

The Planner and Society - Regulation or Inclusivity, Co-creation or Isolation: A Comparative Case Analysis

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Abstract - Professional planning credentials occupy a debated subject matter between state authority, market forces, and civil society. This article addresses that gap through a comparative case study of licensing and certification frameworks for urban and regional planners in seven jurisdictions: Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region), the United Arab Emirates, the Philippines, and Singapore. Drawing exclusively on peer-reviewed academic literature, official policy instruments, and legislative texts, the study examines whether professional regulation strengthens or subverts the public interest mandate of the planning profession. Findings are synthesized through a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) matrix and organized along five thematic axes: the primacy of public interest as a professional obligation; ASEAN regional credential harmonization; the tensions between multidisciplinary practice and mono-disciplinary credentialism; the exclusionary dimensions of professional closure; and the regulatory and capacity challenges confronting environmental planning in the Philippines under Republic Act No. 10587 (RA 10587). The article argues that professional credentials are necessary but not sufficient instruments of public interest planning: institutional environments must actively enable, rather than merely permit, planners to serve communities. It concludes with targeted recommendations for specialization board/s development; Philippine Professional Qualifications Framework (PPQF) alignment; and capacity-building strategies applicable to jurisdictions where the planning profession remains developing and changing to respond the call of the times.

Keywords - Credentialism, Environmental Planning, Professional Licensing, Urban Planning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Urban planning as a profession did not develop abruptly. It grew in response to crisis from the wreckage of industrial-era cities whose streets were overcrowded, whose housing was unsafe, and whose air and water had been rendered toxic by unregulated development. In their debates that spanned the different Western European topographies of 19th-century urbanity, reformers and intellectuals maintained that cities required not just better engineering but a novel kind of purposeful and enduring spatial thinking.

In 1898, Ebenezer Howard wrote about planned towns in "To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform" (reissued in 1902 as "Garden Cities of To-morrow"), arguing that decent housing and social reform could go together with a carefully planned settlement design. Patrick Geddes came in when a different prism, the natural scientist and regional surveyor, said that planners ought to know about the environment, history, and society of a place before trying to redesign it. These theoretical concepts gave breed to civic reform movements resulting in the Housing Act of 1909 and Town Planning Act of 1919 in Great Britain, the first legislative frameworks in the English-speaking world to regulate organized planning practice. The Town and Country Planning Act 1947

marked a landmark institutional turning point: the right to change land use was virtually nationalized, and a material change of use could only be made with prior permission of the reorganized Local Planning Authorities (LPAs).

The institutional context in which the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI, established 1914, Royal Charter 1959) was able to establish as a professional standards body could also be found here. The RTPI now has tens of thousands of members in a myriad of countries and yet still has its origins in that post-war moment of state ambition and social hope. The 1947 Act matters to this analysis not only for what it did in Britain but for what it exported. When the British Empire dissolved, planning ideas and institutions followed through versions of the Town Planning Ordinance in Hong Kong and later Singapore. The Philippines developed its own planning profession based on public administration influences from the American system and later its own environmental planning legislation. The United Arab Emirates, a federation formed only in 1971, drew its planning professionals primarily from international consultancy firms, producing a hybrid of Gulf governance traditions and compressed Western practice. These divergent genealogies are visible in the systems examined today.

A. Scope and Purpose of This Article

This article compares professional licensing and certification regimes for urban and regional planners in seven jurisdictions: Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, the United Arab Emirates, the Philippines, and Singapore. It does it in a comparative prism based on peer-reviewed scholarly sources and poses a focal question: Does professional regulation promote the common good, or in some situations does it become a subversive practice? The article puts a lot of emphasis on the example of the Philippines, where the case of the Environmental Planning Act of 2013, known as Republic Act No. 10587, is a reality but it is limited due to structural obstacles concerning school supply, practitioner density and connection to the Philippine Professional Qualifications Framework (PPQF).

II. METHODOLOGY

The primary methodological approach is a comparative case study design. A case study is a suitable approach to phenomena that are highly contextual (Yin, 2018), and professional credentialism in city planning is just such a phenomenon: the same title Registered Professional Planner could refer to radically different practices, roles, and community relationships within different jurisdictions. Peer-reviewed journal articles, policy materials of professional organizations and statutory bodies and legislative texts were used to draw the data.

