Public Participation in Planning: an intellectual history

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ABSTRACT This paper tracks the changing role of public participation in planning thought. In doing so, the paper shows that the role of public participation in planning is largely determined by the nature of the planning enterprise being undertaken. The definition of the planning problem, the kinds of knowledge used in planning practice, and the conceptualisation of the planning and decision-making context are the important determinants of the extent of participation offered to the public. The paper therefore contributes to thinking about how to evaluate public participation by showing that it can only be understood in terms of the decision-making context in which it is embedded. Specifically, it makes little sense to evaluate public participation in terms that are not shared by the planning model itself.

KEY WORDS Public participation; planning; blueprint planning; synoptic planning; communicative rationality.

Introduction

In recent years, public participation has made a comeback. Whereas a decade ago, the literature was replete with laments about limited opportunities for public involvement (see, for example, Munro-Clarke 1992; Webber & Crooks 1996), participation has become a central feature of making and implementing policy. Indeed, government has been replaced by governance:

... the world has become too complex and our leaders too fallible for anything approaching a universal good even to exist, let alone be reliably located. The new political culture no longer places much faith in solutions imposed from above, increasingly relying instead on a network of decision-making relationships that link government and civil society across many scales. (Van Driesche & Lane 2002, p. 237)

As Rose (2002, p. 1405) observes, we can now discern a host of ‘new technologies of governance’, including governance through communities (Rose 2000; Reddel 2002), ‘Third Way’ approaches (Giddens 1998; Rose 2000), decentralisation of governance to civil society (Fischer 2000), and public–private partnerships (Edwards 2001; Teisman & Klijn 2002). These approaches, while diverse, are unified by the need to involve, variously, citizens, non-governmental...
organisations, and social movements directly and centrally in the development and implementation of policy (Beck 1992).

This paper tracks the changing role of public participation in planning thought. Just as the formal role of citizens has changed, so too have concepts and theories of urban and regional planning (see, for instance, Sandercock 1998). Apart from tracking the correlated changes in thinking about public participation and planning, this paper seeks to demonstrate that the role of public participation in planning is largely determined by the nature of the planning enterprise being undertaken. The way in which planners and policy-makers define their field and approach their work is to a large extent indicated by the role they provide to non-planners. The definition of the planning problem, the kinds of knowledge used in planning practice and the conceptualisation of the planning and decision-making context are the important determinants of the extent of participation offered to the public.

The importance of planning practice to the type and nature of public participation has not been widely recognised in the literature. No systematic examination of the link between planning epistemology and public participation has previously been made. Although there has been recognition that public participation usually serves explicit management purposes (Painter 1992; Sandercock 1994), recognition that opportunities for participation may differ according to particular conceptions of planning has not often been recognised. By correlating various models of planning with Arnstein's famous 'ladder of participation', the paper shows that the model of planning being used determines the role of the public.

The ladder of participation

The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you. (Arnstein 1969, p. 216)

With these words Arnstein delivered her seminal critique of citizen participation in a range of federal (US) urban planning programmes. Her analysis remains pivotal to what continues to be one of the most central debates in the field: to what extent are efforts to involve the public tokenistic, lacking the required degree of delegated authority to make citizen participation meaningful? As Arnstein phrased it, 'there is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcomes of the process' (Arnstein 1969, p. 216). This has been a common refrain. Sandercock (1994, p. 117), for instance, in lamenting the failure of public participation to generate social change, and the dominance of the 'haves' rather than the 'have nots' in planning, argued that the demand for public participation amounted to little more than a 'populist red herring' (see also Robinson 1993; Beatley et al. 1994).

The central point of these pithy criticisms was that if policy-makers and planners seek public participation, it is necessary, indeed axiomatic, that there be a redistribution of power (Arnstein 1969). According to this view, unless citizens have a genuine opportunity to affect outcomes, participation is centrally concerned with 'therapy' and 'manipulation' of participants (Arnstein 1969). Amy (1987) also regarded power as the central variable. He argued that the distribution of power will determine the fairness of a given process because imbalances of power create
persistent patterns of unequal access (Amy 1987). Arnstein (1969) conceived of power in public participation as a ladder or a spectrum ranging from ‘non-participation’ through to ‘degrees of citizen power’. Figure 1 shows Arnstein’s (1969) typology.

