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A Turning Point for Planning Theory?: Overcoming Dividing Discourses

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A TURNING POINT FOR PLANNING THEORY? OVERCOMING DIVIDING DISCOURSES

“My only real way to challenge the powers that be is by unveiling their presence in the workings of our minds.” (Castells 2009, p. 9)

Communicative planning theory

Communicative planning theory (CPT), which emerged in the 1980s and 90s, unsettled assumptions about what planning is, how it works, and how it ought to be done. It also challenged ideas about what theory should be for and what form it should take.¹ CPT refers to the work of a cluster of scholars in planning and related fields² who conducted fine-grained, interpretive research on planners and planning processes, using concepts from social theorists as tools to make sense of what they observed and to develop normative perspectives on practice. They focused in considerable part on communication, interaction and dialogue, and drew new theorists into planning thought, including most notably Habermas, Foucault, and Dewey. They wrote stories of practice along with reflections on them. While CP theorists each took a different angle, they became a community of sorts, sharing drafts of manuscripts, discussing ideas on panels and in personal correspondence, building their work on one another's ideas.^{3 4}

As CP theorists proliferated, their work drew increasing attention in the planning academy. This came to a head in response to an article in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (Innes 1995), which asserted that CPT could become the dominant paradigm in planning theory.

A storm of criticism broke out, surprisingly not primarily from the rational model theorists whose work they had challenged, but from the political economists and neo-Marxists, whose work had also been an important part of planning thought since the 1960's. Panels and conferences were set up to "debate" CPT and proceedings were published in journals.⁵ Writing articles critical of CPT became almost a cottage industry. Many of critics' claims, however, were grounded in oversimplifications and misunderstandings of CP research and ideas. CP theorists continued to focus on their own work rather than responding to what amounted to attacks. The few who offered limited responses⁶ seemed unable to change the critics' views.

Today planning theory seems to have become a set of dividing discourses.⁷ People talk past one another. Blame, criticism, and incivility often crowd out scholarly dialogue and inquiry (e.g. Bengs 2005). Theorists are divided into camps, speaking in different languages to different ends. Students are often confused and frustrated, craving a way to make sense of the differences. While the brouhaha may have started as a war over turf and over which views will be dominant, the result today is that we as theorists have little ability to learn from our differences. The situation is neither conducive to constructive conversation, nor to building richer and more robust theory. The most difficult obstacle to such conversation is that the critiques have framed a set of dichotomies among perspectives, making them appear incompatible.

Purpose and outline of the paper

This paper takes on the project of helping the field move toward a common discourse through which we can explore and learn from our differences. We will not try to merge the perspectives-

-rather we will identify some of the tensions among them as evidenced by these dichotomies and use these as fuel for new ways of see our common enterprise. Along with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (Bernstein 1976), we contend contradictions are normal and that we must not only accept, but also embrace them if we are to learn and move forward. Our situation is similar to that of physicists trying to resolve the contradictions between quantum theory and general relativity, where research shows mysteries and paradoxes. This situation offers an opportunity for learning and new discoveries which could transform our understanding of the universe (Overbye 2013).

We have to learn to live with dualities in our constantly changing world. In this paper we will offer one way to do this using the lens of Castells' theory of communication power (Castells 2009). We start with brief summaries of the critiques and of Castells' theory. We then examine four contradictions that emerge from the critiques: community knowledge versus science; communication power versus state power; collaboration versus conflict; and process versus outcome. Finally we offer thoughts on how planning theory can move beyond dividing discourses to richer theory.

The rational model

The so called rational model was a major preoccupation of planning theory from the 1960s, and by the 1980s it had become deeply integrated into planning education.⁸ In this model planning was supposed to proceed somewhat like science, at least in its ideal type version (Mitroff 1974), in that it would use logic, focus on the measurable and on what could be verified through

hypothesis testing and data. It would start with goals, proceed to generating alternatives, evaluating them, choosing solutions and implementing them. The public's role would be limited to advising on values and preferences. The epistemology was profoundly positivist, relying on theorists like Karl Popper, Herbert Simon, and decision theorists. This simple, but powerful, model envisioned planners as first and foremost neutral analysts. Its meaning as the correct way to do planning was to become embedded in the minds of countless practitioners, even when they found it difficult to follow the precepts (Howe 1980, Baum 1996). Planning educators teaching substantive topics such as housing and transportation typically trained students to apply this model. At the same time the model became inextricably entwined in the norms of bureaucracy, which needs certainty to operate and straightforward ways to assure accountability. The underlying theory of change in the rational model was that if you speak truth to power, the powerful will act (Wildavsky, 1987). This theory offered little or nothing about politics, ambiguity, or conflict because these are supposed to be outside of the scientific process. The rational model is for when values and goals are settled.

