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Land-Use Planning Methodology and Middle-Ground Planning Theories

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Abstract: This paper argues that a monolithic land-use planning “grand narrative” is not sufficiently flexible, but that the fragmentation into innumerable “small narratives” goes against any sense of the existence of an established domain of knowledge. Its aim is to explore the epistemological possibility for “middle ground” theories. The methodology adopted for this purpose is to take as a standard reference the methodological components of comprehensive/procedural planning and to measure against them the methodologies proposed by a corpus of other major land-use planning approaches. The outcome of this comparison is that for more than half a century, planning theories in the field of urban and regional planning have been revolving incessantly around the methodological components of the comprehensive model, which seem, at least at the present stage of our knowledge, to be the universal nucleus of the land-use planning enterprise. This paper indicates on this basis the prerequisites for the construction of middle-ground land-use planning theories and how we can pass from the formal contextual variants to real life contexts through the original articulation of planning theory with input from the findings of the actual planning systems.

Keywords: land-use planning theory; land-use planning methodology; middle-ground theory; urban and regional planning systems; positivism; postmodern/semiotic approaches to planning

1. Introduction

As is well known, after the dominance of the physical planning and design approach, closely related to architecture and engineering, in the first half of the previous century, a genuine paradigm shift occurred in the 1960s with the first land-use planning theory in the full sense of the word, procedural planning theory. It was not, however, long-lived, at least not theoretically. Although it had some less prominent competitors at the time, the strongest criticisms against it date from what Simin Davoudi and John Pendlebury consider the third of the five phases they distinguish in the evolution of the planning discipline, the fragmentation phase, which they locate in the 1970s and 1980s. During this phase, the introduction of competing social theories into planning and changes in its established principles challenged its coherence and introduced “a sea change in intellectual . . . terms” [1] (pp. 625, 629). Whether or not one agrees with Davoudi and Pendlebury, who see the next two phases as a difficult march towards maturity, it is incontestable that there has been a proliferation of planning theories during the last three decades—see also [2] (pp. 36, 38).

Nigel Taylor sees comprehensive planning as part of the first of the three major shifts he identifies in urban planning theory since 1945: from physical planning to systems and rational planning; from the latter to the view of planning as a political process; and from these modernist forms of planning theory to postmodern planning. While in 1998 [3] (pp. 159) he stated that comprehensive planning is a literal Kuhnian paradigm shift (the discontinuity position), he retreated from this position in 1999 [4]

(pp. 331–333, 341), now arguing that it represents a rupture with a long historical tradition but is not actually a paradigm shift (the continuity position), because it did not replace urban design. Although I lean towards the first position (since I do not consider urban design as belonging to planning but to architecture), the fact is that Taylor uses criteria which belong to the level of the paradigm, that is, to a legitimate but highly abstract level, which results in a rather orderly image. On a lower level, the image today is kaleidoscopic. In the mosaic formed by competing land-use planning theories, a marked tendency is discernible: from the “grand narrative” of “classical” procedural planning theory, we have arrived at a set of “small narratives” (see on these terms [5], mainly sections 10 and 14), advanced, for example, by the influential trend of collaborative planning.

In the sciences, methodology is second to theory, because, while it allows us to move from theory towards application, it is considered as a direct by-product of theory. On the contrary, in applied domains such as land-use planning, in spite of the connection of methodology to theory, the emphasis is on methodology, since these fields aim to be operational and achieve real-world efficiency, which involves a looser connection to theory. This primacy of methodology is recognised by Andreas Faludi, who proposes to replace the term “planning theory” with “planning methodology”, which he compares to scientific methodology [6] (pp. 12, 19, 23, 84, 115).

Given that a universal monolithic theory is generally considered too inflexible, but the fragmentation into innumerable purely local rethinking exercises goes against any sense of the existence of an established domain of knowledge, the aim of the present paper is to explore the epistemological possibility for theories of the “middle ground”. It has no ambition to formulate a specific middle-ground theory, nor does the author believe that only one such theory is possible. Instead, it will try to identify the prerequisites for any middle-ground theory, which should rely heavily on the methodological level. For reasons that will become clear in the course of the discussion, the strategy adopted is to take as a standard reference the methodological components of comprehensive planning and measure against them the methodologies proposed by a corpus consisting of the other major theoretical land-use planning approaches.

The paper will start with the “classical” approach of comprehensive-systemic planning (see, for example, [2] (pp. 49–50)), as well as the equally “classical” rational planning (see, for example, [7] (pp. 24–25, 27)). It will then continue with a corpus of other approaches which recur systematically in land-use planning bibliography, namely: the action-centred approach; the implementation approach; the incremental approach (which actually refers to economic planning, but is widely discussed in the bibliography); the pragmatic approach, into which Allmendinger [2] (p. 141) integrates the incremental approach while conceding that the latter is pragmatic “in the ordinary sense of the word”; the neo-liberal approach; advocacy planning; collaborative planning; and postmodern theorising on planning. It does not include in this set approaches such as the Marxist, which are analytical and do not involve planning methodology, nor urban design approaches, due to their architectural orientation.

2. Land-Use Planning Theories and Methodologies

2.1. The “Classical” References

In order to make a systematic comparison of these planning approaches primarily with comprehensive but also with rational planning, we should specify the elements to be compared and thus we will need to recall briefly the methodological nodes of the whole set of these theories. This is the only way to achieve an analytical and convincing demonstration. Since methodology is always part of a wider theoretical perspective, the general lines of the latter will also be recalled. This revisiting of our recent past combines research interest with a useful pedagogical aim, because our recent fashion of pursuing the latest theoretical trends obscures achievements of the past. The paper will start with a standard reference, comprehensive planning.

J. Brian McLoughlin drew his planning theory from the fields of general ecology and human ecology, general systems theory and cybernetics, operational research and decision-making theory,

and founded it on location theory. Space, for him, is an ecosystem and may be simulated as a complex dynamic system which does not literally represent the real world but is determined by the aim for which it will be used. The general systemic elements of space as a human ecosystem are four, ordered into two pairs: that of the components, namely located activities and the spaces in which they occur, which are the physical vehicles of the activities; and that of their connections, namely human communications between activities and their channels, the physical vehicles of communication [8] (pp. 17, 22–29, 34, 58–70, 75, 77–79, 81, 126).

McLoughlin conceptualises planning as a process referring to a human ecosystem. It consists of the following stages (Figure 1—For a quite similar figure, see Muller [9] (pp. 141–142):

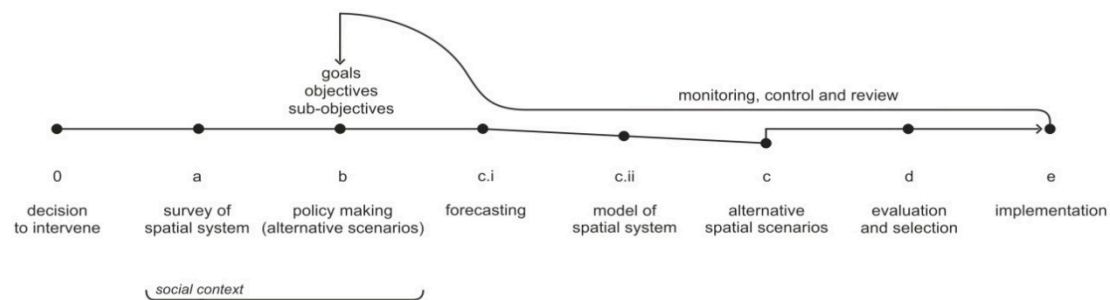


Figure 1. The components of the comprehensive land-use planning model, according to McLoughlin [8], in a diagrammatic form. Dark circles: the model’s components presented on a methodological axis. Below the axis: contextual factors.

Stage 0: decision to intervene. This stage is not clearly distinguished from the next one by McLoughlin [8] (p. 96). However, the decision to intervene is a distinct and significant step in the planning process. It may be preceded by a feasibility report. It defines the orientation of the next stage (what is to be sought). It encompasses certain goals and thus has a political character.

Stage a: scanning of the environment. This refers to the planning survey and aims at the description of McLoughlin’s general systemic elements of space presented above through the use of a limited number of variables. Also at this stage, individual or group needs, based on values, are recorded with the help of public participation [8] (pp. 95–103, 126–129).

Stage b: formulation of goals. This is the main policy stage and includes the formulation of broad goals, more specific objectives that must be fulfilled in order to reach the goals, and sub-objectives or precise programmes of action, accompanied by their costs, which help to clarify the goals. This set is organised in hierarchical order, from goals to objectives to programmes of action.

The level of sub-objectives coincides with the precise planning programme, on paper, of land-use intervention. Goals and objectives involve, according to McLoughlin, the direct opinion of formal and informal groups and the general public, as well as information from other sources such as the mass media and public statements of representative groups, but, for him, the essential dialogue takes place between the planner and the client politicians and may involve more than one turn of negotiations between them. This policy stage takes the form of policy variables, with different values that may correspond not only to actual decisions, but also to working hypotheses; that is, at this stage different (written) scenarios may be tried [8] (pp. 97–99, 106–107, 120–124, 233–234). This and the previous stage are the only ones in which McLoughlin foresees participation.

