



# Contemporary Movements in Planning Theory

Critical Essays in Planning Theory: Volume 3

*Edited by*

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# Introduction

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People are always shouting they want to create a better future. (Milan Kundera, 1982, p. 22)

Belief in progress doesn't mean belief in progress that has already occurred. That would not require belief. (Franz Kafka, 2006, p. 49).

In the new millennium planning theorists are debating the relative merits and demerits of a multiplicity of different theoretical approaches. As the complex heterogeneity of social, political, economic and ecological worlds has come to be recognized over the past 25 years or so, it has become apparent that planning theories and practices require, and have been undergoing, substantial modification. The essays in this volume illustrate the diversity of theoretical work which currently exists, ranging from the modernist and structuralist to postmodernist interpretations and, most recently, to engagement with post-structuralist thinking.

It has been difficult to group these papers into separate Parts, as there are considerable connections and overlaps between inspirations and conceptions. Nevertheless, in Parts I to III we attempt to distinguish contributions which reflect some of the different ideas with which theorists are working. In Part I we present authors who have become associated with the 'communicative turn' in planning theory. In Part II we link together essays developing network, relational and institutional perspectives of planning understood primarily as a governance activity. In Part III the range of essays is broader, reflecting the work of scholars in the planning field who are adopting, adapting and developing concepts from post-structuralist philosophy and not only the social sciences, but also the physical and biological sciences, especially in relation to complex concepts.

The group of ideas which we have presented under the label of communicative planning theory is particularly associated with authors such as John Forester, Judith Innes and Patsy Healey, while some notions can be traced back to John Friedmann's *Retracking America* (1973). The term 'communicative' acknowledges the link to Jürgen Habermas concept of communicative action. However, many of those who are developing communicative theory in the planning field do not share Habermas's idealistic hope for the creation of a juridically-organized, consensus-based democratic society. Instead, the authors interested in the communicative practices of planning activity incorporate rather more differentiated notions of collaboration and inclusive 'working together' in often fragmented, conflict-laden and uncertain environments.

Published analyses of empirical cases which narrate stories of instrumentalism, lobbying, coercion, deep differences and incommensurable conflict suggest that theorists can ill afford to ignore issues of economics, power and politics (see Part I of this volume). This underlines John Forester's view of planning practice as a highly political endeavour, in which practitioners act 'in the face of political inequality, racism, turf wars, and the systematic marginalisation and exclusion of the poor' (1999, p. ix).

Spatial planning theory and practice attempt to cope with complexity and uncertainty through imagination and experimentation in what is increasingly recognized as 'a world of continuous variation, becoming and chance' (Doel, 1996, p. 421) rather than of stability and predictability. If the world comprises multiple fluxes and flows, how might spatial planners seek to affect and 'manage' environments in undecidable<sup>1</sup> situations? Can we develop theories and practices of provisional agonistic pragmatism<sup>2</sup> which rely less on closure and more on discovery, which reveal potentialities and opportunities and which work with differences and ambiguities?

The essays in Part III of this volume cannot offer definitive answers to these questions, but they do engage with critical debates. Several authors adopt post-structuralist stances developed from the French social philosophers, especially Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze, as well as psychoanalysts Jacques Lacan and Félix Guattari. Key aspects of post-structuralist theorizing with regard to planning are the setting of meaning and action in complex relational contexts, where relations between actors (human and non-human) are subject to contestation and where meanings and identities are not fixed but are liable to be transformed as new interpretations and identifications emerge. Worlds are co-constructed in complex junctions and disjunctions, foldings and fracturings of actors and their situated knowledges, including those of spatial planning theorists and practitioners.

Jonathan Murdoch (2006, pp. 16–18) outlines several important implications of post-structuralist ideas of relevance to planning theory:

- Concepts are open and fluid, not representing but resonating.
- Knowledge is contextualized in performative contexts.
- Space is not fixed, but mutable.
- Theory is not oriented to apprehension of (a single) truth but is 'a practical means of going on' (Thrift, 1996, p. 304), recognizing its own contextual limitations.
- Theory emphasizes the 'on-going creation of effects through encounters' rather than 'consciously planned codings and symbols' (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000, p. 415).
- Encounters can be acute conflicts over domination and resistance of meanings, identities and practices.

The above list indicates a radical rupture from the theorizations of many of the early essays included in Volume 2 (Hillier and Healey, 2008b). It is possible, however, to trace emphases on fragmentation and diversity, practical wisdom and pragmatism through into the postmodern and post-structural ideas in Volume 3.

