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Title

Planning Institutions in Crisis

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2js9k4kv>

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Publication Date

1994-11-01

Peer reviewed

Reprint 251

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November 1994

University of California at Berkeley

\$5.00

Reprint 251

Reprinted from *Planning Theory* 10/11, Winter 1993/Summer 1994

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Planners' Dilemmas

Planning practitioners are faced with dilemmas for which there are no acceptable answers. As the title of Thomas and Healey's book suggests, these dilemmas center around three related topics — ethics, legitimacy, and the validation of knowledge. The planners whose thoughtful reflections on their practice represent the core of this book all are struggling to be ethical, but they are beset by competing loyalties and mandates. As a group they are uncertain about what authority or knowledge gives them the legitimacy to act as they do. They are uneasy about the capacity of elected bodies to represent the public or even to make morally acceptable, informed decisions. They are uncomfortable with the expert role for themselves, recognizing that they cannot be without bias. They have strong beliefs about the kind of society that is desirable, but they know of few legitimate ways to work within their professional roles to produce it. They are left with what they see as an individual, existential choice between actions that are unethical or undesirable to varying degrees.

This message, which I draw from these planners' stories and concerns, is one that is echoed in research on practice in the U.S., particularly as reported in a forthcoming book by Elizabeth Howe, *Acting on Ethics in City Planning*. This study, relying on in-depth interviews and surveys, shows comparable worries among planners whose responsibilities are similar to those who write in *Dilemmas of Planning Practice*.

A Crisis of Institutions

This malaise of planners is a symptom of a growing crisis of the institutions of planning — the political and organizational setting and the norms of practice. These institutions define legitimate action and valid knowledge, and they promote particular values. The understandings and world views on which they were constructed and the problems they were designed to solve have changed in the last 20 years, but the institutions remain. At the

same time a growing body of practices diverges from the norms of these institutions and creates the contradictions with which planners are struggling. The situation is parallel to Kuhn's concept of paradigm in crisis, where normal science is not finding answers to the questions that research uncovers (1970).

Planners, who span the boundaries between the formal institutions of government and the world that citizens, developers, and businesses inhabit, feel these contradictions early and acutely. They fit uneasily into the roles these institutions offer for planners, and they often cannot mesh their own sense of right and wrong or their own perception of reality with the expectations of these institutions. Yet planners, like most of us, often take the institutions and the mandates within which they work for granted. Planners accept the world in which they are embedded as a given rather than pay attention to its structure or recognize its assumptions. They try to address contradictions they experience by relying on personal or professional codes of ethics. Such codes, however, also assume rather than question the adequacy of existing institutions.

An institution is a broad concept, encompassing pervasive aspects of human society. Its broadest definition is the «established order by which anything is regulated — the system or constitution». It is also an «established law, custom or practice, usage, organization or other element in the political or social life of a people; a regulative principle, convention, subservient to the needs of an organized community or the general ends of civilization». More specifically it can be an «establishment, organization, or association instituted for the promotion of some object, especially one of public or general utility». Actions that are legitimate are those which are «conformed to law or rule, sanctioned or authorized by law or right».¹ Institutions are thus the means by which an action is linked to convention and ideology and accordingly accepted as legitimate, and they tacitly embody a value system by regulating social action. Moreover, knowledge is constructed and validated through institutions like professional education, practices of public debate, and procedures such as 'scientific' method (Berger, Luckmann, 1967; Kuhn, 1970; de Neufville, 1987). Institutions are thus at the crucial nexus of planners' dilemmas over ethics, legitimacy and the validation of knowledge.²

1. Oxford English Dictionary, 1971.

2. Mary Douglas (1986) provides a powerful way of understanding both the

What Planners Say about Practice

Practitioners have four related concerns about their own activities, as evidenced in *Dilemmas of Planning Practice* and in my own and others' research on practice in the U.S.³ These involve 1) their interaction with others, 2) their expertise, 3) their role in public participation, and 4) their responsibilities to uphold positions they consider morally acceptable. The actions they take make sense to them on practical grounds and indeed seem intrinsic to the job, but at the same time raise conflicts with many of the established norms of public decision-making.

Planners, especially in local government, spend much of their time in face-to-face interactions with citizens, developers, and staff of other public agencies. Many see themselves, often first and foremost, as communicators, mediators, negotiators, or brokers.⁴ But in this role, as both Forester and Healey (1992) demonstrate, planners' communication can empower or disempower citizens. Planners have wide latitude in negotiating with other agencies, developers, or citizens and inevitably do more than just implement duly adopted public policy. Yet many of these actions are hidden and unaccountable. In short, planners have considerably more power and personal responsibility than they are formally assigned.

