

# **Planning and Foucault**

## **In Search of the Dark Side of Planning Theory'**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper we argue that the use of the communicative theory of Jürgen Habermas in planning theory is problematic because it hampers an understanding of how power shapes planning. We posit an alternative approach based on the power analytics of Michel Foucault which focuses on 'what is actually done', as opposed to Habermas's focus on 'what should be done'. We discuss how the Foucauldian stance problematises planning, asking difficult questions about the treatment of legitimacy, rationality, knowledge and spatiality. We conclude that Foucault offers a type of analytic planning theory which offers better prospects than does Habermas for those interested in understanding and bringing about democratic social change through planning.

## **1. Introduction**

Power has become an inevitable question for planning theorists. John Friedmann, reflecting on the progress of theory to date, identifies theorists' ambivalence about power as one of the biggest outstanding problems in theorising planning (Friedmann 1997). He urges theorists to build relations of power into their conceptual frameworks.

But to bring power more closely into planning theory, we need to consider carefully what is meant by 'power', a concept which has long been the subject of philosophical discourse. For power cannot be simply bolted on to existing planning theory. What lies ahead is what John Friedmann has called 'the long trek' of integrating discourses on power with the 'still sanitised multiple discourses of planning theory' (Friedmann 1997). We believe that along the way, emerging theoretical work will be subjected to difficult challenges about power. Power may become the acid-test of planning theory.

In this paper we take a few short steps of this long trek, and find our progress blocked by an unresolved difficulty with one such emerging body of theory. We encounter an emerging paradigm which asserts a new, Habermasian communicative rationality for planning (e.g. Innes 1995), which is just beginning to be subjected to sustained critique on its treatment of power (e.g. Huxley 1998, Huxley and Yiftachel 1998).

Some planning theorists may feel they have already explored this route, and that the obstacles to a Habermasian paradigm have been removed. We disagree. In this paper, we argue that treatment of power in communicative theory is compromised by the nature of the theory itself.

We suggest that further progress towards the integration of power can benefit from the work of Michel Foucault, an oeuvre which has been cited already by many planning theorists. We will argue that Foucault's work holds more promise, and is more relevant to planning theory than seems to have been generally recognised.

The paper pursues its arguments by exploring some of the vexed differences between Habermas and Foucault. We attempt to show that Foucauldian theory is not what has been described as a 'single minded preoccupation with the politics of coercion' (Friedmann 1997), but a sustained analytics of power and rationality which we can use in productive ways to support the empowerment of civil society. This productive interpretation of Foucault's work appears to have been missed, or dismissed, which has facilitated the rejection of his theories in relation to planning.

The position we are attempting to establish is that communicative planning theory fails to capture the role of power in planning. As a result, it is a theory which is weak in its capacity to help us understand what happens in the real world; and weak in serving as a basis for effective action and change. Because of these weaknesses, we believe that this approach to theory building is highly problematic for planning.

Some theorists might contend that 'using' Foucault, they have repaired the weaknesses in communicative theory which are exposed by juxtaposition with Foucault's work. We believe, however, that this cannot be done convincingly. More importantly we are concerned that, in spite of regular reference to Foucault in planning theory literature, there has not so far been a cogent exploration of the full import of his work for planning.

In turning to Foucault's work, we argue that Foucauldian planning theory addresses exactly the weaknesses in the communicative paradigm, and makes effective understanding (*verita effettuale*, in Machiavelli's words; *Wirkliche Historie* in Nietzsche's and Foucault's) and effective action possible, something planners and planning theorists have typically said they want. It requires a turn towards the dark side of planning theory - the domain of power - which has been occasionally explored by planning theorists (e.g. Yiftachel 1994, Flyvbjerg 1996, Roweis 1983, Marcuse 1976) but has been avoided by many others who see only oppression and coercion where power operates.

## **2. The Habermasian leap of faith - a weak basis for planning theory**

We do not seek to summarise Habermas's work here, or to carry out an exhaustive critique. Instead, we engage with the treatment of power in Habermas's theories of discourse ethics and communicative rationality, which provide the theoretical cornerstones to the communicative planning movement. Habermas's utopian world is oriented towards an ideal speech situation where validity claims are based on consensus amongst equal participants, and the negative, distorting effects of power are removed. Friedmann compared this ideal of a 'perfect polity' to a graduate university seminar (Friedmann 1987, 267).

Habermas's definitions of discourse ethics and communicative rationality, and their procedural requirements (Habermas 1979, 1983, 1985, 1990) are based on a procedural as opposed to substantive rationality: 'Discourse ethics ... establishes a procedure based on presuppositions and designed to guarantee the impartiality of the process of judging' (Habermas 1990, 122). Habermas is a universalistic, 'top-down' moralist as concerns process: the rules for correct process are normatively given in advance, in the form of the requirements for the ideal speech situation. Conversely, as regards content, Habermas is a 'bottom-up' situationalist: what is right and true in a given communicative process is determined solely by the participants in that process.

