

UC Berkeley

IURD Reprint Series

Title

Planning Theory and Practice: Bridging the Gap

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6gj3v6n0>

Author

de Neufville, Judith I.

Publication Date

1983-06-01

Peer reviewed

Reprint 201

**Planning Theory and
Practice:
Bridging the Gap**

Judith I. de Neufville

June 1983

University of California at Berkeley
\$11.50

Reprinted from: *Journal of Planning Education and Research*
Volume 3, No. 1, Summer 1983, pp. 35-45.

The Institute of Urban and Regional Development serves the faculty and students of the Berkeley Campus conducting research into a wide array of policy-relevant questions. Its foci of inquiry are the processes of urban and regional growth and decline, the consequences that alternative styles of governance have for patterns of development, and the scientific bases for development policy and for policy planning.

Toward these ends, current research is directed to the economics of urbanization in the West and in the Third World; techniques of environmental management; effects of using new energy sources; emergent patterns of suburbanization and central area reconstruction; evaluation of alternative modes of transportation; design of effective means for supplying social services; contemporary issues in housing policy; determinants of urban livability and the factors shaping urban life; and potential improvements in methods of analysis, evaluation, and planning.

The Institute's members are drawn from departments throughout the Berkeley Campus. Their research findings are published in their respective professional journals and in commercially distributed books. The Institute prints and distributes many of their research papers; a catalog of publications is available on request.

Abstract

There is increasing evidence that planning theory has been inadequate in recent years. Not only does it fail to guide practice, it contributes to cognitive dissonance and alienation among practitioners. Planning schools agree on no body of literature and ideas to count as planning theory. Planning is like a paradigm "in crisis," in that theory does not mesh with experience. Moreover, neither of the two main candidates for the prime exemplar for planning practice—the master plan model or the policy analysis model—is acceptable enough to provide coherence to the field.

To remedy this situation, the paper proposes an agenda for planning theory to confront many of the dilemmas that have emerged, such as the conflict of technical and political roles and deciding who is the client. New theorizing should be grounded in empirical research on the practice and contexts of planning, and much of it should be holistic and interpretive, rather than quantitative and hypothesis testing. A prime goal should be to create a new imagery of what planning is and what planners do. Research should draw on such fields as political economy, anthropology, history, organizational behavior, and political science for methods and theories, and grow from phenomenological thought and critical theory more than from positivist analysis. Topics which demand particular attention include problem defining, language and symbols, values analysis, knowledge for interactive planning and unique settings, communicator roles, and planning ethics.

The Doldrums of Planning Theory

Despite some recent signs of life, planning theory remains in the doldrums, where it has been for over a decade. Few new ideas have been generated from within the field, yet the old ones are not supported by consensus. Most significantly, documentation is growing that planning theory not only provides little guidance to the practitioner, but that it also contributes to a sense of frustration and can hinder practice. It is a matter of considerable urgency to develop theories of planning that will both mesh with the realities of practice and be useful and inspiring to the practitioner. The theories must also be richer, more evocative, and more intellectually productive than those now in currency if the field is to mature. The question is how can these goals be achieved?

Dilemmas and Conundrums

Evidence of the inadequacy of planning theory comes from many directions. Klosterman's survey of planning theory courses (1981) showed few contributions by planners in recent years, with the most popular being mainly review articles. There was little commonality among course bibliographies, with few items appearing in more than a quarter of them, and apparently no common structure to courses. No text, or even collection of writings, has gained general acceptance.

Not only is there no agreement on what body of ideas constitutes planning theory, much of the literature raises insoluble dilemmas and endless conundrums. How can the planner choose between being a value-neutral analyst or a committed, effective political actor? If there is no single public interest, how can planners know what interest or value to serve? How can they do long-term, comprehensive, and systematic planning in a world in which action is undertaken incrementally and there are no centers of power? How can they solve problems when there is neither agreement on goals nor technology for solutions? Should a plan be a vision of the future, a contract, or a first step in a process?

Such questions have no answers. They are the stuff of stale philosophical debate, the product of logical-deductive argumentation, in which the implications of various extremes are drawn in relief and the contradictions exposed. They are armchair arguments. In short, there is little in planning theory which offers a view of planning with which professionals or academics can be comfortable.

Planners' education generally provides little guidance in thinking about how to achieve the diverse and contradictory goals in practice or to resolve the dilemmas planning theory poses for them. Each planner must individually invent a rationale and a strategy. This gap of theory and practice is well recognized in planning curricula, which are normally well larded with studios, internships, and experiential learning. Something must fill the void between the world of practice and most of what is formally taught. Yet the void will not be filled until planning theory can make much more explicit what it is that practice is really about.