Stage c: formulation of possible courses of action. This is the formulation of alternative scenarios of land-use plans, which aim at the realisation of the policy scenarios. It consists of two operations involving the projection into the future, according to the selected planning horizons, of:

(a) Individually, the four elements of the urban system, through the specific sub-elements they include (c.i), a projection which depends on the interrelated projections of population and economic data.

(b) Comprehensively, based on a holistic model of the land-use system, the system as a whole (c.ii), stratified according to ranked sub-models and providing the support for the plans—That is, the design aspect of planning, on maps, which has already started with the previous operation (c.i)—Figure 2. Unfortunately, there is no terminology to distinguish between planning as one part of the whole process (the other part being design), and planning as the total process (including both planning and design). Different (mapped) scenarios are examined, which result from the transformation of the states of the model in time, to which correspond different trajectories of the model, each scenario and trajectory following from a specific set of policy variables [8] (pp. 87–88, 99, 108, 166, 174, 211–216, 220–221, 231, 291–292). The discussion by McLoughlin revolves exclusively around planning and its logic, but the projection of the programme onto space, i.e., the design aspect, is far from linear, because it involves a large number of possible spatial combinations, together with the idiomatic logic of design; this last aspect is missing from McLoughlin’s proposal.

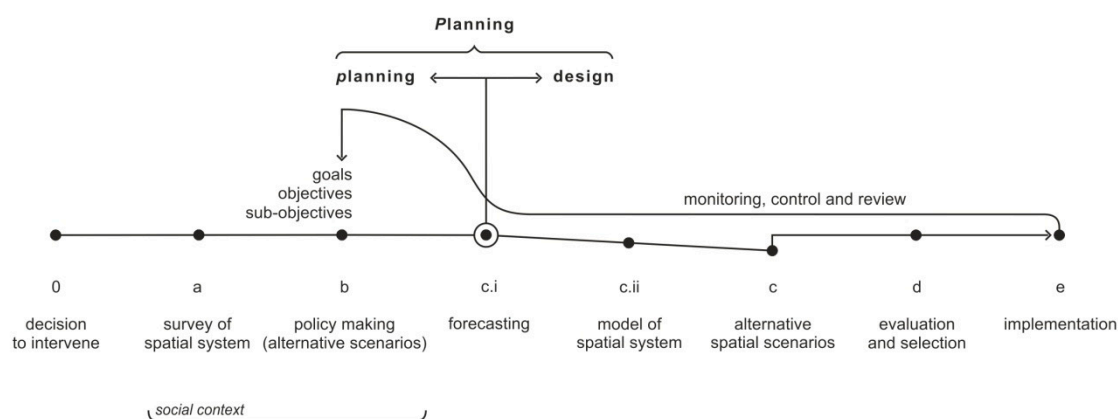


Figure 2. The articulation of planning as part of the whole planning process with design as the end process of planning, presented on the methodological axis of comprehensive planning.

Stage d: comparison and evaluation of alternatives. The first step is the approximate evaluation of general plans. Then follow successive specialisations of the plans and more detailed evaluations. The evaluation takes into consideration the means available, the costs and benefits of each plan and as far as possible its impact. In order to proceed to evaluation, according to McLoughlin, the entities to be evaluated and quantitative indicators for their evaluation must be defined, and must follow directly from the goals and objectives. Given that the evaluation concerns different planning horizons, changes in needs and preferences must be taken into account. The evaluation is carried out by “the planner on behalf of society” [8] (pp. 95, 100).

If we summarise the value judgements involved in these five stages, we may get a clear image of the value factor involved in McLoughlin’s methodology. The goals of stage (b) manifestly render more specific the very broad and usually unarticulated goals of stage (0) and, in the best case, incorporate the values of the social context as derived from stages (a) and (b). Finally, the evaluation in stage (d) is a function of indicators depending on the goals and objectives of stage (b). We see that there is a diffusion of the substantive value (i.e., ideological, semiotic) factor throughout the planning process.

Stage e: taking of action. This stage requires a control mechanism, according to McLoughlin. During implementation, changes are proposed and their impact should be assessed in order to check if they deflect the system from its planned course, an action effected through the operations in stage (c). Together with implementation, or as a next stage, McLoughlin considers necessary a lesser or greater review of the plan and its control mechanisms, effected through adaptations in a continuous control process. The review becomes necessary, according to him, because of new proposals or political, social and economic changes, which generate new needs and desires, and involves the return to stage (b)—and periodically to stage (0)—that is, a feedback operation [8] (pp. 88, 89, 101–103, 279, 295).

This is McLoughlin's procedural systemic and comprehensive planning, with its circular, or rather spiral, process. He misses the appearance of complex feedback mechanisms in the interior of the process, with the exception of the return from stage (e) to (b).

An important theoretical clarification should be made, which is crucial for the comparison of the other planning proposals with McLoughlin's. McLoughlin's stages are technical and belong to an internal process realised by a specific, and heterogeneous, team of experts. These stages are the *components* of the land-use planning methodology (on the axis of Figure 1) and are operations, sub-processes forming a more or less closed set. This is the essence of land-use planning methodology as such, which ends in a land-use proposal, in spite of the simultaneous use of other kinds of data (such as transport, economic, demographic, environmental, etc., data). On this axis, a continuous interaction evolves between the planner and his/her employer. However, in the real world, this set does not operate in a vacuum, but within a wider complex economic, social, institutional and environmental *context* (below the axis of Figure 1), which provides inputs of different degrees of importance to the components in the form of guidance or restrictions. McLoughlin's main orientation is towards the components, not towards this context, which, while not ignored, has only a weak presence relative to component (a) and a stronger one relative to component (b) through the appeal to individual and group values; this input, however is far from decisive, according to McLoughlin's approach, because the decision on how to handle it rests with the planner and the politicians.

The other "classical" approach is Faludi's rational planning. Faludi criticises McLoughlin's approach as a theory *in* planning because of its foundation in location theory, but recognizes the convergence of their two approaches [10] (p. 3). For Faludi, "procedural" theories are theories of planning, concern the form of the planning process and the operations of the planner and are the object of planning theory. He opposes them to "substantive" theories, which are, for him, theories in planning and refer to the content of planning and the fields that are of interest to the planner. Faludi also differentiates between normative planning theory, referring to the rational process of planners, and empirical planning theory, referring to the organisation and procedures concerning planning [10] (pp. 1–4), [11] (pp. 3–8), [6] (Preface). It is implied that procedural theories of planning are identical to *normative* planning theory.

Faludi emphasises the administrative system of planning, the "planning environment", and considers it as part of a wider network of services. According to Faludi, his critical-rationalist planning theory (later planning methodology) encompasses the rationale "of *planning as a rational process of thought and action*" and the construction of a model of planning agencies; the latter operate within a multi-dimensional social (in the wide sense) "environment". Faludi makes reference to the same components of planning methodology as McLoughlin (Figure 3), but he gives more emphasis to the feedback relationships between components [6,11] (pp. 4, 19, 105–106). The three-level hierarchy of McLoughlin is maintained as goals–objectives–targets, but Faludi conceives of a greater elasticity in this pyramidal scheme, because he also adds bottom-up influences.

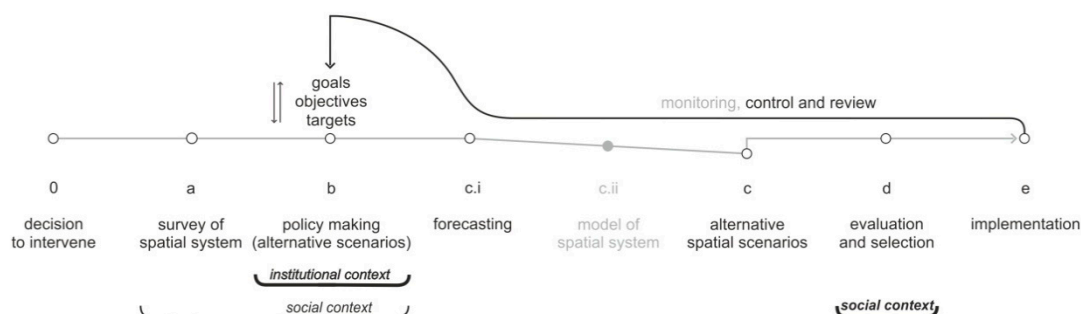


Figure 3. The elements of rational land-use planning, according to Faludi [6,10,11], in diagrammatic form, with the comprehensive model's components in the background. White circle: coincidence with McLoughlin's component. Gray circle: lack of the corresponding McLoughlin component. Below the axis: contextual factors.

The role of the planner is, according to Faludi, that of an analyst of the risks involved in the decisions of politicians, whence the need for a close and continuous collaboration between them. Also, throughout the planning process the planner must participate in public discussions on the alternative plans with the interested community, which is heterogeneous and consists of collaborating, but also conflicting, groups that may attach a greater or lesser importance to the proposal and should be attributed different weights according to their political influence. The planner must be able to communicate the plans in a non-technical language and “conveying *meaning* . . . is a distinct problem in implementing planning proposals” (here Faludi reports that the American transport planners envisage a specialist role of “communicator” in their field). Faludi is against the use of persuasion and argues for a “*collaborative process*”, which “involves seeing the objects of control as *subjects* in their own right, with the ability to participate in the formulation of programmes” and envisages “an *arena* in which people could interact and form collective views”. This process is, for him, open-ended; it is a process of building *consensus*, but also involves conflicts, and imposes new and radical demands on *democratic institutions* [11] (pp. 236–237, 261–262, 270, 274, 281, 283, 288–290; 1986, 106–107, 109; as we shall see later, the terms I have italicized in the above paragraph belong to the nucleus of Healey’s collaborative planning).