Habermas operates within a perspective of law and sovereignty which contrasts with that of Foucault (1980a, 87-8) who finds this conception of power 'by no means adequate.' Foucault (1980a, 82,90) says about his own 'analytics of power' that it 'can be constituted only if it frees itself completely from [this] representation of power that I would term... 'juridico-discursive' ... a certain image of power-law, of power-sovereignty.' It is in this connection that Foucault (1980a, 89) made his famous argument to 'cut off the head of the king' in political analysis and replace it by a decentred understanding of power. For Habermas the head of the king is still very much on, in the sense that sovereignty is a prerequisite for the regulation of power by law.

The basic weakness of Habermas's project is its lack of agreement between ideal and reality, between intentions and their implementation, and is rooted in an insufficient conception of

power. Habermas himself observes that discourse cannot by itself insure that the conditions for discourse ethics and democracy are met. But discourse about discourse ethics is all Habermas has to offer. This is the fundamental political dilemma in Habermas's thinking: he describes to us the utopia of communicative rationality but not how to get there. Habermas (1990, 209) himself mentions lack of 'crucial institutions,' lack of 'crucial socialisation' and 'poverty, abuse, and degradation' as barriers to discursive decision making. But he has little to say about the relations of power that create these barriers and how power may be changed in order to begin the kinds of institutional and educational change, improvements in welfare, and enforcement of basic human rights that could help lower the barriers. In short, Habermas lacks the kind of concrete understanding of relations of power that is needed for political change.

Habermas (1987, 322) tells us he is aware that his theory of communicative action opens him to criticism as an idealist: 'It is not so simple to counter the suspicion that with the concept of action oriented to validity claims, the idealism of a pure, nonsituated reason slips in again.' We would argue further that not only is it difficult to counter this suspicion, it is impossible. And this impossibility constitutes a fundamental problem in Habermas's work.

'There is a point in every philosophy,' writes Nietzsche (1966, 15[§8]), 'when the philosopher's 'conviction' appears on the stage.' For Habermas that point is the foundation of his ideal speech situation and universal validity claims upon a Kirkegaardian 'leap of faith.' Habermas, as mentioned, states that consensus-seeking and freedom from domination are universally inherent as forces in human conversation, and he emphasises these particular aspects. Other important philosophers and social thinkers have tended to emphasise the exact opposite. Machiavelli (1984, 96) states: 'One can make this generalisation about men: they are ungrateful, fickle, liars, and deceivers.' Less radically, but still in contrast to Habermas, are statements by Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida and many others that communication is at all times already penetrated by power: 'power is always present,' says Foucault (1988, 11,18). It is therefore meaningless, according to these thinkers, to operate with a concept of communication in which power is absent.

For students of power, communication is more typically characterised by non-rational rhetoric and maintenance of interests than by freedom from domination and consensus-seeking. In rhetoric, 'validity' is established via the mode of communication--e.g., eloquence, hidden control, rationalisation, charisma, using dependency relations between participants--rather than through rational arguments concerning the matter at hand. Seen from this perspective Habermas (1987, 297-8) seems overly naive and idealistic when he contrasts 'successful' with 'distorted' utterance in human conversation, because success in rhetoric is associated precisely with distortion.

Whether the communicative or the rhetorical position is 'correct' is not important here. What is decisive, rather, is that a non-idealistic point of departure for planning theory must take account of the fact that both positions are possible, and even simultaneously possible. In an empirical-scientific context, something to which Habermas otherwise takes great pains to define himself, the question of communicative rationality versus rhetoric must therefore remain open. The question must be settled by concrete examination of the case at hand. The researcher must ask how communication takes place, and how politics, planning and democracy operate. Is communication characterised by consensus-seeking and absence of power? Or is communication the exercise of power and rhetoric? How do consensus-seeking and rhetoric, freedom from domination and exercise of power, eventually come together in individual acts of communication?

The basic question being raised here is whether one can meaningfully distinguish rationality and power from each other in communication and whether rationality can be viewed in isolation from power, as does Habermas. To assume an answer to this question a priori is just as invalid as presuming that one can ultimately answer the biblical question of whether humans are basically good or basically evil. And to assume either position ex ante, to universalise it and build a theory upon it, as Habermas does, makes for problematic philosophy and speculative social science. This is one reason we have to be cautious when using the theory of communicative rationality to understand and act in relation to planning.

Constituting rationality and democracy on a leap of faith is hardly sustainable. Habermas here seems to forget his own axiom that philosophical questions ought to be subject to empirical verification. And it is precisely in this sense that Habermas must be seen as utopian.