How CPT challenged the rational model

CPT showed, among other things, that, while planners may espouse the rational model, they seldom actually apply it because necessary conditions such as agreement on values and goals are rarely found. Matters planners attend to are often not amenable to quantification or formal analysis. Interaction among players turns out to be central to understanding and conducting planning. CPT introduced norms alien to the model, such as listening, inclusion, dialogue, and deliberation among diverse stakeholders. The research demonstrated what Habermas had

claimed—that communication is a form of acting on others, rather than a clear channel through which one conveys facts (Habermas 1989). Those “facts” themselves are socially constructed, as is science itself. Some CP theorists contend, on the basis of their research, that more robust, feasible, just, and even more rational outcomes could be achieved through collaborative planning or pragmatic joint inquiry (Healey 2006, Innes & Booher 1999a, Hoch 2007) than by relying on a neutral analyst. They found that planning takes place not only in formal government, but throughout networks including other players, public and private. Every situation is unique in the CP theorists’ view, so they have resisted offering guidelines or handbooks for communicative practice. They propose rather that pragmatic interaction and learning, situated in the context of a specific time and place, must be joined with informed judgment to produce tailor-made responses to each issue. CP theorists do not see values and interests as given and immutable, and the research shows that participants can rethink their positions, interests, and even values in the course of dialogue (Barabas 2004).⁹ The tacit theory of change behind much of this work is that deliberation shapes understandings, giving meaning to potential actions and thus motivating players. The theory of change is that communication has power.

The critiques

The critiques came from a variety of quarters, most prominently from political economists and European scholars who were more accustomed to top down planning and powerful central governments than CP theorists who were predominantly from the U.S. and U.K.¹⁰ Some, coming from a positivist position, objected to the relativism of the social constructionist view, insisting that interests are predetermined and that deliberation cannot produce knowledge or change

fundamental values. Believers in the power of rational analysis and planning in the public interest contended that deliberation and inclusion would be inefficient compared to a more standard top down approach. Political economists and neo-Marxists contended that CPT ignored the power of the state and made undue assumptions about planners being able to make much difference in view of the structures of domination in society (Harvey 1978, Fainstein 2000, 2010). Some of the critiques were condescending if not downright uncivil (e.g. Feldman 1997, Huxley & Yiftachel 2000).

The ideas of collaboration and consensus building have come in for the vast majority of the criticism—so much so that these have become equated in many minds with CPT. Research on collaboration and the more formal facilitated consensus building processes often used Habermas' notion of communicative rationality to argue that these could result in well informed and socially desirable outcomes. Many critiques scoffed at the notion that Habermas' ideal speech conditions could be approximated in practice, though some studies have shown that facilitators' ethics and best practices can mirror Habermas' ideas (Innes & Booher 2010). His idea that power can and should be equalized around the discussion table to achieve a communicatively rational dialogue came in for special scorn, given large power differences among stakeholders away from the table. Some criticized CPT for what they regarded as the failings of Habermas' theory, not understanding that CPT did not derive from this theory, but rather used the ideas as tools for interpretation (Mantsalyo 2002).¹¹ Some critics assumed consensus building necessarily involved peer pressure, resulting in lowest common denominator decisions. It would co-opt weaker groups, while legitimating the results. Others assumed that collaboration was unrealistic because it would require altruism on the part of participants. Mouffe (1999) and Hillier (2003) contended

that collaboration and consensus building would paper over conflict rather than acknowledge and confront it, failing to allow the agonism necessary for legitimate decision making. A major additional worry was that collaboration would not result in the “right” outcomes. Deliberations could end up with solutions that oppressed some groups, failed to protect the environment, or simply were not the best ways to address the issues. This concern was heightened by what critics saw as an undue emphasis on process, to the neglect of theorizing about such matters as the good city. Ultimately some complained that CPT was not critical enough. It needed to step outside the micro practices and become more aware of how planning activities were enabling the neoliberal state (Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger 1998).

