



## Introduction to the Handbook on Planning and Power

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# Introduction to the *Handbook on Planning and Power*

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It has been said that power resides everywhere, and that it is, above all else, productive. Power is found in every social relation, embedded in all our institutions, and even in every utterance made through the ways we attach meaning to certain values, articulate knowledge claims, and negotiate discourses. The field of planning is no exception. It is a field defined by its power relations between different actors, institutions, market players, states, non-governmental organisations and the public. But how, exactly, are the productive aspects of power played out in planning? Through which mechanisms and to what ends? Can one conclude that planners have power to make a difference when power increasingly seems to be consolidated in powerful elites; when exclusion, marginalisation and segregation have become systematic, leading to greater socio-economic and spatial injustices; when basic human needs such as housing are not defended as human rights; and when different practices of racial, gendered and religious oppression continue to be played out in so many corners of our society? Indeed, whose truth claims are valued in planning processes, and on behalf of whom do planners hope to *speaking truth to power*?

This *Handbook on Planning and Power* argues that there is a deep-rooted need for a greater awareness of how power plays out in the field of planning. It presents thirty-six authors' insightful and critical analyses of how power can be both *theorised* and *situated* in planning contexts in many different parts of the world, and what, potentially, ought to be done if planning hopes to make a difference. By drawing on diverse thinkers in planning research, this book reveals the cutting edge of contemporary understandings about power so as to identify the current state of knowledge about planning and power, as well as this scholarship's new emerging trajectories. Planning, and its many roles in relation to agency and governance, has changed profoundly over the last few decades; and so too have the theories of and about power in planning, from both a critical and an explanatory standpoint. The wider world and the planning discipline will undoubtedly change even further over the next few decades. Nevertheless, this book provides the reader not only with key insights into contemporary planning theories about power – and the myriad interconnections between planning and power – it also demonstrates the effects of power within planning itself and on those who are shaped and impacted positively and negatively by its diverse practices.

## REVISITING ASPECTS OF THE TERRAIN

More than two decades ago, David Booher and Judith Innes (2002: 221) suggested that 'power is an elusive concept; [and] when [scholars] use the term, they typically assume others know what they mean'. Booher and Innes (2002: 221, 222) go on to lament, 'whatever power is, planners [either] do not have it; [or they] typically do not recognize the power they do

have'. For Booher and Innes this unrecognised power resides in the democratic potential of 'network power' that could serve to minimise the conventional distortions and corruptions often attributed to power. Fast-forward to the present day and we might find some comfort in the transformative power of platform urbanism including, for example, the role that social media played in mobilising action during the Arab Spring (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). Yet, contemporary platforms of collaboration and networking are also beset by exclusionary practices, fake news, alternative facts, algorithmic violence, and participatory methods have their own limitations especially under a governmentality of neoliberalism. Thus, and in contrast to Booher and Innes' more hopeful assessment of planning and power, Bent Flyvberg's (1998) sobering publication, *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*, convincingly demonstrates how planning strategies, frameworks and policies are almost always trumped by the *realrationalität* of powerholders regardless of planners' well-intentioned deliberations that contain technically optimal solutions and socially desirable outcomes. Flyvberg (1998) therefore maintains that if planners hope to promote socio-economic and spatial justice, they have no choice but to engage with the tactics of power that are integral to the arenas in which planning operates. In 1961, Edward Banfield presented a similar argument in his classic book *Political Influence*. This text revealed how Chicago's then powerful mayor, Richard J. Daley, accommodated private capital interests at the expense of socio-economic and spatial justice, thereby setting in motion the idea that planners have limited influence in the face of powerful elites who, invariably, dominate political decision-making processes.