Comparing Faludi’s rationale with McLoughlin’s comprehensive planning, we see that it appeals to the same general logic and components, but also introduces two important new dimensions. The first is the clearer presence of feedback relationships between the methodological components. The second is the insertion of these components within a context, which is underrepresented in McLoughlin. It is a double context, both a strong institutional context and a clearly present social context, represented by public participation and foreshadowing the later collaborative planning.

2.2. Other Modern and Related Approaches to Land-Use Planning

2.2.1. The Liberal Theories

In the following I shall try to test the relevance of McLoughlin’s systemic components for land-use planning methodology through a systematic comparison of the other approaches included in the selected corpus with the comprehensive approach. The approaches discussed below should not be seen as an exhaustive list of possible planning approaches, although I feel they are fairly representative of the field.

John Friedmann’s action-centred model opposes the orientation of McLaughlin towards the decision-making process. From his early writings, Friedmann advocates a shift from rational decisions to action. He believes that, when planning and action are unified into one operation, “it is extremely difficult empirically” to conceptually distinguish methodological phases: what is considered as phases is not prior to action, but part of it [12] (pp. 311–312)—Figure 4.

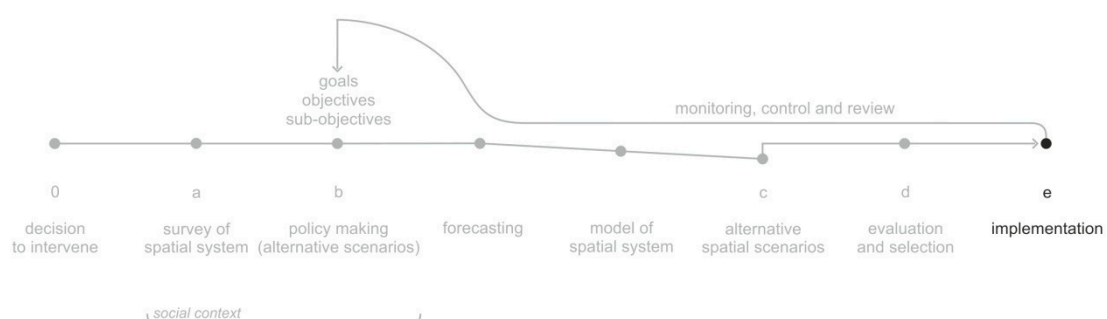


Figure 4. The exclusive emphasis on implementation, according to Friedmann’s [12] action-centred land-use planning model, with the comprehensive model’s components in the background. Gray circle: lack of the corresponding McLoughlin component. Dark circle: the central component.

Taylor agrees with him on the matter of the importance of rational action and also criticises the stages of the rational process for their linearity. In contrast to Friedmann, he considers it crucial to be able to conceptually distinguish between the different components of the rational process, provided their interrelations are not omitted [3] (pp. 113–118)—provided, that is, that the feedback between components is taken into account.

Friedmann's action-planning model marks the emergence of implementation theory [13] (pp. 359, 368). While for Friedmann McLoughlin's components are valid, but indistinguishable and absorbed by implementation, other implementation theorists dispense with them altogether. Their argument is that practical action implies the rejection of planning policy and plans and the exclusive focusing on action, with the result that there is no path from policy to implementation and thus the latter cannot be considered as putting policy into effect—A view they have in common with the action-centred model. Against this view, Taylor argues—rightly in my opinion—that even if policy is adjusted to implementation, “implementation involves, unavoidably, ‘putting policy . . . into effect’” [3] (pp. 114, 119–122).

Charles E. Lindblom's disjointed incremental planning dates from the end of the 1950s. While his aim is not land-use planning, his approach nevertheless represents a global planning theory. To the “root method”, which later became the comprehensive-rational, i.e., procedural view, Lindblom opposes his “branch method” of “successive limited comparisons”, based on the following assumptions:

(a) Policy making consists in close successive approximations to desired objectives, which change with each reconsideration.

(b) Quick consecutive steps avoid big leaps, which demand predictions beyond our knowledge, and allow predictions based on the knowledge of previous similar steps, testing of the previous predictions, transition to the next step if the decision was successful, and the quick correction of a previous error.

(c) Alternative policies under examination must arbitrarily exclude important policies, be limited in number, and differ little between them and from actual policies.

(d) The comparison between alternative policies and their impact must be empirical and not systematic. A good policy is that which is accepted by administrators, even if they disagree about the values it represents or are not able to explain what it is good for.

(e) Values cannot be posed before policy making, because it is not possible to identify them independently from it and they cannot be ranked.

(f) Similar policies involve similar combinations of values. For each policy, a main value and a limited set of accompanying values must be selected, ignoring even important values and their rankings.

(g) This method of policy making follows current practice, which goes by stages and without leaps. The knowledge following from successive comparisons in time marginalises or even eliminates the need for theory, which is useful only for knowledge of a more general level [14].

Lindblom's approach has the advantage of realism, simplicity and flexibility, but also many drawbacks. Epistemologically, it adopts empiricism and the empirical methodology of trial and error, both of which fail to realise that experience is never independent from an underlying theory; moreover, this worldview does not leave any space for important changes [15] (pp. 220–229). Politically, it is conservative, because it considers policies as the outcome of collaborating individuals; socially, it has an individualistic view of action and society; and economically, it follows from the free-competition view of the economy and its adaptive realism amounts to the liberal subordination to the market [11] (pp. 153–154), [15] (pp. 220). It not only impedes important changes, but also hinders us from seeing tendencies to change and conceiving broader directions, at the same moment leading to bureaucratic and uninventive decisions.

Figure 5 shows the methodological components of the incremental approach, on the basis of the preceding discussion, mapped against the background of McLoughlin's proposal. The components

that make sense only as applied to space are missing, as may be expected from a political approach, and thus the components (c) and (d) of the figure must be interpreted in a non-spatial, non-land-use, sense, but many of the other components of comprehensive planning are in fact exploited by incremental planning. There are two major components, policy making and implementation, and a contextual element is taken into account; this, however, is not Faludi's institutional and social context, but the market, regulating the whole process as the context of implementation. Faludi, in his contrast of incremental and rational-comprehensive planning, attributes their differences to different conceptions of the bureaucratic planning system and concludes that the former is faithful to planning practice but should not be preferred, while the latter is a reliable and desirable ideal which is not unrealistic [11] (pp. 153–168).

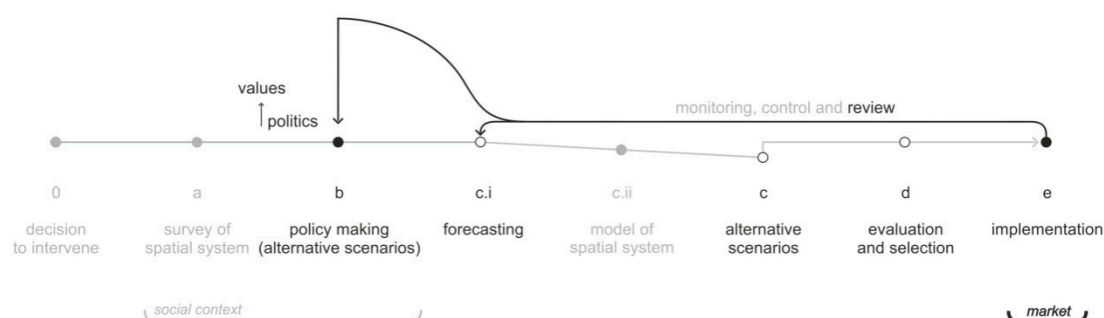


Figure 5. The elements of incremental economic planning, according to Lindblom [14], in diagrammatic form, with the comprehensive model's components in the background. White circle: coincidence with McLoughlin's component. Gray circle: lack of the corresponding McLoughlin component. Dark circle: the central component, also included in McLoughlin's components. Below the axis: contextual factors.

Two other approaches within the same liberal tradition may usefully be mentioned. The first is the pragmatic approach, originating in the U.S. and limited mainly to that country. It is founded on the philosophy of pragmatism, which adopts an empiricist epistemology and is hostile to general theory, limiting itself to empirical data without any search for deeper interpretative causes; it rejects any "absolute" (that is, theoretical) truth, embraces liberal ideology and focuses on the actions of a community. One of the main representatives of this approach is Philip Harrison [16] (p. 158), [2] (pp. 128–133, 139, 146). The pragmatic approach is very similar to Lindblom's, formulated about a quarter of a century ago. A new development of pragmatism, linguistic pragmatism (which is not embraced by all pragmatists), has assimilated the postmodern views on language and communication and in the field of planning tends to be a mixture of pragmatic ideas with collaborative and postmodern planning. There is the belief that the inevitable conflicts of opinions can be solved through discourse ("conversation"), a view aligned with mainstream pragmatism (see [16] (pp. 159–160, 170), [2] (pp. 129, 133, 140)).

