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# A turning point for planning theory? Overcoming dividing discourses

Planning Theory

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## Abstract

After communicative planning theory emerged in the 1980s, challenging assumptions and prevailing theories of planning, debates ensued among planning theorists that led to apparently opposing groups with little space for mutual learning. The most difficult obstacle is that critiques of communicative planning theory framed several dichotomies making different perspectives appear incompatible. This article seeks to advance the dialogue of planning theory perspectives by acknowledging the key tensions embedded in this framing, but arguing that they can be viewed as reflecting contradictions to be embraced as an opportunity for a more robust planning theory. Drawing on Manuel Castells' theory of communication power, the article explores four of these contradictions and shows how in each case embracing the contradictions as aspects of our complex world can lead to insights and a richer planning theory. The article concludes with suggestions for improved dialogue among theorists and identifies research that can advance our understanding of communication power.

## Keywords

Collaborative rationality, communication power, communicative planning theory, critique, discourse

My only real way to challenge the powers that be is by unveiling their presence in the workings of our minds.

(Castells, 2009: 9)

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## Communicative planning theory

Communicative planning theory (CPT), which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, 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.<sup>1</sup> CPT refers to the work of a cluster of scholars in planning and related fields<sup>2</sup> 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 communicative planning (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, and building their work on one another's ideas.<sup>3,4</sup>

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 1960s. Panels and conferences were set up to "debate" CPT, and proceedings were published in journals.<sup>5</sup> Writing articles critical of CPT became almost a cottage industry. CP theorists continued to focus on their own projects rather than responding to what they largely experienced as spurious attacks. The few who offered limited responses<sup>6</sup> appeared unable to alter the situation.

Today planning theory seems to have become a set of dividing discourses.<sup>7</sup> People talk past one another. Blame, criticism, and incivility often crowd out scholarly dialogue and inquiry (e.g. Bengs, 2005). Theorists belong to discourse communities which employ different languages and methods toward 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 conducive neither 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 article

This article 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 tensions among them as evidenced by the dichotomies and use these tensions as fuel for new ways of seeing our common enterprise. Along with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (Bernstein, 1976), we contend that contradictions are normal and that we must not only accept but embrace them if we

are to learn and move into new territory. 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. The contradictions offer the opportunity for discoveries which can transform our understanding of the universe (Overbye, 2013). Dualities and contradictions are equally part of planning, and we believe that a focus on them can lead into new intellectual territory.

In this article, we will offer a way to move forward by applying the lens of Castells' (2009) theory of communication power. We start with brief summaries of the so-called rational model, contrasting it with CPT, then move on to the major critiques and to Castells' basic theory. We then examine four seeming 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 "rational model" was a major preoccupation of planning theory from the 1960s, and by the 1980s it had become deeply integrated into planning education.<sup>8</sup> 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 and focus on the measurable and on what could be verified through hypothesis testing and data. It would start with goals and 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 (Baum, 1996; Howe, 1980). Planning educators teaching substantive topics such as housing and transportation typically trained students to apply the model. At the same time, it became inextricably intertwined with the norms of bureaucracy, which needs certainty to operate and straightforward ways to demonstrate accountability. The underlying theory of change 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 research 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 practical heuristics alien to the model, such as listening, inclusion, dialogue, and deliberation among diverse stakeholders. The research demonstrated what Habermas (1989) had claimed—that communication

is a form of acting on others, rather than a clear channel through which one conveys facts. It shows how those “facts” themselves are socially constructed. 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; Hoch, 2007; Innes and Booher, 1999b) than by relying on a neutral analyst. They found that planning takes place not only in formal government but throughout networks including other players, both 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).<sup>9</sup> The tacit theory of change behind much of CPT work is that deliberation shapes understandings, giving meaning to potential actions which in turn motivates 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 United States and the United Kingdom.<sup>10</sup> 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 power and made undue assumptions about communicative planners’ ability to make much difference in the face of the structures of domination in society (Fainstein, 2000, 2010; Harvey 1978). Critics tended to view communication as simply talk or a clear channel through which facts and opinions would flow without changing anything or anyone. Because many critics made broad and, in the eyes of CP theorists, inaccurate generalizations which mischaracterized their claims, they mostly did not try to engage in debate. The fact that a number of critiques were condescending if not downright uncivil (e.g. Fainstein, 2000; Feldman, 1997; Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000) also interfered with any potential for constructive dialogue.