Furthermore, by determining validity, truth, justice, etc., as an outcome of 'the better argument,' Habermas simply moves the problems of determination from the former concepts to the latter. As Bernstein (1992, 220) correctly points out, 'the better argument,' and with it communicative rationality, is an empirically empty concept: 'Abstractly, there is something enormously attractive about Habermas's appeal to the 'force of the better argument' until we ask ourselves what this means and presupposes.' The problem here is that in non-trivial situations there are few clear criteria for determining what is considered an argument, how good it is, and how different arguments are to be evaluated against each other. This does not mean that we should not attempt to identify arguments and evaluate them. Yet as Bernstein (1992, 221) states, 'Any society must have some procedures for dealing with conflicts that cannot be resolved by argumentation - even when all parties are committed to rational argumentation.' In real society - as opposed to Habermas's ideal types - it is precisely these kinds of conflicts which are of interest, both empirically and normatively.

In his *Between Facts and Norms* and other recent work, Habermas (1996a,b;1995) has attempted to deal with power, and he has, at the same time, developed a deeper analysis of civil society (Carleheden and Rene, 1996). Despite these efforts, however, Habermas' approach remains strongly normative and procedural, paying scant attention to the preconditions of actual discourse, to substantive ethical values and to the problem of how communicative rationality gets a foothold in society in the face of massive non-communicative forces. Habermas also continues to disregard the particular problems relating to identity and cultural divisions as well as the nondiscursive ways of safeguarding reason that are being developed by so-called minority groups and new social movements.

If Habermas's discourse ethics were to be constituted as reality this would not signify an end to power, it would be a way to regulate power. And to the extent that actual implementation of discourse ethics would run counter to the interests of social and political actors--which is bound to be the case for societies and decisions of any complexity--discourse ethics will be opposed, whether such opposition can be rationally justified or not. The basic contradiction here is that coercion would be needed to arrive at Habermas's non-coercive communication. Agreement would, in this sense, be forced. So even if one could imagine the existence of what Habermas (1992a, 453) calls 'a political public sphere unsubverted by power,' such a sphere could not be said to be free of power since it was established through a claim to power. The Nietzschean insight that historically morality has typically been established by immoral means would hold true for Habermas's morality, too. Power is needed to limit power. Even to understand how publicness can be established we need to think in terms of conflict and power. There is no way around it. It is a basic condition for understanding issues of exclusion and inclusion, and for understanding planning.

Habermas draws from the vocabulary of Enlightenment rationalism which Rorty has argued has become an impediment to the preservation and progress of democratic societies, in part because it has little to offer in understanding power (Rorty 1989, 44). Habermas's efforts to achieve more rationality and democracy, however laudable, draw attention away from critical relations of power. The neglect of power is unfortunate, because it is precisely by paying attention to power relations that we may achieve more democracy.

If the goal of planning theorists is to create a planning which is closer to Habermas's ideal society - free from domination, more democratic, a strong civil society-- then the first task is not to understand the utopia of communicative rationality, but to understand the realities of power. And it is here that the work of Michel Foucault, who has tried to develop such an understanding, becomes relevant.

### **3. Towards Foucault**

Instead of side-stepping or seeking to remove the traces of power from planning, an alternative approach accepts power as unavoidable, recognising its all pervasive nature, and emphasising its productive as well as destructive potential. Here, theory engages squarely with policy made on a field of power struggles between different interests, where knowledge and truth are contested, and the rationality of planning is exposed as a focus of conflict. This is what Flyvbjerg has called *realrationalität*, or 'real-life' rationality (Flyvbjerg 1996), where the focus shifts from what *should* be done to what is *actually* done. This analysis embraces the idea that 'rationality is penetrated by power', and the dynamic between the two is critical in understanding what policy is about. It therefore becomes meaningless, or misleading - for politicians, administrators and researchers alike - to operate with a concept of rationality in which power is absent (Flyvbjerg 1998, 164-65).

Both Foucault and Habermas are political thinkers. Habermas's thinking is well developed as concerns political ideals, but weak in its understanding of actual political processes. Foucault's thinking, conversely, is weak with reference to generalised ideals--Foucault is a declared opponent of ideals, understood as definitive answers to Kant's question, 'What ought I to do?' or Lenin's 'What is to be done?'--but his work reflects a sophisticated understanding of Realpolitik. Both Foucault and Habermas agree that in politics one must 'side with reason.' Referring to Habermas and similar thinkers, however, Foucault (1980b) warns that 'to respect rationalism as an ideal should never constitute a blackmail to prevent the analysis of the rationalities really at work' (Rajchman 1988, 170).

