

Should planning and policy gather around the concept of “community of disagreement”?

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Abstract

The planning field tends to have consensus building as a guiding inspiration. Politics, on the other hand, is an activity characterised by disagreement and competition over ideology, values, knowledge, and planning solutions.

Since, or if, we in the planning field today are concerned with giving politicians a leading position, we must recognise the need for politicians to highlight disagreement. Only then will planning become a tool for political governance and for strengthen democracy.

We will in this paper present some main positions in the field of planning theory regarding handling professional and political disagreements, and then introduce the concept «communities of disagreement», as it is defined and discussed in the book *Communities of disagreement: perspectives on democratic interaction*¹ (Iversen, 2014).

Key words: Community of disagreement, politics in planning, disagreement in planning

Introduction

This text is more of a reflection than a conclusive answer. to the question “Should planning and policy gather around the concept of ‘community of disagreement?’” I will argue that this concept, with its theoretical foundation and practice, will be fruitful to use in the debate on how societal planning has dealt with and should deal with disagreement. The field of planning, both in theory and practice, often has consensus as its guiding star for normative theory and practice development. Politics, on the other hand, is an activity characterised by disagreement and competition over ideology, values and what constitutes legitimate knowledge. In politics the goal may be to cultivate disagreement, rather than to reach an agreement. If, or when, we in the planning field are concerned about that politicians should take the leadership position that planning legislation² emphasises they should do, the planning field must both recognise and make room for politicians’ need to highlight disagreement, also in planning processes. Only then will societal planning become a tool for both political leadership and for strengthening democracy.

I stumbled upon the concept a couple of years ago at the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue in Lillehammer (<https://peace.no/>), which uses the concept in its dialogue work, e.g. in the New handbook: A practical approach to public dialogue NEW HANDBOOK: A practical approach to public dialogue <https://peace.no/en/new-handbook-a-practical-approach-to-public-dialogue/>

For a number of years, I have followed and admired this dialogue work that takes place primarily in other countries other countries i.a. the Balkan countries, Ukraine, Chile, Afghanistan, Poland, but also in Norway. The core of their work is to build trust and communities in societies with strong opposing interests and high levels of conflict. The ambition is to increase the understanding and respect for disagreement, to be able to better live with, rather than resolve, such disagreements.

Disagreement is normal within organisations and societies. It is important in a democracy to accept disagreement, to consider it as something inevitable. Disagreements can be both problematic, action-paralysing, and destructive, while also engaging, and have the potential for new thoughts and actions, for innovations.

In this paper, I primarily focus on how the field of planning over the years has given attention to disagreement with emphasis on the place of politics and politicians in the planning field. I delve into some Norwegian and

1 Own translation from Norwegian

2 At least in Norway

international planning theory texts, Norwegian planning research, government planning guidelines, and apply experiences from my own planning research, teaching, student guidance and lecturing activities. I will also draw on experiences from 40 years as a political activist, 25 years as an elected official at local, regional, and national levels, and as an active member of a political party, various organisations, and trade union movements. Politics, however, is not my academic field, just my field of practice, cf. the book *Planners in Politics: Do they make a difference* (Albrechts ed., 2020) where I have written the chapter 'Forty years as a politician with a background in planning. How did this affect me as politician and as a planner?' (Hagen, 2020).

Concluding opinion

My concluding opinion is that (i) politics and politicians are given too little attention in the field of planning. When attention is given, it is more that politics and politicians are part of the problem rather than part of the solution. The dominant narrative is that politicians come late into the process and often politically tear up thoroughly prepared comprehensive planning proposals. (ii) The field of planning, with its focus on striving for agreement and consensus, finds it difficult to incorporate politics' inherent need to highlight disagreement with other politicians and political parties, and to compete for perception of reality, goals and means of action. I believe that this normative pressure to achieve consensus weakens both planning's and politics' place in societies and organisations by making the activities less interesting and relevant for people - citizens and voters. This is unfortunate and pity, especially because part of the purpose of planning should be to sustain and refine an engaged and vibrant democracy.

Politics as a theme in the field of planning – ideals and realities.

