

Planning Theory and the City

Susan S. Fainstein

Programs in city and regional planning typically have one set of courses devoted to the process of planning (planning theory, planning methods), while another group treats the context (structure of cities and regions, urban history) and the object of planning (e.g., redevelopment policy, environmental policy) with little reference to theories of the planning process. In turn, this division of labor within the curriculum has led to a similar divide within scholarship. Consequently, much of planning theory discusses what planners do with little reference either to the sociospatial constraints under which they do it or the object that they seek to affect.

I argue in this article that such a narrow definition of planning theory results in theoretical weakness arising from the isolation of process from context and outcome. I further contend that the object of planning theory should be to formulate answers to the following questions: (1) Under what conditions can conscious human activity produce a better city for all citizens? (2) How do we explain and evaluate the typical outcomes of planning as it has existed so far? Although addressing these questions does require examination of the planner's role and strategies, it also demands exploration of the field of forces in which planners function and a formulation of what a better city might be.

Before I proceed further, three caveats are in order. First, my characterization of planning theory's insulation is a generalization that does not apply to all courses in theory or to all planning theorists.¹ I base it on the question that organized a widely attended roundtable at the 2002 meeting of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP): Should planning theory and theorizing about the city be separated?² The roundtable started from the premise, which appeared undisputed by either the speakers or the audience, that planning theory has increasingly excluded the object of planning from its consideration. It echoed an earlier diagnosis of the problem that Robert Beauregard stated in 1990: "[Planning] theorists delved more and more into an abstract process isolated from social conditions and planning practice. . . . Few planning theorists concern themselves with the physical city" (p. 211). Second, my listing of the two questions that should govern theory building in planning reflects my value orientation—that the purpose of planning is to create the just city. Although later in this article I attempt a justification of this outlook, fundamentally it arises out of a commitment that is not necessarily shared by all and to which others may not be persuaded. Third, when I use the term "the city," I do so out of convenience,³ and by it I mean

Abstract

The distinction between urban theory and planning theory is not intellectually viable. Reasons include (1) the historical roots and justification for planning, which depends on a vision of the city rather than simply a method of arriving at prescription; (2) the dependence of effective planning on its context, which means that planning activity needs to be rooted in an understanding of the field in which it is operating; and (3) the objective of planning as conscious creation of the just city, which requires a substantive normative framework.

Keywords: *planning theory; planning process; just city; communicative rationality*

Susan S. Fainstein is a professor of urban planning and acting program director at Columbia University. She is the recipient of the 2004 Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning Distinguished Planning Educator Award. In fall 2005 she will become a professor of urban planning at Harvard University.

regions as well—that is, any spatially defined unit that constitutes the object of planning.

The characterization of planning theorists as disregarding the city applies most strongly to those who presently focus on prescribing normative criteria for planning practice, as well as their predecessors who sought to delineate a technical strategy for planners in the rational model, in operations research, or in various concepts of bounded rationality. The focus of the contemporary group is on communication and the roles of planners; the theorists of rationality primarily concern themselves with methodology and its limitations. At the same time, however, there has been a developing body of empirically based planning theory that does look simultaneously at planners and their spatial objects. Beginning, to name a few, with Meyerson and Banfield's book *Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest* (1955), continuing through Alan Altshuler's *The City Planning Process* (1965), Francine Rabinovitz's *City Politics and Planning* (1969), Peter Hall's *Great Planning Disasters* (1980), James Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (1998), my own book *The City Builders* (2001), and most recently Bent Flyvbjerg's *Rationality and Power* (1998), we have seen a steady stream of works that raised questions of how planners shaped urban form, the political and economic forces constraining planning, and the distributional effects of planning decisions. That these (with perhaps the exception of *Rationality and Power*) have usually not been labeled books in planning theory and assigned in planning theory courses seems largely a consequence of convenience and of the self-conscious labeling of their output as planning theory by one group of scholars in the field who concentrate on the role of the planner as mediator.⁴

The distinction between urban theory and planning theory, however, is not intellectually viable for a number of reasons, which I will elaborate in this article. They include (1) the historical roots and justification for planning, (2) the dependence of effective planning on its context, and (3) the objective of planning as conscious creation of a just city.

► Historical Roots and Justification for Planning

If one examines the historical roots of planning, the question one would more likely ask is not, "Should planning theory be urban?" but rather, "Why has planning theory ceased to be urban?" The impetus for the development of planning lay in a critique of the industrial city and a desire to re-create cities according to enlightened design principles. Whether the focus was on greenfield sites, as in Ebenezer Howard's garden city model, or on redeveloping the existing city, as in Haussmann's

Paris and Burnham's *City Beautiful*, planning devoted itself to producing the desired object. It did so, however, without reflection on the process by which the ideal city was formulated. Its implicit theoretical arguments were about the nature of the good city rather than how one derived that concept. It was taken for granted that the function of planning was to impose a consciously chosen pattern of development upon the urban terrain; the method of making the necessary choices was not problematized. Rather, good planning was assumed to be simultaneously in the general interest and guided by experts.