Habermas's main complaint about Foucault is what Habermas sees as Foucault's relativism. Thus Habermas (1987, 276) harshly dismisses Foucault's genealogical historiographies as 'relativistic, cryptonormative illusory science'. Such critique for relativism is correct, if by relativistic we mean unfounded in norms that can be rationally and universally grounded. Foucault's norms are not

foundationalist like Habermas's: they are expressed in a desire to challenge 'every abuse of power, whoever the author, whoever the victims' (Miller 1993, 316) and in this way 'to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom' (Foucault 1984a, 46). Foucault here is the Nietzschean democrat, for whom any form of government - liberal or totalitarian - must be subjected to analysis and critique based on a will not to be dominated, voicing concerns in public and withholding consent about anything that appears to be unacceptable. Such norms cannot be given a universal grounding independent of those people and that context, according to Foucault. Nor would such grounding be desirable, since it would entail an ethical uniformity with the kind of utopian-totalitarian implications that Foucault would warn against in any context, be it that of Marx, Rousseau or Habermas: 'The search for a form of morality acceptable by everyone in the sense that everyone would have to submit to it, seems catastrophic to me' (Foucault 1984c, 37 quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1986, 119). In a Foucauldian interpretation, such a morality would endanger freedom, not empower it. Instead, Foucault focuses on the analysis of evils and shows restraint in matters of commitment to ideas and systems of thought about what is good for man, given the historical experience that few things have produced more suffering among humans than strong commitments to implementing utopian visions of the good.

For Foucault the socially and historically conditioned context, and not fictive universals, constitutes the most effective bulwark against relativism and nihilism, and the best basis for action. Our sociality and history, according to Foucault, is the only foundation we have, the only solid ground under our feet. And this socio-historical foundation is fully adequate.

Foucault, perhaps more than any recent philosopher, reminded us of the crucial importance of power in the shaping and control of discourses, the production of knowledge, and the social construction of spaces. His analysis of modern power has often been read by planning theorists as negative institutionalised oppression, expressed most chillingly in his analysis of the disciplinary regime of the prison in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1979). However, it is Foucault's explanation of power as productive and local, rather than oppressive and hierarchical, that

suggests real opportunities for agency and change (McNay 1994). Whilst Foucault saw discourse as a medium which transmits and produces power, he points out that it is also ‘a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy’. So, at the same time as discourse reinforces power, it also ‘undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it’ (Foucault 1990, 101).

Foucault rarely separated knowledge from power, and the idea of ‘power/knowledge’ was of crucial importance: ‘we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests ... we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produced knowledge .. that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge ...’ (Foucault 1979, 27). For Foucault, then, rationality was contingent, shaped by power relations, rather than context-free and objective.

According to Foucault, Habermas’s (undated, 8) ‘authorisation of power by law’ is inadequate (emphasis deleted). ‘[The juridical system] is utterly incongruous with the new methods of power,’ says Foucault (1980a, 89), ‘methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus... Our historical gradient carries us further and further away from a reign of law.’ The law, institutions - or policies and plans - provide no guarantee of freedom, equality or democracy. Not even entire institutional systems, according to Foucault, can ensure freedom, even though they are established with that purpose. Nor is freedom likely to be achieved by imposing abstract theoretical systems or ‘correct’ thinking. On the contrary, history has demonstrated--says Foucault--horrible examples that it is precisely those social systems which have turned freedom into theoretical formulas and treated practice as social engineering, i.e., as an epistemically derived *techne*, that become most repressive. ‘[People] reproach me for not presenting an overall theory,’ says Foucault (1984b, 375-6), ‘I am attempting, to the contrary,

apart from any totalisation - which would be at once abstract and limiting - to open up problems that are as concrete and general as possible’.

What Foucault calls his ‘political task’ is ‘to criticise the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them’ (Chomsky and Foucault 1974, 171). This is what, in a Foucauldian interpretation, would be seen as an effective approach to institutional change, including change in the institutions of civil society. With direct reference to Habermas, Foucault (1988, 18) adds:

‘The problem is not of trying to dissolve [relations of power] in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give...the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics...which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination.’

Here Foucault overestimates his differences with Habermas, for Habermas also believes that the ideal speech situation cannot be established as a conventional reality in actual communication. Both thinkers see the regulation of actual relations of dominance as crucial, but whereas Habermas approaches regulation from a universalistic theory of discourse, Foucault seeks out a genealogical understanding of actual power relations in specific contexts. Foucault is thus oriented towards *praxis*, whereas Habermas’s orientation is towards *episteme*. For Foucault *praxis* and freedom are derived not from universals or theories. Freedom is a practice, and its ideal is not a utopian absence of power. Resistance and struggle, in contrast to consensus, is for Foucault the most solid basis for the practice of freedom.

Whereas Habermas emphasises procedural macro politics, Foucault stresses substantive micro politics, though with the important shared feature that neither Foucault nor Habermas venture to define the actual content of political action. This is defined by the participants. Thus, both Habermas and Foucault are ‘bottom-up’ thinkers as concerns the content of politics, but where Habermas thinks in a ‘top-down’ moralist fashion as regards procedural rationality - having

sketched out the procedures to be followed - Foucault is a 'bottom-up' thinker as regards both process and content. In this interpretation, Habermas would want to tell individuals and groups how to go about their affairs as regards procedure for discourse. He would not want, however, to say anything about the outcome of this procedure. Foucault would prescribe neither process nor outcome; he would only recommend a focus on conflict and power relations as the most effective point of departure for the fight against domination.