Planning is an inevitable activity. "We are constantly thinking about the future and how to control it. Man is therefore a planning animal. ... Planning is as old as man." says José L. Ramírez (Ramírez, 1995:24). The public sector is planning like never before, at least in Norway - the Nordic countries. One of the many reasons is that politicians increasingly see planning as a tool for putting their own political issues on the agenda.

Planning theorists and practitioners who aim to make planning as comprehensive as possible often describe planning as a stepwise activity with four main phases: 1) Basis for decision-making: Interpretations of current situation, likely and desirable futures and means to get there. 2) Decisions: Determination of what we want to achieve in the future, in what way. 3) Implementation: From 'words to action'. 4) Evaluations: Output and outcome, what happened, with which results and why.

Traditionally, planning theorists and practitioners have limited planning to be only phase 1. For others phase 2, is defined as part of the planning process, making planning contain two main elements (Kleven ed. 1998:12): Element no 1 - using some form of scientific, knowledge-based analysis method. Element no 2 - making decisions about future actions based on this methodological analysis foundation. Politicians have traditionally been relegated to phases no 2 and element no 2. Politicians are decision makers, not planners.

This brings us to a core question within planning: To what extent can organisations and societies be scientifically, or shall we say professionally, observed, cf. phase no 1? Traditional planning processes are often characterised by professionals, primarily planners and consultants, producing and informing about facts of the present and forecasting both possible and professionally recommended futures. Then, elected politicians, 'lay people,' signal which of these futures with associated means they desire.

The planning field have both theoretically and practically developed away from this position in recent decades. However, the growth of participatory and co-creation theories and methods in recent decades has not decisively changed this basic culture and practice of division of labor between disciplines/administration/planners and politics/politicians. For example, it is preferably professionals, and professionals alone without participation and political involvement, who prepare the "knowledge base" in municipal and regional planning documents. An alternative approach involves a rejection of the fact that facts about the present and expected future unambiguously exist, and a rejection of the fact that correct action comes as an automatic consequence of

being aware of specific, selected facts. Organisations and societies must be “read”, understood, interpreted like text in a book, more than unambiguously registered, investigated and researched using statistical methods. It is also impossible to make certain forecasts for the future development of open systems such as municipal organisation and municipal/county society. My experience as a politician over many years is that there are often greater disagreements about what the current situation is in a society or a thematic area such as climate change or inequality, than about what are good future situations and good planning solutions.

This gives us a situation where neither politicians (lay people), planners (the scholars) nor researchers (the super-scholars) can objectively or adequately capture the past or present, i.e., describe the situation unambiguously as it was and as it is. The cognitive basis is that facts and truth, right and wrong, good, and bad can be fleeting, situational, deeply individual, i.e., something that fundamentally belongs to politics. Then it is problematic when/if the planning field has agreement as a guiding star, when politics undeniably has competing disagreements as an inherent feature.

Planning theory – A glimpse into historical main positions

Most of the leading planning theorists from the 1960s have focused primarily on developing the normative aspects of planning. This one-sided focus on improving and refining the normative approach has tended to go beyond understanding the planning activity that takes place. This has led much theoretical development away from practice rather than attempts to understand and respect practice. The theoretical contributions have become of little practical use; even misleading with all their heavily normative expectations for both the planning process and the planning product.

Here follows a brief introduction to a few theoretical contributions that, for me, stand out as most relevant in the discussion of the place of politics in societal planning. Such brief glimpses do not do justice to the planning theory debate - most contributors and perspectives are not mentioned.

It seems that Edvard C. Banfield in the 1950s gave us the recipe for a normative ideal for planning: First, present a normative model ideal and then analyse various means to achieve the goal, choosing the means that professionally ensure the best goal achievement (Banfield, 1959:149).

The rationalist planning theory and method are born. The normative guiding star becomes consensus because of unequivocal knowledge produced by experts. One must then expect that politicians will loyally listen to the experts when they are invited to make the formal planning decisions.

However, Charles Lindblom immediately responded with the following criticism (Lindblom, 1959, 1973, 1979): It is both useless and unproductive to operate with an ideal that is completely impossible to achieve, which lies in “The range of impossibilities.”

In a reality characterised by uncertainty and disagreement about what constitutes valid knowledge, by conflict of interests and political disagreement, we should choose what is possible, what can be politically implemented given the prevailing power relations. Incremental planning therefore prescribes a step-by-step approach where you try, occasionally fail, and learn during the processes, and where you do not waste time identifying all workable solutions and consequences.

