Phronetic Planning Research: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections

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ABSTRACT *This article presents the theoretical and methodological considerations behind a research method which the author calls 'phronetic planning research'. Such research sets out to answer four questions of power and values for specific instances of planning: (1) Where are we going with planning? (2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? (3) Is this development desirable? (4) What, if anything, should we do about it? A central task of phronetic planning research is to provide concrete examples and detailed narratives of the ways in which power and values work in planning and with what consequences to whom, and to suggest how relations of power and values could be changed to work with other consequences. Insofar as planning situations become clear, they are clarified by detailed stories of who is doing what to whom. Clarifications of that kind are a principal concern for phronetic planning research and provide the main link to praxis.*

> The way to re-enchant the world … is to stick to the concrete. (Richard Rorty)

Letting Rationalism Go

An earlier article discussed what was called 'phronetic planning research' and offered an example of how this method may be employed in practice (Flyvbjerg, 2002). It is a basic tenet of phronetic planning research that practical examples are typically more effective vehicles of communication than are discussions of theory and methodology. Consequently, it was found to be appropriate to first depict phronetic planning research by way of an example. Needless to say, that does not leave theory and methodology unimportant, and this article will argue the case for phronetic planning research from the perspective of its theoretical and methodological underpinnings.

The old joke that methodology, like sex, is better demonstrated than discussed, applies here as elsewhere. The author is well aware of the paradox that the article will be arguing theoretically for a methodology that emphasizes practice. Readers who are unwilling to accept this paradox and want to see practical examples up front should refer to Flyvbjerg (1998b, 2002), which demonstrates the methodology in action. However, for researchers who are considering undertaking phronetic planning research, the thoughts below may be useful, not as methodological imperatives, but as possible indicators of direction. In any case, these are the reflections on theory and methodology

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that have gone into developing the phronetic approach to planning research. The objective has been to help develop a pragmatist, as opposed to normative or utopian, position in planning research.

Three things need to be done if planning research is to be taken in this direction. First, the rationalism typical of most of the schools of planning thought that influence planning research should be given up, from the rational planning paradigm to the knowledge/action theory of planning to the communicative paradigm. The taken-for-granted 'truths' about the rational and progressive promise of planning should be replaced by an analysis of these truths, and of planning, in terms of power. Second, the problems that matter to groups in the local, national, and global communities in which we live should be addressed, and this should be done in ways that matter. Finally, the results of research should be communicated effectively and dialogically to fellow citizens and their feedback should be carefully listened to.

If this is done, with a focus on the values and interests of specific groups in the context of particular power relations, planning research may be transformed more effectively into an activity of import to those involved in and affected by planning, sometimes by clarifying, sometimes by critiquing and intervening, sometimes by generating new perspectives, and always by serving as eyes and ears in ongoing efforts at understanding the present of planning and deliberating about its future.

What is Phronetic Planning Research?

Phronetic planning research is an approach to the study of planning based on a contemporary interpretation of the classical Greek concept *phronesis*, variously translated as practical wisdom, practical judgement, common sense, or prudence. Indeed, other planning research has focused on practical judgement and could be said to contain elements of *phronesis* in this sense (Forester, 1993, pp. xi, 32; 1999; Throgmorton, 1996). The main difference between such research and the approach developed here lies in the concept of power. Previous research with a focus on practical judgement has been steeped in the communicative, Habermasian tradition. Elsewhere it has been argued that this tradition is not the most effective for thinking about power in planning (Flyvbjerg, 1998a). In order to understand power it would be better to take a point of departure in thinkers who focus on power instead of in thinkers who focus on communicative rationality. Therefore, the point of departure in the current study is in the work of Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and Foucault, who have all written canonical texts on power.

Like previous thinking about practical judgement in planning, the classical interpretation of *phronesis* is strong on values but weak on issues of power. The interpretation presented in what follows attempts to balance values and power. Here practical wisdom involves not only appreciative judgements in terms of values but also an understanding of the practical political realities of any situation as part of an integrated judgement in terms of power. First, the article will clarify what *phronesis* and phronetic planning research is. Second, an attempt will be made to tease out the methodological implications of this research approach.

Aristotle is the philosopher of *phronesis* par excellence. In Aristotle's words, *phronesis* is an intellectual virtue that is "reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad for man" (*The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1976, hereafter abbreviated as *N.E.*, pp. 1140a24–b12, 1144b33–1145a11). *Phronesis* concerns values and goes beyond analytical, scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and technical knowledge or know how (*techne*) and it involves what Vickers (1995) calls "the art of judgement", that is to say decisions made

in the manner of a virtuoso social actor. It will be argued here that *phronesis* is commonly involved in practices of planning and, therefore, that any attempts to reduce planning research to *episteme* or *techne* or to comprehend planning practices in those terms are misguided.

Aristotle was explicit in his regard of *phronesis* as the most important of the three intellectual virtues: *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is most important because it is that activity by which instrumental rationality is balanced by value-rationality. The distinction between instrumental rationality and value-rationality follows Max Weber (1978, p. 85ff.). Instrumental rationality is sometimes also called 'means-rationality' and value-rationality is also called 'substantive rationality'. According to Aristotle and Weber, the balancing of instrumental rationality by value-rationality is crucial to the viability of any social organization, from the family to the state. However, a curious fact can be observed. Whereas *episteme* is found in the modern words 'epistemology' and 'epistemic', and *techne* in 'technology' and 'technical', it is indicative of the degree to which scientific and instrumental rationality dominate modern thinking and language that there is no modern word that similarly incorporates the classical word for the one intellectual virtue, *phronesis*, which Aristotle and other founders of the Western tradition saw as a necessary condition of successful social organization, and as its most important prerequisite. Therefore, for lack of a satisfactory modern word, the term 'phronetic' is used to denote planning research that emphasizes *phronesis*.

Aristotle on *Episteme, Techne, and Phronesis*

The term 'epistemic' derives from the intellectual virtue that Aristotle calls *episteme*, and which is generally translated as 'science' or 'scientific knowledge'. Aristotle defines *episteme* in this manner:

> Scientific knowledge [*episteme*] is a demonstrative state, (i.e. a state of mind capable of demonstrating what it knows) … i.e. a person has scientific knowledge when his belief is conditioned in a certain way, and the first principles are known to him; because if they are not better known to him than the conclusion drawn from them, he will have knowledge only incidentally. This may serve as a description of scientific knowledge. (*N.E.*, pp. 1139b18–36)

Episteme concerns universals and the production of knowledge that is invariable in time and space and achieved with the aid of analytical rationality. *Episteme* corresponds to the modern scientific ideal as expressed in natural science. In Socrates and Plato, and subsequently in the Enlightenment tradition, this scientific ideal became dominant. The ideal has come close to being the only legitimate view of what constitutes genuine science, such that even intellectual activities like planning research and other social sciences, which are not and probably never can be scientific in the epistemic sense, have found themselves compelled to strive for and justify themselves in terms of this Enlightenment ideal (for the full argument, see Flyvbjerg, 2001, Ch. 3–4).