Ambe Njoh (2009), however, questions the longstanding claim that planners have limited power. Rather, 'urban planners proved invaluable [to] European powerholders in realizing their twin objectives of domination and socio-political control in colonial Africa' (Njoh, 2009: 301). And while one might assume that 'colonial Africa' is a thing of the past, Njoh (2009: 301) reminds us that many planning policies and land laws promulgated during the colonial era 'continue to guide spatial development projects in Africa'. The same can be said of other Southern contexts (see Bhan et al., 2018). Njoh (2009) usefully distinguishes between 'power over' and 'power to' in his detailed analysis of how planning was – and continues to be – used as a tool of control and exclusion via seemingly neutral technical regulations. Njoh draws on Max Weber's (1978) definition of power in order to analyse 'power over' someone or something. This type of power, he argues, is easy to identify and rebuke. By contrast, the 'power to' enforce values, behaviour and conformity is far more subtle, subversive and insidious in nature. It involves the co-optation and remaking of subjects in accordance with coloniality's established norms, and, as such, it often faces less resistance than more overt power tactics. Amin Kamete (2012) equates this form of power with 'pastoral power' which, in turn, has its roots in the evangelical fervour of nineteenth-century missionaries that accompanied European colonialism. And for Kamete, 'pastoral power' is as violent and repressive as overt forms of disciplinary power. Still, a focus on 'power over' and 'power to' alone might negate the emancipatory categories of 'power with' and 'power within' that encompass aspects of Anthony Giddens' (1984: 14) conceptualisation of power as 'the capacity to make a difference'.

'Power with', as Lisa VeneKlasen et al. (2007) explain, resembles a type of shared power based on mutual support, solidarity and collaborative decision making that leads to collective action. This conceptualisation of power corroborates aspects of John Forester's (1989) seminal text: *Planning in the Face of Power*. And while Forester desists from explicitly using 'power with' as an analytical or normative tool, he, nevertheless, calls on planners to exercise their 'legitimate power' that resides in their frequent communications and engagements with

citizens, politicians, planning commissioners, developers and the like via processes of active listening and learning through dialogue. For Forester (1989), a deliberate consensus-building approach serves not only to facilitate collective actions, but also to counter ‘illegitimate power’ that is exercised and maintained as a result of distorted communication. *Planning in the Face of Power* however desists from examining the workings of power per se, and focuses, instead, on how planners might become more effective in negotiating power, conflict and powerlessness.

‘Power within’, on the other hand, is predicated on an individual’s or a group’s sense of self-worth and self-knowledge (Veneklasen et al., 2007). It serves as a form of emancipatory power that challenges asymmetrical power relations and the silencing strategies of the privileged (Roy, 2021). It also generates resistance to planning’s disciplinary and unjust forms of control by, for example, celebrating ‘the voices from the borderlands’ (Sandercock, 1998), or by celebrating grassroots mobilisations and collective actions (Beard, 2003; Castells, 1983; Friedmann, 1987, 2011; Holston, 2008; Mirafteb and Wills, 2005; Sandercock, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2018). Here, individuals or groups are viewed as active agents for themselves, thereby expanding the traditional planning field from professional practitioners alone to include civil society organisations, activists and citizens as *planners*. And in this framework, planning is no longer ‘only that professional domain that constitutes the field of city-building, but [it is] also that form of collective action [and shared power] which we might call community-building’ (Sandercock, 1999: 39).

## SITUATING PLANNERS WITHIN THIS TERRAIN

Power is, indeed, an elusive concept, as argued by Booher and Innes (2002). For this reason, Patsy Healey and Jacky Underwood (1978) equally concluded – as Banfield (1961) and later Flyvberg (1998) concluded – that planners have limited powers. And since at least the 1960s, planners have raised concerns about their role and mandates (Davidoff, 1965). Some have gone as far as to raise doubts about the value of planning in itself (Campbell, 2010), thereby suggesting that there is no longer any need for a planning profession (Evans, 1993; Wildavsky, 1973). Whereas others seem reluctant to engage in value discussions, and have chosen, instead, to describe their role as neutral (Campbell and Marshall, 2005). Some planners even argue that their role necessitates working at a distance from values they would otherwise identify with (Inch, 2009). These worrying testimonies highlight the urgent need to rethink the relationship between planning and power, since what futures do we hope to contribute to if these are shaped by values that planners do not believe in?