Her point, although rather simple, is of fundamental importance. There are gradations of participation in terms of the degree of power or control participants can exercise in seeking to shape the outcome (Arnstein 1969). Importantly, Arnstein’s typology regards consultation (step 4) as ‘tokenism’. Towards the top of the ladder is ‘partnership’, in which participants are able to exert a high degree of control and power, being able to bargain and broker trade-offs with power-holders. The rungs on the ladder serve to sensitise one to the fact that those who invite the public to participate are able to set the terms of that participation: they can seek to ‘educate’ (step 2), ‘inform’ (3), and ‘consult’ (4), or they can delegate power through ‘partnership’ (6) and other means.

Decision-making agencies often prefer to describe the opportunities afforded to relevant publics as ‘consultation’. Consultation has for many years been the dominant approach used by government agencies to gather advice from the public about draft proposals. For those, such as Arnstein (1969) whose analysis pivots on the power of participants, consultation is often dismissed as a tokenistic exercise because it confers little real power (see Arnstein 1969; Pateman 1970; Dennis 1972).

Painter (1992) rejects this analysis on two grounds. First, he argues that these models crudely conceive of power, and confuse ‘power’ with ‘powers’. He argues that it is important to distinguish between potential and actual power. While the ultimate, formal decision-making ‘power’ may rest with institutional decision-makers in a consultative process, to regard this as tokenistic ignores the fact that if the ‘exercise of influence [by participants] is effective, then this formal power is an

![Figure 1. Arnstein's ladder of participation. Source: Arnstein (1969, p. 217).](image-url)
empty shell’ (Painter 1992, p. 23). He argues therefore that formal powers are a significant dimension of consultation and participation, but that understanding power requires an assessment of outcomes, rather than simply resting on an analysis of relative power prior to the occurrence of relevant interactions.

The second criticism Painter (1992) levels at these analyses is that they tend to assume decision-making in policy-making and planning occurs at a single, final point in the process. Such a mistake, ‘which is encouraged by the conflation of participation and power’, ignores the fact that there is rarely an identifiable, or single, ‘point of decision’ in policy-making. As he points out, the decisive events and contributions might come at any point … in policy-making, from setting the agenda, defining problems, collecting information and analysing it, identifying and selecting possible options, legitimising the preferred option by a formal decision, through to implementation and evaluating outcomes. (Painter 1992, p. 24).

To assert, therefore, that genuine participation is only achieved by having power in decision-making ignores the range of benefits which may be associated with being consulted throughout other stages in policy-making and planning. Dialogue and information exchange, which Arnstein (1969) regards as tokenistic, pre-judges the outcome of such interaction (Painter 1992).

The principal utility of this debate in this context is that it reveals that any analysis of public participation in planning must be concerned with both formal and informal policy-making arenas. It also demonstrates that participation in planning can involve the exercise of both formal and informal power. In addition, it suggests that the uses to which public participation can be put depend on the nature of the decision-making processes that they are meant to serve. This conclusion should cause us, therefore, to examine our models of planning. The model of planning, including conceptualisations of the task of the planner and the nature of the planning environment, are of fundamental importance to defining the role of public participation.

**Table 1 Conception of planning and the role for public participation**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Level of participation</th>
<th>Planning tradition</th>
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<th>Planning models</th>
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<tr>
<td>Citizen control</td>
<td>Societal transformation</td>
<td>Pluralism</td>
<td>Communicative</td>
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<td>Delegated power</td>
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<td>Therapy</td>
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<td>Therapy</td>
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Conceptions of planning

In order to validate the link between public participation and models of planning, a systematic interrogation of major planning models needs to be made. Table 1 correlates various approaches to planning to the Arnstein typology. It applies three levels of classification to planning (tradition, school, and model) and relates these to the rungs on Arnstein’s ladder.

At the highest level of resolution, Table 1 distinguishes between two planning traditions. This conceptual classification of the history of planning thought was devised by Friedmann (1987), who distinguishes between two competing traditions: planning as a form of societal guidance, in which the state adopts a pivotal role, and planning as societal transformation, whose principal intellectual premise is that the state and other institutions need to be transformed in order that the conditions of others can be ameliorated.