Second, planners often feel pressure to play the role of expert, but they are uncomfortable doing so. An expert should be objective and provide facts and findings from 'scientifically' conducted research.⁵ But planners do such value-laden tasks as define problems and set agendas more often than they do the technical tasks of solving problems or comparing alternatives in the light of known values. If they have special knowledge to qualify them as experts, they are unsure what it is. Is it knowledge of process and procedures; is it knowledge of context; is it an ability to span disciplines and organizations; or is it an ability to

pervasiveness and the invisibility of institutions.

3. The most pertinent examples include Mayo (1982), Howe, forthcoming, and Howe and Kaufman (1980), Borchard (1988), and Vasu (1979).

4. For example, see John Forester's detailed observational research on local planning.

5. Dryzek (1990) describes this model of research as combining instrumental rationality and objectivism. Knowledge that has the most legitimacy tends to be quantitative and formally produced through social science research methods. See also Innes (1990) on the «scientific model of knowledge use».

communicate? They suspect what they know is little more than common sense. They rely on much that seems to them subjective and qualitative and lacking legitimacy as expert knowledge. They tend to believe that if they cannot provide 'objective' knowledge, they cannot regard themselves as experts. Without the status of expert, however, planners are uncertain about their legitimacy as professionals.

Third, planners are troubled about their responsibilities for citizen participation. While American political culture recognizes the right of citizens to influence policy by voting, through direct contact with their elected representatives, and by speaking in public hearings, indirectly influencing policy through planners is much less legitimate. Yet informal interactions with citizens represent the daily life of planners, and they cannot help being influenced. Planners agree it is their job to provide public information to those who ask for it, but they are divided about whether they should play a more active role and seek out citizens who are unlikely to come forward, such as the poor, and help them to be effective in planning debate. Planners are conflicted over what validity to accord citizens' views. Many argue that citizens provide useful knowledge about the community. But when citizens proffer values that conflict with one another or with official policy, how should the planner use these? Some planners speak wistfully of the public interest as a possible answer, but most seem to believe that even if the public interest is a meaningful idea, they have no way of determining what it is.⁶

The question that disturbs planners the most is whether it is legitimate to promote values and objectives not necessarily those of citizens or local officials, but which they believe are morally right. Some planners, like Jacky Underwood in *Dilemmas*, contend it is the planner's responsibility to protect «planet earth». Others believe they should promote social equity. The quintessential example of their dilemma is the siting of subsidized housing. Planners tend to believe it is morally right to make such housing available, but many interests in the local community oppose it, and elected officials usually decide against it. In general, planners agree they have a responsibility to be procedurally fair but are divided on what ethical responsibility they have for substantive goals. Their solution is most often to defer reluctantly to the

6. Howe (1992) explores planner's views of the public interest and their concerns about administrative discretion.

formal processes of decision-making by elected officials.⁷

Despite these troubling questions, few planners explicitly challenge the legitimacy of the institutions with which their actions conflict. They do not say that formal procedures for democratic process, like voting, are not really representing the public (though presumably many do hold this view). Nor do they ordinarily argue about whether formal, 'scientific' policy research produces adequate information. They do not argue that their task is to change institutions. If the planner is uncomfortable, she sees her choices as the three traditional ones — exit, voice, and loyalty (Hirschman, 1970). That is, she can find another job, speak out within the job, or work for change through the organization's normal processes.

Even the progressive planners Clavel (1986) and Krumholz and Forester (1990) describe work *within* planning agencies to promote redistributive justice. They accept the institutional structure but take advocacy positions for disadvantaged groups. They are able to take this explicit progressive stance without challenging the institution because they are supported by the political leadership. Krumholz speaks as if individuals have great autonomy and institutions have a separate and subsidiary existence. One of his early policy documents in Cleveland states, «Individuals choose their own goals and the means to pursue those goals. Institutions are established to assist individuals in pursuit of their goals».⁸

Planners often see themselves as individuals constrained by, but independent of institutions, rather than as individuals *acting out* their institutions. Planners tend to be reflective, but it is much more difficult to be *self-reflective*, in the terminology of critical theory.⁹ The planners in *Dilemmas* do not identify their own assumptions nor critique their profession and its role in the larger

7. Howe and Kaufman (1980) found, from their surveys, three types of planners which they labelled technical, political, and hybrid. The first type of planner believes her job is to provide technical answers to the questions posed to her, and leave the value judgments to others; the second believes it is legitimate to pursue substantive objectives and to behave in a political way to do so. The hybrids, representing about 50% of the total, held a mixed set of attitudes, and presumably feel this dilemma most acutely.

