* (JAPA), SAGE publishes *Planning Theory* (PT). I searched for articles mentioning '(human) dignity' in the title, the abstract or anywhere in the text. My electronic search found 20 PTP articles, 20 JAPA articles, letters to the editor or book reviews, and 28 PT articles or book reviews which contained the word 'dignity' at least once. Typically, the texts mentioned '(human) dignity' in passing. Removing the name of each journal from the electronic search of the publishers' databases (i.e., searching all journals) yielded a different result. T&F has published more than 94,000 articles that contain the word 'dignity' and 426 articles with 'dignity' in the title. SAGE has published more than 51,000 articles that contain the word 'dignity' and 405 articles with 'dignity' in the title (see Table 1).

Table 1: Results of a Word Count in Taylor & Francis Online and SAGE Journals (July 2017)

	articles mentioning '(human) dignity'		
	in the title	in the abstract	anywhere
<b>Planning Theory and Practice (T&amp;F)</b>	0	0	20
<b>Journal of the American Planning Association (T&amp;F)</b>	0	0	20
<b>Planning Theory (SAGE)</b>	0	0	28
<b>all Taylor &amp; Francis journals</b>	426	200	94,577
<b>all Taylor &amp; Francis journals</b>	405	1,210	51,234

As I have been interested in human dignity, spatial planning, and land policy for some time (Davy, 2014; 2015; 2017; 2019a), the survey proved disappointing. Planners receive little inspiration from the treatises on humiliation and the decent society (Margalit, 1996), poverty and homelessness (Waldron, 1991; Finley, 2003; Nickel, 2005; Walker et al., 2013), or constitutional dignity clauses (Liebenberg, 2005; Ackermann, 2012; Barak, 2015). Why do planners fail to engage with human dignity, a topic that obviously has a significant impact on the substance and process of planning? The Lisbon book of abstracts for the 2017 AESOP congress (motto: 'places of dignity') emphasised the critical importance of the question. Of about 1,000 abstracts submitted and accepted, only four papers had 'dignity' in their title (Ferreira et al., 2017).

### Three Possible Explanations

As can be expected with each value-laden concept, no undisputed definition of human dignity exists. The winner of the Philosophical Quarterly Essay Prize 2004 defined human dignity with a view to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):

1 Planners and similar policymakers engage in urban design, regulatory planning, land policy, informal planning, place making, city marketing, real estate development, landscape preservation, environmental protection, economic development, transport planning, or any other activity with public purposes in mind that aim to protect and improve urban and rural spaces inhabited by human and non-human animals. Planning theory examines what planners and other policymakers are doing and if they could do it better.

We respect a person's dignity when we protect his life and agency and when we prevent others from imposing treatment that is severely degrading or unfair. (Nickel, 2005, p.394)

Human dignity is subject to a variety of discourses which pursue different purposes and apply different methods. Important discourses dealing with human dignity include human rights law, constitutional law, political philosophy, sociology, bioethics, and health care (Düwell et al., 2014; McCrudden, 2014). In each discourse, some formal elements of human dignity are accepted. Human dignity is frequently considered to be universal, inherent, inalienable, unconditional, and overriding. Human dignity is *universal* because it applies to all humans, not merely to citizens, a single sex, or high-ranking individuals. Human dignity is *inherent* to being human, not acquired by merit or chance. Human dignity is *inalienable* because nobody can lose their dignity either by the actions of others or by their own doings. Finally, human dignity is *unconditional* because nobody has an obligation to do or omit something in order to acquire or maintain their human dignity. Human dignity is *overriding* because no higher value exists (Riley and Bos, n.d., 3.b.ii).

Human dignity hardly became a topic of public policy before the UDHR was proclaimed by the General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 (GA resolution 217 A). Yet, even after its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the UDHR principle of human dignity is still of little interest to spatial planners. The preamble of the UDHR starts with the 'recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family' and continues with reaffirming the faith of the 'peoples of the United Nations ... in the dignity and worth of the human person'. Moreover, Article 1 UDHR asserts that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'. Although human dignity has been slower in diffusing itself into public policy than equality, security, or liberty, 70 years have been enough time in many other fields to establish dignity discourses firmly.

Planners seem to be dignity laggards for three main reasons. First, nobody has inspired planners to cherish human dignity as a planning value or goal. Patrick Geddes, Le Corbusier, and Jane Jacobs did not 'do' dignity. In various fields – such as political theory, ethics, or law – discourses on human dignity are promoted by inspiring authors and their texts. With respect to human dignity, planners lack such an inspiration. Patrick Abercrombie, in his superb textbook on town and country planning, uses the word 'dignity' five times, yet only in phrases such as 'dignity of a large central square' or 'dignity of city life' (Abercrombie, 1959, p.25 and p.104).

