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Breaking Out of the Box: Ingredients for a More Radical Planning

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Abstract

A lot of traditional planning is about maintaining the existing social order rather than challenging and transforming it, and it fails to capture the dynamics and tensions of relations coexisting in particular places. As a result, planning faces major ontological and epistemological challenges. The aim of the paper is to reflect on what can be done to revive planning as a critical theory and praxis. For this reason, the paper first deals with the logic and aims of statutory planning and some critiques and introduces the contours of a more radical planning.

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1. Introduction

Our world is facing major developments, challenges and opportunities that are affecting our cities and regions directly or indirectly: the growing complexity (the rise of new technologies, changes in production processes, the crisis of representative democracy, diversity, the globalization of culture and the economy, the rising cost of energy), the financial crisis and the subsequent economic crisis, persistently uneven development (disadvantaged, urban poor, migration), the problems of fragmentation, the ageing of the population in some places and youngsters and woman entering the labor market in other places, and the increasing interest (at all scales, from local to global) in environmental issues (global warming, flooding, pollution -air, water-). I am fully aware that these problems and challenges are ever changing and hence resistant to description in terms of fixed categories (see also Chia, 1999: 211). Coping with these developments, challenges, opportunities, it is argued (see also Sager, 2013; Allmendinger &

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Haughton, 2010) that spatial planning is in desperate need of both a critical debate that questions the political and economic processes of which existing planning approaches are an integral part (see Sager, 2013: xviii) and a search for new ideas (see also Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010: 328). I first look at the logics behind statutory planning, provide a picture of the neo-liberal context and then reflect on what can be done to revive planning as a critical theory and praxis.

2. Logic and criticism behind statutory planning

Statutory planning system is based on land-use planning. It is concerned with the regulation and management of changes to land use and development. Usually, a developer is required to lodge a planning application with the government body, usually a local council, for approval. That application is assessed by the statutory planner to see if it complied with the relevant planning objectives, controls, standards, policies and provisions and decided for approval or rejection. Statutory land-use plans have to be submitted to formal planning institutions for approval according to the law. After that, they become local laws. Land use planning is basically concerned with the location, intensity, and amount of land development required for the various space-using functions of city-life –industry, wholesaling, business, housing, recreation, education and the religious and cultural activities of the people. It embodies as to how land should be used for expansion and renewal proceed in the future (see Chapin, 1965: vi; Hopkins, 2001; EU, 1997; Cullingworth, 1972). Figuring out what zoning category to apply where depends on a plan. System of rights set authorities to make decisions and define the scope of discretion in these decisions (Hopkins, 2001: 140). The framework plans cover at least the whole of the area of the local authority and set out the broad land-use and infrastructure patterns across the area through zoning or land-allocation maps. The EU compendium uses the term Regulatory plan: it indicates detailed specific zonings for building, land use and infrastructure.

2.1. Logic

For steering developments in a certain direction, statutory plans are used as a control tool for the actions of third parties, as a (legal) framework for spatial development and the building rights of owners. It claims legal equal rights; it focuses on bureaucratic and political control and legal certainty for investors. For some, an additional aim is also to avoid clientelism and corruption within the permit policy. But, today, the main rationale seems to be the pursuit of legal certainty as a basis for the permit policy (Verachtert et al., 2011). As a consequence, documents have to set out land uses and formal requirements very carefully and very accurately while eliminating uncertainty as much as possible. Planned residential subdivisions give land and property owners certainty of investment returns. In this way, land use planning and economic growth are intrinsically connected. Progress is equated with order, with buildings and economic development. Statutory planning even in a simplified zoning form is considered a necessity: urban markets need it, there is no way of managing city growth without some form of grids and regulations. In the logic of statutory planning, the challenge seems to be how to redefine the use of zoning to make it more functional to polity life and to spatial governance for developing local citizenship through proper spatial choices.