8. From the Cleveland Policy Planning Report as quoted in Krumholz and Forester, 1990.

9. Bernstein (1978) describes the idea of self-reflection as it appears in the work of critical theorists.

structure of society.¹⁰ They regard their moral positions as personal rather than as values shared within a larger community, or values which are part of the institutions that trouble them.

Bellah and his coauthors (1985, 1991) have argued that institutions are largely invisible to Americans because of the dominance of an ideology of utilitarian individualism in much of our thought and in our most accepted institutions. This view — that we are autonomous individuals who do and should make choices that maximize our personal welfare — is one which denies the power of institutions to shape our views. It supports and legitimizes such institutions as the market system, voting, and pluralist politics. It encourages us to focus on individual rights and procedural fairness. It explains in great part planners' ambivalence about promoting their own moral values. Indeed, the utilitarian model suggests that values are nothing more than individual interests.

Utilitarian individualism is particularly problematic for planners because it denies the significance of community as an important institution. Communitarians believe that society is not a collection of unrelated, morally distinct individuals: rather, it is a plural association of mutually constituting persons, who share a common understanding of what is good (de Neufville, 1992). Members of a community not only share values, but also recognize a responsibility to one another and see themselves as having a common future. Planners are entrusted with planning for and with communities, but are faced with institutions that are grounded in an ideology of individualism. It is no wonder they have difficulty with the notion of the 'public interest'. The public, unlike a community, is but an assemblage of individuals each with different interests. The popularity of this term, despite its quality of oxymoron, is a reflection of how deeply embedded is the utilitarian ethic in U.S. culture. The term itself is an indicator of the contradictions practicing planners face.¹¹

10. Low (1991) provides an excellent framework for linking politics and planning and addresses this question.

11. An alternative communitarian movement is emerging in the U.S., marked by the national attention given to the two books of Bellah et al. (1985, 1991) and to a new journal, *The Responsive Community*, along with the efforts of Amitai Etzioni to build a movement to push for a society more based on mutual responsibility than on individual rights. (This is embodied in *The Responsive Communitarian Platform: Rights and Responsibilities*, Amitai Etzioni, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 1991.) President Clinton's campaign

Institutionalizing Interactive Planning

Though planners do not ordinarily use the rhetoric of institutional change, the reality is that some are currently involved in building new institutions for planning. These new forms are, above all, interactive and based on communication, cooperation, and social learning, rather than on individual choice, institutional roles, and positivist-based analysis. Many of the interactive practices the planners describe in *Dilemmas* are quietly gaining legitimacy, though they still coexist uneasily with more traditional views of carefully channeled public involvement and value-neutral expertise.

Planners in many places are moving further toward institutional change and explicitly creating group processes for many purposes. These groups, often called steering committees, task forces, working groups, and negotiating sessions, are not new to planning. What is new is the design of the groups and the tasks they do. The membership increasingly includes important 'stakeholders' including public and private sector representatives, interest groups, and citizens, along with technical experts. The groups are often run as consensus-building, social learning groups where care is taken for all members to be equally informed and equally heard. Members are sometimes trained in new ways of interacting, and facilitators may manage meetings so that people who are normally in conflict can communicate constructively. The groups meet over long periods of time and build trust, mutual understanding, and mastery of their topic. Discussion tends to be informal, with few topics out of bounds if the group finds them pertinent. These groups are often much more than advisory. They do such things as set policy directions, frame planning problems, oversee implementation of complex legislation, negotiate differences among important players, and develop standards and other regulatory principles (Innes, 1992a).

The models for these groups emerge from the practice and literature of dispute resolution, strategic planning and management in the private sector, social psychology, and law, among others.¹²

made explicit use of themes of community-building and mutual responsibility. His speeches rejected the rhetoric of individualism that has dominated public debate in the U.S. for at least two decades.