Many theorists are struggling with the idea that 'there are no clear boundaries, no well-defined essences, no sharp separation' but 'tangled beings ... rhizomes and networks' (Latour, 2004, p. 24). Current debates in geography and planning centre on issues such as: whether scale is vertical, horizontal or flat; the value of a network metaphor over a metaphor of 'rhizomes'; the difference between the embedding of people and places in social, economic and political relations or their entanglement with such relations; the conceptualization of subjectivities

<sup>1</sup> Undecidability is a concept developed by Jacques Derrida (1988) which 'opens every decision (and keeps it open) to the possibility of being otherwise' (Lucy, 2004, p. 151).

<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to John Pløger and Lars Engberg for this term.



and identities – human, non-human, hybrid or cyborg; and differences between formality and informality.

We note here, with disappointment, the current lack of theoretical inspiration in the planning field directly attributable to women philosophers and psychoanalysts, such as Hannah Arendt, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Luce Irigaray, Melanie Klein, Julia Kristeva and Chantal Mouffe amongst others: ‘a dramatic absence that is directly relevant to the question of women’ (Moore Milroy, 1994, p. 144). A notable exception to this rule, however, has been Beth Moore Milroy (1991, 1992, 1994), who has leant on insights from Braidotti, Grosz and Irigaray to illustrate how women provided ‘the perspiration; not the inspiration’ for planning practice and were often an ‘unacknowledged foundation’ in planning theory (Moore Milroy, 1994, p. 148). Now that over a decade has passed, a new generation of women planning theorists following Moore Milroy’s example is long overdue. We, as editors, hope that the strong presence of women spatial planning theorists in this volume will serve to inspire others to theorize the embodied micro-politics of situated subjectivity and exclusion and to challenge the material and symbolic practices of spatial planning.

Feminist geographer Doreen Massey has stated that space – and spatial planning – is never closed: ‘there are always – at any moment “in time” – connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for all potential connections have to be established), relations which may or may not be accomplished’ (Massey, 1998, p. 28, cited in Murdoch, 2006, p. 20). Space is unpredictable. Yet spatial planning practice must be concerned with the future, with thinking through probabilities and potentialities in new ways in order to construct a democratic and inclusive ‘plan’ for people to come.

This could be a pragmatic theory and practice of hope – a new kind of contest or agon in our cities and rural areas in which there is a ‘cosmopolitical’ (Stengers, 2005) space for democratic debate about the meanings and implications of signifiers such as ‘a good city’, ‘sustainability’, ‘multiculturalism’ and so on. Planning theory and practice must negotiate the complex multiplicities of unknowns constituted and affected by multiple, divergent desires, needs and wants. As such, we argue that theorists and practitioners need to be driven by ‘a belief of the future in the future’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 6).

A broad rereading ... confirmed the theory. In all fictional works, each time a man [*sic*] is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts’ui Pen, he chooses – simultaneously – all of them. He creates, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork. (Jorge Luis Borges, 2000, p. 51, emphasis in original)

JEAN HILLIER AND PATSY HEALEY

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Part I

Communicative Practices and  
the Negotiation of Meaning



# Introduction to Part I

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Telling the truth is not such a simple thing. (Liggett, 1996, p. 299)

The turn to an interest in communicative practices and the negotiation of meaning in planning theory develops from an understanding that ‘we are diverse people living in complex webs of economic and social relations, within which we develop potentially very varied ways of seeing the world, of identifying our interests and values, of reasoning about them, and of thinking about our relations with others’ (Healey, 1996, p. 219). Accordingly, the communication of different values, interpretations and desires between individuals and groups becomes highly important if planning practice is to cater to the needs and demands of its stakeholders. The ‘power’ of planning lies not in its formal procedures, its legislative foundations or its political role, but in the communicative practices of the social relations in which planning is entangled.

In the early 1990s researchers investigating empirical practice situations suggested that ‘solving’ difficult policy problems required a much deeper understanding of how different groups framed the situation (Schön and Rein, 1994). They argued the importance of interactive, deliberative processes of recognizing other groups, their values and arguments, of negotiating the implications of various value-positions, articulating reasoned justifications for claims and discovering shared orientations and desires (see especially Fischer and Forester, 1993). To do this effectively, being able to listen to ‘all the voices’, meant working at local levels. As Hajer and Wagenaar (2003, p. 7) comment, ‘such deliberative approaches to public policy emphasise collective, pragmatic, participatory, local problem solving in recognition that many problems are simply too complicated, too contested and too unstable to allow for schematic regulation’ (2003, p. 7). Originating in the mid-1980s – in John Forester’s (1982, 1985) ‘critical pragmatism’, in Judith Innes’ (1990) social construction of indicators and in Patsy Healey’s research on the practices of policy implementation (Healey, 1983, 1990; Healey *et al.*, 1988), a new form of ‘communicative’ or ‘collaborative’ planning theory became increasingly influential around the world during the later 1990s and early 2000s.