At the intermediate level of resolution, Table 1 refers to a number of ‘schools’ which have enjoyed influence over planning practice for a period before being usurped by alternative approaches. The term ‘school’ is used to refer to an approach to planning with a single, although often broad intellectual basis from which particular planning methods or models are derived. The schools referred to are, following Hall (1992), blueprint planning, systems or synoptic planning and, more recently, theoretical pluralism (see also Forester 1989).

The final and lowest level of resolution in Table 1 is the planning model. A planning model consists of a set of principles and assumptions about the planning process that together form the basis of planning practice. The models considered here are (1) the pioneers of the blueprint school, Geddes and Howard, as well as the Blueprint model itself, (2) the synoptic approach and its variations (incrementalism, and mixed scanning), and (3) the range of approaches which characterise the contemporary era: advocacy, transactive, Marxist, bargaining and communicative planning.

Blueprint planning: early conceptions of planning without public participation

Howard and Geddes have been identified as two of the earliest and most influential early thinkers in planning (Hall 1992). Howard, living in rapidly growing urban–industrial London in the late nineteenth century, was responsible for the garden-city concept that remains influential in urban planning. The concept, as Howard proposed it, was to decentralise industry from the city and to develop a new town around the decentralised plant (Hall 1992). In this way, Howard proposed to integrate employment with a healthy environment. His idea was to integrate the best aspects of town and country (Hall 1992).

Geddes was arguably the most influential of all of the early thinkers. His contributions, which have been both dramatic and persistent, relate to the scale and method of planning. With regard to scale, Geddes argued that planning had to proceed following close study of settlement patterns. Such an analysis, he argued, suggested that the scale of planning needed to extend beyond the town, to the ‘natural region’ (Hall 1992, p. 49). The notion of regional planning was born. In relation to method, Hall (1992, p. 59) suggests that Geddes ‘gave planning a logical structure’ by developing the survey-analysis-plan sequence of planning. According
to this method, which, as we shall see, is the cornerstone of the rational-comprehensive approach, the planning sequence involves: a survey of the region, an analysis of the survey, and finally the development of the plan.

In attempting to pass verdict on the pioneers of planning, Hall (1992) notes their central concern with the production of blueprints or fixed master plans. He suggests that early planners:

were far less concerned with planning as a continuous process which had to accommodate subtle and changing forces in the outside world. Their vision seems to have been that of the planner as the omniscient ruler, who should create new settlement forms . . . without interference or question. The complexities of planning in a mixed economy where private interests will initiate much of the development . . . or in a participatory democracy where individuals and groups have their own, often contradictory, notions of what should happen—all of these are absent from the work of these pioneers. (Hall 1992, p. 61)

Blueprint planning owes much to the contributions of Howard, Geddes et al. Codification and the ‘creation of the post-war planning machine’ was demanded by the dramatic problems posed by rapid urbanisation and industrialisation between the wars and by the need for urban reconstruction following World War II (Hall 1992). Codification of these blueprint ideas is responsible for establishing much of what we now take for granted as the planning apparatus of contemporary western governments.

Faludi (1973, p. 131) defines blueprint planning as ‘an approach whereby a planning agency operates a programme thought to attain its objectives with certainty’. The blueprint mode is concerned with the generation of fixed end-state plans. The ends are assumed (by the planner), and the art and science of planning is concerned with the pursuit of these ends (Hall 1983; Webber 1983). The failure of the blueprint planners to even consider which ends it were that society wished pursued was a source of persistent critique (Hall 1983). As Webber (1983, p. 91) argues, ‘the classical planning model . . . will not work in the absence of agreement on objectives’.

Faludi (1973, pp. 33–4) summarised the criticisms made of blueprint planning as being concerned with ‘gross-simplification and heavy-handedness’. The assumptions made by blueprint planners about the predictability of the world in which they worked required them to have complete certainty (Faludi 1973). This requirement for certainty caused planners to proceed on the basis of simplifying the world around them. Later analysts (see Hall 1983; Webber 1983) were to conclude that long-term predictions are impossible, and the failure of the predictions of the blueprint planner was an important basis for critique.