Cognitive Dissonance in the Profession

Empirical studies document increasingly that planning education and thought about planning do not provide a mindset which guides planners effectively in their behavior or makes them comfortable with the roles they play. Vasu, for example, (1979), after interviewing a large sample, concluded that planners suffer from cognitive dissonance. They are caught, for example, between their acute awareness of a pluralist, political reality and their faith that they should do rational, comprehensive planning while remaining aloof from this political process. At the same time, as individuals, they are politically involved. Conflict among the roles planners have and the lack of congruence between their

goals and their achievements are important sources of job dissatisfaction (Mayo 1982). Marcuse (1976) documented confusion among planners about the nature of ethical behavior, while Howe and Kaufman's later study (1979) linked planners' differences on ethics to whether they saw themselves as primarily technicians or politicians. These authors also have identified a substantial group, close to fifty percent of their sample, rather ambiguously labeled "hybrids," who do not choose between technical excellence and value commitment, but try to achieve both. Planning theory, however, gives little image of the content or logic of this latter stance, but rather suggests the role is logically and psychologically untenable.

Other kinds of dissonance also exist between planners' expectations and what they actually do. Baum (1980a) argues that planners are often ineffective and frustrated because they expect to be analysts and plan makers, but are instead required to operate as bureaucrats and negotiators, for which roles they have not been prepared. In a study of the role of information in the planning of local Block Grant programs (de Neufville 1981a), planners subscribed to a rhetoric that information and analysis are important components of planning. In reality, however, they did not actually use data themselves in any significant way. Benveniste (1982) and Baum (1980b) both contend that planners are confused about behavioral norms and ethics because of their anomalous roles as partially bureaucrats and partially professionals.

Defining Planning

At this point the logical mind will demand a definition of planning. It is my contention, however, that defining what planners do or should do is a task for research to *discover*, rather than simply the *a priori* basis for argumentation. Of course, this position presumes that the readers share with me some tacit conceptions which allow us to recognize certain activities as "planning." But while most might agree that some activities constitute planning, we undoubtedly would not agree about many others.

To discover through research what one cannot define seems paradoxical. "Planning" is an open concept, in Kaplan's terminology (1964), not fully articulated and with fuzzy boundaries, yet in use and generally understood. We have to be cautious to avoid "premature closure," narrowly defining such ideas too quickly, because the meaning of open concepts varies according to context, purpose, and the understanding of the overall situation. For example, to a child a book is a bound set of pages with words and pictures; to a librarian bound "books" may be shelved as periodicals; to a tenure committee a bound volume made up of reprinted articles does not count as a book, while a stack of loose manuscript pages may be quite acceptable.

We can use research simultaneously to analyze and define planning in the same way that we learn the meaning of language. A phenomenon is identified and labeled for us; we observe it and experience it in various contexts and forms; we generalize from our observations; we consider explanations from others; we modify the original definitions and develop principles which allow us to recognize even peculiar variations of a phenomenon. The principles may be tacit, but so long as they are more or less shared, we can communicate and analyze. The exercise of elaborating understanding is one which has both objective and subjective components, as we go back and forth between experiencing and analyzing.

Academics and researchers help make this link between experience and interpretation (Berger and Luckmann 1966), which is a necessity for credible research. On the other hand, those who *do* planning must also provide their own perspective in this definition process; must evaluate the researchers' conceptions; and even test the idea in their practice. And the researcher's own engagement in practice can provide experiential understanding. The result of developing and negotiating these perceptions can be a concept with which both those who plan and those who analyze planning can be comfortable.

At the start of this definition process one may look at the formal planning profession, represented in the U.S. in part by the APA and served by planning schools. But many others belong in this first cut — national planners operating in planned economies, people working in state planning agencies, social planners, policy analysts, program planners, budgetary analysts, and policy advisors. Their continued inclusion in planning theory research depends on its purposes and the degree of commonality among the groups.

My premise is that planning is a set of activities intended to improve the quality of decisions for a community, to help it be prepared for its future. While those in power must be planners by definition, the challenging and relevant problem for us is to define and prescribe the roles and activities for those who try to guide those in power. Other precepts I would begin with are: planning is comprehensive in attempting to deal with many factors; it makes some systematic use of information; and it involves creation of images of the future and strategies to reach them. All of these are preliminary definitions, open to evolution and even rejection as part of the further specification process.

Planning as a Field in Crisis

As a field, planning is in a state of crisis, in a sense which parallels Kuhn's discussions of progress and paradigm change in science (1970). The theories of planning are increasingly perceived to be at odds with the experience in research and practice. The theoretical precepts are not helpful to many attempting to use them. The anomalies, observations unexplained by the theory, are severe enough to create significant malaise among both academics and practitioners. It is time, if we follow out the implications of the analogy to Kuhn's argument, for a revolution in planning thought. It is time to develop a new way of seeing the problems and task of planning—to make a gestalt switch to a view which will provide a more satisfactory mesh with reality, a more usable set of goals for practice, and a more fruitful direction for theoretical inquiry.

A useful way to understand the nature of a scientific paradigm is to look at the exemplar, that is, the principal model for research, complete with ideas, theories, techniques, and model problem solutions which are seen to work effectively. This exemplar becomes the basis for education, which, in turn, defines and perpetuates the paradigm. An analogy for a profession is a model of practice well enough elaborated and widely enough accepted and used to shape education and provide a stable basis for defining and doing research on practice. Such an exemplar would have to resolve many of the anomalies.