Planning research practiced as *episteme* would be basic science aiming at universality and searching for generic truths or laws about planning. Historically, this type of research has contained strong elements of positivism and rationalism. Today, many planning researchers consider positivism a long-dead phenomenon of the 1960s and 1970s. This is the view of Judith Innes, for instance, who in a recent debate about post-positivism held that, "to keep worrying about the positivist model seems to be beating a dead horse".[1] Positivism and the rational model of planning have been

relegated to a corner of the curriculum rather than the center, which is now occupied by communicative planning theory, according to Innes. But, as pointed out by Frank Fischer in a reply to Innes, it is only on the surface of things, in discourse, that positivism has declined. Studies show that in practice the positivist tenet is still very much with us (Morcol, 2001). Fischer therefore concludes:

> In short, the ideology wanes, but the practices [of positivism] remain embedded in our educational and governmental institutions. And, because they still play a powerful ideological role in determining what is considered important and what is not, all the more so because they are hidden, it is unlikely that they will simply go away if we ignore them.[1]

Consider, moreover, that positivism and rationalism are still going strong, with even a renaissance based on rational choice theory in economics, political science, and certain parts of sociology. Therefore, according to Fischer, the critique of positivism and rationalism must be continued. In planning research, this would entail a critique of the major schools of planning thought that inform planning research. These schools all view planning through the optics of rationalism, communicative or synoptic, and have not come to terms with what will be identified as "the inevitable question of power" (Friedmann, 1998, p. 249). However, at the same time as continuing the critique, as Fischer recommends, alternatives must also be developed. In Fischer's words, we have to "operate on both fronts, critique and reconstruction".[2] The remainder of this article will look at the methodology involved in one such attempt at reconstruction, recognizing that other attempts are being developed in other contexts (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003; Hillier, 2002; Sandercock, 2003). The main difference between the approach developed here and other approaches lies, as emphasized above, in the understanding of power.

   Whereas *episteme* resembles our ideal modern scientific project, *techne* and *phronesis* denote two alternative roles of intellectual work. *Techne* can be translated into English as 'art' in the sense of 'craft'; a craftsperson is also an *art*isan. For Aristotle, both *techne* and *phronesis* are connected with the concept of truth, as is *episteme*. Aristotle says the following regarding *techne*:

> Since (e.g.) building is an art [*techne*] and is essentially a reasoned productive state, and since there is no art that is not a state of this kind, and no state of this kind that is not an art, it follows that art is the same as a productive state that is truly reasoned. Every art is concerned with bringing something into being, and the practice of an art is the study of how to bring into being something that is capable either of being or of not being … For it is not with things that are or come to be *of necessity* that art is concerned [this is the domain of *episteme*] nor with natural objects (because these have their origin in themselves) … Art … operate[s] in the sphere of the variable. (*N.E.*, pp. 1140a1–23)

Techne is thus craft and art, and as an activity it is concrete, variable, and context-dependent. The objective of *techne* is application of technical knowledge and skills according to a pragmatic instrumental rationality, what Foucault calls "a practical rationality governed by a conscious goal" (Foucault, 1984b, p. 255). Planning research practiced as *techne* would be a type of consulting aimed at arriving at better planning by means of instrumental rationality, where 'better' is defined in terms of the values and goals of those who employ the consultants, sometimes in negotiation with the latter.

Whereas *episteme* concerns theoretical *know why* and *techne* denotes technical *know how*, *phronesis* emphasizes practical knowledge and practical ethics. Again, examining what Aristotle has to say:

> We may grasp the nature of prudence [*phronesis*] if we consider what sort of people we call prudent. Well, it is thought to be the mark of a prudent man to be able to deliberate rightly about what is good and advantageous … But nobody deliberates about things that are invariable … So … prudence cannot be a science or art; not science [*episteme*] because what can be done is a variable (it may be done in different ways, or not done at all), and not art [*techne*] because action and production are generically different. For production aims at an end other than itself; but this is impossible in the case of action, because the end is merely doing *well*. What remains, then, is that it is a true state, reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad for man … We consider that this quality belongs to those who understand the management of households or states. (*N.E.*, pp. 1140a24–b12, italics in the original)

The person possessing practical wisdom (*phronimos*) has knowledge of how to manage in each particular circumstance that can never be equated with or reduced to knowledge of general truths about managing. *Phronesis* is a sense or a tacit skill for doing the ethically practical rather than a kind of science. For Plato, rational humans are moved by the cosmic order; for Aristotle they are moved by a sense of the proper order among the ends we pursue. This sense cannot be articulated in terms of theoretical axioms, but is grasped by *phronesis* (Taylor, 1989, pp. 125, 148).

One might get the impression in Aristotle's original description that *phronesis* and the choices it involves in concrete decisions are always good. This is not necessarily the case. Choices must be deemed good or bad in relation to certain values and interests in order for good and bad to have meaning. Phronetic planning research is concerned with reflection about such values and interests.

In sum, the three intellectual virtues *episteme, techne*, and *phronesis* can be characterized as follows:

- *Episteme*: Scientific knowledge. Universal, invariable, context-independent. Based on general analytical rationality. The original concept is known today in the terms 'epistemology' and 'epistemic'. Planning research practiced as *episteme* would be concerned with uncovering universal truths and laws about planning.
- *Techne*: Craft/art. Pragmatic, variable, context-dependent. Oriented toward production. Based on practical instrumental rationality governed by a conscious goal. The original concept appears today in terms like 'technique', 'technical', and 'technology'. Planning research practiced as *techne* would be consulting aimed at arriving at better planning by means of instrumental rationality, where 'better' is defined in terms of the values and goals of those who employ the consultants, sometimes in negotiation with the latter.
- *Phronesis*: Ethics. Deliberation about values with reference to praxis. Pragmatic, variable, context-dependent. Oriented toward action. Based on practical value-rationality. The original concept is not to be found in an analogous contemporary term; it has disappeared from modern language. Planning research practiced as *phronesis* would be concerned with deliberation about (including questioning of) values and interests in planning.