Implementation of the blueprint planners’ desired end state also required high degrees of control. Hall (1983) suggests that the requirement for high degrees of control did not allow this approach to planning to cope with decentralised political systems. He adds that a further failure of the blueprint mode was its failure to recognise that the achievement of agreed goals and reconciling tensions between means and ends were central (rather than peripheral) dimensions to the work of the planner (Hall 1983).

The early traditions of blueprint planning included no scope whatever for the participation of the public, except, of course, for expressions of approval or dissent
lodged at election time. Providing citizens a voice in determining the ends and means of planning was contrary to the basic conceptions of blueprint planning. At its heart, blueprint planning assumes science to be all seeing and the planner omnipotent.

Although it is generally acknowledged that blueprint planning was overthrown in the early 1960s, two important dimensions of these early conceptions of planning remain important to the subsequent and contemporary practice of planning. The ethic of planning as apolitical and the concept of a single, unified public interest (Kiernan 1983) remain important issues in contemporary debates about planning theory and practice. These legacies have played an important role in retarding the opportunities for public involvement in subsequent conceptions of planning.

Planning with ‘tokenistic’ public participation: the synoptic model

Perhaps the single most important ‘revolution’ in planning thought occurred in the late 1950s and 1960s when, in the US and then in Britain, systems or synoptic planning usurped blueprint planning (McLoughlin 1969; Hall 1983). Hall suggests that the changes in urban geography wrought by the increase in private automobile use forced planners to deal with problems at a ‘previously unparalleled scale’ (Hall 1983, p. 42). The new problems of scale forced planners to examine

... problems from a systems viewpoint, using conceptual or mathematical models relating ends (objectives) to means (resources and constraints), with heavy reliance on numbers and quantitative analysis. (Hudson 1979, p. 389)

Although synoptic planning represented, at one level, a continuance of the rational-comprehensive paradigm, at another level it represented a sharp and important departure from blueprint planning. As Hudson (1979) notes, synoptic planning remains the starting-point for a number of variant approaches that developed from critical analyses its shortcomings.

Synoptic planning

The central elements of the original synoptic model of planning are: (1) an enhanced emphasis on the specification of goals and targets; (2) an emphasis on quantitative analysis and prediction of the environment; (3) a concern to identify and evaluate alternative policy options; and (4) the evaluation of means against ends (Hudson 1979; Hall 1983).

Despite the important criticisms that have been levelled at synoptic planning, it remains a viable approach. Hudson (1979, p. 389) explains its persistence thus:

... the real power of the synoptic approach is its basic simplicity. The fundamental issues addressed—ends, means, tradeoffs, action-taking—enter into virtually any planning endeavour. Alternative schools of planning can nitpick at the methodological shortcomings of the synoptic approach, or challenge its particular historical applications, or take issue with its circumscribed logic, yet the practical tasks it encompasses must be addressed in some form by even its most adamant critics.
It was in the context of systems planning that the calls for public participation in planning were first heard (Faludi 1973). Hall (1983) notes that consultation conducted by British planning authorities (following legislative change in 1968) became part of a systematic process, led by the professional planner, in the development of the goals and objectives of the planning. This represents, he argues, a fundamental shift in the role of the planner, and his/her relationship with the public (Hall 1983). Although the ‘benign, omniscient scientist-planner’ was (arguably) consigned to history, public participation was constrained to providing a commentary on the goals of planning.

Importantly, the synoptic ideal still clung to the notion of a unitary public interest. In Faludi’s terms, the synoptic model’s image of society was a ‘holistic’ one, implying homogeneity of interest (Faludi 1973). The importance of unitary public interest model is that it assumes that ‘the goals of planning are essentially universally shared and transcend any special, sectional interests’ (Kiernan 1983, p. 77). For others, it is axiomatic that there exists a pluralistic distribution of both power and interest (Friedmann 1973; McDonald 1989). The importance of this notion lies in its consensual, rather than conflictual, societal image that obscures the fact that planning is fundamentally distributional and that there are both costs and benefits of planning interventions which are disproportionately shared among all classes and groups in society (Kiernan 1983).

This has three implications for the role of public participation in planning. First, it immediately reduces the imperative for, and importance of, public participation. The assumption that society is homogenous means that participation is only required to validate and legitimise the goals of planning. Second, the ideology of homogeneity tends to uncritically legitimise planning activities and objectives (Kiernan 1983). Finally, the unitary interest tends to de-legitimise and stigmatise objections to planning proposals as parochial (Kiernan 1983; see also Gariepy 1991).