The literature review was performed on Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR and Web of Science with the following terms: "urban planning certification," "planning profession comparative," "planning public interest," "AICP credentialism," "MCIP Canada," "Philippine environmental planner," "Singapore URA governance," "Hong Kong planning system," and "UAE urban governance," among others. Only English-language sources were included. Primary legislative instruments and documents published by the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP), the American Planning Association (APA), the RTPI, Hong Kong Institute of Planners (HKIP), Emirates Planning Association (EPA), Philippine Institute of Environmental Planners (PIEP), and URA were accessed as documentary sources to verify factual information on credential requirements and institutional frameworks.

Interviews, surveys, and fieldwork were not conducted. Findings are synthesized using a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) framework applied comparatively across all seven jurisdictions. The SWOT framework is employed not as a strategic planning tool but as an organizing framework of comparative observations that would be hard to hold together otherwise. After conducting the SWOT analysis, the five thematic discussion sections proceed through the descriptive observation into the normative argument.

III. RESULTS: COMPARATIVE CASE ANALYSIS

A. Canada MCIP/RPP Dual-Track System

Canada has constructed its planning profession as a two-pronged structure tying national character to provincial accountability. The national-level designation, Member of the Canadian Institute of Planners (MCIP), must be earned in conjunction with or after accreditation as a Registered Professional Planner (RPP), Licensed Professional Planner (LPP), Urbaniste, or provincial equivalent regulated by a Provincial or Territorial Institute

and Association (PTIA) affiliated with CIP (CIP, 2024). This pathway assumes Planning Degree Requirement: This pathway requires a planning degree that is recognized by the Planning Standards Board (PSB) and a specified amount of mentorship with a qualified RPP, supervised planning work, and passing the PSB professional exam (CIP, 2024).

The Canadian system is available to internationally recognized planners under reciprocity agreements with the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) and the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP). There are genuine advantages to this system chief among them the mentorship requirement, which passes professional judgment forward through practice in ways that an examination alone cannot. However, structural tensions remain. One province does not plan legislation and, accordingly, the planners of such jurisdiction are referred to as MCIP designation without the RPP qualification which gives it legal force in other jurisdictions. The lack of credential portability poses a strain when practitioners are doing more work across the regional boundaries. The increasing commodification of planning practice in Canada resonates with trends Clifford et al. (2024) documented in the United Kingdom, where a worrisome professional quietism develops as planners internalize market logics instead of confronting them.

B. United States the AICP Voluntary Certification Model

In the United States, professional planning certifications are done by the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), which is the certifying agency of the American Planning Association (APA). The AICP designation needs a degree at a Planning Accreditation Board (PAB)-approved institution, qualifying professional experience, and a national exam in planning history, law, practice, ethics, and theory.

Certified planners must maintain their credential through ongoing continuing professional development (CPD). AICP practitioners are paid a regular salary premium over uncertified professional, which reflects the worth that employers attribute to the designation. The most distinctive feature of the American model is that certification is entirely voluntary nowhere in the United States is it illegal to work as an urban planner without the AICP designation. Supporters argue that this openness makes planning open to outside the traditional planning curriculum architects, engineers, lawyers, and community organizers. Opponents have countered this with the fact that voluntarism has created a bi-level profession: AICP members are overrepresented in senior, better-paying, and more influential positions, while uncredentialed practitioners (who were disproportionately represented among communities of color and recent immigrant populations) are overrepresented in junior and contract jobs, and lack the ethical accountability mechanisms formal credentialing enforces.

C. United Kingdom the RTPI and Chartered Membership

The United Kingdom represents both a case study and the point of departure for most planning traditions examined here. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), established in 1914 and granted a Royal Charter in 1959, is the foremost professional and regulatory body for planners throughout the UK and Ireland. Chartered Membership comes via four competency-based Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) pathways, with access routes such as Licentiate, Associate, Specialist, and Degree Apprenticeship routes - the routes are to broaden access to chartered status (RTPI, 2024). All non-retired categories require registrants to maintain annual CPD records.

The UK planning system is under considerable duress. Clifford et al. (2024), there is a growing privatization of planning functions, and the ratio of planners in the private sector is now balanced or higher than in the public sector planners. The reduction in local planning capacity by austerity budget cuts to local planning authorities and the growing dependence on the services of private consultancy. The lesson for other jurisdictions is sobering: a powerful professional body and an internationally recognized credential are insufficient to safeguard the planning profession's public interest mandate in an institutional environment that is being systematically eroded.