Another possible explanation of the result of the dignity survey (see Table 1) is that planners do not use the word 'dignity' when they promote human dignity. The language of planning is teeming with nebulous terms (e.g., sustainable development, resilience, climate action, smart city). Since nobody knows (and many often do not care) what these words really mean, sustainability or resilience may contain a morsel of dignity. One of the most eminent theories of human dignity, contained in Avishai Margalit's *The Decent Society*, uses the word 'dignity' infrequently as he prefers to examine humiliation instead (Margalit, 1996). Although planners talk about neither human dignity nor humiliation often, perhaps they are interested (one could object) in respect, flourishing, self-efficacy, agency, autonomy, equality, honour, rank, or other concepts that could be used as a proxy. I dare to doubt the objection because planners do not bother with human dignity even if the law compels them to do so. German planning law, for example, specifically lists the municipal planner's duty to ensure an 'environment worthy of human dignity' (*menschenwürdige Umwelt*; Section 1, para. 5, BauGB [= the German local planning law]). German planners are not inspired by this clause, however, and planning lawyers rarely guide them in its direction. Commentaries assert that pollution control would be important to ensure an environment worthy of human dignity (Battis et al., 2016, no.46; Söfker and Runkel, 2017, no.106). In a country with a federal constitution based on respect for, and protection of, human dignity (Article 1, para. 1, GG), the explicit goal of an environment worthy of human dignity has elicited amazingly little attention from lawyers, courts, and planners. The most popular commentary argues that Section 1, para. 5, BauGB demands that all cities be developed and maintained with a view to human needs (Söfker and Runkel, 2017, no.106). What a disappointment! Planners all over the world pay attention to human needs – whether they are prompted by a dignity clause or not. Human dignity must not be reduced to needs satisfaction, however, even if German planning commentators fail to see the point. Considering the meagre attention paid to human dignity and spatial planning in Germany (with a regulatory planning system explicitly promoting human dignity), it is plausible that planners hardly 'do' human dignity even if they are used to deal with a whole host of values and goals.

The third explanation relates to the fact that spatial planning is loaded with values. Although planners constantly deal with values, goals, and qualitative standards, there is no agreement on a canon of planning values (Thomas, 1994 and 2012; Campbell, 2002; Upton, 2002; Speak, 2012; Davoudi, 2016; Savini, 2018). Over almost 40 years casually observing planners, I have drawn some conclusions on planning and values that perhaps explain the result of the dignity survey (see Table 1):

- Planners seem to prefer 'fresh' standards (e.g., sustainability, resilience, responsiveness, liveability) to traditional standards (e.g., goodness, truth, honour). Social justice and economic efficiency are exceptions. The debate on the 'just city' (Fainstein, 2010; Soja, 2010) is vibrant as is interest in the efficient use of resources. Although fresh standards are added all the time, hardly anybody thinks human dignity is worth being concerned about.
- Planners prefer complex standards to simple ones. Balancing economic, social and environmental aspects to achieve sustainability requires a variety of skills that protecting human dignity does not. Laypersons often do not have these skills, and planners use their complex values as comparative advantage. Human dignity is not complex enough to be accepted by planners, whose interest would rely on the existence of a dignity matrix, dignity coefficient, or dignity algorithm. Though laypersons know when they are humiliated, they are intimidated by resilience, sustainability, and climate change. Surely, planners often deal with complex problems that defy simple solutions. Demanding that plans be non-humiliating (Davy, 2019a) sounds like a solution that is too simple and much less sophisticated than sustainable, resilient, carbon-friendly, and smart cities.
- Planners prefer standards they can control. Planners need numbers, geo-data, and colourful maps to explain their plans to stakeholders. Planners are reluctant to adopt any new standard which is difficult to quantify. Especially in the face of conflict, vague qualitative statements rarely help prepare or justify a contested planning decision. This is true for all normative standards, but human dignity is a particularly clumsy standard which tends to become rather personal (Davy, 2019a, pp.86-87). In many planning systems, humans exist as potential users of designated spaces, as households, as pedestrians, as commuters. Such existence is often reduced to numbers and almost always remains impersonal and anonymous. Considering *real* humans and their dignity can result in a planning standard that is too personal, too intimate, too tiny.
- International human rights law and constitutional law often regard human dignity as the supreme value. A supreme value is typical of religions or cults, but many planners are secular and reluctant to accept that a supreme value even exists. Planners seek to bring into balance conflicting values and prefer goals they can put to a proportionality test and balance with each other. A good plan often involves a multitude of welfare-enhancing trade-offs and compromises. A value that is absolute and resists trade-offs puts planners in a difficult position. Either they successfully repress that a case of human dignity occurs in the context of their plan or the mere fact that a case of human dignity exists already will dictate what their plan must say.