To be sure, there was, during the first part of the twentieth century, some attention to process, as American progressive reformers, in their effort to rid government of bias and corruption, successfully pressed for independent planning commissions. This move, a part of a general impetus to divorce public policy determination from politics, rested on a view that a sharp line separated politics from administration and a belief that experts could develop policies in isolation from selfish interests. It incorporated the thesis, later made explicit in planning's rational model, that general goals could be stipulated in advance within a democratic political process; then, the formulation of the means to reach those goals and the process of implementing those means could be conducted impartially by disinterested appointed officials (Dror 1968; Faludi 1973). In part, it was this assumption that precipitated the recent turn in planning theory to communication, a theme to which I will return later in this article.

The development of an explicit theory directed at prescribing the planner's modus operandi began with the publication of Karl Mannheim's *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* in 1935.⁵ It laid the philosophical foundations for later theorizing by describing a democratic planning process that would enable experts to plan under the guidance of the public through their elected representatives. Mannheim's ambition exceeded that of *city* planning—inspired by the ideals of reform liberalism, he envisioned the national state's participation in economic and social planning. He argued that if the planning bureaucracy was subject to parliamentary control, it could apply its technical expertise to the solution of social problems without impinging on freedom:

The new bureaucracy brought with it a new objectivity in human affairs. There is something about bureaucratic procedure which helps to neutralize the original leanings towards patronage, nepotism, and personal domination. This tendency towards objectivity may, in favourable cases, become so strong that the element of class consciousness, still present in a bureaucracy which is chosen mainly from the ranks of the ruling classes, can be almost completely superseded by the desire for justice and impartiality. (Mannheim 1935/1940, 323)

In his acceptance of the role of impartial expertise and of legislative control of planning goals, Mannheim (1935/1940) laid the foundation for the direction taken by academic planners during the postwar period:

The subject [of physical planning] changed from a kind of craft . . . into an apparently scientific activity in which vast amounts of precise information were garnered and processed in such a way that the planner could devise very sensitive systems of guidance and control. . . . Instead of the old master-plan or blueprint approach, which assumed that the objectives were fixed from the start, the new concept was of planning as a *process*. . . . And this planning process was independent of the thing that was planned. (Hall 1996, 327, 329)

Famous for transforming city planning from a primarily design profession to a social science, theorists at the Universities of Chicago and Pennsylvania and their followers laid out the rational model and methods for testing policy alternatives (Sarbib 1983). They relegated public input to the goal-setting process, after which experts would reach a decision using the tools of modern statistical and economic analysis. Ironically, however, the vision of planning expertise incorporated in the rational model wholly ignored the devastating attack on positivism mounted by Mannheim himself in his essay on the sociology of knowledge. Here, in a striking foreshadowing of postmodernist/poststructuralist critique, he stated,

For each of the participants [in a discussion] the “object” [of discourse] has a more or less different meaning because it grows out of the whole of their respective frames of reference, as a result of which the meaning of the object in the perspective of the other person remains, at least in part, obscure. . . . [This approach] does not signify that there are no criteria of rightness and wrongness in a discussion. It does insist, however, that it lies in the nature of certain assertions that they cannot be formulated absolutely, but only in terms of the perspective of a given situation. . . . Interests and the powers of perception of the different perspectives are conditioned by the social situations in which they arose and to which they are relevant. (Mannheim 1936, 281, 283, 284)

As applied to urban planning, Mannheim’s (1936) assault on universalism denies that forecasters can assume that past experience will simply repeat itself in a new historical context and jettisons the notion of a value-free methodology. Thus, the assumptions underlying applying quantitative cost-benefit analysis to weigh alternatives within the rational model are undermined, and the use of reason and comparative analysis rather than a formally rational methodology is proposed. Mannheim is a clear precursor of Habermas in respect to this view of rationality; he differs, however, from contemporary communicative theorists in that he expects an educated elite, working within his flexible definition of reasoned reflection, to

plan on behalf of society at large. His views perhaps find their most recent echo in the work of Giddens (1990). In both his explanation of people’s willingness to trust expertise and in his description of reflexivity, by which knowledge circles in and out of society, Giddens presents an approach to knowledge that is neither relativist nor positivist but, as he puts it, “relationist” (or, one might say, dialectical).

If not in practice, at least within theoretical expositions of planning and in legitimations of its practice, the rational model’s assumption of expertise divorced from its social base lived on, leading to the critiques of planning that developed within the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Fainstein and Fainstein 1974; Castells 1977, 1983; Davidoff 1965/2003).⁶ These critiques were directed at both process and outcome. Even though planners were accountable to elected officials, albeit indirectly, critics accused them of being undemocratic by not consulting the people most directly affected by planning initiatives.⁷

In the areas of highways, housing development, and urban renewal, opposition was not to general goals of urban and transportation improvement. Rather, it was to the particular impacts of public programs on affected communities; these communities needed to be involved in the specifics of planning if they were to exercise any real control. The theoretical model of democracy, by which the public made its wishes known through electing representatives and then withdrew from deliberations, crumbled in the face of the actual operation of planning bureaucracies (Fainstein and Fainstein 1982). But while some of the objection was to the procedures governments used at the time, the principal concern of those resisting planning programs was with the consequences of those programs for the city. Thus, Jane Jacobs (1961) referred to the sacking of cities, and Herbert Gans (1968) analyzed the impacts of urban renewal on the displaced.