It is because of his double 'bottom-up' thinking that Foucault has been described as non-action oriented. Foucault (1981) says about such criticism, in a manner that would be pertinent to those who work in the institutional setting of planning:

It's true that certain people, such as those who work in the institutional setting of the prison...are not likely to find advice or instructions in my books to tell them 'what is to be done.' But my project is precisely to bring it about that they 'no longer know what to do,' so that the acts, gestures, discourses that up until then had seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous (Miller 1993, 235).

The depiction of Foucault as non-action oriented is correct to the extent that Foucault hesitates to give directives for action, and he directly distances himself from the kinds of universal 'What is to be done?' formulas which characterise procedure in Habermas's communicative rationality. Foucault believes that 'solutions' of this type are themselves part of the problem.

Seeing Foucault as non-action oriented would be misleading, however, insofar as Foucault's genealogical studies are carried out only in order to show how things can be done differently to 'separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think' (Foucault 1984a, 45-7). Thus Foucault was openly pleased when during a revolt in some of the French prisons the prisoners in their cells read his *Discipline and Punish*. 'They shouted the text to other prisoners', Foucault told an interviewer. 'I know it's pretentious to say', Foucault said, 'but that's a proof of a truth--a

political and actual truth--which started after the book was written' (Dillon 1980, 5). This is the type of situated action Foucault would endorse, and as a genealogist, Foucault saw himself as highly action oriented, as 'a dealer in instruments, a recipe maker, an indicator of objectives, a cartographer, a sketcher of plans, a gunsmith' (Ezine 1985, 14).

The establishment of a concrete genealogy opens possibilities for action by describing the genesis of a given situation and showing that this particular genesis is not connected to absolute historical necessity. Foucault's genealogical studies of prisons, hospitals and sexuality demonstrate that social practices may always take an alternative form, even where there is no basis for voluntarism or idealism. Combined with Foucault's focus on domination, it is easy to understand why this insight has been embraced by feminists and minority groups. Elaborating genealogies of, for instance, gender and race leads to an understanding of how relations of domination between women and men, and between different peoples, can be changed (McNay 1992, Bordo and Jaggar 1990, Fraser 1989, Benhabib and Cornell 1987).

The value of Foucault's approach is his emphasis on the dynamics of power. Understanding how power works is the first prerequisite for action, because action is the exercise of power. And such an understanding can best be achieved by focusing on the concrete. Foucault can help us with a materialist understanding of Realpolitik and Realrationalität, and how these might be changed in a specific context. The problem with Foucault is that because understanding and action have their points of departure in the particular and the local, we may come to overlook more generalised conditions concerning, for example, institutions, constitutions and structural issues.

In sum, Foucault and Habermas agree that rationalisation and the misuse of power are among the most important problems of our time. They disagree as to how one can best understand and act in relation to these problems. From the perspective of the history of philosophy and political theory, the difference between Foucault and Habermas lies in the fact that Foucault works within a particularistic and contextualist tradition, with roots in Thucydides via Machiavelli to Nietzsche. Foucault is one of the more important twentieth century exponents of this tradition. Habermas is

the most prominent living exponent of a universalistic and theorising tradition derived from Socrates and Plato, proceeding over Kant. In power terms, we are speaking of 'strategic' versus 'constitution' thinking, about struggle versus control, conflict versus consensus.

#### **4. Empowering space**

A discussion of the full potential of Foucauldian analysis in enhancing our understanding of policy making would not be complete without considering the spatiality of Foucault's work. This dimension has often been overlooked by theorists who have utilised his theories of discourse and power. Yet it is the spatiality of Foucault's thinking that makes his work particularly relevant to those working in overtly spatial activities such as planning. The importance of Foucault's attempted 'spatialisation of reason' has been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Flynn 1993, Marks 1995, Casey 1996). For the purposes of our argument, it is important to explain here briefly how Foucault links space with the operation of discourses, and hence with power.

Foucault's critique, in *Discipline and Punish*, of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon is perhaps the archetypal example of this linkage (Foucault 1979). Bentham published his plan for the panopticon in 1791. The object was to create a prison arranged in a 'semi-circular pattern with an inspection lodge at the centre and cells around the perimeter. Prisoners ... in individual cells, were clearly open to the gaze of the guards, but the same was not true of the view the other way. By a carefully contrived system of lighting and the use of wooden blinds, officials would be invisible to the inmates. Control was to be maintained by the constant sense that prisoners were watched by unseen eyes. There was nowhere to hide, to be private. Not knowing whether or not they were watched, but obliged to assume that they were, obedience was the prisoners' only rational option' (Lyon 1993, 655-656). Foucault explains the panopticon as a physical space which, through its design, permits physical functions such as surveillance and control of prisoners, and in so doing makes possible the prevailing modern social discourses of punishment, reform, and education (Marks 1995, 75). The panopticon therefore serves as an axiom for contemporary socio-political conditions, illustrating how surveillance and control are reproduced in the fine grain of

daily life, in cities where ‘factories resemble schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons’ (Foucault 1979, 228).