All three explanations of the result of the dignity survey (see Table 1) – planners lack the inspiration to cherish human dignity; planners promote and protect human dignity, but call it by another name; and planners dislike values which they find too vague and difficult to control – are plausible to some degree. Whether any of them, or all three, are correct, I shall not try to ascertain. None of my explanations would categorically clarify why planners are dignity laggards. Hopefully, the result of the dignity survey (see Table 1) does not prove planners' hostility towards human dignity. I have not yet met a planner who claimed passionately that they would not rest until human dignity were entirely annihilated or, at least, severely reduced (and I have met many planners who claimed just that about environmental degradation, racism, climate change, or social injustice). I have discussed elsewhere why and how planners better avoid humiliating plans (Davy, 2019a). In the remainder of this paper, I shall discuss two cases of housing and spatial planning to find out whether there is a place for human dignity in spatial planning.

## Two Cases of Housing, Spatial Planning, and Human Dignity

### Planners as Villains: Blikkiesdorp

In order to prepare South Africa for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the post-apartheid planners invented the

Symphony Way Temporary Relocation Area (TRA), a camp of about 1,600 units in the Delft area of Cape Town.<sup>2</sup> The units are made of corrugated steel which is why the residents call the rows of bleak shacks 'Blikkiesdorp' ('blikkie' is Afrikaans for a small tin can). Initially, Blikkiesdorp was supposed to house a group of pavement dwellers in order to give visitors to the World Cup a good impression of the new South Africa. But as time went by and the temporary homes fell in disrepair, Blikkiesdorp became the permanent home of vulnerable and marginalised individuals.

An astute observer of South African society portrayed Blikkiesdorp in a book about a Somalian refugee:

Blikkiesdorp ... has been described as Cape Town's asshole, the muscle through which the city shits out the parts it does not want. That is about right. ... It is the ultimate ghetto, its residents hemmed in by distance, by poverty and by their own personal histories. (Steinberg, 2015, p.xi)

Asad, the Somalian refugee in Steinberg's biographical novel, operates a spaza shop (an informal convenience store) in Blikkiesdorp. Compared with the civil war in Somalia and the deprivation suffered during his flight, the xenophobia and violence perpetrated by Blikkiesdorp residents and gangs appear relatively harmless. Still, in the world after apartheid, a new scourge has emerged – xenophobia:

Perversely, xenophobia is a product of citizenship, the claiming of a new birthright. Finally, we belong here, and that means that you do not. (Steinberg, 2015, p.270)

Extreme poverty, the indignity of shared toilets, washing and cooking facilities, the remoteness of jobs and the unreliability of public transport, an extraordinarily high crime rate, and the prevalence of HIV threaten the everyday survival of Blikkiesdorp's residents. After several attempts on his life, Asad ultimately relocates to the United States; most of Blikkiesdorp's residents remain in a hell without hope.

In the Blikkiesdorp story, the planners are the villains. The spatial plan which created and located the Symphony Way TRA is based on exclusion by distance and invisibility. With regard to presenting the new South Africa in the best possible light to visitors of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the plan was based upon utilitarian justice, the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'. Utilitarian planning often demands that in order to maximise public welfare some individuals or groups must suffer harm or inconvenience (Davy, 1997, pp.261-263). In the case of Blikkiesdorp, however, actions based upon utilitarian motives have flagrantly violated human dignity. The violation is not unlike the inhumane apartheid planning of segregated areas and townships. When I visited Blikkiesdorp in 2015, I was shocked by the carefully planned design of rows upon rows of boxes with wide open thoroughways between the rows (Figure 1) – an attempt to prevent the spreading of uncontrollable fire which so often occurs in informal settlements. But Blikkiesdorp is no informal settlement; its horror has been meticulously planned, including the 'upgrade' of public open space (Figure 2).

On the day of my visit to Blikkiesdorp, not only did I experience housing conditions in clear violation of human dignity, I also learned an important lesson about human dignity. I met with a group of women who called themselves the 'knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp' (Figure 3). The knitting ladies defy spatial injustice by knitting blankets for distribution on Nelson Mandela Day. The group, I was told, had already been meeting regularly for several months. The blankets would be their contribution to the battle against the inclement weather on the Cape Flats during the winter season. The knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp understood that human dignity is more important than allowing yourself to become a victim of spatial injustice.