In response to this, some scholars are calling for a decolonialisation of power in planning practices (see, for example, Barry and Thompson-Fawcett, 2020; Porter, 2010; Porter et al., 2017; Winkler, 2018); whilst others have emphasised a growing need to situate planning within its wider discursive context (see, for example, Flyvbjerg, 1998; Grange, 2017; Huxley, 2018; Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000; Richardson, 2002). Some of the latter contributions have drawn on Foucault and as such they have contributed to a growing body of research on governmentality. These scholars describe and critically assess a shift in governing modes, from governing through strong welfare states, to new forms of neoliberal governing. And via these critical assessments, power has increasingly come to be seen as part of a regulating discourse which often operates through different mechanisms for self-governing. These mechanisms

typically work at a distance, and have been described as techniques of subjectivity (Dean, 2010; Miller and Rose, 2008). According to Miller and Rose (2008: 71), these self-governing mechanisms have contributed to a new form of relationship between expertise and politics, namely a relationship defined by the unfortunate but ‘constant registration of “failure”’, as well as ‘the constant injunction to do better next time’. A potential outcome of such a relationship is perhaps the gradual distancing from values as maintained by some planners and described above.

Foucault (1983) understood governing as the capacity to structure the possible actions of others, or what he often termed *the conduct of conduct*. Drawing on Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argued that such discursive fields of possible actions ought to be understood as spaces of hegemony. Much like Foucault, they argue that all spaces are discursively constructed. In order to build on this argument, they outlined an ontology of the social in which they claimed that openness is society’s constitutive ground. The fact that society is interpreted as fundamentally open, and never fixed, is what guarantees that there will always be conflicts and struggles over meanings (Laclau, 1996); otherwise, they claimed, there would be nothing to hegemonise. Indeed, for Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the stabilisation of a relationship between a signifier and a signified is what they term as hegemony. Consequently, interventions to fix meaning will always be political. What Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe can teach us is that there will always be attempts to construct society as if it is closed, when, in fact, it is always open and contingent. Discursive fields, like the field of planning, or even the relationship between expertise and politics, are therefore always open for productive articulations of new meanings. Professional values do contribute to shaping new futures, but they need to be expressed. Interpreting the role of the planner as neutral will not assist us in destabilising current hegemonies.

Another way of understanding power is through the concept of ideology. Within the field of planning, Michael Gunder was perhaps the one voice who most persistently argued for the need to critique taken-for-granted ideologies (see, for example, Gunder 2005a; 2010; 2011a; 2011b). Gunder primarily drew on Lacanian theory, in which fantasy and desire are essential. Gunder authored several articles in which he argued that a greater awareness of how power and desires are embedded in political ideologies, such as neoliberalism, might allow planners to reimagine signifiers that structure society.

In Lacanian theory the subject is understood as split. On the one hand, the subject consists of different, but conscious, ego-ideals. On the other hand, it consists of unconscious desires. An important aspect of Lacanian theory, and emphasised by Gunder (2005c: 174), is that our strongest beliefs often stem from that which ‘resides outside of symbolic language’. Consequently, many of society’s ideological manifestations are shaped by a desire for completeness (Gunder, 2005a; 2005b). In several articles, Gunder showed how planning ought to be understood as an institutionalised activity that is aimed at generating narratives, or even fantasies, about a desirable future. Gunder (2010; 2011a) persistently argued that current planning practices, via the implementation of plans and policies, help ‘determine and establish the ideology of contemporary neoliberal space’ (Gunder, 2011a: 327). He also convincingly demonstrated how planning has become a scapegoat for neoliberalism’s many failures (Gunder, 2015). Drawing on Žižek, Gunder (2011a: 330) argued that the subject does not always believe in what it does and sometimes ‘fakes ideological belief’. What Gunder helps us to see is that the productive aspects of power are not only structured by discourses and hegemonic articulations imposed on us, but also by, and to a large extent, our own desires, or

even by our faked ideological beliefs. Hence, his critique of ideology compels us, as planners, to critically scrutinise the consequences of our actions, as opposed to simply faking belief in unattainable futures, or silently concluding that our role is a neutral role.