The strongest and best-developed candidate for planning's exemplar has been the Master Plan approach, complete with planning commission; long-range, comprehensive and visionary plan; planning tasks such as goal-setting, information gathering, alternative generation and solution design; a nonpolitical professional role

for planners as staff to planning commissions; and clients (the commissions or the city council) that could be viewed as representing the public interest. Planners were to be insulated from bureaucracy and from the messy tasks of getting political support for plans, managing or even designing implementation activities. The approach represented a valiant effort to avoid many dilemmas, such as the issue of whose values to promote. The model contained a workable set of institutional and political arrangements and, under the Standard City Planning Enabling Act, it became the framework for much local planning across the U.S. A kind of textbook even appeared in Kent's *Urban General Plan* (1964).

The Master Plan approach never quite achieved the status of exemplar, however. Some part of the profession saw it at the outset as relatively too oriented to physical planning. Certainly it was directed primarily to U.S. city planners, though it could have been adapted to other types of planning. After some experience, many planners and planning theorists were to conclude it did not work as intended. It was hard to develop a plan that would be influential and long-term, as well as pragmatic and implementable, without turning the planning process into something quite different from the image originally projected—something that was part and parcel of daily politics. The whole approach could simply mask a political process, allowing planners to serve class- and power-based interests, while acting as disinterested servants of the "public interest" (Weiss 1983).

Whatever the reasons, however, for the failure of the Master Plan approach to gain full support from planners—it is not the purpose of this paper to reiterate the many arguments on this subject—the model became the straw man for much of planning theory. Attempts were made to modify the model, for example, by talking about the middle-range bridge (Meyerson 1956), to justify planning through public finance theory about intervention in markets (Moore 1978), and to outline alternative planning roles like advocate, facilitator or analyst. Countless diatribes were launched against the logic, the practicality, and the rationality of the Master Plan.

The next strongest recent contender for planning's exemplar has been best articulated and most often practiced by those trained in public policy (which, as a field, has parallel difficulties to planning in agreeing on a paradigm and exemplar). In this approach, the planner is analyst/advvisor to a chief executive or agency head, applying economic and systems analysis frameworks to produce recommendations. Meltzer's book on policy analysts (1976) documented the practices, and many methods textbooks appeared. Some planning schools have begun to identify more with this model, as they loosen ties to architecture and link themselves with policy or public administration.

As yet, however, no clear trend moves planning practice and education clearly into a policy analysis mode. Despite the limitations of the Master Plan approach, the latter did express several ideals important to many planners, which are not embodied in other approaches. These are, most notably: (1) comprehensiveness in the sense of developing a plan for the whole, rather than working on only a part of the problem; (2) a concern with outcomes rather than simply a focus on process (like the advocate or the policy analyst as "hired gun"); and (3) a design perspective, which is synthesizing and creative, visionary, rather than merely critical and reactive to political pressures or narrowly specified problem formulations.¹

An Agenda for Planning Theory

The predicament of planning — the crisis, the malaise, the disjunction between what we teach and claim planners do and what they actually do, the sharp divergences of opinion within the field — all this is, I believe, the responsibility of planning faculty. It is the job of those of us who teach planning to explain the profession to itself, to make explicit the nature of practice, to develop theories about how and why certain modes of practice tend to produce one or another type of result. Our theories should provide a framework to understand the logic of planning action and discourse, and to create a new exemplar for practice.

Dilemmas to be Resolved

Planning theory must first deal with the dilemmas it confronts. To summarize.

Planner as Technician. On the one hand, planners must be objective and value neutral if they are to be credible or legitimate in their technical roles. On the other hand, they choose problem definitions, methods and indicators; they shape questions and point to answers, each of which embodies values.

Planning as the Application of Knowledge. While planners and others pay lip service to the importance of information for public decisions, such decisions often seem to make little use of formal knowledge. Is the concern with information a hollow one, or is it simply that its form is poorly matched to the applications?

The Values Problem. Is there a public interest and, if so, how do we recognize it? If not, which values should we represent if we cannot resolve conflicts? Even more basic, how does one find out what social values are? And what does one do with one's own values — acknowledge them, ignore them, or work for them?

Stance Toward the Political Process. Is the political process good, reflecting the will of the people, or bad, reflecting the interests of the few? Even if it does reflect the popular will, is there any assurance the results will be desirable on other counts?

Comprehensive versus Incremental. How can one reconcile the desirability of comprehensive, long-term plans with the practical reality that decisions are made in piecemeal, incremental fashion, that information about the future is inadequate, and that even effective centers of power seldom carry out even the best-made plans?

Synthesis versus Analysis. Should the planner primarily expect to analyze and solve problems or create new ideas? While the temptation is to say yes to both, the tasks are not clearly reconcilable. Analysis involves taking things apart; it is reactive to problems. Design is creative and putting together (Teitz 1974).