**Incrementalism**

The architect of incrementalist variant of synoptic planning, the so-called ‘disjointed incrementalist’ approach, was Lindblom (1959). Lindblom argued that the rational model was: (1) poorly adapted to man’s intellectual capacities and to the adequacy of information; (2) not cognisant of the relationship between facts and values in policy-making; (3) not capable of coping with the range of relevant variables; and (4) not adapted to the diverse circumstances in which policy problems arise (Lindblom 1959; see also Faludi 1973).

Lindblom’s (1959) critique of the rational-comprehensive paradigm was centrally concerned with its impractical nature. The incremental approach, by contrast, provided a relevant and practical guide to decision-making (Lindblom 1959). ‘Muddling through’ meant: (1) making margin-dependent choices; (2) choosing from a restricted range of policy alternatives and a restricted range of consequences; (3) continuously adjusting policy objectives; (4) a reconstructive treatment of data; (5) serial analysis and evaluation; and (6) remedial orientation and evaluation (Lindblom 1959; Faludi 1973). According to Lindblom (1959, p. 87), ‘successive limited comparison is, then, indeed a method or system; it is not a failure of method for which administrators ought to apologise’.
For this normative prescription, Lindblom was accused of a conservative bias (Alexander 1986). He was not, however, an uncritical advocate, suggesting that decisions taken according to this method ‘will continue to be as foolish as they are wise’ (Lindblom 1959, p. 88). Twenty years later, Lindblom (1979) re-asserted his view that incrementalist analysis, although limited, remained an effective and pragmatic analytical formula. The task was, indeed, to develop ‘new and improved muddling’ (Lindblom 1979, p. 517).

Implicit in the model, as Hudson (1979) acknowledges, are the influences of institutions and actors from outside the formal policy-making arena. The incrementalist approach therefore acknowledges a plurality of interests rather than a unitary interest, and it is prepared to accept limited decentralisation of policy-making. Plans are the product of this push and tug, as well as political and information constraints and the experience and intuition of the planner (Hudson 1979). Lindblom calls it the ‘science of muddling through’, observing that it entails a different conception of decision-making:

... agencies will want among their own personnel two types of diversification: administrators whose thinking is organized by reference to policy chains other than those familiar to most members of the organization and, even more commonly, administrators whose professional or personal values or interests create diversity of view... so that, even within a single agency, decision-making can be fragmented... (Lindblom 1959, p. 88)

While public participation under incremental planning is largely restricted to consultation, the decentralised, pluralistic nature of incrementalism provides a mechanism for incorporation (however informally) of other actors. This represented, as far as both conceptions of public participation and planning are concerned, an important shift.

*Mixed scanning*

The ‘mixed scanning’ approach, like incrementalism, represented a variation from rigid applications of the synoptic model (Alexander 1986). It was also an approach seen to be more versatile and which would overcome the central problem with the incremental approach: that the alternatives considered only marginally differed from the status quo (Faludi 1973; Alexander 1986). The approach also overcame the problem of information overload created by the requirement to consider all alternatives in pursuit of the goal of rational decision-making (Faludi 1973).

The model was developed by Etzioni (1968), who suggested that decision-making could occur at both the tactical and strategic levels. While the incremental mode might be appropriate at the tactical level, there was also a need, he argued, for a broader, more strategic picture. He suggested, therefore, that organisations should scan their environments over different decision-making levels, choosing from both tactical operational issues and fundamental strategic choices (Alexander 1986). In this way, planning and decision-making could be both functional and normative (after Faludi 1973). Despite Etzioni’s contribution, some observers suggested that both incrementalism and mixed scanning were merely alternative technologies to synoptic planning and did not resolve its fundamental flaws (Healey et al. 1982).
Mixed scanning was not concerned with achieving consensus within the planning community about the goals of planning or with reconciling competing objectives between particular actors. As a variant of the rational-comprehensive paradigm, therefore, mixed scanning was an approach to planning in which the planner remained firmly in control. The role for citizen participation remained limited, and as we shall see, it was not until the later 1960s and early 1970s that a serious challenge to the centrality of the planner and the unitary public interest model was made (Hall 1983).