However, where there is power there is always resistance, as Foucault famously stated. According to Foucault (2007: 75), resistance, or a critical attitude, stems from ‘the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this price’. In this respect, Foucault (2007: 75) understood critique as ‘the art of voluntary insubordination’:

I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself [*sic*] the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. Well then!: critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth. (Foucault, 2007: 47)

It has been argued elsewhere that such a critical mode of being implies a commitment to ‘expose oneself as a subject’ (Lemke, 2012: 70). Such exposure not only implies giving an account of oneself before others, but also requires an agonistic relationship towards the self (Foucault, 1985: 67). Indeed, Foucault underlined that new forms of democratic subjectivity can only come about through desubjugating processes. During his later phase he emphasised the ethical and empowering aspects of the subject’s relationship to itself, which he referred to as *the care of the self* (Foucault, 1985, 1986, 2001, 2005).

Via his interest in ethics, Foucault returned to the ancient Greek and Roman concept of *parrhesia*, which means fearless speech (Foucault, 2001, 2005, 2011). According to Foucault, a *parrhesiastes* is a person who speaks what they know to be true, regardless of the potentially dangerous consequences of *parrhesia* that always involves risks (Foucault, 2001: 13). *Parrhesia* is not exercised in self-interest, but, as Foucault (2011: 179) emphasised, in the interest of the city. What drew Foucault (2001: 169; see also Foucault 1985: 6–7) to investigate the concept of *parrhesia* was an urge to understand ‘the problem of the truth-teller’. In an interview from 1984, Foucault (1996: 443) expressed that ‘it seems to me that contemporary political thought allows very little room for the question of the ethical subject’. He warned that without critique, democracy will be reduced to consensus – to the voice of the majority – or even to passivity.

That democracy is under threat in current times is not an understatement. Planners have a role to uphold democratic perspectives. With this *Handbook on Planning and Power*, we argue that there is a need within the field of planning to nurture a critical ethos in order for planners to create democratic spaces where the political can play out in new and alternative ways, where the consequences of the ideological narratives we construct about the future can be identified and discussed, where there is room for fearless speech, and where greater awareness of how power plays out in the field of planning might lead to socio-economic and spatial justice.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

There are countless other ways of *theorising* and *situating* power in planning, as evidenced by the succeeding chapters of this *Handbook*. Power is, after all, central to our understanding of how planning and its practices function and are constantly evolving. The twenty-six chapters of this book are structured as two parts: *theorising power in planning* and *situating power in*

*planning*. The first part – which focuses on the manifold onto-epistemological lenses used to explain, analyse and critique power in planning – begins, in Chapter 1, with Enda Murphy and Linda Fox-Rogers’ assessment of the ongoing relevance of a Marxist analysis of political and economic systems if we hope to understand the power dynamics that shape planning outcomes. Aspects of Murphy and Fox-Rogers’ argument resonate with Lina Olsson and Elena Besussi reading of Henri Lefebvre’s *right to the city*, his radical concept of urban citizenship, and his vision of a *renewed urban society*. These readings are presented in Chapter 2; and both Chapters 1 and 2 conclude with critical reflections on planning’s potential role as a radical praxis. In Chapter 3, Raine Mäntysalo expands on this critical enquiry by demonstrating not only the values but also the limitations of Stephen Lukes’ influential theory of power for planning research and practice. Thereafter, in Chapter 4, John Pløger tackles the monumental impact of Michel Foucault’s scholarship on planning. This influence dates back to Foucault’s publication, in 1966, of *Le mots et les choses* (Words and Things). Remaining within the genre of twentieth-century philosophy, Jean Hillier draws our attention, in Chapter 5, to both the subtle nature of power found in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s work, and their explicit engagements with ‘power over’ (*pouvoir*) and ‘power to’ (*puissance*) concepts. Here, Hillier demonstrates how *pouvoir* is associated with dominance, whereas *puissance* presents us with creative opportunities. This chapter sets up a useful segue into Chuan Wang’s assessment, in Chapter 6, of Jacques Lacan’s account of power found in language and desire. Lacanian perspectives in turn corroborate Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s conception of hegemony, as Nikolai Roskamm demonstrates in Chapter 7, and, like Wang, Roskamm concludes this chapter by arguing for a more sobering awareness of power’s everyday impact on planning. The final chapter that explicitly draws on continental philosophy as an approach towards *theorising power in planning* is Camillo Boano’s exploration of Jacques Rancière’s ‘destituent power’. Thus, in Chapter 8, Boano posits *destituent power* as a means to radically break with the modern logic of sovereignty for the purpose of promoting a politics beyond power.