Professional Dilemmas. Who is the client — the immediate boss, the one who pays, the agency, the segment of the public being served, or the public as a whole? What is a planner's special expertise? How should the planner interact with clients — on the model of the lawyer, the doctor, the social worker, or in some unique way? Where within government should planners serve — as advisors to executive, staff to legislative bodies, working for citizen-based commissions, as staff of line agencies or some other place, and why and when is one approach more desirable than another?

Context Issues. How is planning affected by the political and economic forces in a society? Is it possible to assume an autonomous role for planning? Is there any general model for practice or should it be conducted differently in different organizational environments or degrees of technological and political uncertainty?

Uniqueness. How can planners use knowledge of general laws to deal with practice situations, which are invariably unique in important ways?

Implementation. Is planning simply designing outcomes or does it include designing and following through on implementation strategies? Can the planner be accepted as impartial advisor, while simultaneously being involved in action?

The Interactiveness of Practice. If practice involves give and take between planners and others, can the planner also hold to some visions for the future? Should the planner be subject to the decision process, design decision processes, or simply make recommendations without regard for such processes?

Theoretical and Analytical Perspectives

Much of the research on practice is now virtually atheoretical, but progress in planning theory will depend on strong conceptual frameworks to illuminate rather than simply describe. Several theoretical and disciplinary perspectives currently offer the most promising structures for planning theory research.

History. One obvious strategy is to study what planners have done, or thought, and why and under what circumstances planning has come into being, developed in one form or another, or had one or another set of consequences. A historical approach allows looking holistically at both practice and context and at outcome and action. It permits tracing the influence of ideas and identifying the sources of change. But history will not be particularly useful unless it is informed by some view of causal relationships.

Political Economy. Planning plays a role in maintaining the state and the economy. Political economists tend to look at planning as a result rather than a cause, with at most, the ability to effect marginal change. They rely heavily on historical study and try to understand the forces creating, constraining, and directing the activity of planning. One important contribution to planning theory in this genre is Cohen's classic work (1977), in which the form and logic of French "indicative" planning is defined in terms of the characteristics of the state, the educational system, the bureaucracy, and the economy. A second contribution to theory is Boyer's (1983 forthcoming) book on the history of city planning in the U.S., which accounts for changes in the activities of planning on the basis of the needs of capital for widened investment opportunities or for regulation to limit superspeculation (see also Boyer 1981).

Political Theory. Planning theory and planners are vulnerable in their limited ability to link ideas about practice with an understanding of power and political process. The value of looking at planning through the political science lens is amply demonstrated by Altshuler's important contribution to the understanding of planning practice, *The City Planning Process* (1965).

Organizational Behavior. Planners operate within organizations, which in turn, exist within a set of complex interrelationships of governmental and private groups. Planning theory generally fails to incorporate the necessary understandings of this environment. Theory and research need to deal with how practice varies according to organizational setting, how professional and organizational roles come into conflict or merge, and with ways to design strategies for change within organizations. Contributions thus far include particularly the work of Christensen (1983 forthcoming) and Bryson and Delbecq (1979), who draw heavily on organizational theorists to predict and prescribe planning strategy for types of problems in various organizational situations. Work of political scientists and public policy analysts on policy-making and implementation is also useful as a model as it combines political and organizational perspectives (see for example, Allison 1971; Bardach 1977; Mazmanian and Sabatier 1981).

Anthropology. Planning theorists can draw on the analytic and research style of anthropologists to identify cultural systems which ascribe meaning to events and attach labels, values, and norms to behaviors. Anthropology offers a strategy to uncover expectations that are so much taken for granted that participants no longer are conscious of them. The most notable planning study in this genre is Perin's (1977) documenting the meanings ascribed to residential land uses by local officials and ordinary citizens. Her theory links these meanings to the social order of communities in the U.S. While her findings are not surprising (for example, multi-family housing signals a lower status family and less responsible life style than single family), her work is a model for planning research in the way it identifies, interprets, and analyzes a structure of values which influence planning.

Epistemology. A field such as planning, so centered around informing and communicating, attempting to know and create the future, must have a firm basis in philosophical thought about the nature of knowledge. Moreover this epistemology must be appropriate to the task of planning, providing a consistent, workable and intuitively satisfactory way to link knowledge to action.

The Limits of Positivism. The epistemology which has most influenced planning theory, as it has social sciences in the last two decades, is positivist thought. The influence has led to advances in systematic analysis and to much empirical research, but it has also contributed to the dilemmas of planning theory. The researcher (read also planner) must be the disinterested observer in the positivist view. Facts are considered to exist "out there," to be discovered through research modeled on the methods of science. The search for knowledge involves the hypothesizing of general laws, and proceeds via logical deduction and empirical tests using data that can be measured.

Since the knower and doer must be separate, if a planner is not a value-neutral technician, there is no comfortable alternative. Knowledge and action are virtually unlinked. Decision makers supposedly set goals and ask questions, to which planners respond and present information, on the basis of which decision makers act. This view, however, neither describes practice nor offers an adequate normative model (Scott and Shore 1979). Knowledge which has an impact seldom follows this three-step process (de Neufville 1981a).