Summary: synoptic planning and public participation

Synoptic planning, which dominated planning in the 1960s, generally represented a continuation of the rational-comprehensive paradigm, albeit in a modified form. Importantly, in terms of the objectives of this paper, synoptic planning was the starting-point for more pragmatic planning models (notably incrementalism and mixed scanning) that provided more substantial opportunities for public participation. The two most important developments in the period of synoptic planning as far as participation is concerned were (1) the institutionalisation of a limited role for public comment in planning and (2) the inclusion of actors from outside the formal policy-making arena in the incremental mode of planning. Both of these represent important changes in the context of planning thought. With the advent of systems planning, public participation has become an orthodox element of planning activity.

Despite these important intellectual departures from previous conceptions of planning, two central concepts of the rational comprehensive paradigm remained firmly embedded in planning practice: planning as distinct from politics and the unitary public interest model (Kiernan 1983; Beauregard 1989). These concepts, Kiernan argues, persisted despite the changes occurring within theoretical discourse. The persistence of antipolitical planning ideologies and the unitary public interest model ensured that the important intellectual changes advocated in the synoptic and incrementalist approaches did not result in new opportunities for public participation until the 1970s.

The search for a new paradigm: theoretical pluralism

By the late 1960s, the trenchant criticisms of the rational-comprehensive paradigm had begun to precipitate new models of planning (McDonald 1989; Friedmann & Kuester 1994). A single, unifying model of planning was not to emerge, however. Instead, a range of new approaches were suggested, all of which shared the common goal of overcoming the many and varied criticisms which had been levelled at the synoptic ideal. All of them—transactive, advocacy, Marxist, bargaining, and communicative accounts—are best understood as emerging from the social transformation planning tradition, rather than the increasingly jaded social guidance tradition (Friedmann & Kuester 1994).

Transactive planning

Transactive planning theory was developed by Friedmann (1973) as a response to failures of synoptic planning. Rather than planning for an amorphous, ill-defined
public, transactive planning proposes face-to-face contact with the planning community. Reflecting Friedmann’s (1973) perspective of planning as linking knowledge to action, planning from the transactive perspective does not rely on orthodox empirical techniques but rather relies on interpersonal dialogue in which ideas are validated through action (Friedmann 1994). In keeping with the conservative social learning school of the social transformation tradition (Friedmann 1987), a central objective of transactive planning is mutual learning. Instead of pursuing specific functional objectives, transactive planning places greater emphasis on personal and institutional development (Friedmann 1994).

In terms of opportunities for participation, transactive planning is far removed from earlier models. Not only is the participation of the planning community integral to the planning method, but an important goal is to decentralise planning institutions by empowering people to direct and control social processes which determine their welfare (Hudson 1979; see also Friedmann 1992). Participation and empowerment, according to this concept of planning, become goals to be attained rather than methods to be used. In terms of the scope and role of public participation, transactive planning broke new ground. The professional planner became a conduit for information dissemination and feedback and the public were encouraged to actively engage in policy and planning processes. A new era for public participation had begun.

**Advocacy planning**

Advocacy planning can similarly be understood as a response to the failings of the synoptic model. In the case of advocacy planning, the central issue being addressed is the ‘image of society’ (after Faludi 1973, p. 137). The advocacy model assumed social and political pluralism (Faludi 1973; Mazziotti 1982). The original statement on advocacy planning was made by Davidoff (1965), although a more sophisticated description is provided by Mazziotti (1982).

The central tenets upon which advocacy planning is built are: (1) there is a profound inequality of bargaining power between groups; (2) there is unequal access to the political structure; and (3) there are large numbers of people who are unorganised and therefore unrepresented by interest groups (Mazziotti 1982). These inequalities are the foundation for the objective of advocacy: to aspire to equality of representation and accommodation of all people in planning processes (Davidoff 1965). Advocacy planning therefore falls within the radical social transformation tradition by being concerned with advocating the interests of less articulate actors in the cause of seeking social change to improve the conditions of the disenfranchised.