D. Hong Kong the HKIP and an Executive-Driven Planning System

Hong Kong's planning system bears clear marks of its British colonial legacy. The statutory framework originated with the Town Planning Ordinance (1939), and the Hong Kong Institute of Planners (HKIP), which

became a professional body incorporated by ordinance in 1978, adheres to a British model of professional institution. The HKIP offers a qualifying credential, accepted by the Planners Registration Board to Registered Professional Planner (RPP) status (HKIP, 2024). Alumni of the HKIP/RTPI-accredited University of Hong Kong Master of Science in Urban Planning program can become dual members as well as eligible to take the examination to become a Registered Planner in mainland China (HKU Faculty of Architecture, 2024) a rare career trajectory that symbolizes Hong Kong's location between two fundamentally distinct planning traditions. Planning decision-making in Hong Kong has long been characterized by an executive-led governance model that restricts genuine public participation. Ng (2008) outlined legal-institutional arrangements that institutionalized exclusion to participate and restricted decision-making powers to a privileged few. The situation has deteriorated since 2020. As Leung (2025) notes, most social activists are now quieted by the National Security Law and Article 23 regulations, and such terms as "public participation" have disappeared in the planning-related documents. Recent amendments to the Town Planning Ordinance further reduced the number of required public hearing rounds, representing a clear regression in participatory governance.

E. Singapore URA-Centered Planning Architecture

Singapore presents a planning case that challenges key assumptions in the professional credentialism discourse. The authority in planning here is vested not in a decentralized marketplace of credentialed private practitioners but in a few, powerful governmental organizations. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) established in 1974 and officially declared as the national land-use planning authority in 1989 formulates the Long-Term Plan and the statutory Master Plan that regulates development control. Housing Development Board (HDB) controls the policy of public housing and JTC controls the industrial planning. Together, these agencies have delivered public housing for the vast majority of Singaporeans one of the highest public housing provision rates in the world (Yuen, 2009).

Individual planning practice in Singapore is not subject to statutory licensing examination. The Singapore Institute of Planners (SIP) offers professionals membership and continuing education, although the importance of credentials is highly dependent on institutional membership rather than professional licensing. Although the centralized model has produced impressive physical planning results, critics observe that the model has little co-production to communities, and its historical approach to urban redevelopment has occasionally erased previous social history and *kampung* (village) community networks to efficiency and progress (Yuen, 2009).

F. United Arab Emirates Emirate-Level Governance and the EPA Certification

The UAE offers a planning governance framework that fits neatly within none of the categories examined elsewhere. As a federal state composed of seven emirates, each emirate retains its own land-use planning authority. Abu Dhabi's Department of Urban Planning and Municipalities (DUPM) prepares its structural framework plans; Dubai enacted a new Urban Planning Law in 2023 aligned with the Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan. There is no overarching national planning law and no national professional registration arrangement for planners.

This gap is being addressed by the Emirates Planning Association (EPA) through its Certified Planning Professional (CPP) designation, which requires an accredited degree in urban planning or urban design and defined professional experience within the UAE (EPA, 2024). This is a significant move towards professionalizing a practice that has traditionally been nearly entirely dependent on foreign consultants. The accelerated physical metamorphosis of the UAE, related to iconic architecture, economic liberalism, and global city branding (Alawadi and Dooling, 2016) has created massive demand on planning expertise that local institutions have been unable to fulfill. Rehan (2016) has argued that planners operating in Gulf urbanism must balance social, economic, and environmental sustainability rather than allowing economic strategies to dwarf environmental stewardship.

G. Philippines Republic Act No. 10587 and Environmental Planning Practice

The regulation of environmental planning practice in the Philippines is governed by Republic Act No. 10587, the Environmental Planning Act of 2013, which defines environmental planning used synonymously with urban and regional planning, city planning, and human settlements planning as "the multi-disciplinary art and science of analyzing, specifying, clarifying, harmonizing, managing and regulating the use and development of land and

water resources, in relation to their environs, for the development of sustainable communities and ecosystems" (RA 10587, Sec. 4[a]). This general definition portrays the licensed Environmental Planner (EnP) as not a technician specializing in land-use only, but as a practitioner who has the ability to think simultaneously on ecological, legal, social, and governance scales.

