

Rationality Revisited

From Human Growth to Productive Power

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THEME: TOOLS FOR INTER-ACTION IN URBAN PLANNING

Whether more theoretical or practical in their orientation, planning theorists do not seem to be able to avoid the basic philosophical and socio-political debates around rationality. Contemporary theories on communicative planning (e.g. Healey 1996, Sager 1994, Nylund 1995) are based obviously on a critique of instrumental and strategic rationality of synoptic and strategic planning, and they usually rely on some form of the Habermasian concept of communicative rationality, yet they are clearly interested in developing new forms of planning practice. Sticking to an outmoded conception of rationality seems to these writers to prevent the development of new tools for the reflective practitioner.

On the other hand, the revitalized interest in the problems of power relations in planning has opened another perspective in the debate. Bent Flyvbjerg's critical analysis of the history of the Aalborg Project (Flyvbjerg 1998) was also meant as an introduction to an alternative theoretical perspective (as compared to the Enlightenment tradition) informed by Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Foucault. Although Flyvbjerg's study did not actually enter this theoretical debate, the contribution of this alternative intellectual root is essential, however, and I assume that in the future, planning theory will have to address the Foucaultian concepts of power/knowledge and productive power more seriously.

There are, however, still reasons for a further sharpening of the theoretical tools used in the aforementioned approaches. The purpose of this paper is to examine a couple of the problem zones that seem to have been mapped in a too sketchy manner. Firstly, I shall argue that the transition from the instrumental rationality of rational planning to its dialogical alternatives is often given a too rough formulation. In a sense, instrumental rationality is given up too easily, which also means that the real meaning of its alternatives is not given due attention. Correspondingly, when communicative

rationality is introduced, it is usually connected to the whole of Habermas's theory of communicative action. If Habermas is swallowed in one piece, the heterogeneity of his work is not given enough attention.

In contrast to Tore Sager, for instance, I shall suggest that the essence of rational planning is not the availability of perfect information and the relevant calculation capacity of the planning agency. The introduction of imperfect information and risk by no means entails an irrational element in planning. On the contrary, the rational planner, as far as he or she is rational, must take the limited amount of knowledge and the limited capacity to process it (including time!) into account. However, there are still serious theoretical problems connected with the rational planning paradigm – and subsequently addressed by the communicative planning theories. I shall demonstrate this by discussing the "human growth" rationale for planning introduced by Andreas Faludi, and used also in the communicative theory of Sager, as part of his "compound rationale" for planning. I shall suggest that this is based on the Cartesian philosophy of consciousness and the modern, Hegelian political philosophy of a conscious and self-guiding political community.

Since this tradition has insufficient capacity to analyse the actual social relations determining the problems and potentials of planning, I shall suggest that communicative theories should take a distance from this tradition, in order to address both the structural and the micro levels of power relations. I shall then discuss how the argumentative approach that I have suggested elsewhere (Lapintie 1998) and the perspective opened by Foucault's understanding of power could contribute to this debate (Foucault 2000). This requires an extension of the analysis put forward by Flyvbjerg (1998). In this article, I shall not fully explore the area opened by this perspective, but only point out its main directions.

The basic motivating idea behind this article is that the development of planning practice, such as the introduction of new communicative tools for planners, is deeply connected to the most puzzling problems of planning theory. Without entering into this theoretical field, our practical efforts will seem like fighting in the dark against an unknown enemy. Paradoxically, the practical orientation of planning research – our desire to reach for applications as soon as possible – is perhaps the reason why we so often seem to lose touch of what really goes on out there.

A Critique of Synoptic Planning and Instrumental Reason

In theoretical texts introducing different rationality concepts in planning, synoptic or rational-comprehensive planning is often used as an idealized type to distinguish it both from incrementalism and dialogical theories. One of the assumptions connected to this idealization is the idea that planners should have perfect information to be able to calculate the best possible action alternative in a given situation (Sager 1998, 8). In other words, to use the means-end scheme, given certain ends, only by using perfect information and a perfect information processing capacity are planners able to calculate the best possible combination of means to reach the ends.

This idealized exposition is a sort of straw man, however, since it does not correspond to the original theories of rational planning, such as those by Banfield and Meyerson (1955) or Faludi (1973). According to Banfield and Meyerson, perfect information can of course never be reached, but rationality can still be added to the process of deliberation through additional knowledge of the consequences of alternative actions. This more moderate conception of rationality can still be seen behind contemporary practice of environmental impact assessments. In his *Planning Theory* (Faludi 1973, 107), Faludi also clearly addressed this limitation, without thereby rejecting his rationalistic approach to planning. Thus it seems to me somewhat beside the point to discuss rational planning in this transcendent form which, as Sager clearly demonstrates, even leads to logical inconsistencies (Sager 1998, 125).