2 See <https://www.google.de/maps/@-33.9810184,18.6310054,831m/data=!3m1!1e3> (last accessed 1 June 2020).



Figure 1 - The Reality of the Symphony Way Temporary Relocation Area, Figure 2 - Plan for a Public Open Space 'Upgrade', Figure 3 - The Knitting Ladies of Blikkiesdorp Posing for Local TV © 2015 B. Davy

### Planners as Village Idiots: Poor Doors

In a 2015 article published in *The Guardian*, New York City councilwoman Helen Rosenthal praised legislation to end the poor doors' tax break for developers as 'a big win for dignity' (Kasperkevic, 2015). 'Poor doors' is activist shorthand for the separate entrances that residents of affordable housing units must use in an apartment block which predominantly contains high-end apartments and a 'posh door' for wealthy tenants or flat owners. Depending on the housing system, various reasons for putting poor doors in an apartment building exist (Schindler, 2015; Arpey, 2017; Stahl, 2017). The basic rationale, however, relates to the pressure on developers and investors to provide a number of affordable or social housing units in a building where the tenants or condo owners of market-rated flats pay substantial fees for high-end opulence: 24/7 concierge and security services, rooftop swimming pools, fitness rooms, saunas, aroma management, and many other amenities not included in social housing projects. If the tenants of the affordable units had access to such amenities, they would also have to pay the service fees associated with the 'posh apartments'.

Developers use poor door schemes to protect affordable unit tenants from excessive financial burden which would arrest the development of affordable housing in highly priced neighbourhoods. The poor door controversy involved, among others, real estate developments in Los Angeles (Branson-Potts, 2014), New York (Navarro, 2014 and 2015; Wirzbicki, 2014), Vancouver (Lee, 2015; Woo, 2015), and Washington, DC (Withnall, 2014). This 'protection' of residents in affordable apartments can be regarded as treating them as second class citizens, a practice which violates human dignity. Separate entrances to apartment blocks containing affordable

as well as market-rate apartments also instigated controversy in London's East End. One Commercial Street was a prestigious project led by one of the largest real estate companies in the United Kingdom (Figure 4). It too had poor doors – something which stood in stark contrast with the following description of the project available on the developer's website back in 2015:

One Commercial Street towers twenty-one storeys above Aldgate East like a blade of light, its glass fin protruding dramatically to add a sculptural quality to Redrow London's first flagship development.

(<https://www.redrow.co.uk/london/developments/one-commercial-street#development-location>; content has been removed from Redrow's website; last accessed 30 April 2015)

In the poor doors story, planners are not villains, but village idiots. After all, planners had demanded from Redrow that a number of affordable housing units be included in the development. The tenants of affordable units pay much lower service fees than the tenants of high-end market-rate apartments. Separate entrances made separate fees possible (Figures 5 and 6), but resulted in a 'poor door scandal' (Aldridge, 2014). For some weeks, a group of anti-gentrification activists staged protests in front of One Commercial Street. One tenant described her experiences with the housing therein:

I am in need of some help so we accepted this flat but I have never felt so worthless. We aren't allowed to use the main doors and there are always problems in our section, but we can't go to the concierge. (Aldridge, 2014)



Figure 4 - One Commercial Street, Figure 5 - Main Entrance Area, Figure 6 - Tyne Street with Poor Door Entrance to One Commercial Street © 2015 B. Davy

The affordable housing scheme applied to One Commercial Street and similar developments is supposed to serve social justice. To some, however, it is unacceptable that the families, who have secured an apartment in a highly competitive process, are not treated equally to their wealthy neighbours and made to feel 'worthless'. From this perspective, poor door schemes violate human dignity.

Commercial Street is a rather rough, yet vibrant neighbourhood with lots of fruit and vegetable shops and small restaurants offering international cuisine. Its mostly two- or three-storey buildings are home to a culturally diverse (if not very wealthy) population. Historically, the area was famous for its markets, traders, industry, and Jack the Ripper's murders. The street name has not been coined because of the real estate boom, but goes back centuries. It is ironic that a new development in a marginal neighbourhood raises questions of human dignity, but not the fact that London is marred by steep inequality between its residents and pockets of deep poverty. Still, the poor door controversy has hindered Redrow's attempts to improve its image in London's real estate market. The company has suffered a strong public backlash for following the terms and conditions of their planning permission without consideration of potential humiliation. Had the company and the city's planners taken into account the possible conflict between social justice and human dignity, they could have avoided some of the bad publicity. Redrow has distanced itself from the controversy, renaming the market-rate part of the development 'The Relay Building', and the housing association part 'Houblon Apartments' with a separate entrance on Tyne Street (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relay\\_Building](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relay_Building); last accessed 1 June 2020).