Incremental planning provides a greater room and need for politics than Banfield’s rationalist planning ideal. Lindblom argues that consensus about goals and means in societal planning is often unrealistic, not achievable, and not politically rational. Lindblom warns against unrealistic ideals:

“What kind of aspiration, norm, or ideal gives direction and other specific guidance to a body builder - his hope to have the strength of a gorilla or his attention to exceed Arnold Schwarzenegger? For a soprano, the impossible aspiration to hit a note six octaves above the highest note ever sung, or the resolve to reach A above high-C?”

(Lindblom, 1979: 518)

Practice must seek to achieve what is possible, what can be achieved, a consensus on minor ("incremental") changes that occur without the resistance becoming too noisy and paralysing. This gives a greater degree of both room for and need for politics than in Banfield's rationalist planning ideal. Politicians must develop solutions that at least a majority of elected officials in, for example, a municipal or county council can support.

Later, throughout the 70s and 80s, and up to the present day, other theories became more visible, especially the communicative approach. Where Banfield's normative ideal has professional analysis as a key concept, and Lindblom relies on incremental changes, reestablishes the communicative position the idea of consensus. Achieving agreement should be possible thanks to the 'force of the best argument' (Pløger, 1998). Pløger writes in the research report «Communicative Planning: Between Communication and Rhetoric» (Pløger, 1998) that there are two research perspectives dominating the 80s and 90s; the communicative planning theory inspired by Jürgen Habermas and "the perhaps less known research that views planning as a 'rhetorical activity' and exercise of power (Pløger, 1998:3), inspired by, among others, Michel Foucault. Consensus is neither possible nor desirable as a planning ideal.

Inspired by the communicative turn, much planning practice in the seventies, also in Norway, was genuinely concerned with active participation, and that this could result in unified planning solutions (e.g., "Arbeidsbokmetoden"³ Orhaug, 1988). What is new in this communicative turn lies in the fact that influential planning theorists to a particular extent focused on the dialogue itself, the dialog in practice: How to get dialogue to promote understanding, how to get it to be as "dominant-free" as possible, so that it ensures that always "the best argument" wins.

The process becomes central. It becomes important to involve, in the planning dialogue, as many as possible of those affected by the planning work. Direct participation is more appropriate and better for so-called weak groups than being represented by spokespersons and "radical" planners, respectively "Advocacy Planning" and Radical Planning (Pløger, 1998:11). While incrementalism heavily relies on the assumption of a functioning representative democracy, the communicative position focuses on more people engaging in dialogical processes where it becomes paramount to promote mutual understanding of each other's positions in dialogue and develop new, agreed-upon positions.

Patsy Healey writes in her article "Planning through debate. The communicative turn in planning theory" (Healey, 1992) that planning is a child of modernity. By using scientific knowledge and reason, people/organisations/societies are liberated from the "tyranny of thought" that can follow from religious regimes and political/military dictatorships. One of the main challenges to this planning paradigm is related to the criticism of the idea of the scientifically based reason's superior position, in relation to local, tacit, or experience-based knowledge. The salvation for the planning project lies in developing the communicative aspects of planning. By moving from individual reason to reason that emerges because of intersubjective communication, one avoids "destructive relativism." The good and right is what we can develop together through communication and simultaneously agree upon. The dialogue should be informed by knowledge; the communicative position does not reject scientific knowledge, cf. Banfield's normative planning ideal – it is just not seen as superior. For all the planning theorists who lean heavily on Habermas, the dialog-based consensus often becomes a requirement that we can and should make for planning. The pursuit of consensus becomes a central content in the very understanding of normativity.

Bent Flyvbjerg argues in his doctoral dissertation *Rationality and Power* (Flyvbjerg, 1991) that Habermas's discourse ethics are based on the following thinking: If the rules in this discourse ethics are followed, the result will be rational and acceptable actions. But for Flyvbjerg, it makes little sense to separate power and communication as much as he believes Habermas does by composing such process ideals. He aligns himself

3 The Workbook Method – my translation

with Richard Rorty, who claims that communicative rationality almost has a religious status in Habermas's thinking (Rorty, 1985). Habermas's optimism about reason is problematic in relation to what happens in actual communication processes. Communication will be characterised by interest preservation, not by domination-free and consensus-seeking (Ramírez, 1995). Flyvbjerg argues that Habermas's work for more democracy diverts attention away from fundamental power relations. This is unfortunate because attention to power relations is precisely a first prerequisite for more democracy.