Another assumption concerning synoptic planning is its devotion to given ends, without giving any intrinsic value to the means, in particular the planning process itself. According to Sager, this is even the very point distinguishing instrumental and communicative rationality in planning:

In one way or another, a purpose or a goal can be formulated for any action. The means-end scheme is invalid in communicative rationality not so much because goals are too unclear and ambiguous to inform action – which they often are. It is more to the crux of the matter that the ulterior end is embedded in the activity itself. Dialogue, close ego-confirming relationships, and the experience of being able to make a difference when issues are discussed (democracy) are important to the development of mature personalities. Hence, they

have intrinsic value independent of any goal-oriented strategy. Potential advantages in terms of goal achievement are by-products. (Sager 1998, 7)

I find this interpretation, which Sager (in line with Faludi) subsequently applies to planning (ibid. 38–45), problematic in two respects. Firstly, although dialogue in close interpersonal relationships certainly is important for the development of mature personalities, it is strange to define such a rationale for public planning. Planning is and will remain distant to most people, since it is not part of their daily work and personal relations. Whenever they enter into a planning process, they will hardly expect a prolonged process that has the secret objective of developing their personalities. Since planners are, moreover, hardly experts in adult education, suggesting such an ulterior end to planning would represent an unjustified paternalism.

Secondly, this interpretation is not enough to distinguish instrumental and communicative rationality. If, for the sake of argument, we were justified in raising human growth, which Faludi suggested as the ulterior end of planning (and a balanced land-use and sustainability, for instance, as its by-products), then the planner reasoning instrumentally would naturally have to give priority to this end, and choose the means that were most efficient in pursuing human growth. If, as Elster suggests (Sager's reference, ibid. p. 7), pursuing this end requires, for instance, that the planner withholds the information that this really is the ultimate end of planning, then this is what he has to do. Contrary to what Sager assumes (Sager 1994/1998, 33–34) there is no need for the planner, in this case, to step outside instrumental rationality. Or, if one agrees with Habermas, he cannot step outside of it, since this type of strategic use of discourse clearly belongs to action oriented to success, which is dominated by instrumental reason.

Individual and Collective Rationality

Since the Faludian concept of human growth, which is also behind Sager's idea of developing mature personalities, seems to be so central in distinguishing between rational and communicative theories, we should perhaps pause here for a somewhat closer analysis. I will try to demonstrate that this concept was – in addition to drawing on contemporary cybernetic theory – based on an important tradition in poli-

tical philosophy which was, actually, one of the central opponents of Habermas in his theory of communicative action.

But in order to avoid what might be conceived as a straw man, I shall go back to Faludi's original definition of this concept. Referring to Diesing, Deutsch, and Etzioni, Faludi defined human growth as the increase in the range and diversity of goals that we are able of following, and the growth of the learning capacity and creativity as the gaining of insights into the existing order of things and the transformation of that order into a new one (pp. 40–41). He proposed to regard human growth as

...an ideal in the sense of man firstly transforming his physical environment and utilizing its resources; and secondly shaping human institutions, thus including the social environment into the orbit of his control. Because growth in the latter sense also means self-guidance, this concept incorporates a view of man as gaining mastery over himself by power of his faculty of reason. (Ibid., p. 45)

Forgetting for a moment the obvious grand narratives (of mastery over oneself, nature and progress) behind the text, we should notice how smoothly Faludi moves from the individual agent to the social and political level. Taken at face value, the expression even appears absurd, since although human growth at the individual level certainly means, among other things, the development of the mastery over oneself, or self-guidance, it certainly does not mean "shaping human institutions, thus including the social environment into the orbit of his control". Without warning, thus, Faludi is suddenly talking about man in the abstract, as all men, or human culture. And this is no exception: in fact it is very difficult to find, in Faludi's book, discussion of the analogy between the individual and the collective, although there is a lot of discussion of the rationalisation of both. He does write that

this book assumes that processes analogous to individual consciousness exist in society. They result in societal self-awareness which, much as individual consciousness, can be inferred from observations. (Ibid. p. 42)

But no argument is given for the analogy, although the existence of a "societal self-awareness", even a societal "self", can reasonably be questioned.

In a later book (Faludi 1987, 55), Faludi did answer to the critique by Cooke directed against this analogy, based on

the complexity and conflicts in social organizations. Faludi pointed out that the analogy is acceptable, since

conflicting ends are not specific to organisations. Individuals have difficulties also in integrating their ends. So they, too, face 'political' issues.

But this argument is beside the point, which is the basic ontology behind Faludi's thinking. If he accepts the individualist ontology, according to which there are individual agents with consciousness, it is totally irrelevant whether they have motivation conflicts. Calling them "political" is unjustified, since the very issue of politics (how to deal with *social* conflicts and develop legitimate social organizations and decision making) is not present here. Thus the basic assumption behind Faludi's theory, that there is something like a collective goal or a collective consciousness, remains unjustified.