The main difference between pragmatic and incremental planning lies with the issue of values, because pragmatism gives them a position of preponderance and relates them to specific communities with their own norms. The primary concern of pragmatism is ethical deliberation, based on a purposeful and future-oriented human judgement, and social solidarity between the members of the community in view of social action; it is believed that this process is only possible within the pluralistic context of liberal democracy. The drawback of such a view is that it ignores the distribution of power within communities. This is an issue that acquired central importance after the work of Michel Foucault and then entered the pragmatic problematic. It was later recognised even by Lindblom himself and takes the form of a utopian wish in Harrison's pragmatic planning as "a concern with the productive use of power" [16] (pp. 158, 161, 162, 166–170), [2] (pp. 129–141), [17] (pp. 118, 119).

Social action is, for pragmatism, inseparable from values. Values and social action, together with the consequences of such action, constitute the nucleus of pragmatism, a conceptualisation opposed to general principles and the priority of methodology. Contrary to procedural planning, for pragmatic

planning the ends are not established *a priori*, but take form from the integration of people into the world and the possibilities offered by specific situations; there is an interaction between experience and situation.

The major pragmatist ideas (as presented by Charles Hock based on the views of Thomas Harper and Stan Stein) may be grouped into two unequal groups. The first group, by far the richer, focuses on knowledge and values and is composed of two unequal sub-groups. The first sub-group, again much richer, refers to general principles about the relativity and freedom of knowledge and the relativity of truth, as well as to more specific planning ideas about the synthesis of different views. The second sub-group includes just one idea, the importance of community for the individual. The first group touches upon matters of methodology, arguing against the analytical approach to dynamic systems, such as those that constitute the object of planning, and for a trial-and-error approach [17] (p. 121).

Methodology, rejected—together with grand theory—by pragmatic planning, is replaced by an “attitude” towards planning, to use Harrison’s term. Harrison develops this attitude in 12 points, more oriented to planning than the above ideas, which I would arrange into three groups. The first calls on us to adopt for planning an approach that is creative, as against a scientific and dogmatic approach—in other words, it calls for ad hoc improvisations, i.e., small narratives. The second relates to values and encourages us to adopt open goals, corresponding to the norms of the interested community (part of which are the norms of the community of planners), or even diverging from them if required by specific situations, as well as contributing to building and extending social solidarity while respecting difference—a point of overlapping, as we shall see, with collaborative planning. Finally, the third group actually has a methodological character and advocates integrating the lessons of experience, adapting to the specificity of situation, relating ideas to action intelligently and experimentally and being oriented towards outcomes and consequences. “Instrumental reasoning” is not rejected, but is given a vague place within the “planning processes” [16] (pp. 160–161, 163, 166–167, 169, 170), [17] (pp. 119, 122, 127).

As in the case of incremental planning, the central components of pragmatic planning are policy making, now founded on values, and implementation, with its consequences (Figure 6); there is a linear connection between the two, since there is a direction from policy, through the means of action, to implementation. The context surrounding implementation is no longer specifically the market, but an unspecified “situation”; this as such does not exclude the market, but the emphasis is on another contextual factor, the one offering the value-input, namely community. The lack of McLoughlin’s stage 0 in Figure 6—not to mention the great number of other things missing—should not come as a surprise, because, as Hoch [17] (p. 127) explains, “Instead of knowing first *what to do* and how to do it, the pragmatist emphasizes contextual inquiry” (my italics).

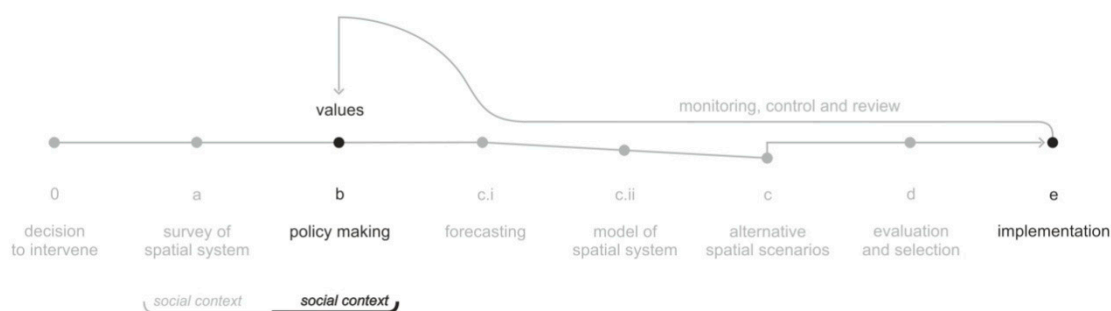


Figure 6. The elements of pragmatic land-use planning, according to Harrison [16], in diagrammatic form, with the comprehensive model’s components in the background. Gray circle: lack of the corresponding McLoughlin component. Dark circle: the central component, also included in McLoughlin’s components. Below the axis: contextual factors.

The second liberal approach comes from the neo-liberal political movement of the New Right, which emerged in the 1970s. This approach downgrades planning altogether, as an aspect of a social

democracy which it considers to be excessively interventionist and ineffective in decision making. State urban and regional planning ends up, according to it, working counter to the market, which is more efficient. The neo-liberal strategy aims at the reworking of the relationship between the state and the market, based on faith in the virtues of the market and the need to limit state power and the planning institutions, but also to reinforce the role of the state in introducing marketing principles in planning [18] (p. 105).

From this logic follow two tendencies: a mild position, accepting a limited planning, provided it supports the market, and a strong position that demands the rejection of planning and leaving the market totally free from constraints. The Thatcherite period in Britain is an example of the first tendency and certainly belongs to operational land-use planning theories, but also reminds us that the latter may originate either from planning theorists, with their inescapable implicit or explicit political ideology, or from politicians, directly specifying their general political ideology in planning terms, so that they formulate a planning policy rather than a planning theory, as is the case with Thatcherism.

The Thatcherite alteration of the established planning system as such was not very radical, but nevertheless led to a series of changes, mainly of an institutional nature and all aiming to support the market—thus converging as incremental planning—such as the simplification of planning regulations, new instructions concerning the operation of the planning system and a widening of the category of development proposals not requiring planning permission [3] (pp. 130–1390, [2] (pp. 90, 105, 117–120)). It is clear that this planning policy was totally uninterested in planning theory, and neo-liberal planning has been in practice an amalgamation of previous planning tendencies under the neo-liberal umbrella ideology. The fact is that the neo-liberal planning ideas, such as city marketing and the Urban Development Projects aiming at the creation or radical renewal of certain urban areas, were universalised (Baeton 2018: 105, 109–110). Neo-liberal planning essentially revolves around practical matters concerning implementation, whence the poverty of Figure 7.

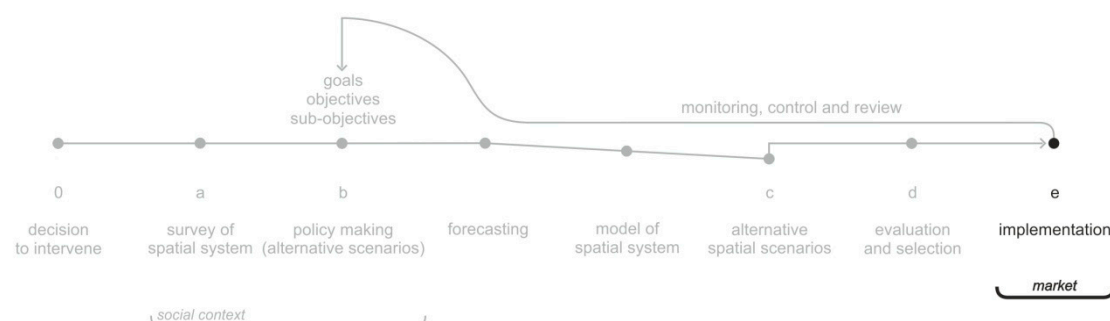


Figure 7. The exclusive emphasis on implementation, according to neo-liberal land-use planning models, with the comprehensive model's components in the background. Gray circle: lack of the corresponding McLoughlin component. Dark circle: the central component. Below the axis: contextual factors.

The incremental, pragmatic and neo-liberal approaches are politically liberal planning theories, and all three of them, together with implementation theory, are methodologically action planning theories. The pragmatic approach is the only one among them with the political and sociological characteristic of addressing the interested community, thus setting the stage for democratic participation. This is the privileged context of participatory planning theories, which I shall discuss below after advocacy planning and collaborative planning.

2.2.2. The Participatory Planning Theories

Advocacy planning appeared in the U.S. in the early 1960s and in its initial form shares with incremental and pragmatic planning (which it preceded by about 20 years) the emphasis on policy and implementation, while accepting stages like those of comprehensive planning; it supported a stable

planning methodology with similar distinct steps, as well as the formulation of alternative scenarios and their assessment. However, it focused on the couple policy–implementation, in which special emphasis was on the political component, considered to be composed of values (for a quite similar analysis, see [9] (pp. 137–138)). The main divergence from comprehensive planning is the conception of the decision-making subject, because for advocacy planning, values should be formulated not only by the planner, but mainly by the clients, in the sense not only of the immediate client, the employer, but also the ultimate clients, the people affected by the plan, with the awareness that there can be disagreements between them [19]. Thus, the component of policy making is marked by the context of public participation.