Communication power as lens

In our effort to encompass these critiques and the dichotomies they suggest between CPT and other theory in planning, we propose to build on Castells’ theory of communication power (2009). He argues that in today’s network society communication is powerful because it shapes shared meaning and accordingly influences action. Power, he contends, “is not located in one particular social sphere or institution, but is distributed throughout the entire realm of human action.” While power can be exercised through coercion, it is also exercised through the “construction of meaning on the basis of discourses through which social actors guide their action.” This can be on behalf of specific interests and values, and the more powerful these meanings are, the less the state or interests need recourse to coercion. Such meanings and their implicit power can become crystallized into institutions that in turn can exercise domination. For example the equating of the market with freedom and innovation supports the power of

corporations and capitalism. Power is not something possessed by institutions or individuals – rather it lies in specific relationships in specific times and places. It is “conditioned, but not determined, by the structural capacity of domination.” Moreover these relationships always involve reciprocal influence between more and less empowered subjects. Even the weakest can resist in one way or another. “When micro power relationships enter into contradiction with the structure of domination embedded in the state, either the state changes or domination is reinstated by institutional means.” (adapted from Castells 2009, pp. 10-19).

Castells shares Habermas’ view that communication itself is a form of action that changes the realities of the social world, including power relations. The complex adaptive system that is contemporary society is in constant evolution. Conflicts never end, though they may pause through temporary agreements and unstable contracts that can be transformed into institutions of domination by powerful social actors. Habermas’ theory of legitimation argues that this domination is stabilized in the face of change through a process largely relying on the consent created through the construction of shared meaning. Thus for example belief in representative democracy is a product of centuries of debate and discussion in the public sphere. Civil society offers a network for communicating information and points of view (Habermas 1996, p.360). Thus dialogue and debate in the public sphere ensures democracy and creates the conditions for the legitimate exercise of power as a representation of the values and interests of citizens.

The contradictions

The critiques have framed a set of dichotomies posing CPT ideas against those of the critics as if they are mutually exclusive--as if one must choose sides. We will argue, however, with the help of the concept of communication power, that these presumed dichotomies can be understood in a way that allows us to embrace the contradictions and move toward new conceptions. We will explore four dichotomies which are necessarily simplified, but which capture the major debates.

Community knowledge vs. science

Even those without conscious or strong belief in the rational model are likely to dismiss laymen's knowledge as less "true" than science because the rational model is so deeply integrated into our education and institutions. What laymen "know" may not even be regarded as knowledge and certainly not as "truth." In deliberative processes and public hearings planners and other experts often dismiss citizens' comments as "anecdotal" and take the view that their job is to educate citizens rather than to learn from or with them. Some regard much of what community members bring to the process as emotion, misinformation, and self interest, none of which they consider relevant to making the decision.

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) in the US is an example of the dominance and institutionalization of the rational model and of its limitations as a planning tool. EIA is a linear process starting with goals, assuming values are given, looking at alternatives, assessing them in largely quantitative projections about specific measurable impacts, like the quantity of air pollution or the number of endangered species. More qualitative social issues are not part of these studies, such as how or whether a development will disrupt the sense of community or

result in impacts unevenly distributed among ethnic or income groups. They do not address the meanings of the projects or of the impacts in the community context. The process often generates endless lawsuits and development stalemate, with neither the environment protected nor the project built.

Citizens and community members on the other hand often regard what scientists or planners say as irrelevant to their concerns or the reality they experience. They often distrust experts' motives and methods. For example citizens called on a colleague of ours to facilitate a conversation with transportation planners because the technical questions to which the planner wanted responses were irrelevant to citizens' transportation needs. Community members may justifiably regard many participation processes as attempts at cooptation. In fact the Tea Party movement in the U.S. has targeted smart growth planning and Local Agenda 21 as a U.N. plot to control how they live. They have succeeded in disrupting public hearings in part because their complaints about not being listened to resonated with the experience of many of those in attendance.