Priority of the Particular

Phronesis concerns the analysis of values—"things that are good or bad for man", in Aristotle's ancient formulation—as a point of departure for planned action. *Phronesis* is that intellectual activity most relevant to praxis. It focuses on what is variable, on that which cannot be encapsulated by universal rules, on specific cases. *Phronesis* requires an interaction between the general and the concrete; it requires deliberation, judgement, and choice (on the relationship between judgement and *phronesis*, see Ruderman, 1997). More than anything else, *phronesis* requires *experience*. About the importance of specific experience, Aristotle says:

> Prudence [*phronesis*] is not concerned with universals only; it must also take cognizance of particulars, because it is concerned with conduct, and conduct has its sphere in particular circumstances. That is why some people who do not possess theoretical knowledge are more effective in action (especially if they are experienced) than others who do possess it. For example, suppose that someone knows that light flesh foods are digestible and wholesome, but does not know what kinds are light; he will be less likely to produce health than one who knows that chicken is wholesome. But prudence is practical, and therefore it must have both kinds of knowledge, or especially the latter. (*N.E.*, pp. 1141b8–27)

Here, again, Aristotle is stressing that in practical decision making and planning (in this case decisions about health, which was a central concern for the ancient Greeks), knowledge of the rules ('light flesh foods are digestible and wholesome') is inferior to knowledge of the real cases ('chicken is wholesome'). In the field of business administration and management, some of the best schools, like Harvard Business School, have understood the importance of cases over rules and emphasize case-based and practical teaching. Schools like this may be called Aristotelian, whereas schools stressing theory and rules may be called Platonic. More Aristotelian planning schools are needed, and encouragingly, developments in this direction are ongoing at a number of schools including MIT, Cornell, Newcastle, Sheffield, and Aalborg.

Some interpretations of Aristotle's intellectual virtues leave doubt as to whether *phronesis* and *techne* are distinct categories, or whether *phronesis* is just a higher form of *techne* or know-how (for such an interpretation and its problematization, see Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1990 and 1991, pp. 102–107). Aristotle is clear on this point, however. Even if both *phronesis* and *techne* involve skill and judgement, one type of intellectual virtue cannot be reduced to the other; *phronesis* is about value judgement in specific situations, not about producing things.

Similarly, in other parts of the literature one finds attempts at conflating *phronesis* and *episteme* in the sense of making *phronesis* epistemic (Ferrara, 1989). However, insofar as *phronesis* operates via a practical rationality based on judgement and experience, it can only be made scientific in an epistemic sense through the development of a theory of judgement and experience. In fact Ferrara (1989, p. 319) has called for the "elaboration of a theory of judgement" as one of "the unaccomplished tasks of critical theory". In line with Jürgen Habermas, Ferrara (1989, p. 316; 1999) says that a theory of judgement is necessary in order to avoid contextualism, understood here as dependence on context in establishing validity claims, although he also notes that such a theory "unfortunately is not yet in sight". Ferrara sees contextualism as dangerous relativism. A theory of judgement would serve as protection against such danger. What Ferrara apparently does

not consider is that a theory of judgement and experience is not in sight because judgement and experience cannot be brought into a theoretical formula. Aristotle warns us directly against the type of reductionism that conflates *phronesis* and *episteme*.

With his thoughts on the intellectual virtues, Aristotle emphasizes properties of intellectual work, which are central to the production of knowledge in the study of planning and other social phenomena. The particular and the situationally dependent are emphasized over the universal and over rules. The concrete and the practical are emphasized over the theoretical. It is what Nussbaum (1990, p. 66) calls the "priority of the particular" in Aristotle's thinking (see also Devereux, 1986). Aristotle practices what he preaches by providing a specific example of his argument, viz. light flesh foods vs. chicken. He understands the 'power of example'. The example concerns the management of human health and has as its point of departure something both concrete and fundamental concerning human functioning. Both aspects are typical of many classical philosophers. It is also typical of the strands in planning theory and research, and in other types of social science, that has come to be known under such labels as post-positivist, post-structuralist, and postmodern, if one can still use such ambiguous terms.

These points will be returned to later. At this stage it can be simply concluded that despite their importance, the concrete, the practical, and the ethical have been neglected by modern science. Today one would be open to ridicule if one sought to support an argument using an example such as that of Aristotle's chicken. The sciences are supposed to concern themselves precisely with the explication of universals, and even if it is wrong the *conventional* wisdom is that one cannot generalize from a particular case (on how to generalize from a single case, see Flyvbjerg, 2004). Moreover, according to the canon the ultimate goal of scientific activity is the production of theory. Aristotle is here clearly anti-Socratic and anti-Platonic. If modern theoretical science is built upon any body of thought, it is that of Socrates and Plato. There is a profound disagreement here.

As pointed out by Rorty (1991, p. 25), in this interpretation reflection is what a culture, including cultures of planning, becomes capable of when it ceases to define itself in terms of explicit rules, and becomes sufficiently leisured and civilized to rely on inarticulate know-how, to "substitute *phronesis* for codification". Aristotle found that every well-functioning organization and society was dependent on the effective functioning of all three intellectual virtues, *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*. At the same time, however, Aristotle emphasized the crucial importance of *phronesis*, "for the possession of the single virtue of prudence [*phronesis*] will carry with it the possession of them all" (*N.E.*, pp. 1144b33–1145a11). *Phronesis* is most important, from an Aristotelian point of view, because it is that intellectual virtue that may ensure the ethical employment of science (*episteme*) and technology (*techne*). Because *phronesis* today is marginalized in the intellectual scheme of things, scientific and technological development take place without the ethical checks and balances that Aristotle saw as all-important. This is a major planning and management problem in its own right.

Four Phronetic Questions

The principal objective for planning research with a phronetic approach is to clarify values, interests, and power relations in planning as a basis for praxis. The point of departure can be summarized in the following value-rational questions:

(1) Where are we going?
(2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?

Key Questions of Phronetic Planning Research
(to be asked for specific instances of planning)

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(1) Where are we going with planning?
(2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?
(3) Is this development desirable?
(4) What, if anything, should we do about it?

Box 1.

(3) Is this development desirable?
(4) What, if anything, should we do about it?

Question (2), the power question, is what distinguishes, in particular, contemporary from classical *phronesis*, and phronetic planning research from other types of such research. The phronetic concept of power will be developed further below. The 'we' referred to in questions (1) and (4) consists of those planning researchers asking the questions and those who share the concerns of the researchers, including people in the community or planning organization under study. Thus the 'we' will always be situated in relation to a specific context. Furthermore, when there is a 'we' there is also usually a 'they', especially when issues get constructed in adversarial terms, which often happens in the planning conflicts planning researchers examine. Phronetic planning research takes into account both the 'we' and the 'they',

  Planning researchers who ask and provide answers to the four value-rational questions, use their studies not merely as a mirror for planning to reflect on its values, but also as the nose, eyes, and ears of planning, in order to sense where things may be going next and what, if anything, to do about it. The questions are asked with the realization that there is no general and unified 'we' in relation to which the questions can be given a final, objective answer. What is a 'gain' and a 'loss' often depends on the perspective taken, and in zero-sum games one person's gain may be another's loss. Phronetic planning researchers are highly aware of the importance of perspective, and see no neutral ground, no 'view from nowhere', for their work.

  It should be stressed that no one has enough wisdom and experience to give complete answers to the four questions, whatever those answers might be for a specific problematic. Such wisdom and experience should not be expected from planning researchers, who are on average probably no more astute or ethical than anyone else. What should be expected, however, are attempts from phronetic researchers to develop their partial answers to the questions. These answers would be input to the ongoing dialogue about the problems, possibilities, and risks that planning face and how things may be done differently.