Soon this socio-political position became the nucleus of advocacy planning, as we may observe from the development of the thought of Paul Davidoff, who is mainly preoccupied with the evaluation of the plans, because they too appeal to the value system. Simultaneously, he seems to consider that two more of what I have called the components of the comprehensive approach, namely survey and forecasting, are necessary parts of the planning process (Figure 8). Davidoff’s democratic advocacy or plural planning is founded on political and social values coming from the public involved, the planning agency and the planner. However, the substantive alternative proposals must come from the interest group and—in opposition to comprehensive planning—not follow from the planner’s technical choices. The planner must convince when needed the client agency and also help the interest group to clarify its ideas. Davidoff argues that the professional planner may oppose official plans and defend alternative plans proposed by interest groups, as well as personally prepare minority plans for low-income people. Thus, for Davidoff the alternative plans do not derive from the planner, as prescribed by the “‘rational’ theories of planning”. The planner may be a technician, but he/she is mainly an advocate, a legal person involved in political dialogue, a profile determined by the adversary nature of advocacy planning [20] (pp. 277, 279–287, 291).

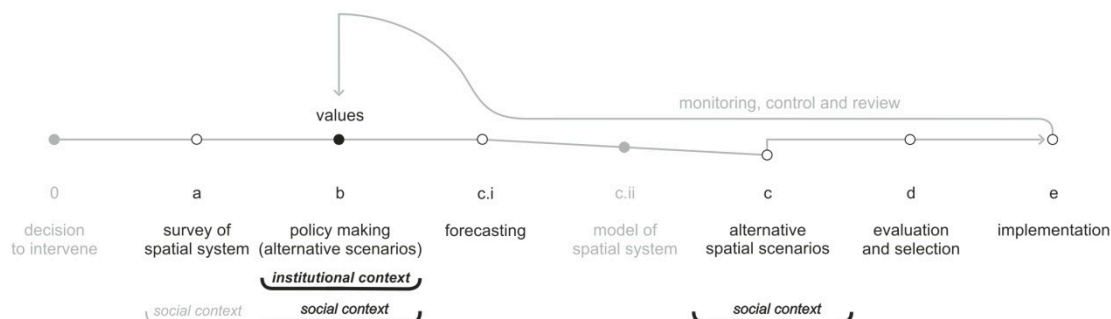


Figure 8. The elements of advocacy land-use planning, according to Davidoff [20], in diagrammatic form, with the comprehensive model’s components in the background. White circle: coincidence with McLoughlin’s component. Gray circle: lack of the corresponding McLoughlin component. Dark circle: the central component, also included in McLoughlin’s components. Below the axis: contextual factors.

Taylor points out that the implementation approach brought to the foreground the importance of the planner’s interpersonal skills of communication and negotiation, with an emphasis on the first term and an appeal to Jürgen Habermas’s socio-philosophical theory, and this conceptualisation led to communicative planning theory, which emerged in the end of the 1980s [3] (pp. 122–125). We should mention that there is also a third position. Buunk and van der Weide [21] adopt the view of a “substantive” rationality, as against both “technical-instrumental” rationality and “communicative” rationality, which seeks to identify peoples’ underlying values with the help of “discursive” (i.e., discourse) analysis based on a limited corpus of relevant documents and interviews.

In a discussion of communicative planning, we should not forget Faludi’s collaborative process. It is here that Patsy Healey’s collaborative planning belongs. Allmendinger [2] (pp. 33, 196, 239) considers collaborative planning post-positivist or neo-modernist; we should add that it has strong

postmodern influences. It overlaps to an important degree with advocacy and pragmatic planning on the issues of democratic planning, citizens' participation and the centrality of values.

Healey writes that the influences on her work came from urban institutional sociology and regional economic geography, policy theory as related to the dynamics of the governance of spatial change, urban political economy, phenomenology, social anthropology and planning theory. Her interest is focused on the institutionalist analysis of the micro-scale of social and economic networks, in opposition, as she states, to the macro-scale of political economy; this micro-scale is characterised by cultural diversity, different ways of seeing the world and thinking about social relations, and different values and interests. She wants to formulate normative principles for a communicative practice in public space, based on citizens' participation and aiming at a strategic consensus-building. For Healey, the strategic process of spatial planning is an interpretative process, of an inclusionary nature and on the basis of participatory discursive democracy. She notes that this approach may today be seen as too radical and idealistic, but urges planning theorists and practitioners to embrace it with its "utopian edge" [22] (for example, pp. 5, 57, 71, 237, 316; [23] pp. 238–239, 252).

In the context of her institutionalist approach, Healey conceptualises planning as a case of collaborative governance consisting of two interconnected levels: the "hard infrastructure" of the abstract systems of formal institutions, political, administrative and legal, based on rules, rights, duties, competences and resources, and the "soft infrastructure" of informal relations and relation-building within the political communities of stakeholders; hence the combination of the technical knowledge of experts and governance agencies with the moral values and emotive appreciation of the stakeholders. The first level of the above is the planning system, the second the planning practices, and they correspond, for Healey, to Anthony Giddens's structure and agency respectively.

Healey's planning methodology (because she does formulate one, in spite of her rhetoric) evolves within this general context, but succumbs from the very start to a major fallacy by reversing the synchronic (in the wide sense) structural influence between the two levels. The five key parameters for the restructuring of the "hard" infrastructure of the local institutional level come, according to Healey, from below, since its aim is simply to support the processes of the soft level. Thus, she holds the utopian view that the hard level can be transformed voluntarily—In non-revolutionary situations into a "structure of challenges" constraining and modifying the centres of power (cf. Figure 9—[22] (for example, pp. xiii, 34, 45–49, 72–73, 86, 199–200, 231–232, 238, 240, 286–289). But here she misinterprets Giddens, on whom she is supposedly based, who states exactly the opposite, because he explicitly differentiates between three rhythms of temporality, from the immediate interaction between actors of everyday life to the "long-term reproduction of *institutions* across the generations", institutions "which 'stretch' over long time-space distances" [24] (pp. 28, 53). For Giddens, then, institutions have a relative structural stability and are not shaken by local dynamics (which in the case of land-use planning are limited in scope, although frequent).

Healey tries to avoid both the linearity of the comprehensive model and the term "methodology" and wants planning to revolve around a set of "questions" to be answered; these questions are answered within the context of "sub-processes" [22] (pp. 268–282, 310, 320, 325–326), [23] (pp. 242–252). The issues attached to these "questions", somewhat rearranged, are presented below:

Question 0: opening of the strategy-making process. This is undertaken by initiators/activators generally belonging to the institutional level. This is the initial given of the planning practice and is considered by Healey as the first step; she integrates it into the following question as the next step.

Question a: constitution of the arena. The major task of the initiators is, according to Healey, to define two issues. The first issue is the determination of the community of stakeholders. It is composed of different "discourse communities" and it is not limited to the people in the interested spatial community, but extends beyond it to all people concerned with the (expected) topic of discussion. The second issue is the definition of the arenas in which the public discussion will take place.

Question b: definition of the context and style of discourse. This sub-process is, according to Healey, the necessary condition for policy-making and the whole planning process. It corresponds to the issues

of what will be discussed and how. The umbrella of the issues to be discussed concerns spatial and environmental planning of neighbourhoods, towns, urban regions and regions [22] (pp. 5, 57, 61, 83).

This position has a double drawback. First, it is not easy to conceptualise an arena at the scale of the “urban region”, let alone at the regional scale. Second, “spatial” is too wide a term, since it does not define land uses specifically (there is, for example, a spatial economic planning or the ecological planning of natural systems).

This is the reason why I insist on using the no longer fashionable term of “land-use” planning. I see the 2004 inclination of the British Labour government towards the use of the term “spatial” planning as leading to confusion in respect to the field and the actual possibilities of urban and regional planning.

The environment also is either too general a concept, or, if taken in its strict sense as the natural environment, would refer to an object quite different from (social) land uses—cf. [25] (pp. 97–99). Healey’s planning wants to be all-encompassing, since she considers that the relational webs targeted can be extended to encompass the natural world and defines planning as interrelating economic, social and environmental issues [22] (pp. for example 5, 28, 58, 69, 82, 235–236). I do not doubt that these issues are important for land-use planning, but this kind of imperialistic (on the part of land-use planners) and confused approach obliterates the specificity of land-use planning and its demarcation from other forms of planning, such as economic or social planning.

Healey compares the issue of what will be discussed in this sub-process to the survey stage of the planning tradition. However, this is a misunderstanding, because, once the object of planning (what will be discussed) is settled, the survey that follows is primarily a technical operation of gathering data and not the product of further open discussions. Of course, this technical part is advantageously complemented by the expression of views, values and needs on the part of the stakeholders.

For Healey, the same sub-process involves an open handling of issues and of the manner in which they are discussed. As for the manner of discussion, Healey refers to the style, process and spatial organisation of the discussion, the need for the different “languages” (i.e., frames of thought) to be comprehensible and the need to respect the personality, not only of present but also of absent people.

Healey gives special weight to the meaning of the issues for different people, and believes (echoing Husserl’s phenomenology) that it is possible for them to free themselves from acquired assumptions. Her reference to the use of deconstruction for the revelation of hidden values is excessive empirically, given the huge work needed to accomplish such a task for great numbers of people, and not useful theoretically, since Jacques Derrida never gave any precise instructions for textual analysis. Discourse analysis, also referred to by Healey [23] (pp. 240, 247), is indeed a possible method for textual analysis, but anyone who has worked with similar linguistic and semiotic methods is aware that the volume of information to be processed must necessarily be limited; on the contrary, the systematic analysis of the chaotic material coming from the arena, if it is possible to record it with some accuracy, would need much more time than planning itself.