The dichotomization of knowledge into scientific and lay categories disempowers both planners and community members, making planning goals difficult to achieve and keeping the community marginalized from the decisions that affect their lives. This opposition between hard "scientific" data and the more qualitative "soft" knowledge in the community is unnecessary and counterproductive. These knowledges can be linked through communication power without ignoring their differences or making one trump the other. With communicative action among scientists, planners and laymen all can learn and take advantage of what the other does best, and the resulting knowledge can be both more accurate and more meaningful. Great scientists, it

should be noted, rely on dialogue to develop ideas, face to face and in print (Bohm 1996) but they also use their intuition to go beyond or even ignore the data (Mitroff 1974) and come up with new and more powerful theory. Similarly planners need to hear and take into account many relevant knowledges (Sandercock 2003) in making proposals for particular times and places. While elected officials may want scientific reports and analyses, they are as likely to be swayed by stories which tap into meanings of potential policies and decisions. It is a case of both and—both community knowledge and positivist data and analysis (Innes & Booher 2010, Chapters 6 & 7).

Science by its very nature misses a lot. It abstracts and simplifies, looks for laws and bare facts, and it involves choices about assumptions and measurements (Ozawa 1991). It is not holistic and does not give the “feel” of a situation. Planners not only have to study the demographics and the economic information about a downtown, but they also have to visit it, talk to people and get a sense of how it works—a sense of all that could not be captured in a positivist study. Many instances have been documented where the scientists made wrong assumptions and where laymen with firsthand knowledge could have corrected it if scientists had listened and collaborated with them. For example in a major project to protect the waters of the San Francisco Bay and Estuary, scientists did not know that certain fisheries had declined, but the fishermen themselves did (Innes & Connick 1999). Similarly in the case of the Love Canal environmental disaster it was a local housewife who recognized the problem and local people who first gathered the data (Gibbs 1982). In Cumbria in the UK scientists who arrived to treat soil that had been radiated from the Chernobyl nuclear fallout, ignored the sheep farmers’ knowledge and made decisions that unnecessarily cost the farmers their herds (Wynne 1982). In

each case it was a struggle to get the scientists even to attend to this local knowledge, much less to respect or respond to it. If all had built shared knowledge and meaning the results would have been different.

The most powerful knowledge makes use of both local knowledge and science, but it requires mutual education and cooperation. For example neighborhood residents in New York City were able to work with the city environmental agency to develop documentation of pollution hot spots at a fine-grained level. This allowed identification of specific pollution sources endangering particular residents (Corburn 2005). Fischer (2000) and Wilson (2003) offer parallel examples in agriculture and fisheries management, respectively. This kind of effort has been termed coproduction and it offers promise for improving information in planning.

Such citizen-science collaborations reflects Habermas' concept that there are three kinds of knowledge interests: technical/instrumental driven by interest in knowing how something works and what causes it; practical/interpretive driven by interest in understanding a situation; and critical/emancipatory driven by interest in surfacing truths hidden by socially constructed measures and analyses. In collaborative dialogue all forms of knowledge play a part.

Stakeholders want hard data and scientific projections, but they also use personal and other stories to move the dialogue forward and to identify possible actions (Forester 2009, Innes & Booher 1999b). Emancipatory knowledge can be most important of all—the moment when someone challenges a taken-for-granted assumption and reframes the problem so the most intractable of wicked problems can become amenable to joint action.

Ultimately information influences most when least visible--when it has become a part of shared meaning and does not even need to be invoked (Innes 1998). This becomes possible after there has been plenty of dialogue around the data so it is meaningful, accepted, and understood by all sides (Innes 1990). It happens without our noticing when meanings become embedded in institutions and practices.

Communication power vs. state power

We share Castells' view that in the network society a theory of power is "tantamount to a theory of communication power" (Castells 2009, p. 5). The power relationship works through communication, which builds shared meanings of power—of who and what is powerful. Norms and practices develop through networks and, in turn, guide action and embed into institutions like the market. Such meanings and norms shape how individuals and institutions respond to what they understand as power as well as how they deploy it in relationships. The power is invisible, taken-for-granted, so it can be exerted without overt action or even evidence of its existence. Communication mediates the way these power relationships are constructed and challenged. Thus the power of the state and communication power are inextricably entangled, shaping and influencing one another.¹²

This view suggests that planners and planning have power through the ways they shape communication, although that power is shaped and constrained by the larger institutions. Bryson and Crosby (1993), following Lukes, contend there are three types of power in society: deep structure or the background setting of power; political power or the ability make decisions; and a

mediating power in between-- the power to shape ideas, frame problems, and set agendas. This mediating role is the essential power of planners and other professionals who play a part in public decision-making. Forester (1982), for example, demonstrates the importance of planners' role in organizing attention, and Throgmorton (2003) contends that rhetoric, whether of planners, business leaders or public officials can be crucial in shaping development decisions. Both he (Ekstein & Throgmorton 2003) and Sandercock (2003) write of the power of stories in shaping understandings and motivating action. U.S. housing policy has been profoundly shaped by founding myths of the frontier and the yeoman farmer (de Neufville & Barton 1987).