The construction of the panopticon therefore creates a social ‘space-time’: it creates or makes possible a particular set of practices and knowledges that are specific in both space and time. In this way, social norms are embedded in daily life, and the individual is ‘constructed’ to think and act in particular ways. Through this type of analysis, it becomes possible to understand, for example, how different planning policies construct their own ‘space-time’. For example, discourses of personal freedom and mobility may require transport policies which produce transport spaces which are dominated, for example, by high speed private transport, at the expense of other types of movement. In this way, the late-modern individual is constructed as increasingly mobile, rejecting barriers to freedom of movement. The pattern of daily life adapts to the opportunities of increased mobility, and land use patterns shift to accommodate the new trends. Conversely, discourses of accessibility, which recognise the mobility needs of those who, for example, do not have access to a car, or wish to travel by other modes, may require policies which intervene to restrict the opportunities of movement by private car. Physical spaces may be characterised by pedestrianisation and traffic calming.

However, if spaces may be constructed, in this way, to allow certain forms of control, they may also be reconstructed by others, to serve different functions. Crush has shown, using Foucauldian analysis, how mining compounds in South Africa, which were designed using panoptic principles, were not simply environments for repression and coercion, but that they ‘were also sites for the development and practice of rich oppositional cultures’ (Crush 1994, 320). Spaces, then, may be constructed in different ways by different people, through power struggles and conflicts of interest. This idea that spaces are socially constructed, and that many spaces may co-exist within the same physical space is an important one. It suggests the need to analyse how discourses and strategies of inclusion and exclusion are connected with particular spaces.

Perhaps most importantly in the context of this paper, exploring power - space relations begins to suggest how we can supplement the preoccupation with language and communication, and develop a distinctively spatial planning theory.

### ***5. From communicative rationality towards power analytics***

Many planning theorists have explored Habermas's work, and applied it to planning theory, notably John Forester, Patsy Healey and Judith Innes. Similarly, these theorists recognise the usefulness of aspects of Foucault's work in understanding the micro-politics of power, and how it affects planning in the real world. Indeed, John Forester seems to identify Foucault's genealogical approach - the contingent way he carried out his analyses of power, as opposed to his theories of power - as the type of thing he would like to see planners doing, advocating a Foucauldian 'contingent staged agency' (Forester 1989, 237). However, Foucault's work has seldom been developed further than this in planning theory or research.

It is understandable why planning theorists have found Habermas a useful ally. He at least offers an alternative form of rationality to the modernist instrumental rationality, which continues to be asserted in, for example, the new technical approaches to environmental planning (Wong 1997), and in the neo-liberal assertion of the critical role of market forces in shaping policy (Healey 1997). Habermas's work supports the attempt to break free from instrumentalism.

In the new paradigm power is acknowledged, but regarded as a negative, distorting influence whose effects can be removed by constructing idealised debate. The normative gaze of communicative theory looks towards an idealised future state of power-free critical debate. However, in the same way that Habermas fails to tell us how this ideal state can be reached, and so raises expectations without the prospect of fulfilling them, planning theorists who talk of Habermasian communicative planning as an actual possibility are constructing a powerful idea, without promise of its achievability.

Perhaps in recognition of this dilemma, another strategy adopted by planning theorists has been to use Habermas's ideals as a reference point, and to work backwards. The Habermasian ideal is accepted by many planning theorists as being out of reach, so the theory is applied in a different way, as a benchmark, a way of recognising the distortion of communications in real life planning processes, and thereby guiding action to remove some of these distortions. This application of Habermas is shaping a tranche of empirical analysis of discourse in planning, and can be seen for example in the writing of John Forester:

'... the responsibility of planning analysts is *not* to work toward the possibility of "fully open communications". It is to work instead toward the correction of *needless* distortions, some systematic and some not, that disable, mystify, distract and mislead others: to work towards a political democratisation of daily communications' (Forester 1989, 21).

Habermas does not provide a detailed vocabulary of power, or a theory of its workings, which might facilitate the close understanding of how power shapes policy making and implementation, and rationality itself. Healey recognises the risk that the focus on the analysis of communicative acts 'could render the researcher myopic to the power relations among planners, municipal councils and clients' (Healey 1992, 10). She, like others, addresses the problem by emphasising the permeation of power into communication: 'Communicative acts contain assumptions and metaphors, which by conveying meaning, affect what people do. These assumptions and meanings may carry power relationships or structure within them. In turn, the way communicative acts are created and used help sustain or challenge power structures' (1992, 10). This argument seems to acknowledge the importance of an understanding of power, but then turns away from it, towards a preoccupation with the mechanics and dynamics of communication.

