“Law is an essential element of planning” announces the International Academic Association on Planning, Law, and Property Rights (PLPR). The association bridges the gap between planners and lawyers. In February 2010, more than 120 academics from Australia, Asia, Africa, North and South America, and from all over Europe participated in the Fourth International Conference on Planning, Law, and Property Rights at the School of Spatial Planning, TU Dortmund. The increasing number of participants within the last years demonstrates the demand for a platform of experts in the field of Planning, Law, and Property Rights. The submitted abstracts passed a double-blind review. 94 presentations have been scheduled in 21 sessions. They addressed controversial and pressing issues, dealing with land use regulation, theories of property rights, expropriation, land use control, poverty, or management of natural resources. Despite this wide scope, all presentations had in common a strong interest in spatial planning issues, law, and property rights.

Professor Walter Grünzweig, associate rector for academic affairs and international exchange, proudly welcomed the academics from different disciplines at the School of Spatial Planning – “the very center, the very core, of our university” – as he mentioned. He expressed his admiration for Dortmund planners due to “their unusual way of thinking, synthesizing different approaches and questioning accepted, standard answers”. It was interesting for him to see how many of the presenters “will be questioning established truisms, criticize procedures that are carried out in the name of law, or use legal arguments and principles against inequitable means of coercion, expropriation or environmental destruction. Many presenters here seem not only to analyze but also present, implicitly or explicitly, advocacy for improve

The topics of the sessions addressed the core issues of the relation between planning, law, and property rights, like land management, regulatory practice, expropriation & compensation, or land rights. A session was held on theorizing planning & law to investigate the basic principles of PLPR. Other sessions were about specific contents, regarded from a perspective of PLPR, like history & heritage, challenging climates, planning law & housing, and land & the city. The conference demonstrated the wide scope of PLPR and its members’ research. Professor Greg Lloyd summarizes the session called “So many the use of land” as an excellent session with two presentations with a solid audience which was impressive given.

Professor Michael Wegener put the trend from government to governance into question. Professor Wegener explained that “in Germany, Federal and Länder governments have increasingly withdrawn from national and regional planning and delegated responsibility for spatial development to local governments or private actors with the aim to reduce bureaucracy and strengthen citizen participation”. He claimed for a “reinforcement of democratic decision making at the lowest possible level of government at which not particular interests but the common welfare is pursued” and concluded that “for an increasing part of spatial planning decisions this will be a higher level of government than the local level”.

The four presented papers took the debate well beyond the limits of property development economics and had the great virtue of being usefully complementary. In addition to the presentations, Professor Benjamin Davy showed his poster exhibition “Faces of Land Policy”. The figure below shows important keywords of the session topics during the conference.

Philip Booth, the chair of the session “Commercial property” concludes that "Many presenters during the conference have questioned the prevalently economic perspective of land development and property rights, highlighting the social and environmental implications of land use decisions. They have emphasized the need for more participatory planning processes that involve a wider range of stakeholders and account for the diverse perspectives and values that are at stake. The conference has clearly demonstrated the importance of the PLPR association for fostering a dialogue between planners and lawyers on issues related to land, property, and planning. The future of land management and planning requires a more integrated and inclusive approach that considers the interests of all stakeholders and respects human rights and environmental sustainability."
The young academics of PLPR assembled for the PhD roundtable during the 2010 conference, chaired by Dr. Thomas Hartmann. The aim of the session was to get in touch, learn from each other and help each other. In this manner, the 20 PhD students virtually conducted a PhD speed dating. The participants explained each other the three conclusions of the own thesis in a short talk, which Americans call the "elevator talk". Afterwards, all participants of that particular session split of in four groups, each creating a word cloud of keywords – “social justice”, “real estate”, “legislation” and “stakeholders”. These posters reflect the concerns of PhD topics within PLPR on one hand, on the other hand the roundtable showed that all PhD students within the association have common issues to research about. This is a result that encourages future PhD activities of PLPR.

In the end of the conference, the general assembly of PLPR elected their new executive committee. Leonie Janssen-Jansen, Ben Davy, Thomas Hartmann and Michelle Oren form the new committee.

Finally, the conference in Dortmund showed how the PLPR association bridges gaps between different disciplines and generates new and inspiring research ideas about pressing as well as controversial topics.

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