Methodological Guidelines for Phronetic Planning Research

What, then, might a set of methodological guidelines for phronetic planning research look like? This question will be the focus of the remainder of the article. It should be stressed immediately that the methodological guidelines summarized below should not be seen as imperatives; at most they are cautionary indicators of direction for researchers who would like to introduce an element of *phronesis* in their work. It should also be repeated that undoubtedly there are ways of practicing phronetic planning research

other than those outlined here. The most important issue is not the individual method involved. Phronetic planning research is not method-driven, even if questions of method may have some significance. Phronetic planning research is problem-driven. Therefore such research does not, and cannot, subscribe a priori to a certain method, for instance discourse analysis, statistics, or qualitative methods, even though each or all of these methods may prove relevant in a specific piece of research in order to address the specific problems at hand. It is impossible to be truly problem driven and at the same time committed to a certain method. Thus the primary issue for phronetic planning research is to arrive at research that effectively answers the four value-rational questions as a basis for action. The method employed to provide such answers is of secondary importance, in the sense that the method will be decided by the specific research problems at hand.

The main point of departure for explicating the methodological guidelines for phronetic planning research is a reading of Aristotle and Michel Foucault,[3] supplemented with readings of other thinkers, mainly Pierre Bourdieu, Clifford Geertz, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Richard Rorty, who all emphasize phronetic before epistemic knowledge in the study of social affairs, despite important differences in other domains.

Focusing on Values

By definition, phronetic planning researchers focus on values and, especially, evaluative judgements; for example, by taking their point of departure in the classic value-rational questions: 'Where are we going?' 'Is this desirable?' 'What should be done?' The objective is to balance instrumental rationality with value-rationality and increase the capacity of researchers, planners, and those planned to think and act in value-rational terms. This will not be news to planning researchers who have asked and answered such questions with increasing success since the questions were first introduced during the 1970s in reactions against positivistic research. However, when asked in the context of power, value questions take on new meaning (see next section). Asking value-rational questions does not imply a belief in linearity and continuous progress. The phronetic planning researcher knows enough about power to understand that progress is often complex, ephemeral, and hard-won, and that set-backs are an inevitable part of planning.

Focusing on values, phronetic planning researchers are forced to face questions of foundationalism versus relativism, that is, the view that there are central values that can be rationally and universally grounded, versus the view that one set of values is as good as another. Phronetic planning researchers reject both of these 'isms' and replace them with contextualism, or situational ethics. Distancing themselves from foundationalism does not leave phronetic planning researchers 'normless', however. They take their point of departure in their attitude to the situation in the context under study. They seek to ensure that such an attitude is not based on idiosyncratic morality or personal preferences, but on a common view among a specific reference group to which the planning researchers belong. For phronetic planning researchers, the socially and historically conditioned context, and not the universal grounding that is desired by some scholars but not yet achieved, constitutes the most effective bulwark against relativism and nihilism. 'Nihilism' is here used in the conventional meaning as a theory promoting the state of believing in nothing or of having no allegiances and no purposes. Phronetic planning researchers realize that our sociality and history are the only foundations we have, the only solid ground under our feet; and that this socio-historical foundation is fully adequate for our work as planning researchers.

As regards validity, phronetic planning research is based on interpretation and is open for testing in relation to other interpretations and other research. Validity, for the phronetic researcher, is defined in the conventional manner as well-grounded evidence and arguments, and the procedures for ensuring validity are no different in phronetic planning research than in other parts of the social sciences. Thus one interpretation is not as good as any other, which would be the case for relativism. Every interpretation must be built upon claims of validity. Phronetic planning researchers do not claim final, indisputable objectivity for their validity claims, however, nor do they believe other social scientists can make such claims. This is because, empirically, objectivity of that kind has never been demonstrated to exist in the social sciences. It is not available to phronetic planning researchers, nor to positivists, nor to anyone else studying human affairs. If positivists or others think otherwise, the history and philosophy of social science show that they carry the burden of proof. Phronetic planning researchers also do not claim their analyses to be outside power, because no analysis is. The latter point has been established by several decades of Foucauldian and Nietzschean scholarship. Any thoughts of a neutral 'evidence-based policy' should take such considerations into account (on the current UK fashion for evidence-based policy, see this journal, 3(1), 2002).

Phronetic planning researchers oppose the view that any one among a number of interpretations lacks value because it is 'merely' an interpretation. As emphasized by Nehamas (1985, p. 63), the key point is the establishment of a *better* option, where 'better' is defined in the customary manner as based on better sets of validity claims, accepted or rejected by the community of scholars. If a new interpretation appears to better explain a given phenomenon, that new interpretation will replace the old one, until it, too, is replaced by a new and yet better interpretation. This is typically a continuing process, not one that terminates with 'the right answer'. Such is the procedure that a community of planning researchers would follow in working together to put certain interpretations of planning ahead of others (see also the section on 'dialogue' below). The procedure by which validity is determined in phronetic research is therefore no different from how this is done in other social science research. The procedure does not so much describe an interpretive or relativistic approach. Rather, it sets forth the basic ground rules for any inquiry into human affairs, inasmuch as social science and philosophy have not yet identified criteria by which an ultimate interpretation and a final grounding of values and facts can be made.

Placing Power at the Core of Analysis

There can be no adequate understanding of planning without placing the analysis of planning within the context of power. Rationality without power spells irrelevance (Flyvbjerg, 1998b). Friedmann (1998, pp. 249–250) in a recent stocktaking article on planning research identified power as one of the key points he would do differently today in thinking about planning: Friedmann would now explicitly introduce what he calls 'the inevitable question of power'. This is what phronetic planning researchers attempt to do. But here the guidance from Aristotle and other classical thinkers of *phronesis* is weak. Aristotle never elaborated his conception of *phronesis* to include explicit considerations of power. Gadamer's (1975) authoritative and contemporary conception of *phronesis* also overlooks issues of power. Yet, as Bernstein (1989, p. 217) points out, if we are to think about what can be done to the problems, possibilities, and risks of our time, we must advance from the original conception of *phronesis* to one

explicitly including power. Unfortunately, Bernstein himself has not integrated his work on *phronesis* with issues of power. Elsewhere it has been argued that in modern society conflict and power have evolved into phenomena constitutive of social and political inquiry, of which planning research is considered to be a part. Therefore, an attempt has been made to develop the classic concept of *phronesis* to a more contemporary one, which accounts for power (Flyvbjerg, 2001, Ch. 7–8).

Besides focusing on questions (1), (3), and (4), which are the classical Aristotelian questions, a contemporary reading of *phronesis* also poses questions about power and outcomes: 'Who gains, and who loses?' 'Through what kinds of power relations?' 'What possibilities are available to change existing power relations?' 'And is it desirable to do so?' 'What are the power relations among those who ask these questions?' Phronetic planning research poses these questions with the intention of avoiding the voluntarism and idealism typical of so much ethical thinking.