Collaboration vs. conflict

Critics often assume that collaboration is the opposite of conflict, but nothing could be further from the reality. Collaboration is about conflict. If players did not have conflicts and differences they would not need to collaborate, but could march forward on their own. Agonism, deep and seemingly irreconcilable conflicts among competing views, values and interests, is the reality of societies today in a globalized world. Conflict may wax and wane and at times be largely suppressed, but it remains under the surface. Deep divisions in society such as race, gender, culture and ideology are difficult and perhaps impossible to overcome, and efforts to do so can result in domination by one part of society over another. The question is how to move forward in the face of agonism and how to assure we do not tamp down meaningful differences, or lose the multiplicity of voices and creativity that emerge around such conflict.

Many scholars in Western societies contend that politics and formal government decision making are the correct ways to address societal conflict. Elected officials represent the public; bureaucracy can be even-handed in carrying out laws, and politics allows for conflict where pressure groups maneuver in electoral, legislative, agency, and judicial processes to determine who gets what (Truman 1951; Schattschneider 1960). This is the legitimate decision process established in nations' constitutions, along with a variety of arenas for jousting over the issues. Politics involves tradeoffs and compromise in a typically zero sum game. Winning for one's constituency is often the real goal, even at the expense of the greater good. Nowhere is there a better example than the recent so-called sequester in the U.S., a massive across the board budget cut necessitated by the unwillingness for political reasons of the parties to move toward a compromise that would make selective cuts and increase revenues in ways that would be less harmful to the nation.

Collaborative dialogue and planning emerged in the U.S. largely in response to government failure to solve problems because of political stalemate or heavy-handed application of one-size-fits-all policies.¹³ Collaboration among competing stakeholders can enlarge the pie, expanding possibilities through cooperation so that, without compromising their interests, they can move forward. Stakeholders and public agencies collaborate to develop tailor-made solutions to social and environmental problems in specific times and places. In the course of their efforts they engage in dialogue, which can result in reframing an intractable problem into one that allows agreement on action (Innes & Booher 1999b). This dialogue builds new meanings of the problems, creates recognition of shared purpose, and builds networks through which communication can flow among diverse players.¹⁴ All this can be done without suppressing basic

interests or values of the various stakeholders. These stakeholders may come to reevaluate what actions can best serve their interests during such dialogue and they may come to expand or develop their own values as they learn about other's values and needs. Of course they can always return to other arenas if they choose.

In collaborative dialogues and consensus building run according to best practices (Susskind et al. 1999) and what Innes and Booher (2010) have dubbed “collaborative rationality,” conflict is the central dynamic that drives the process. Stakeholders would not be there if their interests did not differ. If everyone more or less agreed, normal governmental processes would be enough. Only when deep differences exist over important issues is it worthwhile to try to find ways to move forward through collaborative dialogue, which can be slow and costly. Though the term “consensus building” suggests to some commentators a friendly discussion among those seeking the common good, in practice it is quite the opposite. Stakeholder interests are at the core; conflict is central to achieving robust solutions; and frank and impassioned discussions are the norm. Groups may seek the low hanging fruit at first—things on which everyone can agree--but they move on to more difficult issues, which can take months or years to work through. Conflict is never stamped out. People agree on some ways to move forward together on things they care about without sharing values or interests. Even when a group reaches agreement and disbands, unresolved conflicts reemerge in other processes. The Sacramento Water Forum, after the resolving the major conflicts over water allocation and facilities, moved to a smaller “successor” group to address conflicts and unresolved issues that would emerge in implementation (Connick 2006).

Conflict may at times be beneath the surface but it can erupt at any time. In collaboratively rational dialogues stakeholders will have explained their underlying interests for all to hear and discussed throughout the dialogue how proposed actions will affect their interests. Altruism is inappropriate because stakeholders represent groups whose welfare is at stake. It is counterproductive because it obscures differing interests and thus makes it difficult if not impossible to develop robust cooperation and decisions that will be feasible, widely accepted and long lasting. The rule in consensus building best practices is not only that everything is on the table, but also that participants must challenge assumptions if they want to get past stalemate to practical action. Over time participants come to understand each other's interests and try to make proposals that will accommodate them. Nonetheless emotions can run high, and civility does not always prevail (Forester 2009, Innes & Booher 2010 Ch. 4). Trust can take months or years to emerge. But out of these tensions the group can gain new insights into the nature of the conflict and what it may take to move forward. Experienced facilitators try to manage, but not suppress, these conflicts and try to get participants to reflect on the sources of their differences.