Practitioners must obtain a Certificate of Registration and Professional Identification Card from the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) by passing the Environmental Planning Licensure Examination (EPLE) (Republic of the Philippines, 2013). RA 10587 also made education requirements significant compared to the previous Presidential Decree No. 1308, catalyzing increased enrolment in planning programs (UP CIDS, 2025). The accredited professional organization (APO) in the law is the Philippine Institute of Environmental Planners (PIEP), which has the institutional home of the practicing Environmental Planners and the development of CPD and examination syllabi.

H. Comparative SWOT Analysis

Table 1. Comparative SWOT Analysis of Planning Certification Frameworks Across Seven Jurisdictions

Country / System	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Canada (MCIP/RPP)	Dual-track national/provincial MCIP+RPP system; mentorship-led certification pathway; reciprocity with AICP and PIA.	Provincial fragmentation; one province lacks planning legislation; credential portability barriers for internationally trained planners.	Indigenous planning integration; CIP policy renewal; expansion of international reciprocity.	Commercialization of planning services; austerity-driven outsourcing; structural barriers for internationally trained planners.
USA (AICP)	PAB-accredited programs; AICP salary premium recognized by employers; national competency benchmark via examination.	AICP entirely voluntary; uncredentialed practitioners face no ethical accountability; equity gaps in professional access.	Equity-centered AICP reform; climate and AI planning specializations; interdisciplinary credential tracks.	Privatization of public planning functions; credential exclusivity reproducing racial and class inequities.
UK (RTPI)	RTPI Chartered status internationally recognized; four competency-based APC routes; CPD mandatory for all non-retired members.	Privatization erodes public sector planning capacity; planner shortages in local planning authorities (LPAs).	Planning reform agenda; RTPI international chapters; degree apprenticeship routes widen access.	Planner workforce crisis; austerity cuts to LPAs; commercial logics absorbing professional public interest mandate.
Hong Kong (HKIP/RPP)	HKIP statutory professional body; dual HKIP+RTPI membership pathway; legislative advisory role for members.	Executive-led governance constrains participatory planning; post-2020 political environment further limits community voice.	Greater Bay Area integration; cross-boundary planning expertise; smart city governance opportunities.	Erosion of participatory governance tools; political constraints on professional advocacy; land scarcity pressures.

UAE (EPA/CPP)	EPA Certified Planning Professional (CPP) designation emerging; national vision frameworks drive strategic planning investment.	No unified federal planning profession law; planning expertise heavily expatriate-dependent; nascent EPA certification system.	Gulf-wide planning network; smart city ambitions; knowledge economy diversification under Vision 2071.	Expatriate workforce instability; limited local planning capacity; absence of statutory professional regulation.
Philippines (EnP / RA 10587)	RA 10587 statutory mandate; multi-disciplinary scope defined in law; PIEP as accredited professional organization (APO); EPLE as national standard.	Shortage of accredited planning schools outside Metro Manila; geographic barriers to EPLE; limited CPD infrastructure.	PPQF-MRA alignment; ASEAN credential harmonization; CSC reclassification mandate under Section 34; expansion of planning schools.	Proliferation of unlicensed practitioners; inadequate CPD; LGU governance gaps in Mindanao and the Visayas.
Singapore (URA/SIP)	URA as powerful statutory planner; long-term Concept Plan; high plan compliance rates; HDB public housing model.	Top-down technocratic planning culture; limited community co-production; limited transparency in plan review.	Smart Nation integration; climate resilience planning; knowledge-sharing with rapidly urbanizing Asian nations.	Centralized model suppresses community agency; limited adaptability for kampung-scale and participatory contexts.

Source: Synthesized from peer-reviewed literature and official institutional documents reviewed in this study.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Public Interest as a Primordial Professional Obligation

Across all seven jurisdictions, the public interest functions as the foundational moral claim that justifies professional planning credentials. Republic Act No. 10587 states that the Philippine state acknowledges the significance of environmental planning in "nation-building and development" (Sec. 2). The RTPI makes Chartered Membership a guarantee that planners will act in line with the "highest professional and ethical standards" in service of "healthy, sustainable and prosperous communities" (RTPI, 2024). In Singapore and Hong Kong, statutory planning authority requirements enshrine the popular interest. The vision documents used in planning in the UAE appeal to the sustainability and liveability of the nationals and the high expatriate population.

But language is not practice, and the gap between the public interest as stated and as delivered is where much of the critical planning literature lives. Howe (1992) determined that the understanding of the relationship that planners have with the public is the focal point of ethical orientation of the profession - and that a certificate cannot take the place of such understanding. A meta-analysis of the literature by Dawidowicz et al. (2024) affirmed that although the planning profession is legitimized by the concept of public interest, there has been a growing critique of the ideological connotations underpinning the concept, as well as the concealed nature of the concept.