The ideas about 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. While collaboration means simply to co-labor on a task, consensus building is a special type of collaboration involving structured dialogical process engaging a diverse range of stakeholders and involving ground rules, a facilitator, and a search for a consensus<sup>11</sup> on how to move forward. The idea of consensus building came in for much of the criticism in part because it is often poorly done and in part because it is foreign to the standard ways Western societies engage in public decision making.

Research on collaboration and consensus building often used Habermas' notion of communicative rationality to argue that such processes could result in well-informed and socially desirable outcomes. Many critics scoffed at the notion that Habermas' ideal speech conditions could be approximated in practice, essentially dismissing claims by CP researchers that facilitators' ethics and best practices mirror Habermas' ideas (Innes and Booher, 2010). The concept 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. Many criticized CPT for what they regarded as the failings of Habermas' theory, not understanding that neither CPT nor collaborative practice derived from this theory, though CPT researchers found it helpful to interpret and evaluate the practices they observed (Mantsalyo, 2002).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the practices were not about searching for a truth in the Habermasian sense, but about finding practical solutions to shared problems in the ways Dewey advocated.

One of the most common critiques was that consensus building necessarily involved peer pressure and resulted in lowest common denominator decisions. Others said it would marginalize or co-opt weaker groups, while legitimating the results. Still others contended 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 inappropriate 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 and Allmendinger, 1998).

It is not difficult to see where the critiques are coming from as many "collaborative" processes do involve peer pressure or do co-opt or ignore the poor or marginal groups. Because Habermas seemed to be talking about participants who would have the public interest in mind, some critics assumed that altruism would be needed, though in practice successful collaboration depends on participants working to achieve their interests. It was true that CPT theorists tended to focus on process rather than theorize about good outcomes and true as well that they tended not to ask questions about how planning practices might be enabling the neoliberal state.

## 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' (2009) theory of communication power.<sup>13</sup> 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: 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: 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 seem to have framed a set of dichotomies posing CPT ideas against those of 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 contradictions and move toward new conceptions. We will explore four dichotomies which are necessarily simplified, but which capture the major issues in the literature.

### *Community knowledge versus science*

Even those without conscious 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 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 a decision.

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) in the United States 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, and 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 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 co-optation. The Tea Party movement in the United States has targeted smart growth planning and Local Agenda 21 as a United Nations 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. It has been a legitimate concern of critics that science itself and its products like the technical fixes for sprawl of building infrastructure or transit villages can help to empower the state and control citizens' behavior in the ways Foucault (1978) has described.

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 integrated through communication power without 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 community knowledge and positivist data and analysis (Innes and Booher, 1999a, Innes and Booher, 2010: chs 6 and 7).

Scientific method, in its search for facts and relationships among variables, necessarily abstracts and simplifies. It involves choices about assumptions and measurements (Ozawa, 1991). Lay knowledge is more holistic, though less precise, and it can give the "feel" of a situation. Planners thus not only study the demographics and economic information about a downtown, but they also visit it, talk to people, and get a sense of how it

works—a sense of all that cannot be captured by an armchair analysis of data. Neither type of knowledge can stand alone. While most of us recognize that citizens’ “knowledge” can be grounded in anecdotes and outlier examples, it is less well recognized that laymen possess knowledge that can correct the assumptions of scientists if the two groups collaborate. 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 and Connick, 1999) and working together they developed more sound information. 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 United Kingdom, scientists who arrived to treat soil that had been irradiated by 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.

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 reflect 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 and Booher, 1999a). Emancipatory knowledge can be most important of all—the moment when someone effectively 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 need to be invoked (Innes, 1998). This influence becomes possible after there has been plenty of dialogue around the research and data so it is meaningful, accepted, and understood by all sides (Innes, 1990) including scientists and citizens. It happens without our noticing when meanings become embedded in institutions and practices.

### *Communication power versus state power*

We share Castells’ (2009) view that in the network society a theory of power is “tantamount to a theory of communication power” (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.<sup>14</sup>

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 that there are three types of power in society: deep structure or the background setting of power, political power or the ability to 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) shows that rhetoric, whether of planners, business leaders, or public officials, can be crucial in shaping development decisions. Both he (Eckstein and Throgmorton, 2003) and Sandercock (2003) write of the power of stories in shaping understandings and motivating action. In their history of US housing policy, de Neufville and Barton (1987) show how the founding myths of the frontier and the yeoman farmer have been foundational to that policy.