The positivist view has given credibility to quantifiable data, and, in the process, discouraged the study of meanings, intentions, and values. The search for laws encourages the use of limited hypotheses, rather than efforts to understand whole systems in their full complexity. Positivism provides little way to understand how context relates to action or how to deal with planning problems in specific places and times. The effect of these limitations can be observed in planning theory in its search for simple principles, and in the quantitative and hypothesis-testing nature of much research on practice. Such research cannot generate new categories and images for planning theory. For planning practitioners the effect has been to drain legitimacy from many of the ways of knowing they depend on which are intuitive and holistic.

Phenomenology. An alternative to positivism has been gaining acceptability in the social sciences along with application to the research process (Patton 1980) and to the understanding of society. A phenomenological view of knowledge provides a path through some of the paradoxes of planning theory and practice. While phenomenology takes many forms in the literature (Bernstein 1976), several themes recur. The basic idea is that the knower tries to understand a phenomenon in its own terms and in its own uniqueness. Subjective and unmeasurable data, such as meanings and intentions, are not only accepted, but are central. Facts, in

the phenomenological view are, in any case, socially constructed within a community (Berger and Luckmann 1966). One can learn by bracketing one's own feelings and values and by trying to put oneself in the place of the other. Since there is a commonality across people, an intersubjectivity, one can interpret the reasons for other's actions when one knows enough of the circumstances and meanings of events to those people. One learns through the technique of *verstehen*, or interpretation – making sense of a complex set of circumstances.

From a phenomenological view, some planning dilemmas do not exist. For example, it is not an issue whether the planner is a technician/problem solver or someone imposing a personal view in defining problems and choosing methods. Instead the planner can be both, without being in dichotomous roles. To be a technician is to impose one's own understandings; yet those understandings are not merely personal. The planner can develop skill in identifying and formulating the *social* meanings of facts – meanings that can be shared and that will produce actions which are also accepted. They can draw the actors into the knowing and learning process and develop ways to legitimize and institutionalize information production and use.

There is less difficulty with using knowledge in real world applications for the phenomenologist. A general law is of assistance in specific situations only to a small degree. The method of proceeding by hypothesis testing is impossible in the haste of real world decisions; many unique and idiosyncratic features of a situation frequently determine final recommendations. Phenomenological, holistic and specific knowledge, however, is of use in daily decisions.

Thus phenomenology offers a view of the learning process which links knowledge to action far better than the positivist view. Moreover in looking to the actors for the meanings of planning and in attempting to make new sense of complex stories of what planners do, it provides the opportunity to search for new images as a basis for planning theory.

Some recent contributions to planning theory demonstrate ways to use the phenomenological view to study and analyze practice. Schön (1983) watched and listened to practitioners solving client problems in an effort to understand the thought processes and analytic strategies they employ. He concluded that, while they do use scientific knowledge in some limited way, their primary effort is to formulate the client's problem in a way analogous to one they know how to solve. They use generalizations from previous experience, but they remain open to the idea that the particular case is unique. They work interactively until both client and practitioner are satisfied they have reached a solution. Bolan (1980) tries to understand the "theories" of planning that are constructed in the minds of practitioners and explores the relationship between these and the more formal or "institutional" professional theory. His analysis emphasizes language, the meanings participants bring to the action, and the uniqueness of each planning episode. My own research on the development and use of social indicators in public policy (1975) concludes that to be politically significant and socially meaningful, such measures have to be developed through carefully constructed and lengthy social processes and integrated with the public and expert understandings.

Critical Theory. The critical theorists, particularly Jurgen Habermas, offer the potentially richest and most useful set of ideas for future planning theory. The work of these theorists is still relatively inaccessible, however, and remains to be developed into an operational and widely usable set of concepts.^{2,3} This work may, however, deal with even more theory/practice dilemmas than the phenomenological approach. For one thing, Habermas, at least, is seeking more than merely an epistemological view, but an all-encompassing perspective linking action, knowledge, ethics, and politics. Moreover, his view accepts the necessity of employing many ways of knowing and learning—the positivist, empirically-based method, the phenomenological, holistic and interpretive method and the method of critique.

The notion of “critique,” basic to critical theory, demands that the knower question all assumptions and be aware of how formal knowledge reinforces the status quo. The relativity of facts and methods to personal or social values and understandings becomes, rather than a dilemma, the foundation for further thought. Moreover, the knowing process is dialectical and does not require the observer to be disinterested or value-bracketed. The knower takes a position and learning proceeds through discourse and disagreement. Certainly taking such a view could help legitimize the interactive planning roles which now are so problematic and could provide an intellectual framework to evaluate and improve these roles.