In terms of participation, advocacy planning represents an important break from the traditions of the past. Public participation became a fundamental objective, rather than a marginal planning technique. The essence of advocacy was to ensure that unheard or invisible interests were articulated and, as far as possible, accommodated in decision-making. Implicit in the approach is the rejection of the notion of a unitary public interest. Beginning with the assumption of political plurality, advocacy planners are essentially facilitators whose central task is to either catalyse the participation of inarticulate actors or, alternatively, advocate their interests directly.
Marxist approaches to planning

Hall (1983) suggests that the brief Marxist ascendency in planning theory was the result of the increasing problems of large urban-industrial areas and the powerlessness of planners to respond. The conclusion of those confronting these issues was that only a grass-roots challenge to the capitalist state would accomplish meaningful change (Paris 1982; Hall 1983). According to this view, the capitalist state and mode of production were primarily responsible for the inequitable distribution of money, status, and power, and it was this failure of distribution that was the fundamental source of the inner-city malaise (Harvey 1973; Davies 1982).

The dominant tradition of Marxist thought in planning emphasised the importance of academic analysis and critique of planning (Hall 1983). In part, this emphasis reflected a central dimension of the Marxian analysis: the planning system was a construct of the capitalist state and therefore reflected views of the dominant class structures produced by capitalism (Davies 1982). Planning, therefore, ultimately served the capitalist state (Davies 1982). Marxists explained the persistence of technical approaches to planning in the face of their political (distributional) analyses by suggesting that ‘anti-political ideologies’ (Kiernan 1983) allowed them to side-step the distributional issues and affirm their claim to professionalism (Davies 1982).

There was no scope for public participation in Marxist analyses of planning. Although the raison d’être of this approach was the amelioration of the lives of the impoverished and disenfranchised, no role was provided for the public. The logical explanation for this lies in the tradition’s concern with procedural rather than substantive theory (Hall 1983). The tradition offered almost nothing in the way of prescription. This focus on critique meant that the approach had little to offer the practising planner (Hall 1983). In terms of public participation, while the Marxists advocated grass-roots action, they offered no suggestions for coping with the dominance of the ‘haves’ rather than the ‘have nots’ in planning.

Bargaining

As McDonald (1989, p. 333) observes, the failure of the synoptic ideal left ‘planners struggling to find a new paradigm’. The unifying feature of subsequent theorising has been the view that planning is an element of policy-making, rather than a separate technical field (Faludi 1987; McDonald 1989). This policy or decision-making approach to planning is responsible for bequeathing the bargaining model (Dorcey 1986; McDonald 1989). This approach asserted that bargaining, within the parameters established by legal and political institutions, was the most important aspect to decision-making in mixed economies (Dorcey 1986; McDonald 1989).

Bargaining is used in this context to mean a transaction between two or more parties that establishes ‘what each shall give and take or perform and receive’ (Dorcey 1986, p. 83). According to this view, planning the decisions is the product of give and take between active participants involved in the planning process. This model therefore eschews the antipolitical ideologies of earlier models and recognises the fundamental political nature of planning. Like advocacy and Marxist planners, the bargaining school recognises the uneven distribution of power to bargain but insists that the plural nature of most planning situations means that all
participants have the capacity to influence decisions ‘even if it is only to vote, to embarrass, to provide information, to demonstrate or to block decisions’ (McDonald 1989, p. 333).

The participation of interested citizens was fundamental to the bargaining analysis of planning. However, unlike some of the other planning approaches considered here, bargaining is less of a normative model of planning and more a substantive analysis of the decision-making process. This is a crucial distinction. Whereas, in normative models, such as the synoptic ideal, public participation has a particular function, such as the provision of information to the planner, according to the bargaining analysis the participation of actors is the principle ingredient of decision-making. Whereas public participation is a decision-making adjunct in the former, according to the latter analysis, participation is the central dynamic in decision-making.

**Communicative theory**

Healey (1992, p. 157) argues that these forms of ‘power-broking planning’ did not aid the creation of an ‘inventive form of environmental planning’. In particular, she argues that these approaches

> treat interest as a source of power, bargaining with others to create a calculus which expresses the power relations among the participants. Its language is that of prevalent political power games. It is not underpinned by any effort at ‘learning about’ the interests and perceptions of the participants and with that knowledge, revising what each participant thinks about each other’s and their own interests. (Healey 1992, p. 157).