The next four chapters of Part I shift gears into the terrain of planning theory. In Chapter 9, Crystal Legacy outlines the potential power of communicative planning from a transformed standpoint, namely one grounded in citizen-led and reflexive practices. This standpoint corroborates aspects of Bjørn Sletto’s insurgent planning project found in Chapter 10, despite the oft maintained incompatibility between collaborative/communicative and insurgent/radical planning. Legacy and Sletto add a fresh dimension to theorising power by arguing for renewed attentions to co-productions that foster counterhegemonic knowledges, imaginaries and actions. Calls to foster counterhegemonic knowledges, imaginaries and actions are equally engendered by Libby Porter’s chapter on decoloniality. Porter begins Chapter 11 by arguing that conceptualisations of power are, in themselves, shaped by histories and structures of violence, colonialism and imperialism before positing pluri-versal understandings of knowledge and ethics. Katie McClymont’s focus on how normative ethics either support or unsettle the less visible structures of power in planning serves as the final chapter of Part I (namely, Chapter 12). McClymont employs Lukes’ power analysis to reframe grounds for judgement and decision making in planning processes and outcomes.

Part II – which focuses on *situating power in planning* – begins with Andy Inch’s suggestion that any attempt to renew the idea of ‘the public good’ in planning necessitates reclaiming the overlooked role of ‘promissory power’. Promissory power, as Inch demonstrates in Chapter 13, is often ceded to developers under neoliberal planning regimes. In Chapter 14, Hilary Malson expands on this situated power dynamics by defining and tracing an abolitionist

tradition of housing justice. Malson's multi-dimensional analysis demonstrates how abolition emerges as a counterhegemonic praxis that enables marginalised residents to cultivate their own power by imagining alternatives beyond systems that perpetuate subjugation. Within a similar ontological framework, Mona Fawaz sets out to demonstrate, in Chapter 15, how the disjuncture between planning's imagined order and informality results in a top-down, exclusionary adoption of power by the state, which, in turn, fuels a counter power dynamic by excluded residents. Fawaz goes on to argue that while both analytical frameworks might be deemed relevant, expanded readings of power beyond state/citizen relations might, in fact, be more useful if planners hope to recognise and address power struggles among unequal actors, where the legislation tends to favour the formal and 'the included'. The final chapter in this cluster of housing concerns – namely, Chapter 16 – is Ernesto López-Morales's chapter on the rent gap that epitomises the intersectional relation between uneven development, planning and power.

The next three chapters that speak of *situating power in planning* are James Duminy and Vanessa Watson's Southern planning perspective; Petra Doan and Ozlem Atalay's application of queer theory to examine the relationship between planning, power and LGBTQ communities in Atlanta and Istanbul; and Leonora Angeles' feminist analyses of power in the planning field. In Chapter 17, Duminy and Watson identify three distinctive yet interrelated lines of critical inquiry associated with Southern planning research, and they conclude the chapter by reflecting on the limitations of the Southern perspective in confronting Northern epistemological hegemony. In Chapter 18, Doan and Atalay highlight the powerful attributes associated with queer-insurgency and queer-theory that serve to transform discourses of redevelopment and gentrification. And in Chapter 19, Angeles argues for an intersectional feminist thinking that might enable planners to imagine multiple centres of intersecting power relations of oppression and privilege affecting practice in the face of complex realities and identities.