12. Fisher and Ury (1981), Amy (1987), Marshall and Peters (1985), and Schweiger et al. (1989) all provide clear and usable models of group process which provide ways to assure what Habermas calls communicative rationality, including equal power for participants in the discussion and opportunity to

This experience suggests that groups can be efficient and creative in establishing visions for new directions, in problem-solving, and in building a sense of shared mission among players normally at odds. The planning literature is just beginning to recognize this movement and to document and provide guidelines for the practices.¹³

Within group processes, planners can partially resolve their institutional dilemmas. Group processes make a virtue of the interactiveness of planning by using face-to-face discussions systematically as a way of learning and deciding. Such processes can be open and accountable, unlike interactions with individuals. These groups address the expertise dilemma because they include members with different perspectives and kinds of knowledge, while at the same time providing opportunities for members to question assumptions and identify biases in information. Groups can and do socially construct information so it is meaningful as well as acceptable from a positivist perspective (Innes, 1989). The planner can resolve the participation dilemma by selecting group members systematically to assure that those with a genuine stake in an issue participate. She can provide the same information to all participants and use group management techniques that assure all members are heard. Finally, the group approach addresses planners' concern about their values by allowing them to assure representation of these views in discussion. Planners can even legitimately voice their own views in the group process. Because the group has a dynamic of its own and reaches its own conclusions, the planner does not have to bear either the moral burden of imposing her view or of concealing it.

A Case in Point: State Growth Management in New Jersey

Nowhere are the emerging uses of group process more evident than in new statewide programs to coordinate and direct the actions of those who shape the growth patterns of regions.¹⁴ The principal

challenge assumptions, and learn as a group. The achieving of equal power is the most difficult, but in practice, power differences in some cases can be overcome where all players have a veto.

13. Examples of this work include Bryson (1988), Bryson and Einsweiler (1988), Ozawa (1991), Susskind and Cruikshank (1987), Sullivan (1984), Dotson et al. (1990), and Godschalk (1992).

14. Seven states have passed growth management legislation since 1986: Florida, New Jersey, Vermont, Maine, Rhode Island, Washington, and Georgia.

players in these are local governments, which make land use decisions, state agencies, which regulate natural resources such as air or water and provide public infrastructure, and a variety of interest groups that influence these processes. All these new state programs, whether they are designed as incentive-based, permissive strategies or top-down, regulatory approaches with strict sanctions for those who do not cooperate, have created group processes to do a variety of key tasks (Innes, 1992b). In most cases, however the groups are ad hoc, created for limited purposes. Their products may or may not be channeled into the actual decisions.

In New Jersey, however, growth management is formulated to require group process. Planners have created a new institutional design for planning consciously, and the experiment has already been far more successful than anyone predicted at the outset. New Jersey's law sets up a State Planning Commission (SPC), independent both of executive and legislative branches, and empowers it to prepare *and adopt* a state plan designating areas for development, redevelopment, conservation, and so on, and defining policies to carry out broad state goals. The law requires SPC to follow a process it calls «cross acceptance», where the counties are mediating bodies between localities and the state. In contrast to other states, such as Oregon, this law does not require local governments to conform their land use plans to the state plan or goals. Nor does the law require state agencies to conform. The plan will be implemented if the participants truly agree it is a good idea and if they trust one another to implement it.

SPC devoted five years to creating a consensus plan. This commission, itself a stakeholder group made up of state agency heads and representatives of key interests ranging from local governments to environmentalists, prepared a preliminary plan as a starting point. Counties organized group processes among local officials to compare their own plans to the state plan and to identify points of disagreement. SPC organized itself into working subcommittees, which met around the state for day-long meetings

A 1991 federal law, however, representing arguably the most important planning legislation in two decades, The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, may turn out to be even more significant than growth management in promoting the use of group processes for planning. This law requires local and regional negotiations over transportation investments, which have been almost exclusively the bailiwick of large state and federal highway bureaucracies.

with county planners and any others who chose to attend. The state provided training in group process for the participants, and the meetings were open, informal discussions which stressed building on common ground and which specified and narrowed disagreements. As a result of these discussions and later negotiation sessions, SPC modified its plan in fundamental ways. Advisory committees on issues such as housing or agriculture or regional design were composed of the competing interests along with technical experts. These committees met in parallel with the cross-acceptance process, and also proposed significant changes to the preliminary plan, which SPC adopted. The process was labor-intensive and engaged planners as facilitators, process designers and managers, as well as staff to these various groups.¹⁵

The accomplishments so far are considerable. Controversy and mistrust greeted the first draft of the preliminary plan in April 1987, but in June 1992, the SPC was able to adopt a state plan unanimously. During the intervening period, over 500 disagreements between local governments and the state had been reduced to a small handful. Supporters of the plan stymied a last-minute effort by those in opposition to stop the plan from going into effect by requiring legislative adoption. Most of the major interest groups in the state, from business organizations to environmentalists, supported the plan, including the farmers, who had the most to lose and held out the longest. Even local governments, which feared loss of their right to control the use of their land, were supportive. The executive director of the association of local governments stated in a hearing before the legislature that the state plan already represented the public will more as adopted by the commission than it would if the legislature had passed it. He could make this remarkable statement because at least 50,000 people had participated intensively over time in ways that engaged them far more deeply than any ordinary public participation process. Moreover, the final product represented a substantial degree of shared understanding and consensus. The group members had educated each other and learned together about the problems of unmanaged growth. In the process of reaching agreement, they had developed an understanding of each

15. See Neuman (1992) and Innes (1992a) for further description of these processes. The changes to the plan are evident in the comparison of New Jersey State Planning Commission, 1988 and 1991.

others' concerns and a stake in the plan and its implementation.