Influenced by the move toward critical theory occurring in all the social sciences at that time, the first major conference devoted explicitly to planning theory examined planning’s impacts, connecting causes within the political economy with planning projects, and urban transformations.⁸ Although there was a tendency in these papers to blame planners as the people most directly responsible for policies resulting in neighborhood destruction, planners were not the principal wielders of power in framing urban renewal and highway programs. Viewing planners in isolation from the political forces impinging on them unduly magnified their importance and resulted in a distorted understanding of the causes of community displacement. Perhaps, however, it was inevitable that a conference dedicated to planning theory would have such a singular focus.

Among scholars who examined planning from the vantage point of other disciplines, the approaches used by planners were regarded simply as mediating factors. Thus, the broader political economy literature examined planning within the framework of general forces and constraints. In the United States, discussions of urban redevelopment programs placed primary emphasis on what came to be labeled the urban regime (Fainstein and Fainstein 1986; Stone 1976, 1989). In Western Europe, officials of the national state allied with important economic interests were identified as the force behind large public programs for physical change (Harloe 1977; Pickvance 1976; Castells 1977).

Those writings that went beyond critique to propose new strategies for planning were tied to visions of a transformed city. The lasting influence of Jane Jacobs's *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1963) did not come from the chapters suggesting a novel form of metropolitan governance but rather derived from her suggestions concerning what makes cities work for their inhabitants. She argued that planners should examine the experience of successful cities elsewhere; she did not suggest that they simply inquire of local residents what they thought they wanted—in part because they lacked models of other approaches to urbanism. Likewise, Paul Davidoff's (1965/2003) famous argument for advocacy planning and Norman Krumholz's (1982) defense of equity planning, while focusing on the role planners should play, tied that role to particular outcomes and relied on planning expertise as the path for reaching them. Davidoff himself led a movement for opening up the suburbs to minorities that was based on a specific view of the desirable metropolis. Krumholz (1999/2003, 228) pressed for unpopular policies like limiting public investment in downtown because of his conception of just distribution: "Equity requires that locally responsible government institutions give priority attention to the goal of promoting a wider range of choices for those Cleveland residents who have few, if any, choices."⁹ For neither Davidoff nor Krumholz was participatory or deliberative democracy the principal goal, but social inclusion was—inclusion not necessarily in the discussion of what to do but inclusion in having access to the benefits of the city.

Even though the political process underlying urban renewal and highway programs was causal in creating inequitable outcomes, changing the process was not the sole goal of the critics in the streets. Rather, they desired a different model of the end result of urban programs. The demands of the urban protest movements of the period were for community control *but also* for equitable distribution of benefits, the end of displacement, and a more humane urban design than was embodied in the megaprojects then popular (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003). Greater citizen input could be instrumental in

affecting urban development, but shifts away from high-rise housing projects for the poor, equally banal though more luxurious developments for the rich, and quasi-suburban downtown malls required a different vision of the city. It would be one that facilitated interaction between different groups, provided low-income people with improved housing and access to jobs and amenities, and did not privilege investment to benefit downtown business interests over neighborhood improvement.

Thus, just as in the nineteenth century, when revulsion against the squalor of the manufacturing city stimulated the modern planning movement, distaste for the form the city had taken and an idealized image of a desirable future city spurred efforts at reform. The reform movement was attacking the prevailing rational or quasi-rational model on two grounds: first, it was a misguided process; and second, it produced a city that no one wanted. The demands of reformers on the ground expressed themselves within planning theory through political economic analysis of the roots of urban inequality and through calls for democratic participation in planning.

► The Context of Planning

During the 1970s, neo-Marxists emphasized the structural underpinnings that limited the potential of planning to achieve change that did not primarily support the owners of capital (Castells 1977; Harvey 1978; Fainstein and Fainstein 1979). Needless to say, this conclusion proved very discouraging to progressive planners who by then were also working for community-based organizations rather than only for city governments and developers. One response to this seeming impasse was to chart courses whereby planning could, in fact, achieve redistributive outcomes (Mier 1993; Clavel 1986; Hartman 2002). The problem, from the perspective of planning theory, was that although these efforts were rooted in an underlying normative position, their theoretical premises were rarely made explicit. In other words, exemplary remedies were presented but without describing and justifying their value premises and without a deep probing of the underlying strategies and conditions that could produce their desired results (Fainstein 1999; Sayer and Storper 1997).

