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## Fragmentation and cohesion

*Thinking about ideology in planning*

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Key Words: Decolonization, Indigenous Planning

## **FRAGMENTATION AND COHESION: THINKING ABOUT IDEOLOGY AND PLANNING**

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Roundtable

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We appear to be living in an era of crisis of political ideas which is challenging various political settlements which have secured relative stability over recent decades. Whether it is the rise of populism in Europe and the Americas, the possible fragmentation of the European Union, political unrest in Hong Kong or the battle for the soul of the United States of America it seems that all around us there is evidence of intensified political rupture and discontent.

Dominant political ideas therefore seem to be losing their grip and the post-political order of things is giving way to a period of marked ideological confusion and struggle. If the analysis of ideologies is concerned with carefully revealing patterns of ideological bias and preference and examining their effects, the contemporary historical moment demands a renewed commitment to the study of ideology in all its theoretical and practical complexity.

Given the highly political nature of planning it is therefore essential that we develop tools and techniques to think through the relationship between patterns of ideological bias and planning practice whether it be at the level of national policy, local implementation or spaces in between. Although far from a dominant concept in planning theory, ideology has made repeated appearances throughout the history of the discipline, evoked in a variety of terms to address foundational questions for the field, including:

- problems of incoherence and fragmentation in the contested meanings of planning and the status of the knowledges underpinning its practice;
- the need for planning to establish its own rationale and meaning and the challenges to achieving this, whether due to inherent instability of meaning, vested interests of professionals or the structural contradictions inherent to planning's position in capitalist societies;
- the psycho-social ambiguity of concepts central to planning which can serve to legitimise and secure investment in the dominant order;
- the need to engage in pluralist debate through open, rational communication geared towards overcoming distortions and achieving agreement;
- the apparent post-political domination of neoliberalism over planning thought and practice, including through the 'totalitarianism' of consensus;
- the effects of political ideologies on change in planning ideas and practices;
- the variation in cultural expressions of planning practice and the politics and power-relations involved in their transformations. These treatments of ideology in the planning literature adopt various normative and methodological stances but are united by a common acceptance that ideas, concepts, the ideologies they comprise and the discourses through which they find expression

matter, and that they matter because they have the power to shape the terms by which political and social reality is understood, articulated and (re)shaped through planning practice.\

This roundtable starts from the premise that the significant potential of the concept of ideology for analysing planning can only be realised if its role is brought to the fore of analysis and that this is an essential move now more than ever. The discussion will seek to contribute to established academic debates by exploring some of the ways ideology can be explicitly deployed as a tool in the analysis of planning problems. It is hoped that the participants will explore how we might clarify our thinking regarding the relationship between ideology and planning and think through some of the ways in which this relationship is expressed. The roundtable is therefore part of a project to bring the concept of ideology out from the shadows and into the open so that we may examine its value and what it can tell us about the politics of contemporary planning.

Note: This abstract draws from an Editorial for a recent special issue of Planning Theory journal (see bibliographical citations).

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Key Words: ideology, crisis, discourse, power, politics

### **ACSP-AESOP JOINT ROUNDTABLE: THEORISING THE FUTURE OF THE 'PROFESSIONAL' PLANNER**

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Roundtable

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MAIDMENT, Christopher [University of Reading] c.s.maidment@henley.reading.ac.uk, participant  
PARKER, Gavin [University of Reading] g.parker@henley.reading.ac.uk, participant

This is a joint ACSP-AESOP roundtable which will follow on from a similar session to be presented at the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) 2020 Annual Congress in Bristol.

The aim of this session is to bring together perspectives from both sides of the Atlantic that explicitly focus on the future role of the planner. The session will provide an interactive opportunity for the participants and the audience to explore how emerging practical and theoretical insights frame the normative role of the planner.

As an academic discipline, planning is thriving, energised by the exploration of new theoretical insights, drawing on, for example, complexity and the post-political, and the urgency of addressing social and environmental crises. Elsewhere, scholarship on the relationship between communities and planning continues to develop, as does work on what planners do in their day-to-day practice.

However, the identity of the profession is at a crossroads. Especially in a neoliberal political paradigm, there has been a move away from thinking of planning as a state led activity, characterised by technocratic and communicative methods. In reality, much of planning is done in conjunction with, or in