• The French and British Study Group on Urban Planning is an interdisciplinary network created in 1998 to promote dialogue between French and British academics conducting research on cities in the other country. 21 years of cooperation.

• The group has developed a sustained activity of meetings and events in France and the United Kingdom since that date and has produced a number of academic publications in English and French.

• The present symposium carries forward a theme explore at the French Embassy in London in June 2017.

• Today, the group has more than 50 members, mainly British and French, but also includes researchers from third countries interested in planning and society in France and the United Kingdom.

• Since 2005, the group has been formally established as a thematic network of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP), which has enabled it to reach a wider audience of European researchers.
the potential and perils of cross-national planning research

Discussion of the internationalisation of planning practice, education and research is currently very much in vogue. This is often seen against the backdrop of the contemporary phenomenon of globalisation and growing exchanges and interdependence between global regions and peoples.

The characterisation of the 21st century as the ‘urban century’ and the identification of global planning challenges by many observers and institutions have also contributed to raising the international profile of urban and spatial planning.

International organisations like the UN, regional groupings like the EU, national governments, and region and city networks are engaged in international reflection on the planning of cities and urban regions which are sustainable and resilient in the face of challenges to social, environmental, economic and cultural development. International consultancies offer their planning services in many countries across different continents, often expanding from ‘niche’ markets in the global North and West in search of opportunities for growth.

Educational institutions and professional bodies are increasingly seeking to capitalise on the international demand for education and professional accreditation in planning. Over the past decade UK planning schools have seen their overseas student numbers and applications increase considerably, demonstrating the demand and recognition for RTPI-accredited qualifications abroad, while other countries, like Russia, are seeking to establish more planning and urban-oriented curricula to train practitioners adequately.

Meanwhile, in many countries, including the UK, the highest-quality academic research is considered to be that which is deemed to be ‘internationally recognised/excellent’ or ‘world leading’—although quite how the notion of ‘international’ is interpreted and used in this context, and the extent of meaningful internationalism within the planning academy, remain matters of debate.

However, what is undeniable is that across the various domains of planning activity, scholars, practitioners and students are currently being called upon to contemplate the international dimensions of their discipline. When surveying this context, there is perhaps a need to avoid the trap of what historians term ‘presentism’. Planning has, after all, long been characterised by the international ‘flow’ of ideas, techniques and policy solutions, in a process given impetus by various mechanisms and bodies, including colonial governments, educational and scientific research institutions, professional associations and journals, and international development agencies and consultancies.

The flow of ideas and practices has also been inspired by a general interest in comparing how planning works and deals with certain issues in different places, and a desire to ‘learn from other countries’. As Healey observes: ‘Whenever and wherever planning and development has occurred, it has always involved a degree of transfer, even if this was not planned or designed to happen, and was often an unintended consequence of the experiences of others in other places.’

Similarly, Booth notes that ‘Learning from other countries and the desire to make comparisons have been fundamental to research activity in the field of planning.’ He also emphasises that comparative planning research is complex and can be prone to pitfalls if the context-specificity and cultural embeddedness of planning are not recognised, and that this can be particularly problematic if the goal of comparison is policy transfer.

Echoing this, UN Habitat concludes that: ‘An important lesson from the experience of modern planning is that planning approaches which have been shaped by a particular context should not be considered as models and imposed uncritically on very different contexts. While

Bristol 2015, Nantes 2016 – ‘Green Cities’
London 2017 – ‘Metropolisation’
Tours, April 2019

• The issue of metropolitan governance and the dynamics of urban areas are currently at the centre of political and research priorities in many countries.

• Thanks to UMR CITERES for organisation of this conference
Liverpool, September 2019?

“Make Planning Great Again: Legitimacy and Justice in a Post-Truth World”

Abstract submission until Tuesday 30th April 2019

https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/geography-and-planning/events/planningresearchconference/