The themes discussed in the final seven chapters of Part II are undisputedly shaped by the current moment in history. Thus, in Chapter 20, Marlyana Marzukhi presents the tension created for planning as a consequence of neoliberalism's hegemonic power and global impact. A more celebratory embrace of the contemporary era allows Elham Bahmanteymouri and Mohsen Mohammadzadeh to explore, in Chapter 21, the advancement of cybernetic technologies in relation to planning and power, while Yvonne Rydin's chapter (Chapter 22) demonstrates how planning regulations operate as powerful connections between socio-material assemblages. This chapter concludes with pertinent reflections pertaining to the reform of regulatory processes. In Chapter 23, Kristof Van Assche, Raoul Beunen and Martijn Duineveld reflect on the ways in which planning and power are intertwined by distinguishing between power *in* planning (namely, the power dynamics within the planning domain), power *on* planning (societal influences on the planning system), and the power *of* planning (the impact planning has in society). This argument serves as a viable launching pad for Ernest Alexander's post-postmodern approach to situating power in planning (see Chapter 24). Alexander's argument begins with the established critique of modernist planners as professionals who are empowered to plan rationally, comprehensively and in the interest of an homogenous public good. Postmodernists, by contrast, reject these metanarratives, whilst post-postmodernists are neither technocrats nor communicators, nor do they aspire to become social-change agents. Rather, they are experts in their fields, and, as such, they contribute to the social co-construction of knowledge, which, as posited by Alexander, is the essence of planning. The final two chapters of the book present more sobering accounts of the contemporary era. In



Chapter 25, Jaime Lopez and Lisa Schweitzer de-tangle the complex power relations between media and planning by arguing for new norms and practices, whilst simultaneously warning planners and built environment practitioners against the pitfalls that may further proliferate within an already noisy and authoritarian environment of mis- and disinformation. Failing to achieve a more refined appreciation of media's power threatens to prevent planning from delivering equitable outcomes. Similarly, Eric Sheppard concludes the part and the book with a poignant chapter on the current 'post-truth' moment that is not new but that is, nevertheless, accommodating ardent right-wing truth claims that bend the arc of knowledge production away from social and environmental justice (see Chapter 26). But instead of ending on a note of despair and utter dysfunctionality, Sheppard reminds us that planning is a political process with ends and means up for grabs. He therefore urges planners to face the future from a position of engaged pluralism.

## HOW THIS BOOK CAME ABOUT

This book grew out of an invitation from Michael Gunder to both of us to collaborate on a *Handbook on Planning and Power*. All three of us were, at the time, editorial board members of *Planning Theory*: the same journal for which Michael served as the Managing Editor from 2011 to 2015. We therefore knew Michael as an experienced editor, an inspired theorist and above all else, an exceptionally caring and supportive person. With this in mind, neither of us needed much convincing to accept Michael's invitation to collaborate on a fascinating – but broad and complex – 'planning and power' project.

We started the joint work by deciding that a *Handbook* on power must, by necessity, include many different voices. We knew we wanted to attract authors from diverse parts of the world, and to celebrate both emerging and experienced scholars. For this reason, we reached out to colleagues with whom we had collaborated in the past, as well as colleagues with whom no prior connections had been established. The outcome, as evidenced in the succeeding chapters, is inspiring; and this can be said despite the fact that we were limited to working only with scholars who write and publish in the English language. While we were unable to secure authors for some of our original chapter themes, this forced us to rethink and craft new themes. Looking back, this rethinking and recrafting contributed to some of the most valuable aspects of our planning and power understanding.

A year and a half into the project – when we were starting to receive the first chapter drafts, and when the three of us were in contact with each other almost on a daily basis – we received the heart-breaking news of Michael's death. After the initial shock, we – in collaboration with all the contributing authors – decided to continue the project in honour of Michael's work and unwavering dedication to planning scholarship. If it wasn't for Michael, the two of us would not have met and we would not have been given the fantastic opportunity to discuss so many different aspects about power and planning with all the chapter authors of this book. For all the new insights these chapters have given us we are immensely thankful, and we can only hope readers of this *Handbook on Planning and Power* will feel the same. With gratitude we dedicate this book to Michael.

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