In this sense, Flyvbjerg's criticism of Habermas and all the planning theorists inspired by him has much in common with Lindblom's criticism of Banfield's normativity. Both Flyvbjerg and Lindblom ask us not to overlook, or develop theories away from, power games and politics.

Månson gives us an additional argument about politics that is relevant for societal planning when he points out that a dialogue will always contain a "... flow of power relations that envelop and condition the discourse" (Månson, 1989:326). It is unreasonable, "irrational," to be communicatively rational if one wants to gain support for their viewpoints. This was emphasised by Davidoff, the father of advocacy planning, already in the mid-60s: "... it may be simpler for professionals, politicians, or lobbyists to make deals if they have not laid their cards on the table" (Davidoff, 1965:287).

Research, development work, guidance booklets

What attention is given to politics and politicians in research, development work, and guides in planning from national ministries and KS - The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities? The main picture, up until 2018, is that politics and politicians have been given little attention. Where politics is given attention, it is usually under the theme of participation and involvement: Inhabitants, landowners, users of public services, civil society representatives, businesses should be involved early in all planning processes. Politicians are hardly mentioned in connection with participation in, and/or management of planning processes.

'Program Plan 2017-2024 Democratic and Effective Governance, Planning and Administration'⁵ (DEMOS) (Forskningsrådet, 2018) is a typical example where politicians are mentioned, but mostly as one of several groups that planning must include - "... residents and users, local politicians ..." (page 17). Another clear feature is that research is to be conducted on and about politicians and then communicated to politicians. It is not conducted together with politicians. There are no co-research ambitions in this research program.

The research project 'Evaluation of the Planning and Building Act' (EVAPLAN) (NIBR, 2014) aimed, among other things, to find out to what extent broad participation and political governance are the basis for planning. When we search for the words 'politics' and 'politicians' in the two books presenting findings from the research project (Hanssen & Aarsæther a and b ed., 2018), we find that only one of the 47 chapters has the word politics in the title, namely the chapter on Planning Strategy (Kvalvik 2018). There is some writing about political leadership (pages 34 and 192), politician training (page 48), and politicised problems (page 229). The researchers have interviewed mayors but have hardly talked to part-time politicians about, for example, how to help/support/encourage part-time politicians to take the lead in planning work or to use plans/planning as a political tool.

The guidance booklet 'Municipal planning process' (Miljøverndepartementet, 2012) hardly mentions politicians. The same applies to the guidance booklet 'Participation in the planning process' (Kommunal- og distriktsdepartementet, 2014) and '10 pieces of advice for a well-functioning and effective planning system'⁶ (KS, 2016). None of the three addresses politicians about leading planning processes, even though we have a planning law that precisely assumes that societal local and regional planning is a fundamentally political activity.

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However, 'Let's do it together! Handbook in local co-creative social innovation'⁷ (KS, 2018) addresses the role of politicians in the co-creative municipality. It emphasises that politicians must use time for policy development together with inhabitants in various workshops, working groups, and open thematic meetings, and not spend all their time preparing for and attending meetings - with piles of ready-made documents with proposals for decisions.

Community of disagreement – introduction and theoretical foundation

The concept of "community of disagreement" is used in various areas in Norway, especially related to democracy, education, and culture. In the book "Uenighetsfellesskap: blikk på demokratisk samhandling," "Community of Disagreement: A Look at Democratic Interaction"⁸ Lars Laird Iversen writes that the term can refer to a group of people who come together around a common theme, problem, or goal but have different or conflicting views on how this theme, problem, or goal should be handled (Iversen, 2014).

In my search for the use of this concept, I have come across a bunch of texts, none of them planning texts. I therefore in this paper rely heavily on this book (Iversen 2014) and Trond Solhaug's review in the Journal of Social Research (Solhaug, 2015).