While communication by itself does not change public actions or institutions, it plays an integral part in such change by shaping the understandings of key actors and the public. Of course it does not always influence. Claims and rhetoric may fall on deaf ears. The bully pulpit may not persuade. Individuals may withhold reasonable consent for strategic reasons. External forces such as propaganda or bullying may intimidate participants. When the communication is multi-way rather than one-way and authentic dialogue takes place, many of these issues may be addressed.

### *Collaboration versus 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 differences, they would not need to collaborate, but could march forward on their own. Conflict itself is a valuable resource in collaboration as efforts to overcome it can lead to a range of new options and outcomes that were not previously foreseen. Agonism—deep and seemingly irreconcilable conflicts among competing views, values, and interests—is the reality of societies today and papering it over cannot work. Overt conflict may wax and wane or even be suppressed, but it remains under the surface. Deep divisions based on race, gender, culture, and ideology are difficult and perhaps impossible to overcome. The question becomes how to move forward in the face of agonism, assuring 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 arenas to determine who gets what (Schattschneider, 1960; Truman, 1951). These are the legitimate decision processes established in nations' constitutions. Politics involves trade-offs 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 mindless "sequester" in the United States—a massive across-the-board budget cut necessitated by the extreme partisanship of the political parties, which were unwilling to compromise on the selective cuts and increased revenues that would be less harmful to the nation.

Collaborative dialogue and planning emerged in the United States largely in response to government failure to solve problems because of political stalemate or heavy-handed application of one-size-fits-all policies.<sup>15</sup> 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 and Booher, 1999a). This dialogue builds new meanings of the problems, creates recognition of shared purpose, and builds networks through which communication can flow among diverse players.<sup>16</sup> 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 others' 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) or what Innes and Booher have dubbed "collaborative rationality,"<sup>17</sup> 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 seek 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 arenas. The Sacramento Water Forum, after resolving the main 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).

In collaboratively rational dialogues, stakeholders explain their underlying interests for all to hear and discuss 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 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 and Booher, 2010: Ch. 4). Trust can take months or years to emerge. But out of the tensions, a group can gain insights into the nature of the conflict and what it may take to move forward. Experienced facilitators try to manage, but not to 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 by the process manager. All stakeholders are provided with shared information and all are equally entitled to question assumptions and make objections or proposals. The greater power of some stakeholders outside the table is an explicit part of the conversation, but 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 on their own. 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 or 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 and Booher, 1999a). Peer pressure is never fully absent, but skilled facilitators can help assure that interests are genuinely addressed. Although participants do not come into the process looking for the public interest, as they accommodate diverse interests, the 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 lobby for new 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, often 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 critics hypothesize that agreement by stakeholders could overwhelm the political process, it is far more common in our studies that politicians and bureaucrats balk at implementing such agreements because they want to be in charge. Today, collaborative processes are less influential and less used than they could or should be in our view. Some challenges are more amenable to politics and top-down fiat; others

are more appropriate for collaboration, but in either case, government will be needed to enable or implement solutions.

Solutions are never permanent, however—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 temporary agreements may become part of the structure of domination and become fixed rather than adaptive. The antidote is to continue to surface and address conflict creatively.

### *Process versus outcome*

The fourth common critique of CPT is that it focuses on process rather than outcomes (Fainstein, 2010: ch. 1), as if these are mutually exclusive phenomena. It is true that most CP theorists do not identify specific outcomes as goals. Their normative commitments are to what they identify as good process—inclusionary, empowering, equitable, informed, and so on. To also describe 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 reach these outcomes, though they sometimes mention social movements or the need to convince government to act. Other planning theorists examine cases where they can show how well-intentioned projects end up being co-opted by the capitalist state.

We see process and outcome as integral to one another. Iris Marion Young, for example, argues that “social justice means the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression.” She notes that the dominant distributive paradigm is only 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” (Young, 1990: 15–16). In other words, these outcomes can shift throughout a process and *because* of the process.