While it remains to be seen whether the power of the plan's ideas and the consensus behind it are strong enough to assure implementation, public agencies at this writing have begun to review their own policies for consistency with the plan, the Governor supports it, and the courts seem likely to use it in the case of disputes. The plan itself has something to offer each of the important groups or agencies that will make it better off than without the plan. Perhaps more importantly, something new has been created that has its own dynamic — a shared sense that New Jerseyans need to work together to assure they can have the future they want. The process has been a way of building statewide community.

The Role for Planning Theory

While the design of these group processes draws on theoretical concepts and empirical research, it lacks the integrated perspective that can provide planners either an ethical compass or criteria for institutional redesign. Though the group processes resolve some dilemmas, they create others and raise difficult philosophical, moral, and practical questions. Do such stakeholder groups really represent the public? What safeguards can prevent groups from coming to agreement on self-serving or morally objectionable policies? Is it possible genuinely to equalize the knowledge or the power of group members when the discrepancies among them are very great? And if not, are the conclusions meaningful? Can understandings reached in intensive, long-term group processes be translated into societal consensus? How can the work of such groups be legitimately linked into or substitute for the bureaucratic and legislative processes of government?

One task for planning theorists and researchers is an empirical one. These emerging practices need documentation and evaluation. What are they like, how are they working, and what are they being used for? What gaps are they filling in traditional practice? A primary goal of such research is to develop models of how and under what conditions group processes can be an appropriate form of planning practice.

A second task is to help planners and planning scholars understand the nature of group processes and what they can and cannot do. Planning theorists need to be familiar with the literatures

of fields such as conflict resolution, management, and social psychology, where the theory and practice of group processes has been developed. They need to draw understandings from these fields and develop models for use in planning (see note 13).

The most important task for planning theorists is, however, to explore group processes from theoretical and moral perspectives and to develop principles for institutional designs and ethics for planners appropriate to practice that relies on these groups. This task involves reviewing literature and developing theory about governance, epistemology, and community. Bolan's essay (1992) on "Planning and Institutional Design" is one of the few examples thus far, where a planning theorist has addressed many of these terms. Bryson and Crosby's conceptions of planning institutions as forums, arenas, and courts (1991) provides a powerful framework for planning based in group process. Their work draws heavily on Giddens (1984), whose work seems likely to be a fertile source for rethinking planning institutions.

My own work (Innes, 1990) along with that of John Friedmann (1987) has drawn on epistemology to develop better ways of seeing knowledge and its links to action in planning.¹⁶ This work suggests ways of drawing on philosophers like Dewey to understand group process as social learning and as an alternative to the positivist approach that troubles planners. It also draws on phenomenologists like Schutz to build an understanding of knowledge as socially constructed in a community. The work of critical theorists, particularly Habermas (1984), develops ethical principles for this type of group in defining the characteristics of ideal speech and in setting up the conditions to achieve «communicative rationality». Their notion of critical self-reflection is also important for the ethical planner working with group process. Dryzek (1990) has begun to piece together many of the important philosophical perspectives in developing his proposal for «discursive democracy».

Finally, to understand group process as an approach to planning, theorists must explore moral philosophy, particularly the communitarian philosophers like Sandel (1983) and MacIntyre (1984). Harper and Stein (1992) and Howe (1990, 1992, and

16. A substantial literature exists on knowledge utilization in policy-making. Most notably, this includes the work of Charles Lindblom (1990), Lindblom and Cohen (1979), and Frank Fischer, (1990). See also the bibliography in Innes (1990).

forthcoming) have already begun the work of linking planning theory more explicitly to normative ethics and the literature of moral philosophy. The next step is to explore how these ideas help to assess and to design planning institutions that make use of group processes.

As *Dilemmas of Planning Practice* tells us, planning institutions need redesign and planning requires new conceptions both of ethics and of knowledge. Planning practitioners are already at work. Planning scholars and educators should play a much greater role than they have thus far. As scholars, their task is to explore implications of the new practices and develop theories and principles for an integrated set of institutions, ethics, and understandings. As educators, their task is to help future planners to see institutions critically and play an active role in their reconstruction.

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