But one should perhaps not accuse Faludi for failing to distinguish between the individual and the collective, since this way of thinking has an important cultural tradition. It goes as far back as Plato, who used the analogy in *The Republic*, and its more recent developments can be found in the Hegelian and Marxist traditions. According to this line of thinking, the freedom of the individual – unlike in the liberalist tradition – is based on self-mastery. The ethical dimension of the individual corresponds to the political dimension of the community; both represent freedom from natural instincts and drives.

However, it is easy to see how this intellectual tradition became a trap for Faludian planning theory. In his analysis of the role of politics and planning, Faludi referred to the fact that people often react strongly against planning proposals, which they cannot see serving their own ends (Ibid. p. 100). Instead of trying to specify what kind of people would react and what kind of interests are concerned, Faludi immediately translated this problem into the classical problem of the rational individual, the so-called infinite regress of reasoning, according to which even the rational individual has to accept some reasons as given, without requiring arguments for them. Faludi's suggested solution to this other problem is to the point: although some assumptions have to be accepted provisionally as given, this does not mean that they would be sacrosanct or absolute.

However, this solution does not help us in solving the original problem of conflict, although this is what he suggests:

I suggest that the same holds true even where the subject is not an individual but a collectivity, or even a whole community, making decisions. This amounts to saying that, from the point of view of decision making, political choice is that process by which a community agrees to make those assumptions required to underpin and supplement knowledge so as to arrive at decisions. (p. 102)

Thus, the individualist metaphor in fact destroys the communicative question opened by the conflict situation: a political decision (no matter how it is arrived at) simply becomes "community agreement". The whole problematic of political decision making (including rhetoric, coalition formation, struggle, participation, exclusion, etc.) are reduced to the simple self-guidance of a community.

Let us now return to Sager. Even if we could formulate a purpose or a goal for every action (as he suggests) and, consequently, for the planning process itself, there are two problems that make the situation complicated enough to destroy the means-end scheme of rational planning. Firstly, formulated goals are not the only things that matter. The meaning of action, of personal relations, and of life itself is not exhausted by setting them goals. The same applies for cities and their development.

The means that are chosen to reach given ends, of course, carry independent meanings, but so do the perspectives and experiences rejected or silenced. There is, in fact, no reason to assume that these unformulated meanings would automatically be less important than the formulated goals. One could even go as far as to claim that the formulation of projects with goals and means is a special and a heavily simplified action orientation, suitable perhaps for very simple planning projects.

The second problem is that even if goals could be formulated for a community, they are always the result of a social and political process. Some individuals and groups are more successful in getting their suggestions and definitions for 'common goals' accepted, and even if the established goals were legitimate, marginalized goals and private interests do not simply disappear. They continue to be expressed and demand to be heard and taken into account in the subsequent stages of the process. Instead of one set of goals we thus have a multiplicity of goals and expressed interests, many of which are inconsistent with each other. And in

addition to that, we always have the silence of the marginalized groups.

Communicative Action and Argumentation

It is important to see that one of the basic motivations behind Habermas's theory of communicative action was to provide an alternative to the Cartesian philosophy of consciousness that has dominated Western thought for centuries. One of the corollaries of this philosophy is that the solitary thinker, *solus ipse*, is projected onto social groups and communities. Cartesianism is thus the epistemological counterpart of Hegelian political philosophy. Thus we are accustomed to discourses where communities "pursue certain ends" and "develop strategic consciousness."

If we reject the use of these individualistic metaphors that seemed to be the key problems of rational planning theories, that is, admit that social entities cannot *really* have intentions or self-awareness, we will have to use communicative concepts to describe purposive social action. This is actually what Habermas tried to do with his theory of communicative action. However, also Habermas was heavily tied to the same continental tradition that pervaded Faludi's thinking. His idea of communicative action as necessarily an action "oriented to reaching common understanding" is not so far from the Hegelian self-mastery of the state.

The feature of Habermas's theory that makes it difficult to apply in practical contexts like planning is its purism:

Communicative action is defined in a way that makes it impossible to combine it with instrumental or strategic action. In order to use discourse for strategic purposes, according to Habermas, one will first have to cheat one's partner into believing that the situation is purely communicative, that is, oriented only to reaching a common understanding. Lying, for instance, or seduction, are only possible if the audience is first led to take the situation as such that truth and sincerity prevail. Using Austin's terminology, Habermas denies the use of illocutionary acts for perlocutionary purposes in communicative action. (Habermas 1984, 294)

This is what makes communicative action a very narrow term, although Habermas did not aim to use it only as an idealised reference point. It is important to remember that, for Habermas, acts of communication and communicative action should be kept apart: in order to use speech acts strategically, they first have to be disengaged from the context

of communicative action (ibid. 295). Similarly, Habermas regarded as linguistically mediated strategic action those interactions in which at least one of the participants wants with his speech act to produce perlocutionary effects on his opposite number (ibid.). Needless to say, planning could thus never become an instance of communicative action, in Habermas' sense, since nearly all of the participants usually have strategic aims (such as attempts to persuade others to accept or to reject a certain plan).