Question c: sorting and organisation of the arguments. The aim of this question is to mobilise the participants to fully conceive the meaning of the issues discussed and to express their values. This process is orchestrated by the experts, in their role as “facilitators”, who thus undertake a double role, their other role being that of “common” participants expressing their spontaneous point of view. The expected outcome of this process of “expert facilitation” is that it will lead to the revelation of common lines of thought. Strangely, there is no special reference to urban or regional planners, and the technical language is considered to be only one among the many “languages” used, ignoring its different composition as a function of the issue to be dealt with. Tore Sager [26] (pp. 95, 96), arrives at a similar conclusion when he observes that the change from rational to communicative planning is a change from expert planning supplemented by participation to participatory planning supplemented by the technical-economic expert and that it is not clear how communicative planners can use their technical-economic knowledge.

Question (c) is composed of two parts: (c.i) which overlaps with (b), and (c.ii) the further development of (c.i) and (b) through the facilitators.

Question d: creation of a policy discourse. This discourse is a new system of meaning, resulting from the elaboration of all the discourses heard in the arena, which gives meaning to problems and actions and is embodied within a strategy for action. It interacts with the previous process and in another variant Healey incorporates (c) into (d), considering that there is logically a development from (c.i) to (c.ii) to the end step of (d). The aim of this question is the achievement of a strategic consensus about the major planning issues, a Habermasian idea central to Healey's proposal, which has been repeatedly criticized—See, for example, [26] (p. 101). This consensual proposal takes the form of a “storyline” which was selected gradually among a set of storylines about possible alternative actions developed in the course of the discursive collaborative process. Such a consensus, which, as she states, is not easy to construct or maintain, should be formally sanctioned. Healey believes that a new cultural community is created around this new storyline.

Question e: criticism and maintaining of consensus. According to Healey, there should be a way to challenge the consensus and, thus, there is a need to determine the formal terms for that. On the other hand, actual changes and inevitable reinterpretations of the meaning of policy occur, which is why the agreed policy must be the object of a continuous “reflexive critique”, which Healey compares to the monitoring of “rationalist methodology”. Her reflexive critique is not limited to the assessment of the implications, for the policy to follow, of any kind of change partially influencing the selected storyline, but extends to the problematics of whether the policy discourse still makes sense in view of the possibility that a new storyline has emerged; this is close to the sense of McLoughlin's “review”.

There has been a large front of both enthusiastic approval and criticism of collaborative planning (see f.ex. [27] (pp. 4–15), but neither one deals with my aim, methodology. Healey emphasises that the planning process is location-specific, must each time be invented locally and cannot be formulated in a specific process model, thus giving the impression that she adopts the model of small narratives. She maintains that her list of sub-processes is not really a methodology, but rather a set of guiding questions. However, they bring to the surface the components of the “grand narrative” of comprehensive planning (Figure 9). The validity of this last observation is shown by her admission that rational planning brought important innovations which any alternative approaches “would do well to safeguard” and that her “approach in some respects . . . revisits” it. The same view is expressed by Sager, who considers communicative planning in general as a revision and extension of instrumental rationality, which, for him, is a strong protection against the relativity of postmodernism [26] (p. 93). In fact, collaborative planning is an ad hoc mixture of postmodern small narratives and the classical modernist grand narrative—see also [3] (p. 153). The presence of the comprehensive model in collaborative planning is also demonstrated by Healey's criticism that the sub-processes she proposes must be considered “interactively, often in parallel rather than sequentially”—[22] (pp. 251–52, 268–69, 282; [23] (pp. 251–253), because this is a criticism of the procedural model, whose components are implied.

Healey is right in pointing out the feedback nature between the planning sub-processes, but she overstates the lack of linearity in her own proposal, which is not straightforward but inescapably present. In general terms, Healey starts with the initial decision to intervene (question 0)—which clearly could not be found in the middle or at the end of the planning process; then she adds something missing from comprehensive planning, the constitution of the arena (a); she continues with the planning survey as understood by her, adding the communicational dimension (b)—necessarily the survey must precede policy; she extends (b) into the next question (c) and the latter constitutes a further development of the issues under discussion, which aims at their understanding—this is a given prerequisite and part of policy-making, that is, of her next question (d); in the context of (d), alternative scenarios are examined, before the selection of the final proposal—by definition, the proposal cannot come before the formulation of alternative scenarios; finally, monitoring and review follow—which have no sense if there is no proposal.

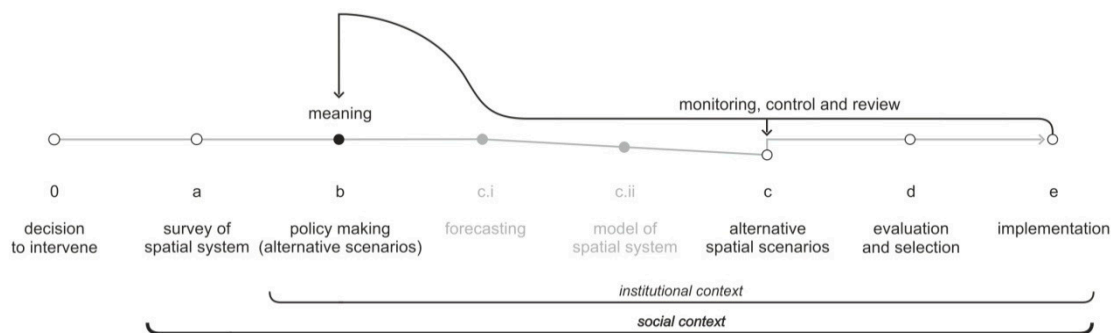


Figure 9. The sub-processes of collaborative spatial planning, according to Healey [22,23], in diagrammatic form, with the comprehensive model’s components in the background. White circle: coincidence with McLoughlin’s component. Gray circle: lack of the corresponding McLoughlin component. Dark circle: the central component, also included in McLoughlin’s components. Below the axis: contextual factors.

2.3. The Postmodern Approaches to Land-Use Planning

While collaborative planning presents these convergences with modernist comprehensive planning, it revolves, on the other hand, around a set of concepts that are central to postmodern theories. The social group of stakeholders becomes a “discourse community”, planning an “interpretative process”, the proposal a “storyline” and monitoring “reflexive critique”. This overemphasis given to meaning and communication, and thus semiotics, is the mark of the latest trend in the field, postmodern approaches to planning. We shall take a quick look at this trend, although my references to this corpus are not systematic and are just meant as characteristic examples. As in the previous cases, my concerns are the possible methodological proposals advanced by the followers of this trend, but, as will be clear, we are not given much help on that matter.

Bent Flyvbjerg and Tim Richardson, inspired by Foucault, consider as a satisfactory basis for planning theory the role of the micro-politics of power in the production of knowledge, the control of discourse and the social construction of spaces, disagreeing with the Habermasian consensus. Flyvbjerg and Richardson criticise the excessive importance given to communicative events, for example public meetings, and argue that an important part of politics takes place outside them. However, they still manifest a strong semiotic—in their case literally textual—orientation, because their “planning analytics” proposes to deal with genealogies of planning cases in different contexts. This analytical approach, intended to guide planning practice towards democratic social change, transforms the planner into a “researcher”, to use their term [28] (pp. 44, 51, 53, 59, 61).

Power is indeed an important factor, but limiting the discussion to *a priori* issues obscures other major planning issues, varying from one case to another. Also, planning studies are a useful material for analysis, but a theory is not constructed inductively, because it presupposes established explicit principles. The planner should indeed be a researcher, but he/she is not only a theorist and his/her aim should also be to go beyond the text to the material world (whatever its epistemological definition) and acquire, as in any profession, his/her own practical experience. Besides these comments on theory, no comments on methodology can be made, because Flyvbjerg and Richardson do not propose any.

It is certainly not the planning perspective that Robert A. Beauregard serves when he criticises modernist planning on the basis of postmodern cultural criticism and semiotic terminology. As he states, postmodernism rejects grand narratives and general social theories, abandons critical discourse in favour of the ironic comment, and adopts multiple discourses. All these positions, according to him, question planning theory, which is just a “master narrative”, offering a single planning process and a single master plan. To this single planning process he opposes the existence of many “narratives” linked to the variety of interested communities.

Beauregard translates the above planning concepts into semiotic terms as “plot” and “text” respectively, equivalent to Healey’s “questions” and “storyline”. This is all we are told about planning

itself. On the other hand, Beauregard does not neglect the material social conditions surrounding a plan and also argues for a partial reconstruction of modernist planning, linked to postmodern ideas, which would conserve the positive elements of modernist planning, such as its reformatory character and mediating function within the state, emphasising the prerequisite of a democratic context [29] (pp. 109, 112, 120–121). Here, we have a statement of principles but no planning theory, even less methodology.