2.2. Criticism

Traditional statutory plans remain too much of an administrative framework for development instead of an action plan aimed at the implementation of visions and concepts. It entails false assumptions of certainty and static context. Most of the statutory plans were designed for situations of stability and predictability in which plans can serve as blueprints offering investors and developers the certainty they want. It is guided by what the planners normatively would like to see happen (see Friedmann & Douglas, 1998) rather than form a fine-grained analysis of what takes place. The interpretation of statutory plans in terms of form and content (comprehensive, detailed, etc.) is in effect often a negation of change, dynamics, uncertainty, etc. meaning that they soon become outdated, are often utopian, are often not based on sufficient and correct data, do not take into account resources or the time factor or even the possibilities for their implementation (see Van den Broeck, 2013). In short, they focus on legal certainty that makes the plans far more rigid and inflexible and less responsive to changing circumstances. In this way they seem not

suited for dealing with the dynamics of society, the challenges mentioned, changing issues, changing circumstances and a changing context. They force planners, politicians to make choices before the time is right to do this and the mainly comprehensive nature of land-use plans is at odds with increasingly limited resources. In addition, most land-use plans have a predominant focus on physical aspects, providing physical solutions to social or economic problems. In this way, they often abstract from real, historically determinate parameters of human activity and gratuitously assume the existence of transcendent operational norms.

As spatial planners, we have to look for a type of planning that can play a role in these challenges and to embed the structural changes needed. As the context forms the setting of the planning process, we need to reflect on it.

3. Neo-liberal context

Neo-liberal policies have allowed capital to restructure in ways that are socially and spatially uneven. These neo-liberal policies' distributive injustice was considered as a temporal problem that will be ironed out as economic growth proceeds. But many practices illustrate that the rollout of neoliberal policy privileges urban and regional competitiveness mainly through the subordination of social policy to economic policy and new -more elitist- forms of partnerships and networks (see Jessop, 2000; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009a: 618). City and regional governments are lured to adopt a more entrepreneurial style of planning in order to enhance a city and regional competitiveness. As neoliberalism assumes that socio-spatial problems have a market solution (see Peck and Tickel, 2002; Swyngedouw et al., 2002; Purcell, 2009), its aim was/is to depoliticize the economy (Friedmann, 1992: 83) and to subordinate everything to the economic realm and to the sovereignty of the market (Mouffe, 2005: 92). Indeed, one can witness neo-liberal attempts to create competitive cities and regions by generating investments into major cities and urban regions (Olesen & Richardson, 2012: 1692; Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Such investments (projects) have become a key component of a neoliberal shift from distributive policies, welfare considerations and direct service provision towards more market-oriented and market-dependent approaches aimed at pursuing economic promotion and competitive restructuring (see Swyngedouw et al., 2002: 572). In many cities, urban revitalization is presented as an (the?) opportunity to change economic hierarchies and functions within the urban region, creating new jobs and strengthening the city's position in the urban division of labor. Planners and local authorities are lured to adopt a more proactive and entrepreneurial approach aimed at identifying market opportunities and assisting private investors to take advantage of them (see Harvey, 1989; Peck and Tickle, 2002; Swyngedouw et al, 2002; Purcell, 2009). A democratic deficit emerges as a central element of the neoliberal approach (Purcell, 2009:144; Swyngedouw et al., 2002: 573).

Questions have to be raised whether spatial planning practices can resist the hegemonic discourses of neoliberalism (see Olesen, 2011; 2012). As a result, planning faces major ontological and epistemological challenges. These challenges may imply the scope of planning, approaches, use of skills, its context, resources, knowledge base, involvement of a wider range of actors. Within (and constrained by) this established framework of the market society, places and communities face the challenge to construct (or reject) and implement the discourses of cultural diversity, sustainability, equity and place quality and, subsequently, to creatively transform their own functioning and practice. This creative transformation refers to changes in governance relating to current and historical relations of dominance and oppression (see Young, 1990). Class, gender, race, and religion do matter in terms of whether citizens are included or excluded in the process (see Young, 1990). The neo-liberal context forms the setting of the planning process but also must be questioned in the process (see also Dyrberg, 1997).