If one turns from Habermas to less demanding theories of argumentation, the results become more promising. For instance, the pragma dialectical theory of the Amsterdam school (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992) is an attempt to combine the normative and the empirical dimensions of rational argumentation. The result is a normative definition of rational discussion, or discussion aimed at resolving differences of opinion (instead of simply settling disputes).

The norms of rational discussion, which are based on the basic function of this interaction, can of course be breached in actual interaction, which results in the classical fallacies. The important feature of fallacies (such as the straw man, or begging the question, or *argumentum ad hominem*) is that they are not necessarily literal fallacies, but they can be intentionally used for strategic purposes. Thus, they may lead to individual success, but they block the way for a common search for solutions.

The difference between purely instrumental or strategic action (that is, action oriented to success) and argumentation is that when the participants engage in argumentation, they can no longer merely stick to the standpoint that they have adopted previously. They will have to be ready to modify or even reject their own positions if they cannot be defended in critical discussion. Thus argumentation differs from mere rhetoric or other forms of strategic communication, where participants defend their preconceived positions and private interests by using whatever means that they find useful for this purpose.

In contrast to the Habermasian communicative action, however, argumentation does not collapse if one or more of the participants uses the situation for strategic or perlocutionary purposes. On the contrary: it is perfectly acceptable to bring private interests to the forum and see if they can be generalised. For instance, the inhabitants of a housing estate that is subject to compaction can defend their access

to natural green areas by claiming that such access is the basic right of every citizen, or that this access is provided in other areas. Similarly, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce can defend the access to the city centre by car by claiming that the economic viability of the city is necessary for every citizen. The fact that in both cases the original motivation is 'selfish' does not mean that the arguments are invalid; their validity is rather based on the acceptability of the suggested generalisations (for the application of pragma dialectics in planning, see Lapintie 1998).

Settlements and Solutions¹

Since modern theories of argumentation are rarely used in planning theory, their contribution to the debate on communicative planning and rationality deserves a somewhat closer look. Since communicative planning theory is a normative-practical theory (Healey 1997:68), it would thus seem to fit naturally into the tradition of argumentation theory that tries to combine empirical and normative elements in communication. However, spatial or land-use planning is also a communicative practice that differs from the more paradigmatic cases referred to in argumentation theory, such as legal proceedings or science. It is an instance of political or policy discourse and, consequently, strongly dominated by rhetorical communication. But this is not by itself an obstacle. Supposing that the concept of *resolving* differences of opinion (instead of merely *settling* the disputes or negotiating between the parties with conflicting interests) is the dividing line between argumentation theory and rhetorics, then the communicative theory of planning as a normative theory should benefit from the theory of sound non-fallacious argumentation. This will make it possible to evaluate and criticize argumentation in planning, and even to provide the practising planner with a toolbox for making better arguments (Lapintie 1998. A tool analysing and assessing planning argumentation (AAA), based partly on pragma-dialectics, is developed in Lapintie 2001).

However, since communicative planning theory is also a *practical* theory, this will not be sufficient. Suppose that, in spite of all the efforts to avoid fallacies and to take care of relevance in communication, no common solution is found, in the sense that the parties are not ready to accept each other's arguments, or withdraw from their conflicting standpoints? This is usually resolved by lifting the problem from the

public meeting to the official political or juridical level, or sometimes by letting an expert do the job alone. Resolving conflicts by resorting to authoritative planning will, however, mean the shipwreck of communicative planning.

Another possibility is that a common solution is found, but this is not in every respect a good solution, because the 'best' argument has not won, or it may not even have appeared in the discussion; for example, in a situation when severe environmental risks are created due to an insufficient understanding of the environmental impacts of development. Similarly, the least advantageous groups of the community (children and adolescents, the elderly, the unemployed, the mentally ill, etc.) may have difficulties in getting their voices heard, since they do not or cannot participate in the planning process. Even if they do, they have very different cultural capacities for producing sound arguments, and they are perhaps heard but not taken seriously enough.

Traditionally, these difficulties have been dealt with through professionalism: the professional planner and policy maker are supposed to act on behalf of those who are not present or able to defend themselves. They are also supposed to carry out the relevant investigations in order to assess the environmental impacts, health hazards, etc. Actually, this is not always the case, but in any case it is the ideal of professionalism in planning. But how is this related to the idea of the communicative turn, according to which rationalist expertise is to be discredited, and local participation and consensus-formation should take over? Are we not facing the classical dilemma of the Aristotelian rhetorics:

Even if we had the most accurate scientific investigation in use, it would be very difficult to get some of our audience convinced by arguing only on that basis.