Mark Oranje accurately identifies what I considered an overemphasis on meaning with his description of the postmodern attitude to planning: the planning proposal becomes a planning “text”, the texts are “stories/narratives” produced by the rules of specific “language games”, the planners are persuasive future-oriented “storytellers” and the “reader”-researcher of the planning texts is a “textual” analyst, seeking out the hidden rules and meanings of the language game and its players. Oranje thinks that textual analysis may be useful, but also that in respect to planning theory there is the danger that the continuous penetration into textual analysis will end up as intertextual references from text to text, instead of referring to the material world. He also disagrees with the fragmentation of planning theory into a multiplicity of small narratives, which are attached to the local, unique and different and neglect similarities, and instead argues in favour of mixed theories [30] (pp. 178, 181–182). As is the case with Beauregard, Oranje is looking for a synthesis between modernist and postmodernist planning—Beauregard embracing the semiotic terminology, Oranje distancing himself from it, indeed for a middle-ground theory, but, like Beauregard, he remains on the level of a statement of principles.

As we see from the above, the semiotic orientation of the postmodern approaches implies a strong textual view of planning which is highly restrictive. This is not to deny the usefulness of a theoretically sound semiotic view of planning, but one related and limited to the cultural/ideological sphere incorporated into the production of a plan, without transforming the whole planning process into a semiotic discourse. When the planning text as such, and not the actual planning process and implementation, becomes the object of (a semiotic) analysis, a fallacy emerges. Like any other object, a text may be viewed from different perspectives and one, but only one, of these is the semiotic perspective. Each perspective, when consistent, as it should be, provides information only about its own field of relevance and the same manifestly holds for the semiotic point of view. A biological, an astronomical or an engineering text may be the object of semiotic analysis, but such an analysis does not involve any discussion of the specifics of biology, astronomy or engineering (what in semiotics is called the “referent”). It is a kind of literary approach, concentrating on the text *as text* and totally indifferent to the material referent. As a result, and considering the dismissal of coherent approaches (as well as the experimental and amateurish use of postmodern theorising by planners), it does not come as a surprise that the postmodern theorising on planning fails to offer any useful methodological directives.

Allmendinger notes, correctly, that it is unclear what postmodern planning is, but he nevertheless feels that postmodern theory offers a powerful critique of planning. He also believes in the possibility of a postmodern theory and practice of planning free from what he calls the extreme version of postmodernism, and thus the principles for planning that he states presuppose the invention of a non-extreme version of postmodernism, a very heavy task indeed to be undertaken by a planner [2] (pp. 180–181, 184–185, 237, 238–239). It is difficult to identify the divergences between these principles and collaborative planning, since both have a touch of a late May ’68 manifesto. In respect to methodology, Allmendinger’s main emphasis is given to a utopian democratic functioning of the planning context, i.e., a radical grassroots democracy, as opposed to representative democracy, which is seen as connected to the control of decision-makers, while the planning processes “need to be invented and agreed anew”, something which echoes the postmodern choice of non-theory and, hence, non-methodology. Note here that the view concerning the singularity of the planning process for each case (which is a direct transfer of the Lyotardian concept of small narratives) is closely akin to the traditional Anglo-Saxon empiricist idiographic position (also persistent in Anglo-Saxon human geography).

This lack of interest in methodology seems to be widespread today in the land-use planning field; we observe it in approaches very different from the ones discussed above, such as the “just city” approach, inspired by political economy. In the views of Susan S. Fainstein, for example, a theoretical conception is not lacking, but it concerns general social, political and economic matters, while planning is identified with the achievement of the qualities of a selected target city, in her case Amsterdam. The city is described as an empirical list of positive features, without any spatial theory interrelating them, and planning methodology is not part of the rationale of the author [31] (pp. 466–471).

3. The Ghost of the Procedural Model and the Middle-Ground Theory

The search for the prerequisites of a middle-ground theory, which needs to rely strongly on a middle-ground methodology, was founded on a double assessment: the inflexibility of an ossified “grand narrative” and the paralysing effects of a practice consisting exclusively of “small narratives” constantly reinvented.

The comparisons made above between planning theories demonstrates the structural importance of procedural planning. Reference to it, and thus direct or indirect reference to McLoughlin, is the rule for the modern approaches to planning examined, neo-liberal planning excepted. In the case of incremental planning, the reference has an oppositional character although it involves very similar components. Pragmatic planning accepts theoretically the procedural approach as part of a broader context. Advocacy and collaborative planning integrate it operationally within a broader context. In other words, almost all planning approaches revolve around the components of procedural planning. Healey looks back to it, in spite of her own very different view, and Allmendinger ascertains its continuing strong influence and argues, as does Healey, that we must not reject it as a tool internal to planning, even if we reject it in its pure form [2] (pp. 49–50, 60), a point of major importance, as we shall see.

As we know, the comprehensive-rational approach was subject to acute criticism starting from the 80's. It was accused of being representative of the optimism of the Enlightenment and modernity, positivist, over-generalised and ahistorical, technocratic and based on instrumental rationality, bureaucratic, apolitical and socially insensitive because it leaves the responsibility for decision-making with the politician and the planner, linear and silent on matters of implementation—see [2] (pp. 32–33, 85, 90, 93, 96–97, 148), [3] (pp. 60, 74, 77–78, 95–96, 113–14), [32] (pp. 1, 3, 4). These criticisms are not unjustified, up to a point, but, in rejecting the problematic parts of procedural planning, they risk rejecting its capital contribution to the operational aspect of land-use planning theory.

This fact leads us to revisit the criticisms addressed to the procedural model referred to above:

(a) Yes, comprehensive planning, and in general procedural planning, is the product of modernity and positivism. In the postmodern era, there has been a fierce criticism against positivism and formalism, which challenges positivism as a whole. This kind of certainty presupposes a superior standpoint from which to pronounce it. Adherents of postmodernism think that they have found such an external and superior standpoint, but it is in fact only different and its supposed superiority (accompanied by a suspicion of evolutionism) is just a matter of confrontation between epistemological paradigms. We should note that there is a close historical kinship between postmodernism and modernism: postmodernism is the Americanised form of post-structuralism, which in turn is the direct non-positivist descendant of positivist structuralism, turned into postmodernism by a reinterpretation of the German philosophical tradition of Romanticism—for a discussion of post-structuralism as “neo-structuralism”, see [33] (pp. 7–30). Beyond a certain point, the wholesale criticism of positivism ceases to be sound and becomes ideological, because postmodernism is on principle against scientific thought. There is no sense in dismissing positivism as a whole, when it is the dominant paradigm in the positive sciences and strongly present in any quantitative approach in the social sciences. It offers tools at more specific levels than general principles that cannot be found in any other paradigm.

(b) Comprehensive planning is indeed over-generalised and appears to be ahistorical, because it has the rigidity of any ideal model, with the optimism accompanying such constructs. On the

other hand, the fact that it has proved to be theoretically and practically useful in a persistent manner indicates that it is not throughout an abstract and utopian model.

(c) The labels “technocratic” and “bureaucratic” have a whiff of the post-May’68 negative view of instrumental rationality. It has been argued that the rationality in planning did not follow from rationalist philosophy, but from Herbert A. Simon’s behavioural model and Talcott Parsons’s rational action theory [9] (p. 135). Planning combines rationality with socially sensitive matters and thus the criticism should refer only to its misplaced use for such matters. The reasoned participation of instrumental rationality in planning theory is generally not rejected—see also [4] (pp. 327–328, 340, 341)—and thus this criticism is also only partly correct.

(d) The criticism that the comprehensive model is apolitical and socially insensitive, related to the point above, is careless and once more only partly valid. McLoughlin focuses on the dialogue between planners and politicians, but he is also well aware of the importance of formal and informal public opinion, although he does not elaborate on this, and Healey’s proposal is extremely close to Faludi’s collaborative conception of rational planning. Thus, these criticisms are only very partly true. They are also unfair when compared to the “city survey–social spirit and individuality of the city–town planning scheme (plan)” model of Patrick Geddes—[34] (mainly chapters XVI and XVII). This “survey–analysis–plan” model, based on evolutionary biology but closely comparable to the architectural model of a different origin, was the standard methodology of land-use planning from 1920 to 1960, though during those decades there were proposals suggesting many of the principles of procedural planning—cf. [9] 126–127, 129. The criticism does not stand, because the marked component of the procedural model is precisely policy making.

(e) The accusation of linearity is also careless. It is bibliographically unsound, since some feedback mechanisms are present in McLoughlin’s proposal and are even more present in Faludi’s. Such criticism may be due to a combination of the lack of systematic analysis with rhetoric, as is the case with Healey. But more importantly, it obscures a logical fact of crucial importance for planning. Taylor’s view about the importance of distinguishing the components offered by the rational process, without identifying them with stages linearly connected, was referred to above. This is true from a certain important point of view, because it describes what happens during the planning process. The same author replies, as we saw, to Friedmann’s view that there is no linear connection from policy to implementation by arguing for its inevitable linearity. This logical position, however, throws another light on his criticism of stages, because it indicates that, whatever the feedback dynamics between components *during* the planning process, its *final* coherence cannot but be acquired linearly in a general sense. The idea of stages is not wrong, but partial—see also [35] (pp. 12–13).

(f) The criticism that the model lacks interest in implementation needs clarification. If it concerns the analysis of the sub-components composing it or of the possible types of real contexts of implementation, it is justified. If, on the other hand, it refers to a methodological lack, it is not justified, because McLoughlin foresees both changes during implementation and the assessment of their impact, and further directly relates his model with the revolutionary concept of a kind of circularity of the planning process by requiring periodic reviews.