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 the 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 because they need first 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 and who felt powerful within a process 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.<sup>18</sup>

## **Moving forward: recommendations**

The dividing discourses of planning theory are counterproductive. This is not to say that planning theorists all have to share the same worldview. On the contrary, the differences are what will allow us as a field to learn and develop richer theory. We have much to learn from trying to understand one another's perspectives as we in turn explain and clarify our own ideas. Learning from difference is an enterprise requiring mutual respect and avoiding glib misrepresentation, oversimplification, or painting of diverse work with a common brush. Ideally, people from different discourse communities would read each other's work and attend each other's talks at meetings. Organizers can set up cross-cutting panels rather than separating discourse communities into sessions that reinforce divisions and allow them to "speak to the choir." The encouragement for dialogue and face-to-face discussion can go a long way toward building a more effective learning community and more robust theorizing.

Second, to bridge the multiple perspectives planning theorists should focus more research on the role of communication in planning and incorporate into their thinking work already published that can shed light on how communication has power. Most notable, of course, is Foucault's (1972, 1978) work on how knowledge and power work together through discourse. Maarten Hajer (1995) has demonstrated the importance of language and discourse coalitions in environmental policy making. His more

recent work explores the variety of powerful ways that discourse analysis helps in understanding politics and policy making (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). Gunder (2011), following Lacan, has shown how popular communication media influence public aspirations for the future of their cities. The building of popular concepts plays a central part in planning. The iconic role of tulips in the Dutch economy and culture was central to the emergence and institutional embedding of new forms of heritage and nature in a controversy over the building of a new town near Leiden (Duineveld and Van Assche, 2011). Detailed research on the history of the development of urban form and settlement patterns can also illuminate the role of communication. Louise Mazingo's (2011) book *Pastoral Capitalism* illustrates how images of the suburban landscape and attitudes toward the city fostered the exodus of major companies to isolated campus-like environs during the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, in an excellent book that could serve as a model for others, Perin (1977) shows how the imagery and symbolic meanings of single-family houses and multiunit housing influenced community decision makers to try limit or exclude the latter. A great range of work is out there to be explored and integrated into planning theorists' thinking. This work can open new ideas for fruitful research that will help the field build a nuanced understanding of communication power in planning.

## Notes

1. A major thrust of the change was a concern that theory be linked to practice (de Neufville, 1983, 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 Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning–Association of European Schools of Planning (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 United States 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 and 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 and Gottweis, 2012).
5. A series of additional Oxford conferences were set up primarily to pursue this "debate" (Throgmorton, 1999; Yiftachel, 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 United States in the late 1960s, 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. This consensus is typically defined as an overwhelming majority that does not exclude any major interests and that is only reached after every effort has been made to find a way to satisfy an interest in a way that also accommodates or is acceptable to others at the table. At best, those who do not support the outcome may agree not to challenge it later because their interests have been sincerely considered and they recognize that another effort will not get them what they want (Susskind et al., 1999).
12. Harper and Stein (2006) discuss some of the many other influences on CPT thinking.
13. Castells (1979, 1983, 1996) has traveled a remarkable intellectual journey from his early book *The Urban Question: A Marxist View*, first published in French in 1972, to his detailed case studies of social movements in *The City and the Grassroots* to his trilogy on the information age, led off by his widely read *The Rise of the Network Society*. In many ways, this was a logical progression to his ideas on the centrality and power of communication. It also demonstrates that it is possible for one’s ideas and intellectual commitments to evolve in a way that builds on the gaps in previous work toward new ways of seeing.
14. This is a view that has much in common with Giddens (1984). It also shares the view with Foucault (1978) that discourses shape state power and vice versa.
15. Susskind and Field (1996), in a powerful book, demonstrate how and why industry needs to adopt collaborative approaches to conflict.
16. Pertinent case examples can be found in *Planning with Complexity* (Innes and 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.
17. Collaborative rationality is an adaptation from the idea of communicative rationality to real-world practices of collaborative policy making with stakeholders. The basic idea is that a decision can be collaboratively rational if it incorporates diverse and interdependent stakeholders who engage in authentic dialogue around a shared task. The ground rules of this dialogue establish expectations that participants will speak sincerely, be legitimate representatives of an interest, and provide accurate and comprehensible information. Professional facilitators and members of the group make sure these conditions are met as they work through issues, and the practices become shared norms in the group. See pp. 35–38 in Innes and Booher (2010).
18. 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 works.

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