(Aristotle, Rhet. I 1, 1355a25)

The communicative planning practise may thus be said to solve some problems of traditional planning (authoritarian governance, closed and insensitive expertise, the predominance of certain private interests, etc.) at the price of creating new ones, which could be solved through responsible professionalism.

The actual situation is much more complex, however. One of the reasons for the growing interest in direct participation in planning has to do with the general level of education, as well as the multiplicity of disciplines relevant

to planning. The communicative process in planning is no longer (if it ever was) one between a few experts (the planner, the architect, the engineer) and a number of lay persons, the former explaining and the latter accepting or protesting. Instead, the planner is often dealing with a number of issues (such as ecology, ethics, economy, social life) of which he does not have any specific expertise. He may or may not be backed by some special experts, but his role is in any case that of combining and interpreting, and possibly negotiating and communicating, rather than providing some kind of universal super-expertise. On the other hand, the 'stakeholders' may today hold expertise in many fields far superior to that of the planner.

Thus we end up with a combination of different types of expertise, local knowledge and ignorance, as well as different levels of professionalism and ethical concerns. What is the role of argumentation in this context? Evidently, the solution-centred view of argumentation that is central in much of argumentation theory is useful here, albeit with qualifications. In planning, as well as in other forms of argumentation, it is essential to make the distinction between settlement and solution, where the former means simply any (peaceful and discursive) method of getting rid of differences of opinion. But what, then, is a solution?

A dispute is resolved, according to pragma-dialectics, only if the antagonist retracts his doubts because he has been convinced by the other party's argumentation, or if the proponent withdraws his standpoint because he has realised that his argumentation cannot stand up to the other party's critique. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst thus contrast the resolution with the usual ways of getting rid of such conflicts, such as calling on an unbiased third party (a jury, an ombudsman, a judge, or a referee) or negotiating a compromise solution (van Eemeren et. al. 1996, 277). The paradigmatic case of good argumentation they seem to have in mind is, obviously, scientific discourse, where referees certainly have to be used, but the actual resolution of scientific debates is supposed to be guaranteed only by free and open debate, where fallacies should be avoided as much as possible. There are no judges or juries in science. Let us call a solution arrived at in this way *solution 1*.

Since this is an empirical criterion, the definition of good argumentation cannot, however, be that it has succeeded in getting the antagonists to retract their doubts or withdraw

their conflicting standpoints. This may, of course, happen for many reasons; for instance, out of respect for a renowned scientific authority, or from an unconscious fear of becoming unpopular, or for any other "unscientific" – though perhaps strategically rational – reason. Resolution, defined in this way, is therefore not tantamount to truth or the best policy decision, if one wants to avoid the problematic consequences of cognitive and moral relativism. But if that is so, then one may wonder whether there is such a great difference between settling and resolving differences of opinion, although van Eemeren and Grootendorst present it as a demarcation line.

If we consider the solution to a mathematical problem, the criterion cannot be the adherence of the minds of mathematicians, nor the willingness of critics to retract their doubt, but it must be a *real* solution, a proof. Conversely, the absence of unanimity is no criterion for the failure of the suggested solution, if the proof is valid, and no one can find any mistake in it. Certainly no proofs can be expected in planning, but is it really not possible that *something of this kind* is also meant by the practitioners trying to find solutions to social, political, ethical, or planning problems, not simply unanimity, but the real, or at least a good enough, solution?

In that case, van Eemeren's and Grootendorst's definition of resolution is somewhat counter-intuitive. We might, of course, understand this as the empirical element of resolution (*solution 1*), and do the usual philosophical idealization trick to arrive at a more trustworthy solution (*solution 2*). Let us define solution 2 as the situation where the differences of opinion will be resolved *at the second level* if the parties would in their debate conform to all of the rules of critical discussion, for instance those specified by the pragma-dialectical theory (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, 202–209). Thus, the above-mentioned examples about the uncritical scientific audience would not be examples of critical discussion, since fear and too great respect for authority should not affect the proceedings of critical discussion. *Solution 2* is thus the solution that we would end up if we followed the normative requirements of argumentation in our planning discussion.