From the perspective of critical theory there is no truth “out there,” independent of those who think and argue about it. There is, instead, a set of “claims to truth” which allow us to decide what to take as valid. These include the comprehensibility of what is said, the logical truth of a proposition, the legitimacy and expertise of the person making the truth claim, and the veracity of the speaker. These concepts have already provided a useful analytic framework to some planning theorists for conceptualizing and evaluating what planners do (Forester 1980, 1982; Krieger 1981).

The dialectical approach accepts the shifting and self contradictory nature of truth—the notion that every truth implies its opposite. Faith in the dialectic would make it easier for planners to live with the uneasy contradictions which seem inevitable in their work. For planning theorists the dialectical model implies that research must be, at least in part historical, and take into account competing forces and frameworks for explanation. This approach is illustrated in two works of Ann Markusen (1983a, 1983b), which trace U.S. regional planning and development historically and explain them simultaneously from microeconomic, geographical, political, and political economy perspectives.

Critical theory offers the strongest linkage between knowledge and action of the three epistemologies. Knowledge is an evolving set of understandings rather than a snapshot in time, and thus it approximates better the realities of practice. In addition the knower *must* act in order to know. While the disinterested observer is necessary to some forms of knowledge, it is only through “praxis” that many ideas can take shape. Some critical theorists argue that change will be a result of critique and discourse. Finally, the theory suggests an ethical stance—that the knower should oppose the status quo and thus advocate for the powerless.

While those of us whose minds have been shaped by positivist thought and the idea of the disinterested search for truth may have difficulty with some of this argument, as a mindset for planners it offers attractions. It suggests that planners should take a more active role than many do, but it also spares them the difficult choice between political involvement and detached analysis. For planning theorists one message is that practice is part of research. Another is that communications

activities of planning can be conceptualized and critiqued in new ways. Planning theorists begin to be aware of critical theory and a few have begun a serious effort to use it in their work. There is still much to be done to elaborate and apply critical theory to planning. Many points will be challenged and argued—how can discourse lead to change; how can practice be transformed into knowledge; does critical theory really offer a normative model for planners?⁴ Critical theory will generate its own dilemmas. But, in the meantime, it is a source to enrich and revitalize planning thought.

Research Strategies

Planning theoreticians will have to get their hands dirty with data, with firsthand study of planning and of the meaning systems in which it takes place. Studies such as Howe's (1980) or Howe and Kaufman's (1979) and Vasu's (1979) provide a valuable beginning. These authors surveyed planners' attitudes and understandings of their roles, through formal questionnaires. This research is valuable in addressing these subjective questions, but the next step is to go beyond these basically positivist, quantitative studies to a more holistic form of research. Surveys have to be designed on the basis of *a priori* ideas about what planners think and do. They can demonstrate when the ideas are wrong, but cannot provide alternative explanations. If the right question is not asked at the outset, the survey gives no answer. Moreover a survey is limited to finding out what people say they do and say they believe, and cannot uncover what is hidden or unrecognized. Finally while responses can be correlated with measurable variables like age, sex, or education, if the causal system is more complex, a survey will not discover it.

The new research that is needed involves using many types of knowledge simultaneously and examining many types of variables, ranging from the actions and behaviors of participants to their results. The work should rely on a range of methods — surveys, open-ended interviewing, direct observation, historical study, language, and content analysis and in-depth case studies.

An important output of such research will be complex stories, “thick descriptions” as Geertz (1973) calls them, rather than laws linking a few variables or offering conclusions generalizable to well-specified categories of planners or situations. Causality is established rather by persuading the reader that the researcher’s interpretation of the meaning and logic of a series of observations makes sense, that the actors behaved as they did for the reasons given. The story enlightens by its insights, by its ability to deepen understandings as well as its ability to raise theoretical questions for further empirical test. Well done, these descriptions have the truth of literature. They speak, not of men, but of man. Learning from them is, in part, at a tacit level, as it is from experience, though a well-interpreted case can be more focused and offer a clearer message than experience as it highlights and links the most critical details. Some research on planning has been done in this style (e.g., Forester 1980; de Neufville 1981a), but Schön’s *Reflective Practitioner* (1983) provides the clearest example.

Topics Demanding Research

A number of topics demand the attention of planning theorists, as they are critical elements of planning which are poorly understood.

Problem Definition. A few analysts have begun to study how problems are defined, exploring for example, the routinized ways problems are found in bureaucratic process (Pounds 1969), or the role of quantitative measures in identifying problems (de Neufville 1981c). One can identify the values associated with elements of the problem definition along with the accompanying implications for policy (Moore 1976), or one can try to link stakeholders and assumptions to different problem definitions (Mitroff et al. 1979). The possibilities are many, but goals are to outline the problem identification process, to link it to other planning tasks, and to develop criteria to define problems in technically adequate or ethically acceptable ways.

Language, Symbols, and Indicators. Public debates focus on “signifiers” — language, numbers, and shorthand labels for policies which are layered with meanings and mythologies (de Neufville 1983). Rallying cries — “a decent home for all Americans,” the rising unemployment rate, closing tax “loopholes” — link into deeply held emotions (Edelman 1977) and values, but a common meaning of these never fully exists. Planning theory should give attention to how to uncover meanings, to the process by which meanings are ascribed, and to the implications of the fact that complex and ambiguous stories underly explicit debates.^{5,6} Planners must not only work with the elusive tools of language and indicator, but must be themselves symbol makers.