The first sentence in the first chapter titled 'Community of Disagreement' sets the tone: "Norge er et uenighetsfellesskap, og har alltid vært det" (Norway is a community of disagreements and always has been⁹.) (Iversen, 2014:11). Norwegians share problems and arenas for discussion, but we share values to a much lesser extent. Our democratic communities are communities of disagreement, which he which he defines as follows:

"Et uenighetsfellesskap er en gruppe mennesker med ulike meninger, som er i en felles prosess for å løse et problem eller en utfordring" (A community of disagreement is a group of people with different opinions, who are engaged in a common process to solve a problem or challenge¹⁰) (Iversen, 2014:12).

For me, this goes directly to the core of what community planning is, namely solving problems and challenges together in a democracy. With this book, Iversen aims to create greater insight and debate about managing disagreement, creating consensus on critical issues, and, importantly, living with diversity (Solhaug, 2015:251). Iversen mentions school classes, religious communities, and institutions as examples of community, and in what he refers to as 'public sphere of democratic nations'¹¹ (Iversen, 2014:18). That must mean, in my view, that we can also include local and regional communities, as well as communities such as municipal planning committees, city councils, neighborhood associations, county councils, and civil society organisations.

Iversen is concerned with several ways to normalise and demystify disagreement, including value disagreement, so that individually and collectively, we become better at living with all this disagreement. Iversen claims that behind much perceived agreement, there is much disagreement, from the internal disagreement within the individual to disagreement in several types of communities. We must be aware that agreeing as well as disagreeing is about relationships, strategies, politics, and conventions. (Solhaug 2015:251). This reminds me of the discussion we have within planning regarding wicked problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973). The point is that 'living with' is often a wiser strategy for practice than seeking to solve these types of problems, which is precisely why they are labeled 'wicked.'

Iversen is focused on revitalising and expanding democratic processes. Influence must be genuine. We need to take more decisions back to real democratic bodies "- and away from experts, bureaucrats, markets, and

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regional enterprises”¹² (Iversen, 2014:135). He argues that disagreement stimulates creativity (Iversen, 2014:52-58). Freedom of expression, free debates, and a positive approach to disagreement stimulate new thinking.

Iversen discusses Habermas’ argument for a power-free conversation, where only the rational value of arguments is emphasised, where everyone has a real opportunity to participate. Iversen disagrees with Habermas on the view of rationality:

“Habermas argues for freedom from power in public discourse because the best arguments will then prevail. This is not necessarily the case in a community of disagreement”¹³ (Iversen, 2014:138). Within the community of disagreement, the arguments for open, free, real discussions are that multiple voices provide a greater diversity of ideas, more innovation.

In the end of the book, Iversen points out that the community of disagreement closely resembles Chantal Mouffe’s theory of political leadership and agonistic politics (Mouffe, 2000 and 2005, in Iversen 2014:145-156). What Iversen presents here are the same arguments found in definitions and discussions of agonistic planning theory. This is an approach to planning that has recently emerged as a critique of and alternative to communicative planning theory. The agonistic perspective recognises that conflict is an inevitable part of democracy. Therefore, the idea that the goal of democracy is to achieve consensus among society members is rejected. On the contrary, disagreement is somewhat of an inherent necessity in a lively, engaging democracy. In an agonistic model, both for politics and planning, the conflicting parties acknowledge each other as legitimate, even though they disagree. They accept common premises and procedures for political struggle and planning discussions, enabling a more constructive form of conflict, and increasing the likelihood of innovation.

Community of disagreement – implications for planning practice

Planning literature is dominated by arguments that agreement is preferable, a prerequisite for successful planning. It is about, among other things, creating legitimacy for a plan, preventing frequent rematches, and showing outwardly that one stands united. Overall societal plans, such as municipal plans and regional plans, should preferably give a positive picture, that it is attractive to live and work in this local/regional society. It is therefore important to show optimistic agreement, not to expose disagreement and conflict.

However, such a consensus ambition also has negative consequences. Firstly, it can weaken party politics and thus engagement among party members and voters. The consensus ambition can suppress political debate, as it encourages compromise and agreement rather than highlighting and addressing political divides and ideological differences. Furthermore, it risks overlooking or smoothing over fundamental differences and conflicts in society. This can make it harder for voters to see clear differences between parties, thereby weakening parties’ ability to profile themselves and mobilise voters based on clear political alternatives. Without clear conflict and debate, voters may also feel that democracy is not functioning properly because the planning documents do not contain disagreements and conflicts.