Could we go as far as assuming that *solution 2* is in fact true, or the best solution to a political or social problem? This would be a much more promising idea than the cognitive relativism lurking behind the rhetorical or constructivist

conceptions of *solution 1* (i.e. solution 1 as the only option). But this would not do, at least not without additional rules of critical discussion on top of the ten specified by van Eemeren and Grootendorst. The problem is, namely, that these rules are meant to create the *preconditions* of free presentation, defence and challenge to standpoints, just like in the communicative theory of planning, *if the parties wish to do so*. There is no rule *requiring* the antagonist to challenge a standpoint that is not warranted, or the protagonist to present arguments if nobody has cast doubt on the standpoint. Thus we may imagine a communicative situation where, for social or cultural reasons, no one wishes to create a controversial situation. In a community like that, *solution 2* will not necessarily represent the truth or the best policy option. It is perfectly possible for such a community to end up, for instance, in a development that will cause disastrous environmental consequences. A 'real' solution would thus represent a third type, say *solution 3*.

Although our original attempt to define the 'real' solution is still unanswered, this distinction between *solutions 1, 2, and 3*, would perhaps help to clarify the somewhat vague conceptual scheme that theorists of communicative planning are putting forward. Consider the following description of Patsy Healey's "inclusionary approach" to argumentation in planning:

The challenge for an inclusionary approach to strategic spatial planning is to experiment with, and test out, strategic ideas in initially tentative ways, to 'open out' possibilities for both evaluation and invention of better alternatives, before allowing a 'preferred' discourse to emerge, and 'crowd out' the alternative. (...) This suggests that a discursive process needs to be designed which explicitly explores different 'storylines' about possible actions and offers up different 'discursive keys' for critical attention, maintaining a critical attitude until there is broad support for a new strategic discourse. Having thus generated a knowledgeable consensus around a particular storyline, the task of consolidating the discourse and developing its implications can then proceed. The discourse community can be said by this time to have collaboratively chosen a strategy, over which they are then likely to have some sense of 'ownership'. A new 'cultural community' has been formed around the strategy. (Healey 1997, 278-279)

What kind of solution are we talking about here? Com-

municative or collaborative planning, according to Healey, would seem to consist of the following steps: (1) opening up the discourse in order to allow for different alternatives, meanings and visions to come forward, (2) closing it down again through a careful timing and consensus-formation, and (3) forming a new "cultural community" around the chosen strategy. The problem is, however, that the theory still does not address the two original questions that were mentioned earlier: (1) why would the participants finally give up their differences of opinion concerning, for instance, a planned motorway through a residential or natural area, and (2) even if they do, is this a guarantee for its being the 'right' solution in any sense of the word? Since unanimity is not the basic social feature of a large community, and, as we saw, it does not produce truth or even the best available solution to our problems, then what kind of consensus-formation are we talking about? A rhetorical success? Or is it at all possible to arrive at such a "cultural community" after a successful opening up of real alternatives?

In its essence, Healey is describing a *solution 1*, since the participants are not forced to arrive at a specific decision, nor do they use an unbiased third party for arbitration. But it is not only that, since the organizer of the process, the 'communicative planner', is supposed to take care that all of the strategic ideas and possibilities are brought forward for evaluation, and that a "critical attitude is maintained until there is broad support for a new strategic discourse." There are, thus, many elements of critical discussion present in this description, but they are mainly concentrated on the opening phase, by removing obstacles of free discussion. The consensus-formation still remains a black box.

In order to arrive at a *solution 2*, the other resources of argumentation should be taken into use, in the sense that participants would learn to challenge the relevant alternatives and defend their standpoints with relevant arguments, but also to develop a readiness to alter and even to reject their standpoints if they cannot be defended. The strategy of communicative planning could thus be described as a turn from expert-oriented planning and *solution 1* towards *solution 2*. Although this will not guarantee that the 'best' solution is reached, if it even exists *at all*, this gives space and a relevant role for both the professional (who can produce arguments not only for his own views but also for those who are not present, or cannot defend their interests) and

the local activist (who can bring forward the meanings and values that are woven into the life-world and the everyday speech and story-telling of the inhabitants). As the case studies we have carried out in a number of research projects at Helsinki University of Technology demonstrate, however, planning argumentation is still far away from this ideal. But nothing prevents taking it as a professional goal for the reflective practitioner.

Rationality and Power

The most important critique against any kind of argumentative approach, be it Habermasian, pragma-dialectic or whatever, is that argumentation in practical contexts is in principle not rational, but rather based on the existing power relations. This means that arguments (which may seem like attempts to give rational reasons for action) are in fact either weapons in a continuous power struggle or even symbolic tools for domination and exclusion.