4. In a search for building blocks for a more radical type of planning

4.1. Spatial Planning as an Open, Normative Approach

The normative dimension inscribed in spatial planning is of an ethical nature, as it always refers to values, specific practices. This also implies taking on board the wishes and aspirations of the disadvantaged and the urban poor. Spatial planning has to deal with values and meanings, and related judgments and choices formed with reference to the ideas of desirability (Ozbekhan, 1969), the good society (Friedmann, 1982), and betterment (see

also Campbell and Marshall, 2006). The ethical stand is taken on substantive and procedural issues (see also Forester, 1989) depends on particular (institutional, legal, political, cultural) contexts and intellectual traditions. Without the normative, we risk adopting a pernicious relativism where anything goes (see Ogilvy, 2002).

Planning implies an open dialog in which opinions, conflicts, different values, power relationships are addressed. It aims to provide an arena (a space of deliberative opportunities in Forester's (2010) terms) where actors reflect on who they are, what they want and in this way can articulate their identities, their traditions, their values, reflect on what spatial quality, what equity, what accountability, what legitimacy means for them. To avoid pure idealistic thinking, the views of social critics such as Harvey, Friedmann, and have to be integrated with the approach. To add to the debate on a more radical planning I look for building blocks -working with conflicts, coproduction and legitimacy-, with a relatively consistent logical relationship, which are not only related to epistemological challenges but also to ontological issues.

4.2. Three Central Concepts: Conflict, Coproduction, Legitimacy

4.2.1. Conflict

Content and process are given by certain ideals, principles that articulate certain values (justice, equity). As the values, interests, views, ideas, policies from actors are different strategic spatial planning involves choices and hence inevitably works in a context of conflicts, clashes between the different actors. In the spatial planning field, it requires a need to recognize the deeply pluralistic character of our neighborhoods, cities, city-regions, regions with all the conflicts that pluralism entails. Hence the necessity to open up spatial planning -as a field of contested planning rationalities and spatial logics (see Olesen & Richardson, 2012: 1691) - for a plurality of understandings. What is at stake is the recognition of social division and the legitimation of conflict. It brings to the fore the existence in a democratic society of a plurality of interests and demands that should be considered as legitimate (Mouffe, 2005: 119-120).

It is not the aim of planning nor is it in its power to eliminate conflicts, but it is in its power to create the practices, discourses and institutions that would allow those conflicts to take an agonistic form (Mouffe:130). Agonism is looked upon as a we /they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents (Mouffe, 2005: 20). Allowing conflicts to take an agonistic form needs a fundamental shift in the balance of power not only between governments and citizens, but also between different private actors (see Boyle & Harris, 2009).

4.2.2. Coproduction

A challenge in contemporary politics -and by extension in planning- consists in the dialectic between movements that seek democratization, collective decision-making and empowerment of citizens on the one hand and the established institutions and structures that seek to reabsorb such demands into a distributive framework on the other (see Young, 1990: 90). It entails a political struggle between different visions of justice: justice as distribution and justice as enablement and empowerment (Young, 1990: 15-38). If concerns of some groups in society (especially the disadvantaged and urban poor) cannot be tackled at the preconceived level of government new practices will have to be invented. Within this context coproduction -a normative and moral concept in its own right- is conceived as a collective endeavor, with citizens as a part of action not its object (Friedmann, 2005) and as a combination of a needs-based and rights-based approach. It is inclusionary, intentional to secure political influence and to change the status quo with specific projects and policies. It combines local and scientific knowledge. It provides an interaction between the delivery of public goods (plans, policies, projects) and building strong, resilient, mutually supportive communities i.e. coproduction as a political strategy. Coproduction is looked upon as a process of becoming with outcomes that must be well informed, just and fair. In this way, coproduction is part of a much broader shift that is emerging across all the sectors and most obviously in those fractures between and in the public and the private.

Coproduction is introduced to avoid shaping an urban future that is just in line with the aspirations of the most powerful segment among the actors. For this reason, coproduction, as a political strategy, aims to mobilize citizens to engage in counter-hegemonic struggles to establish other policies and to play a central role in decision-making

insisting that other policies are possible. Coproduction requires a change to the status quo, it combines the usual concept of coproduction in the provision of public goods and services needed and coproduction as a political strategy preparing citizens and grassroots organizations for a more substantive engagement with the political. In this way, it is instrumental in the building of strong, resilient and mutually supportive communities that could assure its members that their needs would be met. This makes coproduction different from standard 'participation' (see also Mitlin, 2008).