Secondly, consensus gives increased attention to planners, administrative staff, and experts. Consensus-oriented planning is often characterised by a heavy emphasis on inputs from planners, administrative staff, consultants, and researchers. This marginalises the political dimension, where different values and interests compete. It reduces the space for political discussion and influence from political parties. Voters might get the impression that politicians do not have real power over the most important decisions. Likewise, it can marginalise participation from civil society and inhabitants. Processes become more ritualistic and characterised by information dissemination and feedback rather than real discussions where participants can draw on their own experiences and values.

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Thirdly, consensus can suppress political innovation. Consensus-driven planning processes can also hinder political innovation, as compromises often lead to radical or new ideas being toned down to achieve broad agreement. This can reduce the dynamics of party politics and lead political parties to be more cautious in their political programs. When consensus is the goal, it can be tempting for parties to avoid promoting new or controversial ideas that might disrupt the established agreement. This can lead to stagnation in political development and prevent parties from challenging the status quo, which in turn weakens parties' ability to represent the interests of different voter groups and ability to promote real political change.

Flyvbjerg argued (Flyvbjerg, 1991) that heavily normative planning theories, both the classic rationalist approach (Banfield, 1959) and the classic communicative ones (e.g. Healey, 1992, 1997, Harper and Stein, 2012, Innes, 2004, Sager, 1994) would soon appear as a historical phenomenon because they will not survive all the attacks that will eventually come against them. They will fail the practice criterion (Flyvbjerg, 1991). I believe, mostly hope, that this is now about to happen. The rational planning model and the communicative planning models are not two extreme positions. They represent a common mindset that only the normative ideal, the maximum, is good enough as an ideal. In this sense, they are both located in "The range of impossibilities" (Lindblom, 1959, 1973, 1979). They overlook realities on the ground such as power imbalances, the inherent communicative limitations of language, ideological and value-based conflicts of interest, disagreements, and uncertainties in knowledge, and therefore, fundamentally, politics as well.

Three planning Theories – relevant for community of disagreement

I will briefly point out three theoretical positions that support the argument for community of disagreement as a concept and ambition for planning in organisations and society. These three are not independent planning methods but rather approaches that can appear in collaboration or be integrated into other planning methods and processes. What all three have in common is that they have internalised that planning is fundamentally political, and therefore must provide understanding for, respect for and relevant room for action for politicians, for the exercise of their political rationality.

Planning as rhetorical exercise of power - as previously mentioned, Pløger argues that two research perspectives dominate planning in the 80s and 90s; communicative planning theory and the perspective that views planning as a "rhetorical activity" and exercise of power (Pløger, 1998:3). A key point in this latter perspective is that planning is about communicating successfully (Hellspong, 1995: 2), not about finding or jointly developing objectively correct answers. Rhetoric is a practical logic, not a descriptive model, not a normative model, but a prescriptive model. It gives advice, it points out approaches in planning processes. (Hellspong, 1995).

James A. Throgmorton is one of the most visible planning theorists in the USA working with rhetoric. He argues like Hellspong when he claims that planners should work in the following way:

"Planners should strive, not to be good and be right and get things done, but to create, sustain and participate in a public, democratic discourse that enables them (and others) to argue persuasively and coherently about contestable views of what is good, right, and feasible" (Throgmorton, 1996:54).

Throgmorton sees planning as a form of storytelling about the future in which one seeks to convince and constitute the perception of the situation (Throgmorton, 1996:250,251). He compares society to a weave that lacks objective structure or meaning (Throgmorton, 1996:253). What we see depends on where we are placed in the weave. The same applies to what we plan, how we plan, and how we participate in the planning process. Sometimes this leads to agreed positions/consensus, other times to clarified disagreement. In this perspective, the planning text (text – images – maps and figures – design) and speech/conversation become important. Not least, politicians would like to activate their political project, their political ambitions, in such planning processes. It is then important for all those participating in such processes to be good at "storytelling." This is a well-known acknowledgment for politicians.