The later, more theoretical response was to identify in democratic forms a way to counter structural power (Throgmorton and Eckstein 2003). This response combined with moves in other disciplines—especially philosophy and cultural studies—to scrutinize communication. Analysis of discourse dwelled on rhetorical content (deconstruction), "ways of knowing," storytelling, and the openness of the listener to the speaker. The logic was that people went along with courses of action

contrary to their own best interest because of the distorting effect of communication; therefore, by speaking truth to power, employing multiple forms of discourse, and engaging all stakeholders in the communicative process, it would be possible to attain a more just outcome (Forester 1989). Where for Marx a just outcome could only occur when the economic structure was transformed, for the communicative theorists it was the product of transforming communication. But they never explained how communication could be transformed within a context of power except presumably through the power of truth telling. Yet if the powerful lose their advantages as a consequence of open communication, they are likely to either suppress unpleasant truths or to marginalize the tellers of them. Social power includes the capacity to control and channel communication and is extremely difficult to counter simply through voice.

Communicative planning theorists share with progressive political economists a skepticism concerning the usefulness of models of rationality and their associated privileging of efficiency. In many respects, the content of their critique harkens back to Mannheim's (1935/1940) assault on positivism. These theorists argue that means and ends are mutually constitutive and thus cannot be rigidly separated as they were in the rational model (Healey 1993, 1997). But, somewhat oddly given their acceptance of this proposition, they back away from a concern with ends and aim their spotlight virtually entirely on the planner's mediating role rather than on what should be done or on the context in which planning operates. Thus, for example, Judith Innes's (1996) reference to the New Jersey State Plan as resulting from a consensus-building process does not go on to evaluate the actual operation of that plan, the quality of its prescriptions, or the reasons why it has failed to achieve its objectives. In contrast, Bent Flyvbjerg (1998, 7) "caution[s] against an idealism that ignores conflict and power." In his case study of the plan for Aalborg, he focuses on how a plan that developed out of consultation and aimed at sustainability failed in its goals. He looks both at the forces that shaped the projects instituted under the plan and also at what the plan actually did rather than its rhetoric.¹⁰

The issue of power cannot be simply dismissed as hacked, as Forester (2000) does when discussing Flyvbjerg's (1998) book.¹¹ Rather, as Chantal Mouffe (1999, 752) argues,

What is really at stake in the critique of "deliberative democracy" that I am proposing here is the need to acknowledge the dimension of power and antagonism *and their ineradicable character* [italics added]. By postulating the availability of [a] public sphere where power and antagonism have been eliminated and where a rational consensus would have been realized, this model of democratic politics denies the central role in politics of the conflictual dimension and its crucial role in the formation of collective identities.

There is a naïveté in the communicative approach, in its avoidance of the underlying causes of systematic distortion and its faith that reason will prevail (Neuman 2000). As Flyvbjerg (1998) points out, much that is accepted as reason is simply rationalization promulgated and repeated by the powerful. Communicative theorists, to the extent that they concern themselves with how to overcome structural impediments to democratic processes, promote the establishment of institutions that are conducive to open interchange. (In this respect they resemble Mannheim [1935/1940], whose argument for an impartial bureaucracy also relied on an institutional analysis.) But without offering some kind of substantive outcome that will transpire as a consequence of institutional transformation, they are unlikely to evoke much enthusiasm for their prescription.

The ideal that everyone's opinion should be respectfully heard and that no particular group should be privileged in an interchange is an important normative argument. But it is not a sufficient one, and it does not deal adequately with the classic conundrums of democracy. These include the problems of insuring adequate representation of all interests in a large, socially divided group; of protecting against demagoguery; of achieving more than token public participation; of preventing economically or institutionally powerful interests from defining the agenda; and of maintaining minority rights. Within political theory, endless dispute has revolved around these issues, and they have by no means been resolved. Communicative planning theory typically tends to pass over them in its reliance on goodwill and to dismiss the view that the character of the obstacles to consensus building based on tolerance derive from a social context that must be analyzed.¹²

The connection of planning to spatial policies of the state is what gives the practice of planning its specificity, whether we talk about governance, governmentality, or insurgent planning. The practices of urban/spatial/environmental/community planning are connected in diverse and changing ways to the state, its powers and resources deployed in projects of spatial management. Theories ignoring this context risk losing their explanatory potential for prescriptive futility. (Huxley and Yiftachel 2000, 339)

In the case of urban planning, that context is the field of power in which the city lies. And one path toward understanding that context is an examination of planning's outcomes and a comparison of those outcomes to a view of the just city.

In a recent reformulation of her ideas concerning collaborative planning, Healey (2003, 110) counters my argument that planners should evaluate planning practices according to normative concepts of the just city. She contends that

concepts of the "good" and the "just" were themselves constructed through relations of knowledge and power. . . .

[But] the processes of articulating values and the manner in which these might become embedded in established discourses and practices were important. In other words, substance and process are co-constituted, not separate spheres. In addition, process should not be understood merely as a means to a substantive end. Processes have process outcomes. Engagement in governance processes shapes participants' sense of themselves.

I agree with her, so the question really becomes one of emphasis. The frequently made criticism of participatory planning exercises that they deteriorate into mere "talking shops" appears to me a consequence of an overemphasis on process. And while Healey (2003) correctly asserts that the concept of the just city is a social construction and develops out of discourse, it is developed at a different level of analysis from the consideration of whether a particular policy promotes justice (see Fischer 1980, 2003). Goals are not simply there to be "discovered" in the form of preferences, but neither are they redeveloped ad hoc in each interchange (Lindblom 1990; Giddens 1990). While the particular meaning of justice or fairness may assume a different form depending on situation, the ideal of justice or fairness transcends particularity (Nussbaum 2000).