Collaboratively rational dialogue exists in a field of power external to the table, but at the table the power to speak and be listened to respectfully is equalized. All stakeholders are provided with shared information and all are equally entitled to question assumptions and make objections or proposals. While the greater power of some stakeholders outside the table is explicitly part of the conversation, those stakeholders do not get to dominate the discussion. At the table it may be clear that a solution cannot go forward without their support, but it is also clear that powerful stakeholders would not be there if they could get what they want alone. The power at the table is in the eloquence of some participants, the power of the stories they tell, and how compelling

their case may be to the group. The dynamic of decision in the group is not what Habermas posited as the force of the better argument, about winning a sort of debate. Rather it is a process of stakeholders laying out their narratives about the problem and how it affects them and listening to similar narratives from others (Innes & Booher 1999b). They ask questions, get new information, and discuss its validity and implications. The stakeholders typically have firsthand knowledge of aspects of the problem, can correct invalid assumptions, and provide local information, making the potential solutions more robust. Such dialogue can change participants' understandings of their positions interests, and even values. They do not come into the process looking for the public interest, but as they find ways to accommodate a diversity of interests, their proposals come closer to something that can be viewed as in the common good (Innes 1996).

Participants in collaborative dialogues understand that they live in two worlds, each with different rules—that of civil discourse, transparency, problem solving, and a search for joint gain on the one hand, and that of politics, competition, and the exercise of power on the other. Stakeholders may try to pass legislation, sue other stakeholders or promote social movements in the political world, while still maintaining constructive dialogue at the table. They stay in these two worlds until they decide which will get them what they need. While these outside activities continue they change the dynamics at the table, perhaps giving weaker interests more negotiating strength. Politics and collaboration have a symbiotic relationship.

Plans and actions agreed on in collaborative processes seldom can proceed without politics and government. While there is a hypothetical worry that agreement by stakeholders could overwhelm the political process, it is far more common in our research that politicians and

bureaucrats balk at implementing such agreements in principle because they want to be in charge and get credit for results. Today collaborative processes are less influential and less used than they could or should be in our view, but both collaborative and political processes are needed. These are not contradictory but complementary. Politics can involve collaboration, and collaboration can involve politics. Some challenges are more amenable to politics and top down fiats; others more appropriate for collaboration. But in either case government will be needed to enable or implement solutions.

Solutions however are never permanent –in fact the word solution is a misnomer. Problem solving, like making plans, needs to be regarded as work in progress. Agreements are punctuation points; a solution is for now but it soon creates the conditions that require new deliberations among new players. The danger is that these temporary agreements may then become part of the structure of domination and become fixed rather than adaptive as the complexity of the world continues to unfold. The antidote to this is to continue to surface and respond to conflict and try to address it creatively.

Process vs. outcome

The fourth common critique of CPT is that it focuses on process rather than outcomes (Fainstein 2010, Ch. 1). It is true that most CP theorists do not identify specific outcomes as desirable. Their normative commitments are to what they identify as good process—inclusionary, empowering, equitable, informed etc. To also identify desired outcomes would be to undermine that very commitment. Some propose a pragmatic approach, other critical/reflective, and still

others deliberative or collaborative, but all focus on developing their process ideas. CP theorists tend not to comment on the power of the state except indirectly. It is a given--the setting for planning. Their focus is on what planners, planning organizations, and other players can do and how, rather than on what constrains them or on what ought to happen.

Political economists and others more often focus on what kinds of outcomes are desirable, as evidenced most recently in the “just city” movement (Marcuse et al. 2009). They research and write very little about processes to achieve these outcomes, though they sometimes mention social movements or the need to convince government to act. Their logic is that the structure of power in society is such that planners cannot do much to change the inevitable dominance of capitalist interests and the neoliberal state (Harvey 1978). Not surprisingly much of this work comes out of the field of geography, but some prominent planning theorists also espouse such views, for example examining cases where they can show how well intentioned projects end up being co-opted by the capitalist state.