The main question is not only the Weberian: 'Who governs?' posed by Robert Dahl and most other students of power (Dahl, 1961). It is also the Nietzschean question: What 'governmental rationalities' are at work when those who govern govern? (Foucault, 1979). With these questions and with the focus on value-rationality, phronetic planning researchers relate explicitly to a primary context of values and power. Combining the best of a Nietzschean/Foucauldian interpretation of power with the best of a Weberian/ Dahlian one, the analysis of power is guided by a conception of power that can be characterized by six features:

(1) Power is seen as productive and positive, and not only as restrictive and negative.
(2) Power is viewed as a dense net of omnipresent relations, and not only as being localized in 'centres,' organizations, and institutions or as an entity one can 'possess.'
(3) The concept of power is seen as ultra-dynamic; power is not merely something one appropriates, it is also something one reappropriates and exercises in a constant back-and-forth movement within the relationships of strength, tactics, and strategies inside of which one exists.
(4) Knowledge and power, truth and power, rationality and power are analytically inseparable from each other; power produces knowledge and knowledge produces power.
(5) The central question is *how* power is exercised, and not merely *who* has power and *why* they have it; the focus is on process in addition to structure.
(6) Power is studied with a point of departure in small questions, 'flat and empirical', not only, nor even primarily, with a point of departure in 'big questions' (Foucault, 1982, p. 217). Careful analysis of the power dynamics of specific practices is a core concern.

Analyses of power in planning following this format cannot be equated with a general analytics of every possible power relation in planning. Other approaches and other interpretations are possible. They can, however, serve as a possible and productive point of departure for dealing with questions of power in doing *phronesis*.

Getting Close to Reality

Campbell (1986, pp. 128–129), Lindblom & Cohen (1979, p. 84), Lindblom (1990), and others have noted that the development of social research is inhibited by the fact that

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researchers tend to work with problems in which the answer to the question: 'If you are wrong about this, who will notice?' is all too often: 'Nobody'. Bailey (1992, p. 50) calls the outcome of such research "so what' results'. Phronetic planning researchers seek to transcend this problem of relevance by anchoring their research in the context studied. This applies to both contemporary and historical planning studies.

For contemporary studies, researchers get close to the community, organization, phenomenon, or group that they study during data collection, and remain close during the phases of data analysis, feedback, and publication of results. Combined with the above-mentioned focus on relations of values and power, this strategy typically creates interest in the research by parties outside the research community. These parties will test and evaluate the research in various ways. Phronetic planning researchers will deliberately expose themselves to positive and negative reactions from their surroundings, and are likely to derive benefit from the learning effect and possibilities for improved validity, which are built into this strategy. In this way, the phronetic planning researcher becomes a part of the phenomenon studied, without necessarily 'going native' or the project becoming simple action research. Action researchers and anthropologists who have gone native typically identify with the people they are studying; they adopt the perspective and goals of those studied and use research results in an effort to promote these goals. This is not necessarily the case for phronetic planning researchers who at all times retain the classic academic freedom to problematize and be critical of what they see.

Researchers' becoming part of that which they study may also mean becoming part of local power relations. As a consequence some stakeholders may come to see researchers as political or even biased. If this happens during or before data collection, some people may decide not to talk to the researchers and be unhelpful in other ways while others will be forthright and supportive. Some will be honest while others will not. Phronetic researchers' immersion in the local political dialogue will influence that dialogue. Conversely, locally-exercised power may influence what researchers learns. Researchers must take this into account in establishing and arguing the validity of their work

For historical studies, phronetic planning researchers conduct much of their work in those locales where the relevant historical materials are placed, and they typically probe deeply into archives, annals, and individual documents. To the attentive researcher archives will reveal a knowledge whose visible body "is neither theoretical or scientific discourse nor literature, but a regular, daily practice" (Foucault, 1969, pp. 4–5; here quoted from Eribon, 1991, p. 215). In historical studies, as in contemporary ones, the objective is to get close to reality. *Wirkliche Historie* (real history), says Foucault (1984a, p. 89), "shortens its vision to those things nearest to it". C. Roland Christensen, arguably one of the fathers of the case method at Harvard University, expresses a similar attitude about his research by invoking Henry Miller to describe the approach taken by case researchers:

> My whole work has come to resemble a terrain of which I have made a thorough, geodetic survey, not from a desk with pen and ruler, but by touch, by getting down on all fours, on my stomach, and crawling over the ground inch by inch, and this over an endless period of time in all conditions of weather. (Miller, 1941, p. 27; quoted in slightly different form in Christensen with Hansen, 1987, p. 18)

Methodological Guidelines for Phronetic Planning Research

(1) Focus on values
(2) Place power at the core of analysis
(3) Get close to reality
(4) Emphasize "little things"
(5) Look at practice before discourse
(6) Study cases and contexts
(7) Ask "How?", do narrative
(8) Move beyond agency and structure
(9) Do dialog with a polyphony of voices

Box 2.

Emphasizing 'Little Things'

Phronetic planning researchers begin their work by phenomenologically asking 'little questions' and focusing on what Geertz (1973, p. 6; 1983) calls 'thick description'. This procedure may often seem tedious and trivial. Nietzsche and Foucault (1984a, p. 76), both emphasize that it requires "patience and a knowledge of details" and it depends on a "vast accumulation of source material". Geertz explicates the dilemma involved in skipping minutiae. The problem with an approach that extracts the general from the particular and then sets the particular aside as detail, illustration, background, or qualification, is, as Geertz (1995a, p. 40; 1990, 1995b) says, that it leaves us helpless in the face of the very difference we need to explore; it does indeed simplify matters. It is less certain that it clarifies them. Nietzsche, who advocates "patience and seriousness in the smallest things" (1968a, pp. 182, §59) expresses a similar, though more radical, point regarding the importance of detail when he says that "all the problems of politics, of social organization, and of education have been falsified through and through … because one learned to despise 'little' things, which means the basic concerns of life itself" (1969a, pp.256, §10). It is a challenge to phronetic planning researchers not to gloss over such 'little things' when writing up research accounts. Fortunately, the recent ethnographic turn in planning research, exemplified by, for instance Forester (1999), Flyvbjerg (1998b), and Throgmorton (1996), holds examples of how this may be done.

The focus on minutiae, which directly opposes much conventional wisdom about the need to focus on 'important problems' and 'big questions', has its background in the fundamental phenomenological experience of small questions often leading to big answers. In this sense, phronetic planning research is decentred in its approach, taking its point of departure in the micropractices of planning, searching for the Great within the Small and vice versa. 'God is in the detail' the proverb says. 'So is the Devil' the phronetic planning researcher would add, doing work that is at the same time as detailed and as general as possible.