This power blindness is keenly recognised by Hillier, who like Healey seeks to resolve matters by combining Foucauldian power awareness with Habermasian communicative rationality (Hillier 1993). Her aim is to create the idealised Habermasian planning arena, where 'rational debate and negotiation are possible between proponents of different truths, tellers of different stories.... The idea is to pre-empt conflict through negotiated agreement rather than entrenching it' (Hillier

1993, 108) It seems that the point of linking Foucault and Habermas is again to remove the effects of negative power on the planning process. Yet Hillier's aim, like Healey's is the empowerment of disadvantaged interests, which surely requires an acknowledgment of power relations, and the possibility of power being used in a 'positive' way. Ultimately, it is not clear how the 'actualisation of Habermasian communicative action' (Hillier, 1993), which appears to depend on removing power from the gaze of planners and theorists, is to be achieved.

So Habermas neither provides an achievable model for planning, nor does he explain planning as it is actually done, to the exasperation of many practitioners. He therefore fails to provide guidance for those involved in bringing about change - he does not describe a world they inhabit. We see two dilemmas here for the communicative paradigm. Firstly, why ground a planning paradigm in theory which is in turn grounded in an idealism that even Habermas, together with the proponents of his paradigm, accept as unattainable? Power-free critical debate is set up as the essence of what planning ought to be, when no planner has yet had the good fortune to work in such conditions. Nor are they likely to. Secondly, how can this theory help planners understand the full richness of what happens in real life planning, when they are restricted to a vocabulary of communication, which conditions the thoughts of planning analysts?

Nevertheless, the rhetoric of communicative rationality is reproduced in a burgeoning of interest in, variously, communicative, collaborative, consensus-seeking analysis and normative theorising which is beginning to be translated into new models of practice. The outcome of the new consensus-based approaches to planning remains to be seen, particularly when applied to bitterly fought disputes, with which planning is well supplied.

Michel Foucault presents an alternative theoretical approach which deliberately focuses on 'what is actually done' and embraces the centrality of power. Additionally, the spatiality of Foucault's work opens up the possibility of developing a planning theory which understands how power and space are closely bound up in planning. The Foucauldian approach problematises existing planning

tools and processes, suggesting the need for a power-sensitised understanding of the nature of knowledge, rationality, spatiality, and inclusivity in planning theory.

Communicative theory, unsurprisingly, tends to focus on communicative elements of planning. This focus risks overemphasising the importance of key communicative events in planning, such as public meetings, whilst failing to capture the importance of non-communicative processes and actions. Communication is part of politics, but much of politics takes place outside communication. The reorientation from Habermasian towards Foucauldian planning theory - or planning analytics - would involve detailed genealogies of actual planning in different contexts, of the type we have mentioned above, which would allow a re-imagination of planning in the light of conflict. Foucault takes us towards a different kind of empirical work. Many of the methods are familiar to social researchers, but there are important differences in the overall approach:

- the researcher is equipped with a language and theoretical analysis of power and its techniques and strategies which guides the researcher through the studies;
- research is based on richly contextualised, detailed case studies;
- the relations between power and rationality are a central focus;
- the focus moves beyond communicative events;
- the language is of conflict rather than communication. Planning processes and events are written as the playing out of strategies and conflicts rather than debates or arguments.

Lastly, there is no assumption of the key role of the planner as the facilitator of a rational, communicative process. This can be the role of some planners, but others, clearly, choose to work in other ways.

Even in the analysis of communicative events, a language and analytics of power is required, if the non-communicative effects on communication are to be understood.

## **6. Cases in point**

More detailed theoretical argument, and detailed analyses of the type we advocate may be found elsewhere (e.g. Flyvbjerg 1992, 1996, 1998, and Richardson 1996, 1997, 1998). Here, we simply highlight what these studies of the 'realrationalitat' of policy making can reveal.

Bent Flyvbjerg's study of planning in Aalborg is a case study of planning and policy-making in practice, where rationality is malleable, and where power games are masked as technical rationality. The study focuses on the Aalborg Project, a scheme designed to integrate environmental and social concerns into city planning, including how to control the car in the city - a cause of degradation of the historic core. The planners of Aalborg are found to be real people who, like other actors in the case, engage in deception to achieve their ends, manipulating public debates and technical analyses. Institutions that are supposed to represent what they, themselves called the 'public interest' are revealed to be deeply embedded in the hidden exercise of power and the protection of special interests. The project is set in Aalborg, but it could be anywhere. Aalborg is to this study what Florence was to Machiavelli's, no other comparison intended: a laboratory for understanding power. The focus is on a classic and endless drama which defines what modern planning and policy-making are and can be: the drama of how rationality is constituted by power, and power by rationality. Drawing on the ideas of Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Habermas and Foucault, the Aalborg case is read as a metaphor of modernity and of modern planning and policy-making. The study shows how power warps deliberation and how modern rationality can only be an ideal when confronted with the real rationalities involved in planning and policy-making. Finally, the study elaborates on how fruitful deliberation and action can occur by following a century-long, and historically proven, tradition of empowering democracy and civil society.