To conclude, there does not seem to be any structural methodological problem with the procedural model and comprehensive planning. For almost half a century, planning theories in the field of urban and regional planning (and elsewhere) have been revolving incessantly around the methodological components of the comprehensive model. No theory has added any component during this period, while a number of them have left out one or more components. This reference to a common substratum does not come as a surprise if we think of planning practice. The exclusive postmodern focus on difference as a general guiding principle is an abstract epistemological decision, obscuring the factor of similarity. The methodological components of comprehensive planning seem to be, at least at the present stage of our knowledge, the *universal nucleus* of the land-use planning enterprise. In a similar vein, John Muller has stated that: “the attack on the theoretical premises of planning procedure seems unlikely to be sufficiently convincing to overturn the rational method appcart” [9] (p. 151).

Up to now each of the comparisons made were between a certain planning approach and the comprehensive model. It seems useful (and thanks are due to one of the reviewers for this suggestion) to indicate the components of all the approaches studied in a single table (Table 1), so that general comparisons can be made between all models. These comparisons corroborate the conclusion above.

Table 1. The planning components activated by the approaches of the corpus. +: used component. ++: emphasised component.

Components Approach								
	Decision	Survey	Policy	Forecasting	Spatial Model	Scenarios	Evaluation	Implementation
Comprehensive	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Rational	+	+	+	+		+	+	+
Action-centred								++
Incremental			++	+		+	+	++
Pragmatic			++					++
Neo-liberal								++
Advocacy		+	++	+		+	+	+
Collaborative	+	+	++			+	+	+

This paper does not mean to imply that comprehensive planning should be adopted *tale quale*, nor that it does not present structural problems. They are easily discernible: it presupposes a simulation of urban (and regional) space which is far beyond our present knowledge of urban dynamics and was even more so in McLoughlin's time; it integrates within one and the same model a transport planning sub-model, which is once more over-optimistic, as proved by the independent development of transport planning models; it is time-consuming and thus delays the preparation of the plan.

Nor does this argument mean that other approaches have made no contribution to planning theory. They very rightly call attention to the importance of the context social, institutional, economic in which any form of planning occurs. However, the analysis here shows that their contribution lies *only* in the elaboration of contextual elements: the social context, present in McLoughlin and emphasised by Faludi, but becoming central in pragmatic, advocacy and collaborative planning; the institutional context, central to Faludi, very important although finally undermined in collaborative planning and targeted for reformation by it and the neo-liberal New Right; the economic context, central to incremental planning and the neo-liberal approach. The type of context(s) selected, its weight and the nature of its relationship to the components depend on the theory adopted. The components of comprehensive planning appear in almost all cases, which shows that they present a remarkable flexibility and can be integrated within greatly diverging theoretical approaches.

It is not only a matter of components. Comprehensive planning also offers a model for any planning theory, and I do not refer here to its content, but to its *completeness*. A complete theory presupposes the existence of four consecutive levels, each one flexibly deriving from its superior level: an epistemological level (the level of the paradigm), which in the case of comprehensive planning is positivism; a theoretical level; a methodological level actualising theory in practice through concrete operations; and a technical level through which these operations are realised. Comprehensive planning covers extensively all these levels and they are all *necessary* if we intend to do land-use planning theory, not criticism, philosophy or literary studies. Contrary to comprehensive planning, the other theories start with general theoretical statements or empirically and sometimes descend to methodological matters, but do not offer any concrete techniques. In their successive publications, they continue to recycle the same material without ever being able to take the form of a systematic whole. It is striking that much of the energy invested in planning approaches has been focused on the elaboration of a theoretical context, while methodology is weakly represented and techniques are not mentioned at all.

We may now envisage the main lines of a middle-ground theory of urban and regional land-use planning. The standard prerequisites for it—without in any way underestimating the substantive scientific grounding theory and the axiological factors orienting the planning output—are presented below:

(a) Any middle-ground theory of land-use planning is theoretically complete only when it elaborates systematically *all four* of the above levels: epistemology, theory, methodology and techniques.

(b) Starting from whichever theoretical basis has been selected as adequate, a land-use planning theory extends systematically and analytically to *methodology*. The latter is summarised by the logic of the diagrams presented above. They reveal a fact escaping all planning theories. Planning methodology as a whole follows from the *articulation of two registers* having different functions: the first is illustrated by the *axis* including the structural components of planning as formulated by McLoughlin, while the second is the *context* within which these components evolve, including a set of contextual elements (social participation, institutions, the market). The function of the first register are the technical operations of the planner, which take place within the four walls of the planning office, in conjunction with the actions of the decision-making apparatus (the set covered by the structural components), while the function of the second is to provide input for the first register, that is, constraints and values coming from the external environment, the context (see e). The technical part of planning relies on the structural components, but it is *guided* by the values formulated by both the technical operations and the context.

(c) Any middle-ground theory must necessarily include a third register involved in land-use planning: the articulation of other types of planning, such as transport, economic, demographic or environmental (ecological) planning, with the structural components. In this case, these types act as a *framework* providing another kind of input, this time of a technical nature, to the components of planning, an operation also taking place within the planning office – see [36] (pp. 11–12). The framework of land-use planning does not involve the complete planning product of these other types of planning, but only those of their planning elements that are operationally useful for land-use planning. The latter is just one of the different types of planning, each one of which has its own “epistemic object”, to use the expression of Ernest R. Alexander [37] (pp. 93–95, 99, 100 n. 10).

(d) The operations involved within each component and sub-component, which both belong to the technical level—with their possible variations—are explicit and analytical, because without them planning theory is unable to pass to practice. McLoughlin is extremely analytical on this matter, but it is conspicuously lacking in the other proposals. It is very frustrating, for example, not to find any guidelines for carrying out the component of the survey of the planned area, or to be informed about the need to consider alternative scenarios without any technical discussion of the manner of their formulation and assessment.

(e) Any middle-ground theory must make the components of the planning process and their internal sub-components—many, but not all, of which have been systematically investigated by comprehensive planning—a function of possible *formal contexts*, in the form of contextual scenarios linked to existing socio-economic, cultural, political, institutional and legal settings [37] (p. 97). That is, the context not only poses constraints and offers values, but also has an impact on the structural components. In this manner, the middle-ground theory will have the flexibility of choosing each time as a guide one of the models established by the contextual formal scenarios, with as a result the adaptation of the general theory to the national or local context. This implies that: (i) the specific nature—as opposed to the umbrella nature given by the general theory of the components and their internal sub-components is identified and (ii) the umbrella feedbacks between components and between sub-components of the general theory will be specified for each specific case—although it is not probable that there will be significant variation in this matter.

Points (a) to (c) above are of a general theoretical nature and context-independent; point (d) shows a certain context-sensitivity; and point (e) displays the context-sensitive part of planning. This last point does not deny the possibility of a general theory, provided the latter formulates theoretical formal contexts and their impact on the components and their interrelations, that is, provided such a theory builds from the beginning and *in abstracto* its formal contexts.

The normal course to validate a theory is for it to be applied in practice and thus checked and also adjusted to the empirical data. But this is not necessarily the case with land-use planning theory. The reason is that there is already another planning theory, although oddly it has been kept separate from planning theory *stricto sensu*, which is in a position to provide ready-made contextual scenarios, although on a general level. They may replace the scenarios that planning theory would tentatively construct as formal, by providing already tested, real-life empirical scenarios cf. [37] (p. 99). This theory is none other than the one that follows from the study of actual urban and regional planning systems.

An interesting typology of these planning systems has been formulated by Newman and Thornley. They argue that the variety of legal mechanisms between countries influences their approaches to urban planning and the variety of administrative systems influences the application of the plans, and thus they choose as relevant variables for their planning typology national legal and administrative systems [38] (pp. 27–42, 71–75). Their study was preceded by the European Union (EU) project for the Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies and followed by an intensive interest in the construction of a typology for planning systems through large-scale comparisons. Different, but not radically different, typologies have been proposed. The work on the compendium showed that planning systems are fundamentally adapted to the historical traditions of different countries and we understand that these systems are essentially planning cultures, deriving from the wider societal and cultural context. This work resulted in the identification of four different non-exclusive planning traditions, based not only on the variables of the legal family and the distribution of power between central and local government, but also on five additional variables [39] (pp. 1544, 1546, 1549, 1550–1553, 1555); [40] (p. 4).

We may now better understand the structure of a middle-ground theory. Its fundamental structure follows from points (a) to (c), and partially (d), which, *pace* postmodern theorising, constitute a “grand narrative”. This theoretical construction is relativised by two factors: first, by the grounding in a theoretical basis specifically selected in each case, and second by the formulation of a limited number of model contextual settings. These two factors bypass the impasse of “small narratives”, contributing to realistic “middle-ground narratives”, not anchored to an infinity of conjunctural contexts but deriving as variants from a general “grand narrative”.

It follows that there may be more than one middle-ground theory answering the above requirements. But at least they will all respond in a holistic manner to the actual interests of land-use planning, and it will be possible to compare them and assess their usefulness. Perhaps the suggestions above can also provide some clues for the persistent problem of the land-use planning curriculum. I believe, and hope, that the perspective I propose opens a vast field for future research in the field of planning theory.

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