Within political science there has always been a split between those who define politics as a process and those who see it in terms of who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell 1936). The "how" in the latter formulation refers to process, but the "what," which alludes to the distribution of whatever is valued, is equally important. If, as Healey (2003) says, substance and process are coconstituted, then one should not be divorced from the other, and the focus of planning theory needs to be both. The "what" for urban planners is the "right to the city" described by Henri Lefebvre (1991; see Purcell 2003). It raises questions of who owns the city, not in the sense of direct individual control of an asset but in the collective sense of each group's ability to access employment and culture, to live in a decent home and suitable living environment, to obtain a satisfying education, to maintain personal security, and to participate in urban governance. How these aims are achieved raises questions of appropriate strategies in specific circumstances, but defining the "what" is not nearly so problematic as Healey implies. Indeed, when she asserts that "an inclusionary collaborative process does not necessarily guarantee the justice of either process or material outcomes" (p. 115), she is indicating that she knows the meaning of justice independent of a specific situation.

In "Politics as a Vocation," Max Weber (1919/1958) distinguishes between an ethic of absolute means and an ethic of absolute ends. The ethic of absolute means is liberal pluralism, with its stress on tolerance and peaceful resolution of conflicts through negotiation. The ethic of absolute ends requires commitment to an overarching vision, even if adhering to it

requires transgression of procedural norms. Weber contends that such a course should be rare but that it is at times necessary. Within urban planning, commitment to the just city may at times require stratagems that circumvent inclusionary processes. Many of the great advances toward the welfare state, including the origins of the German social security system and the British national health service, resulted from autocratic or bureaucratic decision making, although within a broad context of popular pressure for a more egalitarian society (Flora and Heidenheimer 1981). In arenas more closely tied to urban planning, the development of affordable housing, the placing of community-based facilities for disadvantaged populations, and the protection of the environment from toxic wastes are as likely to derive from court decisions as from deliberative democracy.

Beauregard (2003, 73) asserts that to realize a sustainable city, defined as one where environmental quality, economic growth, and social justice coexist, "the city must be governed in a way that is attentive to the shared concerns of its people." In this formulation, governance is a means to an end—sustainability—rather than simply an end in itself. Once a goal like sustainability or social justice is posited, then it becomes necessary to theorize about this goal as well as about the strategy for reaching it. Scott Campbell's (2003) article that wrestles with the trade-offs between environment, growth, and social justice, then seeks to outline solutions that encompass all three, is an example of such theorizing.

In this and other works, I have posited the just city as the appropriate object of planning (Fainstein 1997, 1999, 2000). My reasoning falls within the Rawlsian tradition, wherein social justice becomes that value that everyone would choose if one did not know where one was going to end up in the social hierarchy ("the veil of ignorance") (Rawls 1971). Harvey (1992) has argued that social justice is a widely held value that could serve to mobilize a mass movement, and a volume of essays commemorating the publication of his path-breaking work, *Social Justice and the City*, begins by asserting that "the ideal of social justice is the bedrock of any democratic society within which citizens can actively participate in a free, tolerant and inclusive political community" (Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1997, 1). The aim of that volume was to place the concept of social justice within the context of contemporary cities. The assumption, differing from Rawls's universalistic model, was that the concept of justice was situated and that theorizing about the just city actually meant theorizing about justice within particular urban milieux.

Why this kind of discussion is not the norm for planning theory rather than an obsession with the role of the planner is something of a mystery. After all, political theory examines the outcomes of governance, not just the activities of politicians;

legal theory focuses on the law, not lawyers; economic theory focuses on the economy, not economists.

Perhaps this is just a question of semantics. No planning theorist would deny the importance of theorizing about urban development, and many of them, when wearing other hats, do so. But the exclusion of urban theory from planning theory courses and from books on planning theory leads toward a compartmentalization of concerns, resulting in a failure to understand the relationship between planning and the field in which it operates.

► What Kinds of Theory Are Needed?

As indicated at the beginning of this article, planning theory needs to consider under what conditions conscious human activity can produce a better city (region/nation/world) for all its citizens. Addressing such a question requires a constant concern with the interaction between planning procedures and outcomes. It also requires investigating the nature of this better city, relative to its particular history, stage of development, and context; the strategies by which it can be achieved; and the obstacles to reaching it. These inquiries in turn force an examination of how cities have developed in the past; the relationship between economic base, social structure (class, gender, and ethnicity), ideas, and governance; what role conscious policy played in producing urban form and social structure; how the system of power relations shaped policy; and the ways in which structures of power are malleable. A realistic acceptance of the power of structures does not imply a blindness to the ways in which structuration occurs (Giddens 1984; Healey 2003) or assume that structures cannot be changed. But it also accepts that they are not changed easily and that the mobilization of bias (Schattschneider 1960) is a constant of collective activity.

