

## **The Planning Expert as Stranger: Implications for Pedagogy**

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In this paper I examine the role of the stranger in planning practice, and propose to include the concept in planning pedagogy. I differentiate the stranger and the expert as roles that planning practitioners play within research and consulting. For instance, planning experts could interpret local communities as outside observers, based on field surveys, participant observation, comparative analyses etc. But in teaching such qualitative research methods, we seem to focus more on ways of acting than on ways of being. I suggest that the stranger, as a way of being, is appropriate for preparing practitioners to accept, decipher, and negotiate differences.

By means of sociology literature, from Simmel (1908) to Sennett (2002), I introduce the stranger as a social type. As an important characteristic, the stranger is near to and far from a community concomitantly. There is a role that the stranger assigns to herself in the community and a role that the community assigns to her. These two roles and the motivation behind the respective spatial practices might not coincide. By means of comparisons I present this duality, and contrast outside consultants with outside researchers as examples of strangers' inclusion in urban development. First, according to Banerjee and Chakravorty's illustration of the case, I describe the Ford Foundation role as consultant in transferring western planning technology to Calcutta, India. Second, I recall my experience as outside observer during field research in the Ruhrgebiet, Germany.

Typically the stranger challenges the institutional order of local communities. Based on the two cases in comparison, however, I suggest that the motivations and the timing of doing that within the planning and design process matters. Similarly to Rittel (1984) I consider urban planning and design as a process of forming judgments about the problem prior to problem solving. I advocate strangers' participation in the first phase of the process towards understanding the problem, which I contrast with recommending the solution. Incorporating the stranger's perspective in planning education can provide insightful performers of this role, without involving economic incentives. Their perspective is capable to bring to local communities additional information that helps to build a complex understanding of problems. Moreover, this teaching method is a means to develop a habit of stranger-like spatial research, due to which future practitioners could take into account differences, turn information from strangers into data, and act reflectively in heterogeneous contexts that these differences generate.

References: Simmel 1908, Sennett 2002, Rittel 1984, Schön 1983 & 1987, Baum 2002, Banerjee & Chakravorty 1994, Chakravorty 2000, Banerjee 2005