One of the recent critics of the argumentative approach in planning is Bent Flyvbjerg, whose book *Rationalitet og magt* [Rationality and Power] from 1992 became a classic even before its translation into English. It has been seen as exceptional and even revolutionary in two senses: first as a rare example of a comprehensive and painstaking analysis of planning in a local political context and, secondly, as a theoretical antithesis to the Utopianism of both the rational and the communicative approaches in planning theory. Flyvbjerg's theoretical underpinnings are – at least this is what he claims – Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Foucault, instead of Plato, Kant or Habermas. He sees democracy and the Enlightenment tradition as weak social powers in comparison to the rhetorical and raw use of power by the traditional interest groups. Both of these expressed intentions – the case study and the theoretical contribution – are welcome in the current discourse of planning theory and practice. Unfortunately, however, Flyvbjerg's contribution is concentrated mainly on the first challenge, providing us with a brilliant case study of local politics around planning. I shall argue, however, that he does not in fact utilize the theoretical perspectives opened up by the tradition of thought that he refers to.

Flyvbjerg follows the story of the prize-winning “Aalborg Project” from an ambitious and comprehensive plan of the late 1970s, intended to reduce private car use and promote

public transportation, cycling and pedestrians in downtown Aalborg in Denmark, into a chopped down and inconsistent collection of individual measures that finally turned against the original objectives. The final evaluation that he gives of the project is ruthless:

There is considerable evidence to indicate that Aalborg's overall situation would have been better had the Aalborg Project not been implemented at all. (p. 224)

This is because only the measures promoting public transportation could be implemented, but the corresponding reduction in private car use did not succeed.

The political reality presented by Flyvbjerg's narrative is by no means unique to Aalborg or any other corresponding city for that matter. Rather, it represents the daily bread of every planner working in the field, and it is a healthy reminder for students and scholars that the problems of implementation are not only related to the slow pace by which finished plans become reality, but also to the fact that the political context is not understood as it is, but is rather confused with what it 'should be'. In such a situation, the planner will, paraphrasing Machiavelli, “come to grief”. Echoing the ideals of rational planning, the key persons in the Aalborg Project showed, in hindsight, even astonishing naiveté: they believed in “the absolutely best plan” and supposed that it would become implemented if they only believed in it “hard enough.”

Flyvbjerg's spearhead, however, is directed at planning theory that backs this naiveté: the idea of common objectives and an evaluation of alternatives based on scientific documentation, and the communicative idea of the force of the better argument. In contrast, Flyvbjerg emphasizes the force of deliberate distortion of documentation, behind-the-scenes negotiations, undemocratic coalitions (such as the “triumvirate” between the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the local newspaper, and the Police Department), and the dominance of rhetorical persuasion. The book is full of radical expressions and quotations dealing with rationality and power, such as “power defines reality” and “the greater the power, the less rationality”.

On the other hand, there seems to be a certain unbalance between the theoretical and the empirical ambitions of the book. I agree that the Nietzsche-Foucault strain of social theory is still insufficiently utilized in planning theory,

particularly since it presents a genuine challenge to both the rationalist and the communicative approaches to planning. However, Flyvbjerg does not actually enter this debate. He does not even define his key concepts, namely 'rationality' and 'power', in a way that would make his constructivist interpretations consistent.

On the face of it, he seems to be suggesting that the 'real politics' of Aalborg (that is, what really happens around and to the Aalborg Project), defines both knowledge and rationality of urban planning in this case. In a sense, knowledge and rationality are inseparable from power relations. Reading the case more closely, however, gives one the impression that behind this constructed rationality there must be some kind of 'supreme' or transcendent rationality, or else this rationality "could not have been yielded to power" in open confrontation. This 'morally supreme' rationality is located somewhere near the original Aalborg Project, perhaps with the exception of the large bus terminal in the middle of the town (which was interpreted as the symbolic monument to "Bus-Marius", the mayor). If the project would have been implemented as a whole, it would not have had the negative consequences it finally had.

But what kind of rationality was this? This is, I assume, a legitimate question in our post-Habermasian and post-Foucauldian world, where 'rationality by itself' makes hardly any sense. Certainly it was not strategic rationality, since the designers of the project were not even prepared to meet the most obvious and potentially dangerous opposition of car-free zoning policies everywhere, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce with their conservative political allies. Neither was it communicative rationality, since the planners did not see the point in constructing alternative solutions, nor did they consider what kinds of solutions would benefit the different stakeholders. They had absolutely no plan for communication, and no readiness to develop their ideas according to the communicative process. At most they can be understood as taking the whole city as an instrument in their own professional enterprise, that is, practising instrumental rationality in its narrowest sense.

Similarly, one may ask in what sense the most important opponent of the Aalborg Project, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, can be described as non-rational. It is an interest-organisation, and therefore it has the legitimate role of pursuing the interests of its members. In the "longue

durée" of urban politics in Aalborg, it also proved to be efficient:

The winners (of the struggle over the Aalborg project) are the business community in downtown Aalborg, who, via their strategy of opposing measures to restrict cars combined with grudging acceptance of improvements for public transportation, pedestrians, and bicyclists, have seen their customer base substantially increased. (p. 224)

If this is not strategic rationality, then what is?