Even as simply a strategy, a focus on the character of the desired city and a critique of what has come before is more likely to mobilize democratic participation and popular pressure than a program extolling a particular planning process. Action depends on entrepreneurial activity; thus the new urbanists have evoked widespread interest in planning because they have something to sell—a particular vision of the good community and how to get it. On one hand, in their actual procedures when planning new communities, they tend to exclude popular participation in everything but decisions on décor; on the other, they have inspired supporters to press for “smart growth” and, in the venues of local planning boards, to participate enthusiastically in a process to which they were formerly indifferent.

If the just city becomes the object of planning theory, how then should we approach theory development? Leonie Sandercock presents one strategy in her book *Towards Cosmopolis* (1997). Her definition of the just city is one that is socially inclusive, where difference is not merely tolerated but treated with recognition and respect. She thus asserts that she wishes to connect “planning theory with other theoretical discourses—specifically debates around marginality, identity and difference, and social justice in the city—because these are debates which empower groups whose voices are not often heard by planners” (p. 110). John Friedmann in *The Prospect of Cities* (2002, 104) asserts the need for a utopian vision and relates it to critique:

Utopian thinking has two moments that are inextricably joined: critique and constructive vision. The critique is of certain aspects of our present condition: injustice, oppression, ecological devastation to name just a few. . . . Moral outrage over an injustice suggests that we have a sense of justice, inarticulate though it may be. . . . If injustice is to be corrected . . . we will need the concrete imagery of utopian thinking to propose steps that would bring us a little closer to a more just world.

Maarten Hajer (1995), in a book that examines how the goal of environmental sustainability has gradually penetrated society, delineates the interweaving of coalition politics, discourse, and concern with outcomes. Hajer’s emphasis is on discourse but within the framework of “alternative scenarios of development” (p. 280).

In a paper called “Can We Make the Cities We Want?” I refer to Amsterdam as providing a grounded utopia—an actual city that, while not, of course, really utopia, offers a picture of possibility, at least in relation to the Anglo-American city (Fainstein 1999).¹³ Martha Nussbaum (2000), in her listing of “capabilities,” offers a set of general goals that can be translated into specifics depending on context. They allow the establishment of criteria by which existing places can be evaluated without demanding that all places reach these goals in the same way. Once such an evaluation is accomplished, deviation from these norms must be explained—another task for theory and one allowing multiple types of theorizing ranging from public choice (which focuses on conflicts between individual and collective rationality) to historical inquiry. Discourse unquestionably forms part of the explanation, but an understanding of the structures of power that shape discourse is a further step.

The task then for planning theory is both normative and explanatory. Here I would like to relate a personal story—thereby accepting to some degree the epistemological approach of communicative planning theory that emphasizes storytelling. When I was taking my Ph.D. oral exam in political science at MIT, my examiner in American politics asked me

what was important about the 1968 (Humphrey vs. Nixon) election. I replied that the rise of a mobilized radical right wing (embodied at that time in the candidacy of George Wallace) marked a significant change that would shape future events in a country where, until then, elections were contested at the center. My examiner informed me that I had supplied an incorrect answer. The “right” response was split-ticket voting.

To me that incident (one never forgets these kinds of offenses to one’s amour propre) summarized all that was wrong with mainstream political science—its obsession with the mechanics of governance, especially voting, rather than a concern with its outcomes and the deep causes of those outcomes.¹⁴ Finding a job in a planning department provided me with a haven where I could concern myself with what I regarded as important—the way in which public policy could benefit people who needed the mediation of government to attain a decent quality of life. Such a quest belies accusations of structural determinism. Nevertheless, policy makers are not free to act without cognizance of structural forces, even as those forces undergo long-term mutations and are susceptible to political mobilization. Thus, we come full circle—political mobilization requires a goal to mobilize about. Planning theory ought to describe that goal, along with the means of attaining it and the context in which it rests. To me, that goal is the just city; working toward it requires, as Friedmann (2000) asserts, both critique and vision. It calls for sensitivity toward process and discourse as well, but never divorced from recognition of the political-economic structure and spatial form in which we find ourselves and those to which we wish to move.

Author’s Note: Thanks to Robert Beauregard and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

► Notes

1. Robert Beauregard, John Friedmann, and Leonie Sandercock, inter alia, are notable exceptions.
2. The roundtable, in which I participated and from which this article is derived, was organized by Michael Neuman and was titled, “Is Planning Theory Urban?”
3. For the same reason we name departments “urban planning,” and give degrees called “master of science in urban planning,” even though such departments typically offer courses in regional planning and differentiate among types of cities.
4. The authors most often generally identified with communicative planning theory, and self-identified as planning theorists, include, inter alia, John Forester, Judith Innes, Patsy Healey, James Throgmorton, and Jean Hillier. See especially Mandelbaum, Mazza, and Burchell (1996). Andreas Faludi’s early work fell into the technical rationality stream, but his more recent discussions of planning doctrine attach planning to its spatial object. I confess that in my own two theory anthologies, *Readings in Planning Theory*

(Campbell and Fainstein 2003) and *Readings in Urban Theory* (Fainstein and Campbell 2002), I have preserved the distinction between planning theory and theories about the city, although the *Planning Theory* reader does include some material that considers the object of planning as well as the planning process. In my planning theory course, I use both books.