All the authors in Part I are concerned with trying to understand the work of planners in professional practice. Many build on versions of discourse analysis, drawing directly or indirectly on the work of Michel Foucault (see Hajer in Volume 2 (Hillier and Healey 2008b), Chapter 16) to examine of the everyday work of practitioners across a range of discourse communities. The authors interrogate planning practice and its written and verbal ‘texts’, investigating the forms of language and images which actors use, the meanings constructed, represented and legitimated in plans, and the relations of power such meanings represent and promote.

None of this emphasis on communication and dialogue was new, however. John Friedmann’s 1973 volume, *Retracking America: A Theory of Transactive Planning*, emphasized the importance of the relations between knowledge and action, dialogue and learning. Friedmann was one of the first to recognize ‘post-Euclidean’ planning in a ‘transactive, dialogic style’



(Friedmann, 1998, p. 31) which broke with the traditional assumption of communication as a one-way process *from* planners and argued for a relation of dialogue as a basis for mutual learning *between* planners and other actors. Transactive planning ‘shifted the discourses of planning theory away from planning as an *instrument of control* to one of *innovation and action*, which, in turn, raised questions about what values ought to guide our practice, what strategies should be adopted and how participation by community and/or stakeholders might be furthered’ (Friedmann, 2003, p. 8, emphasis in original).

Reflecting the major philosophical shift of the late 1960s and 1970s (see the main Introductions to Volumes 1 and 3 (Hillier and Healey, 2008a and b)), Friedmann’s theory embraced notions of the social construction of reality, non-linearity and contingency. His transactive theory, as outlined in Chapter 1 of this volume, goes beyond understanding community knowledges and values and understanding value uncertainty, towards a normative emphasis on what planners ought to, or should, do. Its emphasis on ‘the life of dialogue’ (p. 18) and its characteristic features of the acceptance of diversity or ‘otherness’ as a basis for meaningful communication, a recognition of the importance of moral judgement, feelings and empathy, and an acceptance of conflict as well as assumptions of shared interests and commitments, reciprocity and so on (pp. 17–23) anticipate the selected essays by Patsy Healey, Raphaël Fischler, John Pløger and Vanessa Watson by several years. In addition, Friedmann’s emphasis on ‘the Tao of transactive planning’ (p. 25), suggesting that ‘[a]ll things go through their own transformations’ (p. 26) and his injunction to ‘[k]eep your mind open to what is yet to come’ (p. 29), are significant forerunners of recent developments of complexity theories presented in Part III of this volume.

Perhaps the 1973 world of planning theory was not yet ready for such ideas, influenced as it was by political economy debates (see Volume 2 (Hillier and Healey, 2008b), Part I). It was not until after the publication of John Forester’s *Planning in the Face of Power* (Forester, 1989) that theorists came to focus on procedural issues of how planners in practice could become more effective in acting and in implementing policy ideas. Such theorists tended also to be ‘motivated by the ideal of a democratic, participatory style of planning’ (Taylor, 1998, p. 123) which reflected wider debates about the nature and potential role of participatory and deliberative democracy in politics and philosophy in the 1980s and 1990s (see, for example, Mansbridge, 1980; Barber, 1984; Dryzek, 1990).

In 1980 John Forester suggested that some aspects of German critical theory might have an important role to play in the praxis of spatial planning and public policy-making, since they offer a new way of understanding action (what a planner does) as attention-shaping (communicative action) rather than more narrowly as a means to some end (instrumental action). Forester combined the insights of language philosophy, pragmatism (see Volume 2, Part III) and critical theory in the study of planning practice to demonstrate how planning conduct involves much more than judgements based on rational method and principles. Planning practitioners perform and conceive advice within linguistic, social and cultural deliberation. Forester’s insight was influenced by the ideas of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who summarized communicative action as ‘the conviction that a humane collective life depends on the vulnerable forms of innovation-bearing, reciprocal and unforcedly egalitarian everyday communication’ (Habermas, 1985, p. 12). Forester and other theorists (such as Sager, 1994) were inspired particularly by these concepts of reciprocal and egalitarian communication. In particular it was Habermas’ argument that already implicit in