Communication. This broad term covers many tasks of planning which are poorly integrated into planning thought. Language is the foundation of communication tasks, but there is a need to focus on such specific tasks as advising (Krieger 1981), attention-shaping (Forester 1980), and negotiation and mediation (Susskind and Ozawa 1983), and to develop further the implications of the transactive and social learning models of planning (Michael 1973; Friedmann 1973).

Forms of Knowledge and Ways of Providing It. If the traditional model of information provision and use is inadequate, theorists need to search for a more effective model, by identifying what works in practice and why or why not. For example, formal research often has more role in defining than in solving problems, more in setting targets and standards than in comparing alternatives, more in education of decision makers than in policy choice, more in program design, management, and monitoring than in evaluation, and more in stopping the unwanted program than in creating new policy concepts (Rein and White 1977; de Neufville 1981).

The institutional process of creating information, moreover, is as important as its content in assuring it will be meaningful, legitimate, and used (de Neufville 1978-79). The link of power to the process of informing decisions also requires study (Forester 1982), as does the nature of decision processes which do or do not use one or another form of information. Finally, information design for dialectical, interactive planning needs to be explored in a way informed by a phenomenological or critical theory view of knowledge.

Values. The concept of a social value is elusive, as it is never expressed except in relation to a specific situation. Planning theorists need to understand the content of public values and the processes and influences which transform them into public preferences, as well as the processes by which they are negotiated and modified.

Ethics. An equally elusive issue, linking to the meaning of professionalism for planners, is planning ethics. Planning theorists should study how the ethics planners use work to support or undermine their credibility and self-image and how ethics can help or hinder their relations with clients and correspond to bureaucratic norms. Planning theory should generate a debate over issues the profession needs to decide — such as who its clients are and what values it represents.

Scenes and Settings. Attention must be paid to the settings in which planning is done, to how these can and should influence the way the planner thinks and acts, and to how strategies for practice depend on different environmental conditions. The task involves both organizational and political theory and work comparable to Schön's (1983) and Bolan's (1980) on how planners deal with the predictability and uniqueness of the situations they face.

A Concluding Note

Planning theory cannot seek simple answers, but will have to develop accounts dealing with the full complexity of planning and its many contexts. It will have to give close attention to the interactiveness of planning and the communication roles of planners. It will have to be about meanings and embrace rather than deny ambiguity. The theorizing must be grounded in empirical study and the perceptions of actors. It should account for structural and historical forces and delineate planners who are immersed in interaction — communicators, and simultaneously actors, researchers, and facilitators. It will have to define ethical planning, and establish typologies of the settings in which planning takes place, along with strategies effective in each. A new exemplar, or series of them, should emerge. But, most importantly, the result should be a rich set of insights and theories on which to found the intellectual growth of planning.

Notes

1. Alterman and MacRae (1983), make useful systematic comparisons between graduates of planning and of public policy schools in terms of their assumptions and practice.
2. McCarthy (1978) offers a good interpretation and overview of Habermas' work.
3. Bernstein (1976) interprets, compares, and links the positivists, language theorists, phenomenologists and critical theorists to one another and to developments in social and political theory.
4. See the book review article by Mandelbaum in this journal.
5. One exception to this complaint about the lack of work on language in planning theory is Seymour Mandelbaum's work (1982a, 1982b).
6. The book *The Land Use Policy Debate in the U.S.* (de Neufville 1981b) was designed to uncover conflicting meanings of arguments over land use policy coming from different ideological and disciplinary perspectives.