5. This book was written in German and published in Holland. The English-language edition appeared in 1940 and was substantially revised and enlarged by the author.

6. It is questionable whether planners actually followed the steps of the rational model. Rather, it acted as a “reconstructed logic” (Kaplan 1964) by which decision makers legitimated their policies. Nevertheless, it provided the justification for the highway and urban renewal programs of the time.

7. For excellent overviews of theoretical developments in this period and later, see Teitz (1996) and Hall (1996).

8. This conference took place at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia, May 4-5, 1978. (Papers drawn from this conference appear in Paris [1982]). A subsequent conference in April 1979 at Cornell University (see Clavel, Forester, and Goldsmith [1980] for a number of papers presented at this conference) also chiefly focused on the urban consequences of planning.

9. Krumholz is quoting from the 1975 report of the Cleveland City Planning Commission that he headed.

10. Robert Beauregard (2004) engages in a similar endeavor when examining planning for downtown Manhattan after September 11, 2001.

11. Forester’s view seems to be “been there, done that.” He notes that when it is shown that planning often serves the powerful “who is surprised?” (Forester 2000, 915). He wants to get past issues of structural power so as to be able to press for a more constructive strategy. He does not, however, give any convincing explanation as to how they can be ignored.

12. Healey (2003, 114) admits that while the effects of consensus-building processes may be liberating and creative, they may also be oppressive.

13. Recent events in Amsterdam, including the assassination of Theo Van Gogh, evidently over his outspoken antagonism to Muslim immigrants and angry responses to it, indicate that the social consensus on which Amsterdam’s tradition of tolerance developed appears to be breaking down. The argument in my paper that relative economic equality permitted such consensus to develop did not anticipate that ethnic differences would so strongly assert themselves.

14. To be sure, many political scientists, especially including those cited at the beginning of this article who wrote about planning, do concern themselves with outcomes. And also, split-ticket voting did become more significant at that time.

► References

- Altshuler, Alan A. 1965. *The city planning process*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Altshuler, Alan A., and David Luberoff. 2003. *Mega-projects: The changing politics of urban public investment*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Beauregard, Robert A. 1990. Bringing the city back in. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 56 (2): 210-15.