Related tension is described by Barry and Legacy (2023): with the spread of the participatory planning practice into a credentialled sub-field of its own, the risk is that it will be absorbed by the logic of consultancy and lose the connection to the community-based grassroots engagement on which it was intended to serve. Collectively, these results suggest that there is a widespread agreement that professional credentialism is necessary but not sufficient. The institutional surroundings should be so structured as to render the planning of the public interest not only possible, but feasible and rewarded.

B. ASEAN Integration

The ASEAN region is urbanizing rapidly, and the professional infrastructure for managing that urbanization is struggling to keep pace. Since 2020, UN-Habitat has partnered with ASEAN to accelerate implementation of the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanization Strategy (UN-Habitat, 2022). In this environment, professional Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) - the official arrangements which permit credentials obtained in one member state to be acknowledged in other countries - have become a practical concern to the Philippines.

ASEAN MRAs for engineering, architecture, and surveying have created credential portability frameworks that environmental planning has not yet accessed. The Philippine EnP designation under RA 10587 has not been included in an overall ASEAN MRA, and the lack has its real costs: Filipino planners can no longer easily sell their expertise to rapidly urbanizing neighbors, nor can the Philippines tap into regional pools of planning talent to ease its internal shortage. The two conditions that need to be achieved before meaningful ASEAN-level engagement is possible are a well-defined, publicly accessible mapping of the EnP designation in the PPQF, and a substantially larger pool of licensed Environmental Planners to make reciprocity arrangements viable.

C. Multidisciplinary Practice and the Challenge of Credential Silos

One of the most enduring tensions in planning professionalism is the gap between the discipline's stated multidisciplinary and the mono-disciplinary character of its credentialing mechanisms. RA 10587 defines environmental planning as a "multi-disciplinary art and science." The RTPI's competency framework spans technical, legal, ethical, and community-engagement domains. The AICP examination covers law, social science, physical planning, and professional ethics. However, examination-based tracks question a limited amount of knowledge that, by definition, is not capable of capturing the breadth of knowledge that modern planning requires.

Climate adaptation requires planners fluent in hydrological modelling, public health epidemiology, and behavioral economics. The administration of smart cities requires knowledge of data science, cybersecurity and cyber ethics. The confluence of megaproject development, Islamic urbanism, and global city branding in the UAE necessitates a type of planner that can be culturally sensitive, environmentally sensitive in terms of sustainability measurement, and financially sensitive and skilled in global financial planning. Greater Bay Area integration in Hong Kong also necessitates that planners switch between common law and civil law traditions of planning and alternative institutional vocabularies. Single-track credentialing is not well suited to any of these challenges. A response to this is specialization boards within the PIEP, AICP, CIP or a future ASEAN planning professional network that establishes recognized lines of approaching climate resilience planning, heritage conservation, transit-oriented development and urban data analytics.

D. Licensing and Certification: Exclusivity, Prestige, Discrimination, and Closed-Box Thinking

A strand of critical scholarship on the professions originating with Larson's (1977) foundational work refuses to take professional bodies at their word about public interest. Reading it this way, professional closure is not so much a quality assurance, as a market monopolization: a process where incumbents seek to maintain their economic privilege by limiting entry into a profession.

In the United States, the voluntary character of the AICP designation produces a kind of inverted exclusivity. Since the credential is not a mandatory requirement, lack of it does not prevent access to the field, but having it provides skewed access to senior positions and professional networks. Uncertified planners, who are primarily attracted to the field in disproportion to communities of color and new immigrant populations, hold junior and contract jobs without the ethical accountability framework that formal membership offers. The result is a profession formally inclusive but structurally stratified.

In Canada, internationally trained planners including those from the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and African countries with growing planning professions face significant barriers to credential recognition in a system designed around accredited programs based predominantly in North America and Australia. Lack of such strong Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) routes implies that planners whose education and experience was obtained elsewhere might find their credentials challenging to translate irrespective of work

quality. The significant privatization of the profession in the United Kingdom brings up concerns regarding whether Chartered Membership is quality assurance or market exclusion (Clifford et al., 2024). The HKIP qualification is not able to fully safeguard the ability of the members of the planning profession to serve the interests of the public in Hong Kong because political subordination of the planning profession to executive governance prevails (Ng, 2008; Leung, 2025). In the UAE, the dominance of expatriate planners and the nascent state of the EPA certification marginalizes locally trained Emirati planners and impedes knowledge transfer.