> ... far from giving up on reason as an organising principle for contemporary societies, we should shift perspective from an individualised, subject-oriented conception of reason, to reasoning formed within inter-subjective communication (see also Dryzek 1990; Giddens 1994).

Rationality is thus expanded to include all the ways in which people come to ‘understand and know things and use that knowledge in acting’ (Healey 1992, p. 150; Hillier 1995). If planning activity is focused on inter-subjective argumentation, an understanding of the concerns of individual actors may be achieved. Moreover, by recognising that the concerns of an individual actor may be personally, societally, and culturally situated, inter-subjective communication can help actors ‘understand each other’ (Healey 1992; Hillier 1993). Importantly, this approach to planning recognises the existence of differing types of rationality.

The communicative approach to planning infers a substantial role for public participation. The importance of inter-subjective communication to the commu-
The communicative model is that it demands forms of participation that provide forums for dialogue, argumentation and discourse (Hillier 1993; Healey 1996). It is also concerned with broadening the range of actors (and their concerns) that are viewed as legitimate in planning (Hillier 1995). Public participation in communicative planning must be concerned with more than consultation and placation; instead, public participation in communicative theory is likely to involve negotiation, bargaining, and debate (Dryzek 1990; Giddens 1994; Healey 1996).

Moreover, participation is, according to communicative perspectives, fundamental to planning. To plan, according to this view, is to communicate, argue, debate, and engage in discourse for the purpose of ‘organising attention to the possibilities for action’ (Forester 1989, p. 19). In communicative planning, therefore, without the involvement of concerned actors, planning cannot proceed.

**Summary: participation and theoretical pluralism**

Since the hypothesised demise of synoptic planning, planners have flirted with a variety of new ideas and approaches. Although described as a theoretically plural era (Hall 1992), a number of important tendencies have emerged. With the exception of transactive planning, all contemporary schools begin with substantive theoretical explanations, rather than the development of normative models. Although Marxist conceptions were criticised for lacking prescriptive force, the insistence on description of social and political realities has seen planning thought merge with policy analysis and other social sciences, and begin to overcome the criticisms and failures of past models.

In terms of participation, the important characteristics of recent thought are:

1. All schools in the contemporary era emphasise the political quality of planning. Clearly, such a view is concomitant with planning as a component of policy analysis essentially concerned with decision-making. Recognition of the political (ideological and distributional) dimensions of planning demands an active role for the public.

2. An important change that can be traced to Lindblom’s (1959) seminal analysis and to the work of Etzioni (1968) is the assumption of political plurality. Whereas earlier models assumed a holistic society (after Faludi 1973) and a unitary public interest, the contemporary era assumes society to be atomistic and the interests of individual actors to be varied, competing, and even contradictory. Again, this assumption is central to a far greater role for participation in planning.

3. A final and crucial characteristic of the contemporary era pertains to the function of participation. Whereas participation was previously considered a decision-making adjunct, all schools of the contemporary era view participation as a fundamental element of planning and decision-making.

**Conclusion**

Thinking about what planning is, and how to do it effectively, has changed dramatically. Conceptions of planning have changed from the highly normative, rational models emphasising the pre-eminent role of the planner, the application of scientific method and logic, and future desired end-state blueprints that dominated
in the early part of the last century (Friedmann 1993). With the collapse of the synoptic ideal and the profound challenge of post-modernism, thinkers in the field have ‘struggled to find a new paradigm’ (Beauregard 1989, p. 393; McDonald 1989). In the theoretical pluralism of the contemporary era, a number of tendencies have emerged: the political nature of planning, the atomistic and competing interests of stakeholders, and decisions as negotiated outcomes facilitated and mediated by the planner (Friedmann 1994; Beauregard 1989).

This review shows that the model of planning being used is the fundamental determinant of the role of public. The definition of the planning problem, the kinds of knowledge used in planning practice, and the conceptualisation of the planning and decision-making context determine the extent of participation offered to the public. One of the problems that has bedevilled the literature on participation—since Arnstein’s widely used ladder metaphor—is how to evaluate the success or effectiveness of public participation efforts. What this historical review shows is that public participation can only be understood in terms of the decision-making context in which it is embedded. It makes little sense to evaluate public participation in terms that are not shared by the planning model itself. Of course, it might be that the planning model is inappropriate for the circumstances; this, however, is an entirely different question.

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