


## Book Review

# Book Review: Planning Theory

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This collection of essays on planning theory, edited by Michael Gunder, Ali Madanipour and Vanessa Watson, offers new insights on the continually changing field of planning theory. The book offers a broad view of different perspectives on planning theory, the different theories, its values, the knowledge each brings in and the practices associated with each of the different current perspectives, as well as a broad view of the new or emerging explorations in planning theory. Taken together this collection of essays provides not only a snapshot of current perspectives within planning theory but also a glimpse of a number of possible emerging new trajectories. It helps to understand how planning and its different practices function, and how they continuously change, over time and according to place.

The book is organized into three parts and has 26 chapters. The first part ('Contemporary Planning Practices', p. 13-66) has four chapters and deals with the current state of the diverse practices of planning, illustrating how planning is currently practiced. This section offers critical observations on these diverse contemporary practices of planning, exploring theories of spatial planning, strategic planning, smart growth and environmental planning. While spatial planning emerges as the dominant paradigm in the last decades, it has been seen and conceived in different ways as is shown in chapter 2. The strategic nature of planning is also explored in this part, as well as the paradigm of smart urban growth and its multiple meanings, and the growing importance of environmental planning.

The following section ('How Meaning/Values are Constructed in Planning', p.67-233), with 13 chapters, the largest of the three parts, discusses the notion of public interest, planning ethics, communicative planning, neo-liberal planning, neo-pragmatist planning theory, social justice, grassroots of planning, dilemmas of diversity, new meanings, postpolitics, power, governmentality, and governance. The contributions in this section shed new light on how meanings and values are constructed in planning. Chapter after chapter in this section questions and interrogates long held concepts, such as those of public interest, value-free knowledge, technocratic expertise, entrepreneurialism, social knowledge, the procedural nature of planning, right to the city, or the quest for diversity, among others, proposing in some cases the reconstruction of concepts under the conditions brought about by new circumstances.

The third and last part ('Networks, Flows, Relationships and Institutions', p.234-350), with 9 chapters, theorizes the current and emerging structures and functions - networks, flows, relationships, and institutions - that are present in planning. These chapters analyse theories of governance, new institutionalism, agonism, insurgency, conflict, actor networks, complexity, assemblage and becoming. Each of these narratives emerged and developed in response to changes that occurred in different times and places. It is the case, for instance, of the withdraw of the State from numerous activities that marked the gold period of the welfare state in developed countries, which lead to its substitution by non-governmental actors. This new condition - fragmented governance - required theoretical analysis in all disciplines dealing with public policy and therefore also in planning. Other changes that occurred in the last decades led moreover to the need of enquiry and theoretical discussion which has been on the basis of the emergence and development of new narratives written from these different perspectives. It is about this highly diversified process and perspectives that the 9 chapters of this last section of the book deal with.

In sum, Michael Gunder, Ali Madanipour and Vanessa Watson edited a collection of essays that sheds new light on the highly complex field of planning theories, values, and practices, and which will certainly serve as the basis for the teaching of planning theory in advanced planning programmes. Through this questioning, the handbook contributes to a better understanding of different narratives about planning, adding therefore new perspectives that go beyond the dominant planning culture. For the readers of the International Journal of E-Planning Research and for all those working in the field of urban e-planning, the Routledge Handbook of Planning Theory offers a well-informed account of theories in the planning discipline, seen as narratives told from different perspectives.

The discussion found in these chapters are valuable inputs for the exploration of theories and values embedded in Urban e-Planning practices, which may help to challenge the move towards neo-positivism and to forms of neo-technocracy that seems to be emerging in Urban e-Planning practices, in association with the increasingly extensive use of information and communication technologies in planning. The knowledge of the different theoretical perspectives or narratives that have marked the practice of the discipline, the product of particular times and places, in both education, research and as a professional activity is thus essential for the future of Urban e-Planning, as it is the knowledge of the History of Planning.

This book is an essential contribution for that, even if it is not completely comprehensive in its coverage of planning theory authors, namely of those writing outside the English language. For all the reasons mentioned before this is a book that is mandatory reading for students, researchers, scholars, and planners interested or working in the broad field of Urban e-Planning.

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