There is also the "closed-box" problem: the epistemological insularity that can accompany strong professional identity. When the planning of knowledge is largely justified by examinations and by certification by peers, alternative forms of knowing, tacit, experience-based and community-based, may be systematically undervalued. The experience of governance at barangay level in the Philippines, indigenous land stewardship in Canada, kampung community networks in Singapore, neighborhood memory in the redevelopment areas of Hong Kong, and traditional settlement knowledge of the Emirati communities: none of them fits well into an examination syllabus, but all are forms of planning intelligence that credentialed practitioners disregard at their own peril to the communities they serve.

E. The Philippine Context: RA 10587, the PPQF, Planner Shortage, and Specialization

a. Philippine Professional Qualifications Framework and RA No. 10587

Republic Act No. 10587 is a remarkable piece of legislation. It provides Environmental Planners with a definite statutory requirement, sets up the Board of Environmental Planning as an agency under the PRC, establishes the scope of practice with a fair amount of breadth, and bans unlicensed practice. There is however no legislation that develops professional capacity. The full realization of RA 10587 is inhibited by structural limitations (UP CIDS, 2025).

The PPQF is the policy framework according to which the EnP designation is to be placed in a hierarchical mapping of all professional competencies between generic competency and doctorate level expertise. The problem is that the EnP credential has not been clearly mapped to certain PPQF levels, and the mapping has not been published by the means of official policy instruments. The gap creates ambiguity in two significant respects: recognition of credentialing of ASEAN MRA negotiations, which need clearly parallel reference points among member states; and assessment of EnP qualifications by employers to other licensed professionals in multidisciplinary project teams. Addressing this mapping gap is a finite administrative task that would yield outsized returns for the profession both regionally and nationally.

The Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 10587 mandate that the Civil Service Commission (CSC) establish qualification standards for Environmental Planners, and that after a transition period only registered and licensed Environmental Planners may be appointed as heads or assistant heads of planning departments and divisions in national and local government agencies (PRC, 2015). The current Index of Occupational Services under DBM Budget Circular No. 2022-2 provides the administrative instrument for formal assignment of position titles, qualification standards, and salary grades across the civil service (DBM, 2022). If positions in government do not require an EnP license, there is no market signal to motivate planning graduates to acquire the credential, no basis for promoting licensed practitioners over unlicensed ones, and no structural incentive for agencies to invest in CPD for planning staff.

b. Shortage of Planners, Planning Schools, and Training Infrastructure

The most urgent structural challenge confronting environmental planning in the Philippines is a supply problem: there are not enough licensed Environmental Planners to fulfill the country's planning mandates. Hundreds of local government units (LGUs) are obligated under the Local Government Code of 1991 to prepare Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) and Local Development Investment Programs (LDIPs). In smaller cities, especially in Mindanao and the Visayas, where most accredited planning programs are clustered in Metro Manila, the planning functions are done by engineers, public administrators, or agronomists with the appropriate skills but not trained in planning (UP CIDS, 2025).

Closing this supply gap requires a concerted effort on multiple fronts: expanding accredited environmental planning programs in underserved regions; formally embedding online and blended learning modalities into EPLE preparation; and revisiting the transitional provisions of RA 10587 that permitted incumbent government planning personnel with civil service eligibility and relevant in-service training to take the EPLE within a specified window. The Philippines is not alone in facing planner shortages as it mirrors the reliance on expatriates in the UAE, post-2020 professional limits in Hong Kong, and the workforce crisis in the local planning authority in the United Kingdom (Clifford et al., 2024). The profession as a whole has not yet addressed this challenge with sufficient seriousness.

c. Specialization Boards

The case for instituting formal specialization tracks under the EnP credential is growing. Not all of the practice areas listed above can be well covered by a single generalist study: climate adaptation planning, disaster risk reduction, smart city governance, heritage and cultural landscape planning, transit-oriented development, and others. Specialization sub-tracks are already available in the AICP of the United States; the Canadian RPP system has similar functional differentiation. Specialization boards would enable the PIEP and the Board of Environmental Planning to uphold standards in a widening practice without forcing all EnP to be specialists in all sub-fields. They would also give a better foundation to LGUs, national agencies, and private clients when it comes to making procurement decisions, and would also indicate to the next generation of planning students that being an EnP is a valid specialization and that it has depth.

d. Knowledge Management and Best Practice Documentation

The most invisible yet impactful gap in Philippine planning professional practice is the absence of a robust knowledge management system. The professional libraries of the APA, the Journal of the American Planning Association, and the Planning Theory and Practice, Town Planning Review, and Journal of Planning and Environment Law give planning professionals institutional infrastructure on which to systemically document, publish and disseminate knowledge based on practice. Filipino planning practitioners have no comparable institutional infrastructure.