References

- Allison, G.T. 1971. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Alterman, R. and MacRae, D., Jr. 1983 forthcoming. Planning and Policy Analysis: Converging or Diverging Trends? *Journal of the American Planning Association*.
- Altshuler, A.A. 1965. *The City Planning Process*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Bardach, E. 1977. *The Implementation Game*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Baum, H.S. 1980a. Analysts and Planners Must Think Organizationally. *Policy Analysis*. 6:479-494.
- _____. 1980b. The Uncertain Consciousness of Planners and the Professional Enterprise. *Plan Canada*. 20:39-53.
- Benveniste, G. 1982. Professionalization of Policy Experts. Paper read at 10th World Congress of Sociology, Mexico City.
- Berger, P.L. and Luckmann, T. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Bernstein, R. 1976. *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Bolan, R.S. 1980. The Practitioner as Theorist: The Phenomenology of the Professional Episode. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 46:261-274.
- Boyer, M.C. 1981. National Land Use Policy: Instrument and Product of the Economic Cycle. In *The Land Use Policy Debate in the United States*, ed., J.I. de Neufville. New York: Plenum Press.
- _____. 1983 forthcoming. *Planning the City of Capital: The History of American Physical Planning Between 1983 and 1945*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bryson, J.M. and Delbecq, A.L. 1979. A Contingent Approach to Strategy and Tactics in Project Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 45:167-179.
- Christensen, K. 1983 forthcoming. *Advanced Federalism: Delusions of Certainty in Complex Intergovernmental Systems*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Cohen, S. 1977. *Modern Capitalist Planning: The French Model*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- De Neufville, J.I. 1975. *Social Indicators and Public Policy: Interactive Processes of Design and Application*. New York: Elsevier.
- _____. 1978-79. Validating Policy Indicators. *Policy Sciences*. 10:188.
- _____. 1981a. Federal Requirements and Local Planning Capacity: The Case of CD8G. Working Paper No. 265, Institute of Urban and Regional Development, University of California, Berkeley.
- _____, ed. 1981b. *The Land Use Policy Debate in the United States*. New York: Plenum Press.
- _____. 1981c. Social Indicators. In *Handbook of Applied Sociology: Frontiers of Contemporary Research*, eds., M. Olsen and M. Micklin. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- _____. 1983. Symbol and Myth in Land Policy. In *Values, Ethics, and the Practice of Policy Analysis*, ed., W. Dunn. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Edelman, M. 1977. *Political Language: Words That Succeed and Policies That Fail*. New York: Academic Press.
- Forester, J. 1980. Critical Theory and Planning Practice. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 46:275-286.
- _____. 1982. Planning in the Face of Power. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 48:67-80.
- Friedmann, J. 1973. *Retracking America: A Theory of Transactive Planning*. New York: Anchor.
- Geertz, C. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Howe, E. 1980. Role Choices of Urban Planners. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 46:398-409.
- Howe, E. and Kaufman, J. 1979. The Ethics of Contemporary American Planners. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 45:243-255.
- Kaplan, A. 1964. *The Conduct of Inquiry: Methodology for Behavioral Science*. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company.
- Kent, T.J., Jr. 1964. *The Urban General Plan*. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company.
- Klosterman, R.E. 1981. Contemporary Planning Theory Education: Results of a Course Survey. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. 1:1-11.
- Krieger, M. 1981. *Advice and Planning*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kuhn, T. 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mandelbaum, S.J. 1982a. Too Clever By Far: Communications and Community Development. *Communications*. 7:103-114.
- _____. 1982b. What is Philadelphia? The Integrative Paper Series of Philadelphia: Past, Present and Future, School of Public and Urban Policy, University of Pennsylvania.

- Marcuse, P. 1976. Professional Ethics and Beyond: Values in Planning. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*. 42:264-274.
- Markusen, A.R. 1983a forthcoming. *Profit Cycles, Oligopoly, and Regional Development*.
- _____. 1983b forthcoming. *No Place Like Home: The Politics of American Regionalism*.
- Mayo, J.M. 1982. Sources of Job Dissatisfaction: Ideals Versus Realities in Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 48:481-495.
- Mazmanian, D.A. and Sabatier, P.A., eds. 1981. *Effective Policy Implementation*. Lexington, MA: Policy Studies Organization and Lexington Books.
- McCarthy, T. 1978. *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Meltsner, A.J. 1976. *Policy Analysts in the Bureaucracy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Meyerson, M. 1956. Building the Middle-Range Bridge for Comprehensive Planning. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*. 22:58-64.
- Michael, D. 1973. *On Learning to Plan and Planning to Learn*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mitroff, I.; Emshoff, J.R.; and Kilmann, R.K. 1979. Assumptonal Analysis: A Methodology for Strategic Problem Solving. *Management Science*. 25:583-593.
- Moore, M. 1976. Anatomy of the Heroin Problem. *Policy Analysis*. 2:639-662.
- Moore, T. 1978. Why Allow Planners to Do What They Do? A Justification from Economic Theory. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*. 44:387-398.
- Patton, M.Q. 1980. *Qualitative Evaluation Methods*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Perin, C. 1977. *Everything in Its Place: Social Order and Land Use in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pounds, W.F. 1969. The Process of Problem Finding. *Industrial Management Review*. 11:1-19.
- Rein, M. and White, S.J. 1977. Policy Research: Belief and Doubt. *Policy Analysis*. 3:239-271.
- Schon, D. 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Scott, R.A. and Shore, A.R. 1979. *Why Sociology Does Not Apply: A Study of the Use of Sociology in Public Policy*. New York: Elsevier.
- Susskind, L. and Ozawa, C. 1983. Mediated Negotiation in the Public Sector: The Planner as Mediator. Paper prepared for presentation at 25th Annual Conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, San Francisco.
- Teitz, M.B. 1974. Toward A Responsive Planning Methodology. In *Planning in America*, ed., D. Godschalk. Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Planners.
- Vasu, M.L. 1979. *Politics and Planning*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Weiss, M. 1983. *Scientific Boosterism: The Real Estate Industry and the Origins of Local Government Land Use Regulation in the U.S.* Ph.D. dissertation. University of California, Berkeley.