Innovative planning - increasingly, planning theorists argued throughout the nineties that creativity and innovation are restricted, even hindered, by planning theories and methods that rely heavily on either the analysis perspective (Hillier, 2008) or the communicative perspective (Mäntysalo, 2002). Mäntysalo (2002) argues that Habermas's concept for dialogue is too narrow, too static, and not creative enough. Others claim that planning theory with communicative ideals does not allow and can even stifle creativity and innovation (Stein & Harper, 2012).

Regardless of this specific planning theoretical discussion, we know that planning practice has already benefited from being inspired by innovation theory and practice for many years. No matter what planning theorists may think about the power of various theoretical positions, planners and politicians have increasingly appreciated theoretical and practical contributions from the field of innovation. Arguments that frequently appear in texts about innovative planning is that planning must encourage the development of innovative and liberating planning practices, stimulate innovation, and value and refine disagreement (Hagen and Higdén, 2023). Politicians who want change can therefore be inspired by innovative thinking and practice. The fact that this perspective also celebrates disagreement inspires many politicians to engage in planning processes. Planning that accepts and values disagreement is far more politically relevant than traditional consensus-seeking planning (Hagen and Higdén, 2023).

Agonistic planning - recognises and embraces conflict as an inevitable and productive part of democratic politics. This comes from the political theory of agonism, already mentioned (Mouffe, 2000, 2005, 2013), which emphasises the importance of political competition and disagreement within a democratic society. Instead of resolving or minimising conflicts, agonistic community planning views conflicts as an opportunity to promote democratic participation and innovation. Agonistic community planning acknowledges that groups in society have different interests and values and that these differences can be both legitimate and productive. This is precisely what politics is all about.

Agonistic theories aim to open and provide a new approach to democracy, where the rules of democracy are always open to questioning, competition, disagreement, discussion, negotiation, and changes over time. The same ambitions must also be used as a basis in planning processes. It is important that planning reflects the diversity of today's society in terms of opinions and interests. A central element then becomes how to develop methods and cultures for planning practice characterised by such contradictions, which can still result in accepted decisions (Pløger, 2004, 2012, 2018). The agonistic approach is less focused on achieving consensus as in communicative planning theory. It is more concerned with how to make decisions in planning processes (Pløger, 2018: 265), which can later be accepted and implemented in the community, even though there is disagreement.

Conclusion

It is fundamentally important to both take care of and seek to refine disagreement in planning processes and planning documents. Both planning theorists and practitioners must realise that disagreement is an inherent reality that one cannot theorise away from – neither within the field of planning theory nor within the field of practice. If planning theory should be able to follow up on its ambitions to both describe and prescribe practice, disagreement must at least be accepted, preferably treated as something potentially positive. It represents a potential for change.

Further, acceptance of disagreement by planning professionals is necessary to make planning interesting, relevant, and effective for organisations and society. Acceptance of disagreement by planning professionals is also necessary if planning want to contribute to preserving and building democracy.

Of course, we will continue to seek to reduce disagreement in planning processes, when the participants involved in the planning process, including politicians, see this as possible and appropriate. In other situations, however, it may be wise to do the opposite, to make visible, communicate and explain disagreements that often do not come up in analyses, debates, and the public. Accepting, exploring, and refining disagreements can also be positive in

stimulating innovative thinking, and in recruiting new people and environments into planning processes.

Developing good processes and procedures for voting, and how to work further afterwards in situations with winners and losers, also needs more and better attention in research and practice development.

Good, safe, trusting communities of disagreement are likely to promote individual and collective well-being, innovation, and democracy (Iversen, 2014). We must realise that we cannot plan our way out of many disagreements, only hide them by, for example by forcing a minority to remain silent. This is ethically and democratically reprehensible, and overall, simply counterproductive, or simply stupid.

The question in the title of the paper is: "Should planning and politics gather around the concept of 'community of disagreement'?" My answer is 'yes' and a call to both the planning field and the politic field, theoreticians as well as practitioners, to cultivate and refine theories – models – methods based on 'communities of disagreement.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks for good and helpful ideas and comments to Professor Nils Aarsæther, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, and Kirsti Knudsen, fagtidsskriftet Samfunn og økonomi www.samfunnogokonomi.no/om-tidsskriftet/ (the journal Society and Economy"

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