Iris Marion Young (1990, pp. 15-16) links process and outcome in her work, arguing that “social justice means the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression.” She notes that the dominant distributive paradigm is about outcomes, defining social justice as the “morally proper distribution of social benefits and burdens in society.” This paradigm is lacking because it focuses mainly on material goods, such as income, wealth or jobs. Even if it extends the concept to nonmaterial goods, like power, self esteem or opportunity it “treats them as though they were static things, instead of a function of social relations and processes.” (p. 16) In other words these

“goods” can shift throughout a process and *because* of the process. Process matters and it is part of outcomes.

Process and justice are also closely linked because of what Young terms the five faces of oppression: exploitation; marginalization; powerlessness; cultural imperialism; and violence (Ch. 2). These all involve meanings that have become embedded in the understandings and the practices of both oppressed and oppressors. Merely offering the disadvantaged a chance to speak at a hearing or be represented by knowledgeable professionals, is not enough. Nor is it enough to ask about preferences, as these are deeply mediated through institutional structures and prevalent meanings about what is possible and desirable. It is not enough to tell the disadvantaged that they are empowered as they actually have to be able to build their own capacity to understand and fight for what they need and value. Processes like collaboratively rational dialogue or engagement of citizens in the gathering and interpretation of science and local knowledge are ways to help build such capacity.

Process versus outcome is thus a false dichotomy. Stakeholders engage in a process because they care about the outcome. Aspects of process are part of the outcome through communication power. People who are brought to the table and heard and who learn, influence, and build relationships are changed and the power relationships themselves are changed. Over time players use their new social, political and intellectual capital. Some may even become part of the system of domination. What are often referred to as outcomes are but punctuation marks in a constant flow of activity. Process itself is part of the outcome as those who felt listened to and fairly treated in a process and who felt powerful within it will be more likely to support the outcome.

This process-outcome dichotomy reflects a flaw in both perspectives. Those who pay attention to process tend not to examine how the process affects the larger structure of domination, and those who talk about the importance of outcomes typically offer little in the way of processes to get to those outcomes. Giddens (1984) offers a path to placing this contradiction into a common frame in his argument that structure constrains agency and agency alters structure over time. Shared meanings created through processes can find their way into norms and taken-for-granted ideas which in turn can become embedded in institutions. We believe this dynamic of structure and process deserves considerably more attention from planning theorists than it has had so far.¹⁵

This process versus outcome question is sometimes framed as whether planning theory should be about planning or places. The answer has to be “both and” but it remains a challenge to link these because they are different objects of study. Sager (2013, Ch.7) offers one possible approach proposing value principles bearing on spatial planning for CPT. Though CP theorists do not normally opine about desirable places, they do study processes that have consequences for places—about the infrastructure to serve places, the projects that shape places, or the regulations to protect or enhance environments. They have not done much to link planning activities to outcomes on the ground or to find out what kinds of activities may result in what kinds of places. This is a daunting goal, however, as so many variables other than planning come into play, and places themselves are in constant change and evolution.

Moving forward: Recommendations

The multiple camps and dividing discourses of planning theory are counterproductive. This is not to say that planning theorists all have to share the same worldviews. On the contrary, the contradictions are what will allow us as a field to learn and develop richer theory. We have much to learn from one another, from trying to understand others' perspectives and from trying to explain and sharpen our own claims. People from different camps should attend each other's talks at conferences rather than separating and speaking to the choir of their own followers. Conference organizers should not divide presentations into panels that reinforce divisions. Learning from difference is an enterprise requiring mutual respect rather than the disdain that has at times characterized the discourse. Glib misrepresentations, oversimplification, and painting of diverse work with a common brush for the sake of critique cannot be the approach because it creates and maintains dividing discourses. Learning and enrichment depends on those in different camps working to understand each others' claims and the research backing them up.