This apparent inconsistency in the theoretical and empirical intentions of Flyvbjerg, however, by no means diminishes the value of his case study: rather, it shows how well-done research work lends itself to theoretical interpretations of various kinds. Even if one would not agree with the constructivist or relativist position implicit in Flyvbjerg's conclusions, his observations do force the planner and the planning theorist to address some key issues not always given due attention. I shall only mention two of them.

The first is the almost trivial fact that in addition to "common objectives" (whether they can be formulated or not) urban planning is always confronted with special interests and objectives. Planning is, thus, always a game of interests, and different projects, arguments and interpretations can be used in a strategic way. Once you are in a game, you cannot simply pretend to be outside. As the Aalborg Project clearly demonstrates, poor strategy is simply poor planning, no matter how marvellous the original objectives were.

The second observation is equally important. Throughout the project's life-time, its opponents were much more at home with both the traditional and the modern institutions of communication, that is, building coalitions, using informal negotiations, and using the media. What is essential to notice is that communication in the modern society is an area that requires special skills and education – something that traditional planners seem to lack, at least according to Flyvbjerg's case study. Moreover, skills are not enough, since the political control of a single hegemonic arena – such as the local newspaper – can have dramatic effects on the public image of a planning project.

The merchants in downtown Aalborg found support from the newspaper by a systematic selection of arguments and metaphors, such as "a traffic-happy city". As the original

arguments by the Chamber of Industry and Commerce (that most revenues to downtown businesses come from persons driving their own cars) was shown clearly to be false when it was finally investigated, the local newspaper simply used a misleading headline regarding the survey: “Aalborg’s Best Customers Come Driving in their Cars.” In contrast, the initiators of the project were much more reserved about using the media: Their “stroking strategy” included a refusal to comment on even the most obvious distortions of information. This strategy failed, as it finally turned out, and a much more clever strategy for using the media would have been needed.

There is a certain cynicism behind Flyvbjerg’s narrative, and his conclusions may sound discouraging to more Utopian-minded theorists and practitioners. However, this is at least partly due to the remnants of the rationalist ideal of planning, according to which politics always destroys whatever good planners may have in mind. “I don’t like politics, I really don’t,” said one of the key characters in Flyvbjerg’s story, echoing the feelings of many planners, and perhaps even Flyvbjerg himself. It seems that the time has come for planners to start becoming interested in it again, if they ever want to be important agents in the development of modern cities.

What would it mean if we, as Flyvbjerg suggested, would really take the theoretical challenge derived from the Machiavelli-Nietzsche-Foucault tradition seriously? As I suggested above, it would no longer be possible to maintain clear dichotomies between rationality/knowledge/expertise and power. Instead, we will have to accept that power is created and recreated through various local strategies and tactics, including those of the planner (Foucault 1978/2000). Instead of a struggle between rationality and power, the realm of planning consists of a multitude of smaller and larger power struggles, where the possible roles and agencies of different actors are in fact constituted.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to discuss necessary revisions and extensions to the dominant paradigm of communicative planning. For this purpose, I aimed to trace the key problem inherent in the rational planning tradition that communicative planning theorists have presented as their main opponent. According to the argument, this is the

Cartesian ideology of consciousness, projected onto social communities and societies. According to this view, societies can be said to have common objectives and strategies, created by common understanding and political decision making. If this view is rejected, if the ‘king’, the ‘political body’ is finally decapitated, we shall have to deal with communicative processes that never reach ‘consensus’ or ‘general will.’

Although Habermas clearly sought to provide an alternative to the Cartesian view, his theory of communicative action was, however, still tied to this centuries-old tradition, through his concept of ‘common understanding’. His theory can also be said to be too purist in its attempt to exclude all kinds of instrumental and strategic thinking from the concept of communicative action.

In order to develop communication in planning practise, one should rather turn to less demanding theories of argumentation, such as the pragma-dialectical theory by van Eemeren and Grootendorst. This normative-empirical theory will help to construct a working model for the assessment and development of planning argumentation.

However, as normative theories, theories of argumentation have very little to say about the local political situation pervading the practice of land-use planning. In his book *Rationality and Power*, Bent Flyvbjerg argued for giving a more central position to the analysis of power in planning. Although his plea was well justified, the theoretical implications of the Machiavelli-Nietzsche-Foucault tradition were, however, not fully exploited by him. Instead of a dichotomy between rationality and power (where rationality is supposed to ‘yield to power’), a more complex situation can be said to prevail in planning. As one of the expert systems of the modern society, planning can be seen as consisting of a multitude of strategies and tactics, used by all actors in the process. In a situation like this, the planner should become more aware of his or her own role as the producer of local power, instead of retreating to rational, artistic, or other types of distancing professional strategies.

Note

1. An original version of this section was published in Päävänen & Lapintie (eds.) (1998).



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