### Planning for Dignity?

The two stories – Blikkiesdorp and the poor door controversy – are not ideal marketing material to explain the benefits of human dignity to planners. The two stories illustrate that human dignity does not need marketing, but understanding. Planning for dignity will be haphazard and marginal unless planners understand the many layers of human dignity. Discussing the two cases can be a beginning. Both stories illustrate that neglecting human dignity can make planners look really bad. Blikkiesdorp is a case of spatial injustice and the inability of Cape Town planners to support the FIFA World Cup without exposing vulnerable and marginalised populations to sustained indignity. The poor door apartments are about social justice, location, and the choices that planners (not the housing market) offer to low income households (not unlike the choice air travellers make when they book their seat either in economy or first class). A deconstruction of both cases will show, however, that neither the Blikkiesdorp nor the poor doors case must be reduced to a question of (in)justice.

### Human Dignity as the Co-production of Selves

In a comment in *The Guardian*, the artist Ai Weiwei emphasised the continuous struggle for human dignity:

When we abandon efforts to uphold human dignity, we forfeit the essential meaning of being human, and when we waver in our commitment to the idea of human rights, we abandon our moral principles. (Ai, 2019)

Throughout his comment, Mr. Ai highlighted threats to human dignity and human rights. In this sense, the Blikkiesdorp story is about a violation of human dignity because the residents of the Symphony Way TRA are denied an adequate standard of living and have little or no hope that their situation will ever change. But that is only one aspect of human dignity in this case. After all, the knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp do not complain about violations of their rights. They meet for a good chat and a joint session of knitting, discussing local affairs as well as their knitting progress. The knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp are using their dignity to overcome the despair and squalor associated with their housing conditions. In fact, they practice human dignity as a means of co-producing themselves. Their co-production fulfils an obligation towards the pitiful community of the least well-off.

In Western literature, human dignity is often associated with an individual right or, at the least, the legitimate expectation of every natural person that their human dignity will be protected and promoted. Article 1, para. 1, of the German Basic Law is an interesting example because this dignity clause has been used



- to thwart a general census (BVerfGE 65, p. 1 [1983]),
- to invalidate statutory law authorising the German air force to shoot down planes kidnapped by terrorists and about to be used in a 9/11-kind of attack (BVerfGE 115, p. 118 [2006]), or
- to order social assistance necessary to achieve an adequate standard of living (BVerfGE 125, p. 175 [2010]).

In these cases, the German Federal Constitutional Court ruled on claims based on the *right* to the protection of human dignity: The claim of citizens to digital self-determination and digital autonomy, the claim of potential hostages not to be treated as objects, the claim of persons in need to receive social assistance. Similar claims are made when the right to human dignity is discussed from the perspective of Western liberalism.

But human dignity is not limited to raising claims based on individual rights. Human dignity is also an *obligation*. Many professions – such as emergency doctors, caregivers for Alzheimer patients, teachers of children with learning disabilities – require from their practitioners a profound dedication to the idea of human dignity as an obligation. Stevens, the butler from Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day*, is a fictional example of this idea, because

'dignity' has to do crucially with a butler's ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits. ... The great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost; they will not be shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing. (Ishiguro, 1989, pp.43-44)

We have to admire Stevens for the strength he draws from his notion of human dignity which helps him overcome many of life's obstacles. At the same time, we feel pity with Stevens, who loses his humanity whilst serving an abstract principle of human dignity (his 'professional role' keeps him from visiting his father's deathbed and makes him entertain the follies of his master's guests instead).

The contrast to the knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp could hardly be greater. They do not serve an abstract principle, but instead they practice *ubuntu*. The word derives from the 'Xhosa expression 'Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu', which means that each individual's humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others' (Mabovula, 2011, p.40). The phrase sometimes is translated as meaning 'I am because we are' (Rider, 2016). Individual actions confer *ubuntu* on a person 'insofar as they prize communal relationships, ones in which people identify with each other, or share a way of life, and exhibit solidarity toward one another, or care about each other's quality of life' (Metz, 2011, p.559). *Ubuntu includes 'greeting everyone, sharing, generosity, hospitality, good manners, respect and protecting one's dignity and others' human dignity'* (Mabovula, 2011, p.46). Human dignity is protected under Article 10 and several other provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). Due to this legal significance, the definition and delimitation of *ubuntu* and human dignity are a contested issue in South African jurisprudence (Cornell and Marle, 2005; Mokgoro and Woolman, 2010; Ackermann, 2012, pp.111-115). Justice Yvonne Mokgoro gave this widely accepted definition of *ubuntu*:

Generally, *ubuntu* translates as humaneness. In its most fundamental sense, it translates as personhood and morality. Metaphorically, it expresses itself in *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, describing the significance of group solidarity on survival issues so central to the survival of communities. While it envelops the key values of group solidarity, compassion, respect, human dignity, conformity to basic norms and collective unity, in its fundamental sense it denotes humanity and morality. Its spirit emphasises respect for human dignity, marking a shift from confrontation to conciliation. (Mokgoro J concurring with the majority of the South African Constitutional Court, *The State v. Makwanyane*, Case No. CCT/3/94, 6 June, 1995)

