

Book Review

Markets, Politics, and the Environment: An Introduction to Planning Theory

Reviewed by Carlos Nunes Silva, Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

Markets, Politics and the Environment: An Introduction to Planning Theory

Barry Goodchild

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Planning scholars are familiar with the frequently repeated idea that we live in a time when neo-liberal perspectives appear to have won over the arguments of those that support planning. What neo-liberal critics of planning know much less about is perhaps the risks this retreat from planning may cause to sustainable development. Barry Goodchild's book "Markets, Politics and the Environment: An Introduction to Planning Theory" is an opportune and relevant contribution to the ongoing debate on the multiple and often contradictory meanings of planning and on the critical role urban and regional planning should play in the sustainable development process. This carefully constructed book is organized into 4 parts and 10 chapters and offers an updated and well-informed introductory account of planning theory. The book has many strengths but perhaps the book's greatest contribution is the way the author presents the different planning theories and the way planning theory is related to planning methods and planning practice.

In the first part (Introduction, pp. 3 - 38) Barry Goodchild breaks the traditional boundaries between disciplines and gives a broad overview of theory making, its different forms, and of how theory relates to methodology and practice. It questions the relation and the gap between theory and practice and offers as a result of that a much clearer view of the complexities that make up the planning field. Following this persuasive introductory framework, the next section (Part II - 'Definitions, Styles and Forms', pp. 39-123) explores in its three chapters the different varieties of planning practice and its different meanings. In the first ('Planning and Urban Spaces') Barry Goodchild discusses the idea of planning as a process of plan preparation, which includes among other dimensions the representations of space, and examines a series of different distinctions (descriptions of different spatial patterns; the difference between rules and models; the different ways of organizing the information; the differences between use and exchange value; planning as drawing and mapping; mixing design and action in space;

the multiple distinctions of blueprint planning, among other aspects), highlighting the complexities and the multiple dimensions of planning. The third chapter ('Political and Economic Planning') offers an overview of the collective character of planning actions over time, exploring the need and justification of planning in modern society contrasting it with the neo-liberal justifications that tend to limit the scope of planning to specific concepts such as externality effects and transaction costs. This part ends with chapter 4 ('Styles and Forms of Planning') in which Barry Goodchild discusses the different subdivisions of the ideal types of planning contrasting allocative planning and its main varieties with innovative and radical planning.

The methodology of planning is examined and discussed in the following three chapters (Part III - Applying 'Reason' to Politics, pp. 125-196). Barry Goodchild examines in chapter 5 ('Rationalism and Pragmatism') the main theories of decision-making in planning and shows that while rationalism is a framework built around the means/ends idea, pragmatism on the contrary assumes that aims can be generated as the planning process proceeds and develops. The chapter includes also a valuable discussion of rationalist logics (functional rationality; substantial rationality and critical rationalism) and pragmatic logics (abduction and retroduction and the affinity between planning and pragmatism) highlighting again the complexity of the planning endeavour. In the next chapter ('Evaluation and Translation') the author discusses the different methods, techniques or approaches that are used in evaluation and translation and how they can contribute for a democratic debate about the future, one of the justifications for planning, as Barry Goodchild argues. Again, also in this respect the book offers an interesting discussion of different methods, which will certainly be useful for students and practitioners in the planning field. In the last chapter of this Part - (chapter 7 - 'Difference, Diversity and Dissent') - Barry Goodchild explores issues of political legitimacy and the various theories of how to deal with conflict in planning, and of how to combine technical rationality and democracy, a discussion structured around the notion of postmodernism.

In Part IV (Environmental Risks, Urban Transitions, pp. 197-279), with three chapters, Barry Goodchild deals again with the different types of planning. In chapter 8 ('Managing Risks and Bads') and in chapter 9 ('Transition management') discusses the distinction between allocative planning versus innovative and radical planning arguing that the various forms of transition management are the environmental equivalent of innovative and radical planning. In the first of these chapters Barry Goodchild discusses different theories of risk management following the risk society theory arguments, focused on the notions of risk and resilience, dealing in the following chapter with the notion of transition management and the multiplicity of different pathways and mechanisms of innovation and change, arguing accurately that transition is more than just risk management, as it means a shift towards more sustainable systems of production and consumption. In the last chapter ('Sustainable Urbanism') Barry Goodchild deals with the physical and spatial techniques needed for the development of a 'green state' one that considers the environment at least as important as finance or the economy as the author argues, reconsidering the traditional distinction between models and rules (compact city and its alternative; eco-cities and eco-rating; urban upgrading and retrofitting).

In short, as referred above, the book is published in a period when neoliberal perspectives seem to have won over planning arguments, reducing planning to a minimum level. However, ironically, as the author underlines, and I concur with him, this is also a time when there seems to be a return to the planning ideals, to planning as the guide that our contemporary societies need in order to move consistently towards a sustainable future(s). This apparent paradox is by itself a good justification to re-examine once again the old debates on planning theory, questioning and discussing in the light of recent developments its basic assumptions, methods and practices. Important is certainly to keep questioning those theories frequently presented as innovative or radical, assessing how far they can indeed change the practices and to what extent will they meet carbon reduction and other similar targets. All this makes this book a useful scholarly work, a required reading reference for planning

theory courses, and a well-informed contribution to the much-needed debate on the nature and role of planning theory, which may be useful to help challenge neo-liberal ways of thinking the urban scene. For these reasons, this noteworthy contribution to the study of planning theory should be commended not only to academics but also to all those individuals looking for deeper insights into the notion of planning and on the theory of urban and regional planning.