Looking at Practice before Discourse

Through words and concepts we are continually tempted to think of things as being simpler than they are, says Nietzsche: "there is a philosophical mythology concealed in *language*" (1968a, p. 191, App. C, emphasis in original). Michel Serres puts the matter

even more succinctly, saying that language has a disgust for things. Phronetic planning research attempts to get beyond this problem by focusing on planning practice. What people actually do in planning is seen as more fundamental than either discourse, text, or theory—what people say. Foucault says that discourse is not life; regular, daily practice is life (1991, p. 72; 1981, p. 5; Foucault in Eribon, 1991, pp. 214–216). This could be the motto for phronetic planning research

Phronetic planning researchers focus on practical activity and practical knowledge in everyday situations in planning. It *may* mean, but is certainly not limited to, a focus on known sociological, ethnographic, and historical phenomena like 'everyday life' and 'everyday people', with their focus on the so-called 'common'. What it *always* means, however, is a focus on the actual daily practices, common or highly specialized or rarefied, which constitute a given field of interest, regardless of whether these practices constitute the UNDP headquarters, a local planning office, a particular plan or project, a grassroots organization, a neighbourhood, or the decisions of an architectural review board.

At first, the planning researcher takes no position regarding the truth-value and significance ascribed by participants to the planning practices studied. No practice is seen as more valuable than another. The horizon of meaning is initially that of the single planning practice. The researcher then attempts to understand the roles played by such single practices studied in their contextual relations. If it is established, for example, that a certain planning practice is seen as rational according to its self-understanding—that is, by those practicing it, but not when viewed in the context of other horizons of meaning—the researcher then asks what role this ambiguous rationality plays in a further context, historically, socially, and politically, and what the consequences might be.

In hermeneutics, this research technique is known as the playing off of different horizons of meaning against each other. A further aspect of this technique is so-called 'bracketing', which is a type of neutralizing, temporarily and to the extent possible, of one horizon of meaning in relation to others. This includes neutralizing researchers' own horizon of meaning in order to understand the *wirkliche Historie* (real history) and real (as opposed to formal) rationality of planning. The bracketing of one's own horizon of meaning can never be absolute, needless to say, but it can be practiced to a greater or lesser degree. Such bracketing is particularly important in areas with a strong normative orientation, like planning and planning research, as an antidote to letting visions of what ought to be get in the way of a firm grasp of what is empirically happening.

As pointed out by Yiftachel (2001), planning research is held back by a normative, inward-looking discourse which has long dominated planning theory, recently in the guise of communicative rationalism. Planning researchers tend to hold an a priori belief in the profession's supporting ideological apparatus, i.e. the taken-for-granted 'truths' adopted by most planning scholars about the progressive and rational promise of planning. Yiftachel is right in pointing out that if we are to thrive as a profession of practitioners and scholars, we need to do what successful professions do elsewhere: carry out an ongoing critique of our study object, planning. But critique cannot be done on the basis of the assumption that planning is good, or on the basis of the promise of planning. As scholars we must see planning as simply a phenomenon to observe and engage with which may be good or bad in specific instances of planning practice. Only by relaxing and distancing ourselves from our a priori assumptions about planning will we be able as scholars to make our contribution to progress in planning.

Bracketing enables the researcher to master a subject matter even when it is hideous and when there is a 'brutality of fact' involved in the approach. This approach may, in turn, offend people who mistake for immorality the researcher's willingness to uncover and face what they find to be morally unacceptable. There may also be intensity and optimism, however, in facing even the pessimistic and depressing sides of power and human action in planning. The description of practices endures and gains its strength from detecting the forces that make planning and the life of planners and planned work. If the researcher uncovers a planning reality that is ugly or even shocking when judged by the moral standards, which, we like to believe, apply in modern planning, this reality may also demonstrate something that has to be faced squarely by planners, by planning researchers, and by the general public, if this reality is to be changed.

Nietzsche (1966, p. 55) acutely named this kind of approach to research 'The Gay [*fröhliche*] Science', and he called those practicing the approach 'free spirits', describing them as "curious to a vice, investigators to the point of cruelty, with uninhibited fingers for the unfathomable, with teeth and stomachs for the most indigestible … collectors from morning till late, misers of our riches and our crammed drawers". More 'free spirits' are needed in planning research and Nietzsche's depiction of what they would be like may serve as a first description of phronetic planning researchers.

Studying Cases and Contexts

Based on research of planning in South Africa, Watson (2003) argues that planning research "needs to return to the concrete, to the empirical and to case research". Not as a mindless return to empiricism, but as a way of gaining a better understanding of the nature of difference and conflict, and generating ideas and propositions which can more adequately inform planning practice than much current planning theory and research. Current attempts to develop theory and research through readings of various social theorists, such as Habermas or postmodernist thinkers, do not seem to be able to take us beyond questionable generalizations and universalizing concepts, according to Watson.

It is evident why sound observations like those of Watson and Yiftachel would come from researchers working in highly conflicting settings—South Africa and Israel/ Palestine, respectively. Difference, conflict, and power are so manifest and run so deep there that they refuse to be glossed over by the universalizing concepts of planning theory, planning research, and planning. Planning itself is used as an instrument of control by dominant groups over other groups. It is suggested this would also be the case elsewhere, if only we cared to do what Watson and Yiftachel recommend, be concrete and empirical and study specific cases. South Africa and Israel/Palestine exist anywhere, figuratively speaking, even in a highly democratic welfare state like Denmark, as an attempt was made to demonstrate in Flyvbjerg (1998b).

It was seen earlier that Aristotle explicitly identifies knowledge of 'particular circumstances' as a main ingredient of *phronesis* (*N.E.*, pp. 1141b8–1141b27). Foucault similarly worked according to the dictum "never lose sight of reference to a concrete example" (1969, p. 7; quoted in Eribon, 1991, p. 216). Phronetic planning research thus benefits from focusing on case studies, precedents, and exemplars, like good planning researchers have done from Meyerson & Banfield (1955) to Fainstein (1994), Fischler (2000), Forester (1999), and Healey (1994, 1999). *Phronesis* functions on the basis of practical rationality and judgement. As argued elsewhere, practical planning rationality and judgement evolve and operate primarily by virtue of in-depth case experiences (Flyvbjerg, 1989; MacIntyre, 1977). Practical rationality, therefore, is best understood through

cases, whether experienced or narrated, just as judgement is best cultivated and communicated via the exposition of cases. The significance of this point can hardly be overstated, which is why Rorty (1985, p. 173), in response to Max Weber's thesis regarding the modern 'disenchantment of the world', invokes John Dewey to say: "the way to re-enchant the world … is to stick to the concrete".

Context is important to case studies in planning. What has been called the "primacy of context" follows from the observation that in the history of science, human action has shown itself to be irreducible to predefined elements and rules unconnected to interpretation (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987, p. 8; Henderson, 1994). Therefore, it has been impossible to derive praxis from first principles and theory. Praxis has always been contingent on context-dependent judgement, on situational ethics. It would require a major transformation of current philosophy and science if this view were to change, and a transformation of that kind does not seem to be on the horizon.