Obviously there are no general rules and norms according to which coproduction processes are to be conducted (see Roy, 2003, 2009; Mitlin, 2008; Watson, 2011). While taking part in these processes participants (may) develop institutional rules, norms of behavior.

4.2.3. Legitimacy

Coproduction (can be/has been/ were) looked upon as an attack on the legitimacy of political institutions as it reverses and upsets the relationship between the state and its citizens. The normative idea of coproduction sits not easily within an increasingly neoliberal political climate. It is clear that the representative government articulates merely political and not all values. If we accept that representative democracy is not a single completed thing but that it is capable of 'becoming' in a new context and in relation to new issues at hand than we may conclude that a more radical planning based on coproduction does not reject representative democracy but complements it.

The narrative of coproduction is a narrative of emancipation: it fulfills a legitimating function; it legitimates social and political institutions and practices, forms of legislation, ethics and modes of thought. It grounds this legitimacy, not in an original founding act but a future to be brought about, that is an idea to realize. This idea (of equity, social justice) has legitimating value because it is universal (see Lyotard, 1992: 50). So, apart from a legitimacy stemming from a representative mandate, in planning legitimacy may come from its performance as a creative and innovative force and its capacity to deliver positive outcomes and gaining benefits. Intelligent accountability requires more attention to good governance and fewer fantasies about total control.

5. Concluding notes

Neighborhoods, cities, regions become both the text and context of new debates about fundamental socio-spatial relations, about thinking without frontiers (Friedmann, 2011:69), providing new kinds of practices and narratives about belonging to and being involved in the construction of a place and in society at large (see also Watson, 2011; Yiftachel, 2006). The normative viewpoint of a more radical spatial planning produces quite a different picture than traditional planning in terms of output (strategic visions versus master plans or land use plans), type of planning (providing a framework versus technical/legal regulation) and type of governance (a more pivotal role in civil society through coproduction).

As radical planning questions knowledge (see also Roy, 2010) dominant modes of knowledge (causal, statistical), if they are incapable of envisioning the impossible (as the absolutely new), have to be complemented by other modes of knowing and other forms of thinking (see Grosz, 1999:21).

I argued that planning gets its legitimacy through a combination of its performance as a creative and innovative force, its potential to deliver positive outcomes and a formal acceptance by the relevant government level. As socio-spatial relations have a variable reach, they also carry a potential for a 'rescaling' of issue agendas down from the global, continental, national or regional level, and up from the municipal level. The search for new scales of policy articulation and new policy concepts is also linked to attempts to widen the range of actors involved in policy processes, with new alliances, actor partnerships and consultative processes (Healey et al, 1997; Albrechts et al, 2001; Albrechts, Healey, Kunzmann, 2003). The added value of incorporating coproduction -as an alternative to institutionalized and taken-for-granted practices and routines-, is that it is conceived as a political strategy for the selection of problems, discussing of evidence, of strategies, of justice or fairness and the nature and scope of desired outcomes in planning, and permits a plurality of problem definitions, ambitions and ways to achieve it. In this way it includes not only the views of the most articulate or powerful, but also the views of those who have been systematically excluded by structural inequalities of class, gender and religion (Sandercock, 1998: 65) and, as a

learning process, it gets an emancipatory potential. This implies that radical planning may not be locked within the interstices of the state and the powerful actors in society. In a world where actors are interdependent and have an (implicit) reason to engage with each other, coproduction is considered as an engine of change that may make a difference between systems working and failing.

Radical spatial planning is not presented here as the ultimate model that would be chosen, in idealized conditions, by every planner, every government, every NGO neither as a panacea for all challenges, all problems, it is not meant as a substitute but as a complement to other planning tools (statutory planning). It is clear that radical spatial planning needs a context (see Ostrom, 1990: 192) and an intellectual tradition in which success factors (see Needham, 2000) are available or can be made available. This implies that the capacity of a radical spatial planning system to deliver the desired outcomes is dependent not only on the system itself, but also on the conditions underlying it (see also Mintzberg, 1994).

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