The concept of *ubuntu* has influenced constitutional case law and also permeates rulings on informal housing, land occupation, and eviction in South Africa:

The Constitution and [the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act, 1998] confirm that we are not islands unto ourselves. The spirit of *ubuntu*, part of the deep cultural heritage of the majority of the population, suffuses the whole constitutional order. It

combines individual rights with a communitarian philosophy. It is a unifying motif of the Bill of Rights, which is nothing if not a structured, institutionalised and operational declaration in our evolving new society of the need for human interdependence, respect and concern. (South African Constitutional Court, *Port Elizabeth Municipality v. Various Occupiers*, CCT 53/03, 1 October, 2004)

In *Port Elizabeth* and subsequent cases, the South African Constitutional Court had 'to mediate the tension between the applicable housing and property rights in a manner that affirmed the constitutional values of human dignity, equality and freedom' (Strauss and Liebenberg, 2014, p.435). But whereas many Western interpretations of human dignity emphasise the civil right of individuals to the protection of their human dignity, *ubuntu* seems to emphasise the fulfilling of community-based mutual obligations. Fulfilling these obligations creates the strength of the community not merely as the sum of each individual's strength but as a source of energy in its own right. The contrasts between Figures 1, 2, and 3 reflect the strength of human dignity as engagement with the community and the co-production of selves (Speak, 2012). In this sense, the Blikkiesdorp story is mostly about the extraordinary power of human dignity. But what does it mean for planning?

Human dignity can give the strength to overcome, even if only for a moment, the humiliation caused by a spatial plan. This strength is surprising as well as impressive. Community planners are well aware of the problem-solving ability of close-knit communities. By participating in the co-production of selves, planners can become part of the problem-solving community. This, however, requires them to get involved with stakeholder groups that they, perhaps, do not consider very important. Are there other possibilities to tap into the strength accumulated by *ubuntu*? Once planners have realised that such strength exists, would it be acceptable for them to use it as a legitimisation of their humiliating plans? Assume a planner or other policymaker who knows the strengths and weaknesses of the members of her community well (but prefers to attend to the needs of corporations and the government). She knows, for example, that the coalminers are proud of their tough labour even if it gives them lung cancer. She also knows that poor and extremely poor families can make do with smaller apartments because they huddle together during winter nights in their unheated homes. She also knows that children love French fries and Coca Cola much more than spinach and herbal tea. Being proud of one's work, having close family ties, or enjoying your favourite dinner surely can be expressions of human dignity. But would it not be calculating if the planner withheld safe working places, adequate housing, or healthy food from the community because she is confident of the self-healing capabilities of its members? Asked like this, the question is easy to answer because calculating or predatory planning cannot be morally justified. The Cape Town planners and politicians cannot excuse themselves by pointing at the knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp and their undaunted display of human dignity.

In many other cases of planning in the face of scarcity, the answer may not be so obvious. Needs must when the devil drives, and scarce resources compel planners to make tragic choices all the time. Why not base these choices on local knowledge and community experience? Spatial planning can – and must – account for the abilities, skills, needs, and aspirations of individuals affected by a given plan. Such considerations are calculating or predatory when the planners' expectation of community action is used to justify an unjust and humiliating plan. Harmful plans do not become harmless because a planner expects the affected individuals to withstand the challenge, suffer the pain, and grow in the face of adversity. Expecting positive social skills must be a reason to help such skills expand. The strength flowing from human dignity may make a community resilient or creative, but it does not excuse unjust planning (Kaika, 2017, p.95; Davoudi, 2018, p.105).

One way to resolve the tension between local knowledge and predatory planning is to consider planners as members of the community who partake in the co-production of selves and of community. Still, the balance between predatory planning and making do with scarce resources is delicate. It is easy to imagine a conversation between the municipal officials and planners who were responsible for the World Cup in Cape Town. The conversation would have prioritised displaying South Africa's achievements since the end of apartheid and the comfort of international visitors. The invented conversation would not have focused on the human dignity or *ubuntu* of homeless individuals, especially because the 'mega-event syndrome' makes cities or regions notoriously fail to align their grand aspirations with local needs (Müller, 2015). Even if Cape Town had engaged in a series of participatory events designed to improve decision-making (Kassens-Noor and Lauermaann, 2017), several hundred pavement dwellers would not have swayed the minds of planners

and other policymakers. The story of the knitting ladies cannot end happily because Cape Town planners and politicians still prefer to let the needy of Blikkiesdorp take care of themselves.