What Bourdieu (1990, p. 9) calls the "feel for the game" is central to all human action of any complexity, including planning, and it enables an infinite number of 'moves' to be made, adapted to the infinite number of possible situations, which no rule-maker, however complex the rule, can foresee. Therefore, the judgement, which is central to *phronesis* and praxis, is always context dependent. The minutiae, practices, and concrete cases that lie at the heart of phronetic planning research must be seen in their proper contexts; both the small, local context, which gives phenomena their immediate meaning, and the larger, international and global context in which phenomena can be appreciated for their general and conceptual significance (Andler, 1998; Calhoun, 1994; Engel, 1999; Fenno, 1986; Shannon, 1990). In each example of research, researchers must decide which context is relevant to the planning problematic at hand and will best help answer the four phronetic questions at the core of the research.

Asking 'How?' Doing Narrative

It was seen previously that Foucault (1984a, p. 76) emphasizes a point of departure for social and political research in what he calls "the little question … flat and empirical", the question of 'How?'. Foucault stresses that our understanding will suffer if we do not start our analyses with this question, because we will not understand the dynamics of practice. Thus, phronetic planning researchers focus on the dynamic question, 'How?' in addition to the more structural 'Why?' They are concerned with both understanding and explaining. Researchers investigate and interpret outcomes of planning in relation to planning processes.

Asking 'How?' and conducting narrative analysis are closely interlinked activities. Earlier it was shown that a central question for *phronesis* is: What should we do? To this MacIntyre (1984, p. 216) answers: "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'" Nietzsche and Foucault similarly see history as being fundamental to social science and philosophy, and criticize social scientists and philosophers for their lack of historical sense (Nietzsche, 1968c, pp. 35, §1). History is central to phronetic planning research in both senses of the word, that is, *both* as narrative containing specific actors and events, in what Geertz (1988, p. 114; 1990) calls a story with a scientific plot; *and* as the recording of a historical development (Lerner, 1997). Narratology, understood as the question of "how best to get an honest story honestly told," is as important as epistemology and ontology (Geertz, 1988, p. 9; Czarniawska, 1997, 1998; Van Maanen, 1988).

Several observers have noted that narrative is an ancient method and perhaps our most fundamental form for making sense of experience (Abbott, 1992; Arendt, 1958; Bal, 1997; Carr, 1986; Fehn *et al.*, 1992; MacIntyre, 1984; Mattingly, 1991, p. 237; Novak, 1975, p. 175; Rasmussen, 1995; Ricoeur, 1984). To MacIntyre (1984, pp. 214, 216), the human being is a story-telling animal, and the notion of a history is as fundamental a notion as is the notion of an action. In a similar vein, Mattingly (1991, p. 237) points out that narratives not only give meaningful form to our experiences. They also provide us with a forward glance, helping us to anticipate situations even before we encounter them, allowing us to envisage alternative futures. This orientation towards the future makes narratives particularly useful in planning, a fact that has recently been explored in Eckstein & Throgmorton (2003), Flyvbjerg (1998b, 2001), Sandercock (2003), and Throgmorton (1996).

Narrative inquiries into planning do not, indeed cannot, start from explicit theoretical assumptions. Instead, they begin with an interest in a particular phenomenon in planning that is best understood narratively. Narrative inquiries then develop descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon from the perspective of participants, stakeholders, researchers, and others. In historical analyses of planning, both event and conjuncture are crucial, just as practices are studied in the context of several centuries, akin to what Fernand Braudel calls '*longue durée*'. The century-long view is employed in order to allow for the influence on current planning practices of traditions with long historical roots, an influence that is often substantially more significant than is generally assumed. Putnam *et al.* (1993) and Flyvbjerg (1998b, Ch. 8) provide examples from Italy and Denmark, respectively, of the remarkable influence on current planning practices of traditions with centuries-long historical roots.

Stories of planning practice do not and cannot 'tell themselves', although it will often seem as if they do to the researcher who is deeply immersed in uncovering the events and other minutiae that make up a particular chronicle. Stories have to be narrated, in writing or orally. That means the narrator, here the phronetic researcher, has to make choices about where to begin and end the story, what to emphasize, etc. Again, such choices are made on the basis of how they best contribute to answering the four phronetic questions for the particular planning problematic in question.

Moving Beyond Agency and Structure

Phronetic planning research focuses on both actors and structures, and on the relationship between the two. Planning's actors and their practices are analyzed in relation to the structures of the organizations, institutions, and societies of which they are a part. Structures are analyzed in terms of agency, not for the two to stand in a dualistic, external relationship, but so structures may be seen as part of and internalized in actors, and actors as part of and internalized in structures. Understanding from 'within' planning and from 'without' are both accorded emphasis. This is what Bourdieu (1977, p. 72), in adapting the Aristotelian and Thomist[4] 'habitus', a highly relevant concept for phronetic planning research, calls "the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality". Elsewhere, Bourdieu (1990, p. 10) explicitly states that the use of the notion of habitus can be understood as a way of escaping the choice between "a structuralism without a subject and the philosophy of the subject". Giddens (1984) attempts to tackle similar problems with his so-called 'structuration theory', albeit in a manner less informed by experience from empirical fieldwork.

As anyone who has tried it can testify, it is a demanding task to account simultaneously for the structural influences that shape the development of a given

phenomenon in planning while crafting a clear, penetrating narrative or microanalysis of that phenomenon. As Vaughan (1992, p. 183) says, theorizing about actors and structures remains bifurcated in social science. Researchers generally tend to generate either macro-level or micro-level explanations, ignoring the critical connections. Empirical work follows the same pattern. Instead of research that attempts to link macro-level factors and actors' choices in a specific phenomenon, scholars tend to dichotomize. Structural analyses and studies of actors each receive their share of attention, but in separate projects, by separate researchers. Those who join structure and actor in empirical work most often do so by theoretical inference: data at one level of analysis are coupled with theoretical speculation about the other. Therefore, many researchers may not be convinced that there is an escape from the duality of structural and individual analysis. They may believe there is no middle ground, for the very recalcitrance of the problem seems to attest to its staying power, according to Vaughan.

Things may have improved during the decade since Vaughan published her analysis, and planning researchers may be somewhat ahead of other social scientists in grappling with the actor/structure problem. Moreover, even Vaughan (1992, p. 182) pointed out that the problem may not be a real problem at all, but simply an artifact of data availability and graduate training. Besides, although good examples do not abound of how to integrate and move beyond the simple dichotomy of actors and structures, they do exist and we may learn from them. Geertz's (1973) classic description of the Balinese cockfight progressively incorporates practices, institutions, and symbols from the larger Balinese social and cultural world in order to help the reader understand the seemingly localized event of the cockfight. Putnam *et al.* (1993) similarly combine individual and structural analysis, as well as contemporary history and the history of the *longue durée*, in their attempt to explain the performance of modern, democratic planning in Italy. Ferguson (1990) demonstrates how local, intentional development plans in Lesotho interact with larger, unacknowledged structures to produce unintended effects that are instrumental to development planning and development agencies. Herzfeld (1992) throws new light on bureaucracy and planning by studying what appears to be peculiar administrative practices in relation to structural explanations of the nation state. Tillyard (1994) works from the basis of personal histories and family dynamics to incorporate the larger socio-economic and political scene of the entire Hanoverian Age. Like these scholars, phronetic planning researchers seek a more profound understanding of their problematic by deliberately seeking out information that will answer questions about the intermeshing of actors and structures in actual settings, in ways that dissolve any rigid and preconceived conceptual distinction between the two (Bourdieu, 1988; Coleman, 1985; Collins, 1980; Fine, 1988; Harrison, 1989; Lévi-Strauss & Eribon, 1991; Rosen, 1989; Sewell, 1992).

