AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

The ambivalent character of spatial planning systems

A differentiated state account

Galland, Daniel; Elinbaum, Pablo

Published in:
ACSP 2020 Annual Conference

Publication date:
2020

These heuristics for studying planning expertise have implications for planning practice—they keep us from falling into the post-modern abyss (Beauregard, 1991). Postmodernism suspended us between the decaying validity of the modernist project and convincing, yet discomforting skepticism of the modern state and its experts (Beauregard, 1991; Putnam, 1992). However, if we think symmetrically and look for trials of strength, we can conceive of planning organizations as plural and diverse rather than singular and universal. Dualities between rationality and irrationality are rejected because power drives rationality and no form of expertise is structurally given or inevitable. Competing experts can enter the organizational arena to make a case for their alternative rationalities. In doing so, they engage in the kind of responsible reconstruction that Hilary Putnam said was necessary to avoid the dangers of deconstruction (Putnam, 1992: 132).

Citations

- Beauregard, R. A. (1991). Without a Net: Modernist Planning and the Postmodern Abyss. Journal of Planning Education and Research, 10(3), 189–194.
- Cabantous, L., Gond, J.-P., & Johnson-Cramer, M. (2010). Decision Theory as Practice: Crafting Rationality in Organizations. Organization Studies, 31(11), 1531–1566.
- Bloor, D. (1981). II.2 The Strengths of the Strong Programme. Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 11(2), 199–213.
- Latour, B. (1988). Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society (Reprint edition). Harvard University Press.
- Watson, V. (2003). Conflicting rationalities: implications for planning theory and ethics. Planning Theory & Practice, 4(4), 395–407.

Key Words: Heuristics, Expertise, Rationality, Science Studies, Postmodernism

THE AMBIVALENT CHARACTER OF SPATIAL PLANNING SYSTEMS: A DIFFERENTIATED STATE ACCOUNT
Abstract ID: 193
Individual Paper Submission

GALLAND, Daniel [Norwegian University of Life Sciences] daniel.galland@nmbu.no, presenting author
ELINBAUM, Pablo [CEUR-CONICET] pabloelinbaum@conicet.gov.ar, co-author

Discourses play a key role in determining the form of the state and in promoting state action. Until recently, planning discourses have generally portrayed spatial planning systems as vehicles to attain legally-established, generic policy objectives such as institutional integration, territorial balance, and modernization. This conventional perspective emerges from an understanding of spatial planning systems as fixed, hierarchical and structured policy levels and institutions facilitated by administrative, technical and juridical tools and processes (Newman and Thornley, 1996; Knapp, Nedović-Budić and Carbonell, 2015). Emphasizing their technical operation and instrumental analyses, this formalistic interpretation of spatial planning systems neither accounts for historical structural inequalities nor it considers the socio-political specificities and meaning that result from the 'dialectical interplay between agency and institutions' (Servillo and van den Broeck 2012).

The starting point of the paper is the premise that this orthodox view of spatial planning systems relies on an overly broad assumption of the state conceived as 'neutral'. Moving beyond this impartial imagination, the paper heeds to a 'differentiated' perspective that depicts the state as a set of arenas lacking coherence, where contexts determine particular trajectories of state actions as well as the power relations that exert influence on them. From a post-structuralist perspective, the state is a 'differentiated set of institutions, agencies and discourses' conceived as built historically through political (relational) processes whose outcomes remain open (Kantola, 2006). Placing emphasis on state practices and discourses, a differentiated account unfolds from the premise that states are formed on the basis of opportunities for action 'between and through' the states' contextual institutions and relations. The differentiated state is thereby attuned with Jessop's (2008) strategic relational approach insofar as both critically scrutinize the

formalistic character of state institutions while advocating the need to develop alternative understandings of how states are ultimately conformed.

Based on these critical state approaches, the paper sets out to explore how planning discourses contribute to shape the form of spatial planning systems. The paper uses two 'extreme' Latin American contexts to demonstrate how planning discourses have a constitutive function insofar as they mobilize government agendas and reinforce or modify the form of the state in accordance with selective intervention strategies, e.g. by introducing new administrative levels or suppressing others, creating new jurisdictions or merging others, and/or expanding or reducing the scope of instruments. The paper further shows how state spatial strategies conceal inherent state strategic selectivities for socio-economic intervention and how their outcomes oftentimes diverge from the actual policy agendas they were allegedly set to pursue. The paper concludes that far from perceiving spatial planning systems as formal and one-sided (vertical, ordered, linear), planning research should turn more attention towards acknowledging and examining their strategic side (immanently horizontal and multidirectional), which results from the inherently dialectical and discursive relationship that ultimately binds two sides of state action.

Citations

- Jessop, B. (2008) State Power: A Strategic-Relational Approach. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kantola, J. (2006) Feminists Theorize the State. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Knapp, G.-J., Nedovic-Budic, Z. and Carbonell, A. (eds) (2015) Planning for States and Nation-States in the US and Europe. Cambridge: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.
- Newman, P. and Thornley, A. (1996) Urban Planning in Europe. International Competition, National Systems and Planning Projects. London: Routledge.
- Servillo, L. and van den Broeck, P. (2012) The social construction of planning systems: A strategic-relational institutionalist approach. Planning Practice and Research, 27(1), pp. 41-61

Key Words: spatial planning systems, discourses, differentiated state, state spatial strategies, strategic-relational approach

WICKED PROBLEMS, FOOLISH DECISIONS: PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH CROSS-SCALE URBAN GOVERNANCE IN A COMPLEX WORLD
Abstract ID: 196
Individual Paper Submission

ZELLNER, Moira [University of Illinois at Chicago] mzellner@uic.edu, presenting author
CAMPBELL, Scott [University of Michigan] sdcamp@umich.edu, co-author

Why do wicked problems too often give birth to bad policy choices? Put another way, why do people -- in the face of complex social challenges -- make misdiagnoses, ineffective decisions or no decisions at all? Typical answers point to a plethora of suspects: impatience, myopia, political stalemate, narrow-mindedness, fear and risk aversion, hubris, greed, rational self-interest, ignorance, reliance on emotionally appealing but misleading anecdotal stories, misuse of evidence and misunderstanding of uncertainty.

In this paper we build on previous research (Zellner & Campbell, 2020, 2015) to demonstrate how complexity thinking can engage urban challenges at three levels: (1) to *describe* "complexity" as a symptom of urban systems; (2) to *analyze* the dynamics of complex urban systems; and ultimately (3) to *intervene* through appropriate planning strategies that account for complexity. We employ this thinking to engage sustainability at two scales: the neighborhood (specifically, eco-gentrification), and the megaregion (regional externalities and tradeoffs). These scales involve different actors, conflicts and specializations within planning. Yet both represent new, hybrid patterns of urbanization that produce intractable problems of environmental unsustainability and social-spatial inequality -- two core planning priorities that too often collide. Both situations also generate novel social policy challenges, calling for interdepartmental and/or intergovernmental cooperation, that conventional planning thinking and governance tools are ill-equipped to address.