- . 2003. Democracy, storytelling, and the sustainable city. In *Story and sustainability*, ed. Barbara Eckstein and James A. Thogmorton, 65-77. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- . 2004. Mistakes were made. Rebuilding the World Trade Center, phase 1. *International Planning Studies* 9 (2-3): 139-53.
- Campbell, Scott. 2003. Green cities, growing cities, just cities? Urban planning and the contradictions of sustainable development. In *Readings in planning theory*, rev. ed., ed. Scott Campbell and Susan S. Fainstein, 435-58. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Campbell, Scott, and Susan S. Fainstein. 2003. *Readings in planning theory*. Rev. ed. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Castells, Manuel. 1977. *The urban question*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- . 1983. *The city and the grassroots*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Clavel, Pierre. 1986. *The progressive city*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Clavel, Pierre, John Forester, and William W. Goldsmith, eds. 1980. *Urban and regional planning in an age of austerity*. New York: Pergamon.
- Davidoff, Paul. 1965/2003. Advocacy and pluralism in planning. In *Readings in planning theory*, rev. ed., ed. Scott Campbell and Susan S. Fainstein, 210-23. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Dror, Yehezkel. 1968. *Public policymaking reexamined*. San Francisco: Chandler.
- Fainstein, Susan S. 1997. Justice, politics, and the creation of urban space. In *The urbanization of injustice*, ed. Andy Merrifield and Erik Swyngedouw, 18-44. New York: New York University Press.
- . 1999. Can we make the cities we want? In *The urban moment*, ed. Sophie Body-Gendrot and Robert Beauregard, 249-72. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- . 2000. New directions in planning theory. *Urban Affairs Review* 35 (4): 451-78.
- . 2001. *The city builders*. Rev. ed. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Fainstein, Susan S., and Scott Campbell. 2002. *Readings in urban theory*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Fainstein, Susan S., and Norman I. Fainstein. 1974. *Urban political movements*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- . 1979. New debates in urban planning: The impact of Marxist theory within the United States. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 3 (3): 381-403.
- . 1982. Neighborhood enfranchisement and urban redevelopment. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 2 (1): 11-19.
- . 1986. Regime strategies, communal resistance, and economic forces. In *Restructuring the city*, rev. ed., ed. Susan S. Fainstein, Norman I. Fainstein, Richard Child Hill, Dennis Judd, and Michael Peter Smith, 245-82. New York: Longman.
- Faludi, Andreas. 1973. *A reader in planning theory*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon.
- Fischer, Frank. 1980. *Politics, values, and public policy*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- . 2003. *Reframing public policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Flora, Peter, and Arnold Heidenheimer, eds. 1981. *The development of welfare states in Europe and America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Flyvbjerg, Bent. 1998. *Rationality and power: Democracy in practice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Forester, John. 1989. *Planning in the face of power*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2000. Conservative epistemology, reductive ethics, far too narrow politics: Some clarifications in response to Yiftachel and Huxley. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24 (4): 914-16.
- Friedmann, John. 2000. The good city: In defense of utopian thinking. *International Journal of Urban and regional Research* 24 (2): 459-72.
- . 2002. *The prospect of cities*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gans, Herbert J. 1968. *People and plans*. New York: Basic Books.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- . 1990. *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hajer, Maarten A. 1995. *The politics of environmental discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, Peter Geoffrey. 1980. *Great planning disasters*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1996. *Cities of tomorrow*. Rev. ed. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Harloe, Michael, ed. 1977. *Captive cities*. London: Wiley.
- Hartman, Chester W. 2002. *Between eminence and notoriety: Four decades of radical urban planning*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research.
- Harvey, David. 1978. On planning the ideology of planning. In *Planning theory in the 1980s*, ed. Robert W. Burchell and George Sternlieb, 213-34. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research.
- . 1992. Social justice, postmodernism and the city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 16 (4): 588-601.
- Healey, Patsy. 1993. Planning through debate: The communicative turn in planning theory. In *The argumentative turn in policy analysis and planning*, ed. Frank Fischer and John Forester, 233-53. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- . 1997. *Collaborative planning*. London: Macmillan.
- . 2003. Collaborative planning in perspective. *Planning Theory* 2 (2): 101-24.
- Huxley, Margo, and Oren Yiftachel. 2000. New paradigm or old myopia? Unsettling the communicative turn in planning theory. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 19 (4): 333-42.
- Innes, Judith. 1996. Group processes and the social construction of growth management: Florida, Vermont, and New Jersey. In *Explorations in planning theory*, ed. Seymour J. Mandelbaum, Luigi Mazza, and Robert W. Burchell, 164-87. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research.
- Jacobs, Jane. 1961. *The death and life of great American cities*. New York: Vintage.
- Kaplan, Abraham. 1964. *The conduct of inquiry*. San Francisco: Chandler.
- Krumholz, Norman. 1982. A retrospective view of equity planning: Cleveland, 1969-1979. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 48 (Spring): 163-74.
- . 1999/2003. Equitable approaches to local economic development. In *Readings in planning theory*, ed. Scott Campbell and Susan S. Fainstein, 224-36. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Lasswell, Harold D. 1936. *Politics: Who gets what, when, how*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The production of space*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Lindblom, Charles E. 1990. *Inquiry and change*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- Mandelbaum, Seymour J., Luigi Mazza, and Robert W. Burchell, eds. 1996. *Explorations in planning theory*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research.
- Mannheim, Karl. 1935/1940. *Man and society in an age of reconstruction*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- . 1936. The sociology of knowledge. In *Ideology and utopia*, 264-311. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Merrifield, Andy, and Erik Swyngedouw. 1997. Social justice and the urban experience: an introduction. In *The Urbanization of injustice*, ed. Andy Merrifield and Erik Swyngedouw, 1-17. New York: New York University Press.
- Meyerson, Martin, and Edward C. Banfield. 1955. *Politics, planning, and the public interest; the case of public housing in Chicago*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Mier, Robert. 1993. *Social justice and local development policy*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Mouffe, Chantal. 1999. Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? *Social Research* 66 (3): 745-58.
- Neuman, Michael. 2000. Communicate this! Does consensus lead to advocacy and pluralism? *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 19 (4): 343-50.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 2000. *Women and human development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Paris, Chris, ed. 1982. *Critical readings in planning theory*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon.
- Pickvance, Chris, ed. 1976. *Urban sociology*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Purcell, Mark. 2003. Citizenship and the right to the global city: Reimagining the capitalist world order. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27 (3): 564-90.
- Rabinovitz, Francine F. 1969. *City politics and planning*. New York: Atherton.
- Rawls, John. 1971. *A theory of justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sandercock, Leonie. 1997. *Towards cosmopolis*. New York: John Wiley.
- Sarbib, Jean Louis. 1983. The University of Chicago Program in Planning. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 2 (2): 77-81.
- Sayer, Andrew, and Michael Storper. 1997. Ethics unbound: For a normative turn in social theory. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 15 (1): 1-18.
- Schattschneider, Elmer E. 1960. *The semi-sovereign people*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing like a state*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Stone, Clarence N. 1976. *Economic growth and neighborhood discontent*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- . 1989. *Regime politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Teitz, Michael. 1996. American planning in the 1990s: Evolution, debate and challenge. *Urban Studies* 33 (4-5): 649-72.
- Throgmorton, James A., and Barbara Eckstein, eds. 2003. *Story and sustainability: Planning, practice, and possibility for American cities*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Weber, Max. 1919/1958. Politics as a vocation. In *From Max Weber*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 77-128. New York: Oxford University Press.