Dialoguing with a Polyphony of Voices

The results of phronetic planning research are fed back into the situated power dynamics that gave rise to the research in the first place. The goal is to contribute to changed relations of power, if this goal was deemed desirable when asking and answering the four value-rational questions that frame the research. Thus phronetic research is dialogical in the sense that it incorporates, and, if successful, is itself incorporated into, a polyphony of voices, with no one voice, including that of the researcher, claiming final authority. The goal of phronetic planning research is to produce input to the ongoing dialogue and praxis in relation to planning, which is set in a context of power, rather

than to generate ultimate, unequivocally verified knowledge about the nature of planning. This goal accords with Aristotle's maxim that in questions of praxis, one ought to trust more in the public sphere than in science.

Dialogue is not limited to the relationship between researchers and the people they study in the field, however. The relevant dialogue for a particular piece of research typically involves more than these two parties, in principle anyone interested in and affected by the subject under study. Such parties may be dialoguing independently of researchers until the latter make a successful attempt at entering into the dialogue with their research. In other instances there may be no ongoing dialogue initially, the dialogue being sparked only by the work of phronetic researchers. In *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah *et al*. (1985) expressed their hope that:

> the reader will test what we say against his or her own experience, will argue with us when what we say does not fit, and, best of all, will join the public discussion by offering interpretations superior to ours that can then receive further discussion. (p. 307)

This hope is a fine expression of the phronetic dialogical attitude for a specific piece of research. *Habits of the Heart* was ultimately successful in achieving its aims of entering into and intensifying debate in the USA about US values.[5]

Phronetic planning research thus explicitly sees itself as not having a privileged position from which the final truth can be told and further discussion arrested. We cannot think of an "eye turned in no particular direction", as Nietzsche (1969b, pp. 119, §3.12) says. "There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity', be" (emphasis in original). Hence, 'objectivity' in phronetic planning research is not 'contemplation without interest' but employment of "a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge" (emphasis in original; see also Nietzsche, 1968b, pp. 287, §530).

The significance of any given interpretation in a dialogue will depend on the extent to which the validity claims of the interpreter are accepted, and this acceptance typically occurs in competition with other validity claims and other interpretations. The discourses in which the results of phronetic planning research are used have, in this sense, no special status, but are subordinated to the same conditions as any other dialogical discourse. If and when the arguments of researchers carry special weight it would probably derive not from researchers having access to a special type of validity claim, but from researchers having spent more time on and being better trained at establishing validity and telling a rich, well grounded and persuasive story.

Some people may fear that the dialogue at the centre of phronetic planning research, rather than evolving into the desired polyphony of voices, will all too easily degenerate into a shouting match, a cacophony of voices, in which the loudest and most powerful carries the day. In phronetic planning research, the means of prevention is no different from that of other research: only to the extent that the validity claims of phronetic planning researchers are accepted will the results of their research be accepted in the dialogue. Phronetic planning researchers thus recognize a human privilege and a basic condition: meaningful dialogue in context. 'Dialogue' comes from the Greek *dialogos*, where *dia* means 'between' and *logos* means 'reason.' In contrast to the analytical and

instrumental rationality, which lie at the cores of *episteme* and *techne*, the practical rationality of *phronesis* is based on a socially conditioned, intersubjective 'between-reason', where those actors who enter into a dialogue are situated in contexts of power and where entering into dialogue is therefore entering into a power relation between such actors.

Conclusions

By focusing on planning practice, phronetic planning researchers problematize the taken-for-granted 'truths' about the progressive and rational promise of planning; phronetic planning researchers re-evaluate these contestable truths in the context of power in order to understand who gains and who loses by the telling of such truths, and how things can be done differently. The field of planning research still lacks a coherent body of work in this area, but valuable contributions have been made by, for example, Crush (1994); Fischler (1998, 2000); Hillier (2002); Huxley (1994, 2002); Jensen & Richardson (2004); Watson (2003); and Yiftachel *et al*. (2002). Moreover, good examples for planning researchers to learn from exist in other research areas like geography, development studies, management studies, sociology, and anthropology (see Flyvbjerg, 2001). It should be stressed again, however, that phronetic planning research may be practiced in ways other than those described here, as long as they effectively deal with deliberation, judgement, and praxis in relation to power and values, and as long as they answer the four value-rational questions at the core of *phronesis*: (1) Where are we going with planning? (2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? (3) Is this development desirable? (4) What, if anything, should we do about it?

   A central task of phronetic planning research is to provide concrete examples and detailed narratives of the ways in which power and values work in planning and with what consequences to whom, and to suggest how relations of power and values could be changed to work with other consequences. Insofar as planning situations become clear, they are clarified by detailed stories of who is doing what to whom. Such clarification is a principal concern for phronetic planning research and provides the main link to praxis.

   The result of phronetic planning research is a pragmatically governed interpretation of the studied planning practices. The interpretation does not require the researcher to agree with the actors' everyday understanding; nor does it require the discovery of some deep, inner meaning of the practices. Phronetic planning research is in this way interpretive, but it is neither everyday nor deep hermeneutics. Phronetic planning research is also not about, nor does it try to develop, theory or universal method. Thus, phronetic planning research is an analytical project, but not a theoretical or methodological one.

   Phronetic planning research explores current practices and historic circumstances to find avenues to praxis. The job of researchers is to clarify and deliberate about the problems, possibilities and risks that planning, planners, and those planned face, and to outline how things could be done differently. This is all in full knowledge that ultimate answers to these questions or even a single version of what the questions are cannot be found. The goal is less planning theory and more debate about and development of the craft of situated, contextualized research about planning practices and the power relations which define such practices.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. This and the following quotes refer to a long debate in the TPS (Theory, Policy, and Society) Internet discussion group, Spring 2002, which may be found at http://listserv.cddc.vt.edu/pipermail/tps/2002-April/000028.html. The contributions by Judith Innes and Frank Fischer quoted in the main text are from 5 and 6 April 2002, respectively.
2. Editor's note: this echoes Forester's plea in the *Interface* section of Vol. 5(2) (2004) of this journal.
3. For an interpretation of Foucault as a practitioner of *phronesis*, see Flyvbjerg (2001), Chapter 8, 'Empowering Aristotle'.
4. A Thomist is a follower of Thomas Aquinas.
5. For an interpretation of *Habits of the Heart* as phronetic social science, see Flyvbjerg (2001, pp. 62–65).

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