## Human Dignity versus Social Justice

The housing projects involved in the poor door controversy have in common that the development of high-end real estate was connected to on-site affordable housing (Schindler, 2015; Arpey, 2017). The fact that poor doors are 'reminiscent of Jim Crow segregation and symbolic of the increasing and perverse levels of economic inequality in our cities' (Stahl, 2017, pp.530-531) also generates indignation. Planning literature has ignored the poor door controversy, but legal literature has not (Iglesias, 2015; Sheffield, 2015; Wittlin, 2015; Eagle, 2017; Stahl, 2017). Human dignity is a recurring topic in the poor door controversy, but it is neither central nor well-defined (Eagle, 2017, pp.131-132). And really, what is so humiliating about getting an affordable apartment in New York City or London? Affordable housing units in high-end apartment blocks in New York City or London surely cannot be compared to the pitiful containers of Blikkiesdorp. Kenneth Stahl asserts that the 'challenge of inclusion' demands that planners and other policymakers choose the right level of determining segregation and exclusion:

[T]he likely alternative to the poor door was that the developer simply would not provide housing for low-income individuals in an affluent neighborhood at all, and then, instead of segregation at the scale of the development, there would be segregation at the scale of the neighborhood or the municipality. (Stahl, 2017, p.531)

The argument is hardly convincing. If human dignity is violated by excluding poor or minority residents from housing, scale does not matter. South African apartheid was not more acceptable because it was practised consistently throughout the country. The exclusion of poor and minority residents from the opportunities that housing markets have to offer would not be more or less acceptable if it was limited to certain buildings. Stahl's argument is pragmatic, however, because he notices in the poor door controversy that

exclusion is more problematic when it is imminent and visible than when it is hidden by segregating people into different places. It is discomfiting to face the reality of inequality and segregation on a daily basis. Moreover, it is possible that such visible segregation could stigmatize, and perhaps even traumatize, poor people in a way that neighborhood-level segregation does not. (Stahl, 2017, p.531)

The pragmatism echoes the approval that urban planning received from Thomas H. Marshall in *Citizenship and Social Class*, his famous work on legitimate inequality:

When a planning authority decides that it needs a larger middle-class element in its town (as it very often does) and makes designs to meet its needs and fit its standards, it is not, like a speculative builder, merely responding to a commercial demand. It must re-interpret the demand in harmony with its total plan and then give it the sanction of its authority as the responsible organ of a community of citizens. ... This is one example of the way in which citizenship is itself becoming the architect of social inequality. (Marshall, 1950, p.62)

Under the logic applied by Marshall, urban housing opportunities *must be unequal* unless poor households are to be excluded from living in the city altogether. Yet, if all households can find a home, under the same logic town planning can designate residential areas for wealthy households. Providing for unequal housing turns the planning authority into an 'architect of social inequality'. From this perspective, the question planners have to ask themselves is whether sanctioning separate entrances for wealthy and rich residents in the same apartment block is a wise move for a successful 'architect of social inequality'.

Richard Epstein, an eminent property scholar in the libertarian tradition, treats the poor door controversy as an example of the incorrect understanding that planners, policymakers and regulators have of market externalities:

The correct way to handle this situation is for the state to compensate (in cash) the developer for the losses attributable to these multiple impositions [i.e., inclusion of affordable units; BD], costs that are likely to prove so expensive that they will not be borne as the price is too high. A simpler scheme uses more efficient separation to provide low-income persons with payments that allow them to receive subsidized housing without disrupting the general practices, whose efficiency rationales regulators often fail to understand. (Epstein, 2018, p.1522)

Either by virtue of planning (Marshall) or de-regulated markets (Epstein), cities require a fair degree of inequality. If the poor can live in the same houses as the wealthy, they will either not be able to pay the rent or have to accept some humiliation. Whether this humiliation amounts to a violation of human dignity remains unclear. Some forms of humiliation are inevitable, but unless it violates human rights, an acceptable margin of humiliation exists (Davy, 2019a, pp.100-103). This is why air travellers can choose between economy or first class, and perhaps this is why somebody, who cannot afford to pay the market rent for their apartments, may be excluded from the rooftop swimming pool without violating their human dignity.

