

Chapter 66

Communicative Planning Theory Following Deliberative Democracy Theory: Critical Pragmatism and the Trading Zone Concept

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ABSTRACT

The article reviews the development of communicative planning theory in relation to deliberative democracy theory. The latter has evolved since its “first generation” of Habermas and Rawls, to incorporate more pragmatic and contextual considerations to the theory, in response to criticisms that parallel those on communicative planning theory. The contemporary “third generation” of deliberative democracy theory has relaxed on the consensus goal, considering deliberation as legitimate even when the parties advocate their own interests in intense negotiations. The article discusses how this development has been reflected in communicative planning theory, concentrating especially on John Forester’s critical pragmatism. It further examines the concept of trading zone and its linkages to this theoretical development.

INTRODUCTION

From the late 1990s, communicative (or collaborative) planning theory has been under critical scrutiny. The origins of the theory can be traced to deliberative democracy theory, with close connections to Habermas’ theory of commu-

nicative action (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010; Sager, 2013). Much of the later criticism on communicative planning theory has concentrated on its idealistic, utopian (e.g. Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998; McGuirk, 2001; Mäntysalo, 2002; Hillier, 2003) and, as some claim, even naïve (Bengs 2005; Sager 2005; 2013) character

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in reference to the consensus goal, communicative rationality and approach to power. Many planning theorists have thus withdrawn from the deliberative democracy theory -orientated planning theory and, following Flyvbjerg (1998), have turned to Foucauldian power analytics, or Mouffeian agonism (Mouffe, 2000/2009; Hillier, 2002; 2003; Pløger, 2004; Mäntysalo et al., 2011; Mouat et al., 2013). However, these paths of research do not seem to lead to theory that could guide planning practice any better than “utopian”, “idealist” and “naïve” communicative planning theory. Foucauldian power analytics in planning research is content with identifying the workings of power in planning, while Mouffeian agonism is content with grounding the acknowledgement of difference as the essence of politics. If power and political difference indeed transcend the realm of communicative rationality, where could we then find another normative guideline, alternative to communicative rationality, to conduct our argumentation in planning work?

Critical studies of power plays, political conflicts and legitimacy claims are, without a doubt, an essential part of the body of research dealing with public planning. However, this is not yet sufficient: a planning researcher must also look forward and ask what, in concrete and practical terms, *can be done* to make our common future better *despite* our political differences and power imbalances. Campbell (2006) reminds us that politics and public policy making, and thus also public planning, are about making decisions and acting, not about spectating (p. 95). Similarly, Sager (2013) advises the planning academics not to teach their students as if planners were to be critics only (p. 276).

Deliberative democracy theory, on the other hand, has evolved since its “first generation” of Habermas and Rawls, to incorporate more pragmatic and contextual considerations. In the “second generation” deliberative democracy theory, consensus is not considered realistic. Following Gutman and Thompson (1996; 2004), the goal is

a deliberative agreement in mutual justification, which may also be an “agreement to disagree”. Moreover, the “third generation” of deliberative democracy theory has taken a step further along this path: deliberation in this context is considered successful (i.e. legitimate) even when the parties advocate only their own interests, and public reasoning takes the form of intense negotiation. (Baber & Bartlett, 2005; Hendriks, 2006a; 2006b; Elstub, 2013; Mansbridge et al., 2010; Jarenko, 2013).

Many planning theorists have more or less followed a similar path to develop communicative planning theory into a more pragmatic direction. In more recent planning-theoretical contributions, even Lindblom’s (1959; 1965) bargaining and compromising have been reintroduced among the “normatively acceptable” policy tools in planning, depending on the difficulty of the planning problem (Mäntysalo et al., 2011, p. 259). According to Hillier (2002) bargaining *is* a legitimate way of resolving planning conflicts that would otherwise remain unresolved (p. 255). But she adds: “It should, however, be a strategy of last resort rather than first resort, not a principle of least effort” (Hillier, 2002, p. 255). In Hillier’s (2002) view, the planners should accept the possible inaccessibility of consensus and embrace the pluralism of negotiation approaches and tactics (p. 269). Innes and Booher (2010) also include bargaining as one possible form of planning communication (pp. 37, 116).

Today, communicative planning theorists are concerned with how the deliberative approach can be enabled in contested and coerced planning processes and how justifiable agreements can be reached and mediated. We will look more closely at Forester’s (1993; 1999; 2009) *critical pragmatism* as one of the key threads in contemporary communicative planning theory. Forester (2006) has argued that in most difficult conflict situations the actors may indeed end up with searching mutually for planning agreement in the form of intense negotiations and even transform this into a

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