Tim Richardson's research has explored the construction sites of rationality: the critical stages in planning processes where the frameworks and tools are crafted which will shape later decisions. His study of the planning process for the trans-European transport network explores how, in a heated power-play, the deployment of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) became the central instrument for achieving environmental integration. However, SEA techniques were not simply taken off the shelf by policy analysts, and applied objectively in laboratories. They were

constructed through contested political processes and were vulnerable to shaping by, and in favour of, particular interests. The political and institutional setting of SEA clearly shaped its scope, timing, methodology, and ultimately its impact. In this case SEA was shaped by the discourses of the single market and political integration, by inter-institutional politics, and by the actions of interest groups. Much of the policy process took place outside the public domain, and through non-discursive events, rendering a purely communicative focus unuseful. Communicative actions, such as the use of advocacy documents, or argumentation in committee, were tactical elements on a much broader canvas of power dynamics.

### ***7. Conclusions: take a walk on the dark side.***

Planning theorists (and other modernist thinkers) have tended to disregard Foucault's work as being oppressive. His talk of the all-pervasiveness of power has been seen as crushing the life out of any possibility of empowerment, of change, of hope. Yet this analysis seems to be based on a superficial reading of parts of Foucault's major works, such as *Discipline and Punish*, rather than an attempt to understand his overall project. Foucault's theory of power is exactly not about oppressiveness, of accepting the regimes of domination which condition us, it is about using tools of analysis to understand power, its relations with rationality and knowledge, and use the resulting insights precisely to bring about change.

When it comes to portraying planners and planning, the quest of planning theorists could be called the escape from power. But if there is one thing we should have learned today from students of power, it is that there is no escape from it.

We wish to stress that the modern normative attitude - an attitude that has been dominant in planning theory throughout the history of this discipline - does not serve modernity, or planning theory, well. The ideals of modernity, democracy and planning - ideals that typically are worth fighting for - are better served by understanding *Realrationalität* than normative rationality.

Normative rationality may provide an ideal to strive for, but it is a poor guide to the strategies

and tactics needed for moving toward to the ideal. This, in our analysis, is the quandary of normative idealists, including the majority of planning theorists: they know where they would like to go but not how to get there.

The focus of modernity and of planning theory is on 'what should be done'. We suggest a reorientation toward 'what is actually done - towards *verita effettuale*. In this way we may gain a better grasp - less idealistic, more grounded - of what planning is and what the strategies and tactics that may help change it for the better.

Foucauldian analysis, unlike Habermasian normativism, offers a type of planning theory which is more useful in understanding how planning is actually done, and offers better prospects for those interested in bringing about democratic social change through planning.

Habermas, among others, views conflict in society as dangerous, corrosive and potentially destructive of social order, and therefore in need of being contained and resolved. In a Foucauldian interpretation, conversely, suppressing conflict is suppressing freedom, because the privilege to engage in conflict is part of freedom.

The Foucauldian challenge applies to theory too: perhaps social and political theories that ignore or marginalise conflict are potentially oppressive. And if conflict sustains society, there is good reason to caution against an idealism that ignores conflict and power. In real social and political life self-interest and conflict will not give way to some all-embracing communal ideal like Habermas's. Indeed, the more democratic a society, the more it allows groups to define their own specific ways of life and legitimates the inevitable conflicts of interest that arise between them. Political consensus can never be brought to bear in a manner that neutralises particular group obligations, commitments and interests. A more differentiated conception of political culture than Habermas's is needed, one that will be more tolerant of conflict and difference, and more compatible with the pluralisation of interests.

A strong democracy guarantees the existence of conflict. A strong understanding of democracy, and of the role of planning within it, must therefore be based on thought that places conflict and power at its centre, as Foucault does and Habermas does not. We suggest that an understanding of planning that is practical, committed and ready for conflict provides a superior paradigm to planning theory than an understanding that is discursive, detached and consensus-dependent.

Exploring the dark side of planning theory offers more than a negative, oppressive confirmation of our inability to make a difference. It suggests that we can do planning in a constructive empowering way, but that we cannot do this by avoiding power relations. Planning is inescapably about conflict: exploring conflicts in planning, and learning to work effectively with conflict can be the basis for a strong planning paradigm.

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