At least three concrete implications follow. First, when a municipality in Leyte develops an effective community-level CLUP process following a typhoon, or when a city in Mindanao implements a successful zoning reform, those experiences are not systematically collected and shared across the hundreds of other LGUs grappling with the same issues lessons already learned at great cost are re-learned independently. Second, the lack of institutional Philippine planning literature structures well-developed ideas and experiences of Filipino planners out of global conversations not for want of knowledge to contribute, but for lack of platform infrastructure. Third, the evidenced ground in constructing political and budgetary cases to invest in planning school capacity, competitive EnP compensation, and community engagement tools are still small in cases where the practice of professionalism is poorly represented (UP CIDS, 2025).

A functional knowledge management architecture for Philippine environmental planning could include: a national anonymized database of CLUP and LDIP process documentation; an in-house peer-reviewed journal associated with the PIEP or a national university; a systematic program of case study production tied to EPLE preparation and CPD; and formal affiliations with international schools and organizations that would place Philippine planning practice in global discourse of public policy rather than at its margins.

V. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This article has compared professional licensing and certification frameworks of urban and regional planners in seven jurisdictions Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, the United Arab Emirates, the Philippines and Singapore, and placed them in a narrative history of their origins in the early legislative and institutional developments of early twentieth-century Britain and their subsequent spread, adaptation and transformation in other national contexts. The main thesis has been that credentialism in planning is a valid and required instrument of setting minimum professional standards, imposing ethical responsibility and guarding communities against uninformed or self-interested planning decisions, however, it is not necessarily a community interest instrument. Under the wrong conditions, it becomes a mechanism of market closure,

structural discrimination, and epistemic insularity, all of which undermine the very public interest mandate it ostensibly exists to serve.

The SWOT analysis reveals that each jurisdiction presents a distinctive profile of regulatory strengths and structural vulnerabilities. The provincialization and commodification of the state planning services in Canada mirror processes observed in the United Kingdom (Clifford et al., 2024). The voluntary model of AICP certification provides formality of inclusivity that is fatigued by structural inequities in access to the profession. UK is confronted with planner workforce crisis due to austerity and massive migration of the profession to the private sector. Since 2020, the planning system in Hong Kong has experienced a real regression of participatory governance (Leung, 2025; Ng, 2008). The UAE is developing its domestic planning career on a fairly skimpy institutional foundation (Alawabi and Dooling, 2016). The centralized system of Singapore provides the results other countries admire and limits agency and democratic expression by communities (Yuen, 2009). The Philippines, through RA 10587, has created a statutory framework ambitious in design and underserved in implementation (Republic of the Philippines, 2013; UP CIDS, 2025).

Several cross-cutting recommendations emerge from this analysis. At the national level, coordinated systems of acknowledging community-based, Indigenous, and experience-based planning knowledge and examination-based qualifications would be beneficial to all seven jurisdictions. On an institutional level, professional associations, such as the RTPI, HKIP, EPA, PIEP, SIP, CIP, and APA are to intensify the reciprocal membership and knowledge sharing arrangements. On the regional level, member states of ASEAN must come up with a planning MRA with the Philippine EnP designation. In the case of the Philippines, the CSC reclassification requirement as per Section 34 of RA 10587 is an actionable institutional reform that, should it be undertaken by the PIEP, DHSUD, NEDA, and local government networks, has the potential to bring a fundamental shift in the professional practice of planning across government.

The question in this article's title regulation or inclusivity, co-creation or isolation — is a provocation, not a forced choice. Planning systems that best suit most people over the most extended durations of time are those that embrace both of the values simultaneously; strict professionalism and fairness to community wisdom; responsibility to a profession and responsibility to a populace; that discipline which credentials indicate and that humility which acknowledges that no test can prove all that good planning demands. No jurisdiction examined here has fully achieved this balance but all seven have something to learn from the others, which is itself one of the strongest arguments for comparative planning research.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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