One way to bridge these perspectives would be to conduct research building on the work of scholars in various fields to understand how communication power works to shape the physical and social world of planning.¹⁶ This would allow both planning and places to be studied simultaneously. Many important questions come to mind. How does communication power shape what planners choose to do or not do? How do some landmarks become revered symbols? How does communication power influence ideas about the nature and problems of a city? How does urban density for example become either admired or reviled? How do particular urban forms become desirable? How do ideal outcomes get envisioned and become internalized among professionals and others—ideas such as the new urbanism and or transportation-oriented

development? What are the sources of such ideas and what interests do they serve? How do ideas become taken-for-granted goals embedded in institutional practices like regulation? What are the micro processes and mechanisms at work? What happens when these practices become rigid and do not fit the particularities of specific places? Is it possible to dislodge such assumptions and institutionalized meanings and, if so, how? How can we maintain an adaptive culture of planning that enables new ideas and approaches? How do real actors break out of the assumptions that otherwise constrain them? Answering such questions can help move us into a new generation of planning theory and into largely uncharted, but important, intellectually challenging territory. Many other paths could be followed of course, as new generations of theorists also seek to move beyond dividing discourses.

Notes

¹ A major thrust of the change was a concern that theory be linked to practice (de Neufville 1983, de Neufville 1987, Forester 1980).

² While there are many more today, the pioneers in planning included John Forester, Patsy Healey, Charles Hoch, Howard Baum, James Throgmorton, and Judith Innes. All owed a debt to John Friedmann, among others of an earlier generation.

³ These scholars began to coalesce as a community at the first joint ACSP-AESOP Congress in Oxford in 1991, where, as they debated some senior theorists, they found kindred spirits among themselves and across the Atlantic. An edited collection of papers from that meeting became a well used text (Mandelbaum et al, 1996).

⁴ This community intersected with a parallel one emerging from public policy and public administration in the U.S. and Europe, including Maarten Hajer, Frank Fischer, Dvora Yanow, Eva Sorenson, Jacob Torfing, Christopher Ansell, and Nancy Roberts. Their terminology differed, but they focused on governance, deliberation, and inclusion and did case studies using interpretive methods on a wide array of policy issues. They have made great efforts to challenge the dominance of the rational paradigm in public policy and political science and eventually started their own annual conference on Interpretive Policy Analysis. A partnership between planner John Forester and political scientist, Frank Fischer, produced an edited volume of articles under the title *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning* highlighting Habermas' concepts of debate as a way of making choices (Fischer & Forester 1993). This was to become the first CPT text. It was widely used in planning and is now out in a new version (Fischer & Gottweis 2012).

⁵ A series of additional Oxford conferences were set up primarily to pursue this “debate” (Yiftachel 1999; Throgmorton 1999). Panel “debates” at ACSP conferences were published in *Planning Theory* (14, 1995 and 17, 1997), and a symposium appeared in 2000 in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (vol. 19 pp. 331-377).

⁶ See Innes (2004), Healey (2003), Hoch (1997)

⁷ Major philosophical differences have always existed in planning thought, but the multiplicity of discourses is significantly greater than it was in the 1960s. For excellent overviews of some of the differences and critiques see Healey (2012) and Sager (2013).

⁸ In the field of public policy, which emerged in the US in the late 1960’s, the rational model and quantitative methods were even more central than in planning, which included topics like design and land use in which these methods were seldom used. public policy drew more on political science and economics than CPT, which tended to draw more on the “softer” disciplines of sociology and anthropology.

⁹ Argyris and Schon (1996) in their work on organizational development identified this phenomenon as “single loop learning” as participants revise their causal analysis when they discover their proposal will not work, “double loop learning” as they rethink their interests and goals in the face of continuous failure, and triple loop when they start to reframe their underlying values in response to what they learn as they work through tasks. Clearly this dynamic is incompatible with the rational planning model, which takes these as givens.

¹⁰ Both Sager (2013) and Healey (2012) offer excellent and more detailed overviews of the critiques.

¹¹ Harper and Stein (2006) discuss some of the many other influences on CPT thinking.

¹² This is a view that has much in common with Giddens (1984). It also shares the view with Foucault (1980) that discourses, shape state power and vice versa.

¹³ Susskind and Field (1996) in a powerful book, demonstrate how and why industry needs to adopt collaborative approaches to conflict.

¹⁴ Pertinent case examples can be found in *Planning with Complexity* (Innes & Booher 2010) Chapter 3, in particular the Sacramento Water Forum and CALFED. In both cases collaboration allowed multiple uses of water and ended decades of paralyzing stalemate over water infrastructure needs.

¹⁵ Martinelli, et al (2013) have put together a volume that reflects the structure and agency perspective. Healey uses the concept in much of her work but both CPT scholars and their critics could benefit from incorporating this perspective in their wor.

¹⁶Castells (2009) has begun this effort.

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