Using the case of air travellers helps explain what went wrong for the planners in the poor door controversy, and why the controversy teaches planners about the relevance of human dignity. Inequality to some degree is tolerable, even necessary, but it becomes dangerous if inequality is enjoyed by the privileged individuals in too obvious a way. Physical and situational inequality in air travel services can result in air rage (DeCelles and Norton, 2016, p.5590). Airlines create inequality by offering greater legroom and edible meals to passengers, who pay extra for the service. This inequality has to be designed carefully unless the airline is willing to risk repercussions from humiliated passengers. Inequality can increase an individual's perception of being poor and excluded even if they are not (Payne, 2017, p.8). The humiliation created by a poor door arrangement is not reduced if the building is located in Central London or Manhattan. Planners in the poor door cases may be dedicated to social justice and affordable housing. Still, they allowed the developers to make them look like village idiots (what Epstein much more politely characterises as regulators who 'often fail to understand' market efficiency). It does not matter that the outcome is just if the process of delivering the outcome is humiliating.

Planners must not assume that equitable plans make everybody forget about human dignity. In fact, a constant tension exists between notions of human dignity and social justice. Tenants of affordable housing units can feel as though they are treated as second-class citizens even if their homes satisfy the standards of adequate housing and social justice. Unnecessary bureaucracy, impolite caretakers, the haphazard disruption of services, or unequal treatment can affect human dignity. The perception of unequal treatment can instigate quite violent reactions. Such tensions in Germany and other European countries caused by actual or alleged differences in the treatment of the urban poor and refugees have shifted public opinion against helping others. The emergence and strengthening of right-wing political movements in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and the United Kingdom can, to some extent, be explained as an unresolved tension between social justice and human dignity (Davy, 2019b). The same seems true of identity politics in the United States (Fukuyama, 2018, pp.22 and 37-49). The poor door controversy of 2014, in which planners and other policymakers neglected the difference between social justice and human dignity, foreshadowed what went wrong in the humanity crisis of 2015.

## Conclusion

In the first part of my article, I discussed why spatial planners are dignity laggards. In the second part, and using unrelated examples, I demonstrated that there is a place for human dignity in planning. The question remains on which level planners should pursue human dignity. Legal debates in countries with constitutional dignity clauses prefer rather demanding concepts of human dignity (Ackermann, 2012; Düwell et al., 2014; McCrudden, 2014; Barak, 2015). A demanding concept sets a high threshold for recognizing a violation of human dignity. Constitutional dignity clauses are often demanding because their application is limited to, for example, the death penalty, torture, excessive use of tranquilizers by hospital staff, or indefinite solitary confinement. Demanding concepts of human dignity avoid conflicts over values, although they have (fortunately) little or no relevance in many everyday cases. But human dignity can also be conceptualised in ways that make it very relevant in everyday life. The ubuntu of the knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp emphasises that human dignity is a

source of strength that planners, in a respectful manner, can use to garner support for plans made under the pressures of scarcity and austerity. The poor door controversy is interesting for planners not because separate entrances for wealthy and poor tenants inevitably violate human dignity, but because it occurred in a situation where planners thought they had been doing their very best to advance social justice. Planners must recognize the tension between social justice and human dignity: A plan that is socially just can still be humiliating.

Both cases provide lessons that cannot be learned as long as planners have no or only a demanding concept of human dignity in their minds. The planning of housing must not merely refrain from setting up conditions that are similar to a concentration camp. The planning of public space must not merely refrain from using arbitrary and violent police procedures. Private homes and public spaces are central to leading a full life worthy of human dignity, and planning must account for the wide variety of opportunities necessary to lead flourishing lives (Gilroy, 2008; Crawford, 2011; Alexander, 2018). A concept of human dignity with a low threshold can result in an increasing number of dignity conflicts. Think, for example, of the black junkie, the white guard, and the (First Nation) narrator in Sherman Alexie's poem on open defecation in a shopping centre stairwell. All three feel that their dignity is compromised by what methadone, the job description of security staff, or the fear of being mugged forced them to do (Alexie, 2005). No constitutional court would consider the situation as a dignity case. Whose dignity anyway? But everyday life constantly makes us define our dignity as well as learn about the dignity of other humans in a negotiation process on paying respect and avoiding humiliation. In this sense, planning for dignity is a very human activity.

## Acknowledgments

I have benefitted from discussions in the workshop for doctoral students at the Chair of Land Policy, Land Management, and Municipal Geoinformation at the School of Spatial Planning (TU Dortmund University). I am grateful for the many comments I received as mentor in the AESOP PhD Workshop in Stara Lesna (Slovakia) and as presenter at the AESOP congress in Prague (Czechia), both in 2015. I am also indebted for my fellowship at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) in 2015 and inspiring discussions with Simon Becker, Ulrike Davy, Margot Strauss, Sandra Liebenberg, Sandra Marais, Anne Phillips, Cheryl Walker, and Eddie Webster. Thank you, Sattwick (Dey Biswas), for bringing the poor door controversy to my attention! Thank you, Sandra (Marais), for introducing me to the knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp! Bertie Dockerill has helped enormously to improve the presentation of my thoughts: Thank you!

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