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A Turning Point for Planning Theory?: Overcoming Dividing Discourses

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A Turning Point for Planning Theory? Overcoming Dividing Discourses

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Abstract:	<p>After communicative planning theory (CPT) emerged in the 1980's, challenging assumptions and prevailing theories of planning, debates ensued among planning theorists that led to apparently opposing groups with little space for mutual learning. The most difficult obstacle is that critiques of CPT framed several dichotomies making different perspectives appear incompatible. This article seeks to advance the dialogue of planning theory perspectives by acknowledging the key tensions embedded in this framing, but arguing that they can be viewed as reflecting contradictions to be embraced as an opportunity for a more robust planning theory. Drawing on Manuel Castells' (2009) theory of communication power the article explores four of these contradictions and shows how in each case embracing the contradictions as aspects of our complex world can lead to insights and a richer planning theory. The article concludes with suggestions for improved dialogue among theorists and identifies research that can advance our understanding of communication power.</p>

A TURNING POINT FOR PLANNING THEORY? OVERCOMING DIVIDING DISCOURSES

“My only real way to challenge the powers that be is by unveiling their presence in the workings of our minds.” (Castells 2009, p. 9)

Communicative planning theory

Communicative planning theory (CPT), which emerged in the 1980s and 90s, unsettled assumptions about what planning is, how it works, and how it ought to be done. It also challenged ideas about what theory should be for and what form it should take.¹ CPT refers to the work of a cluster of scholars in planning and related fields² who conducted fine-grained, interpretive research on planners and planning processes, using concepts from social theorists as tools to make sense of what they observed and to develop normative perspectives on practice. They focused in considerable part on communication, interaction and dialogue, and drew new theorists into planning thought, including most notably Habermas, Foucault, and Dewey. They wrote stories of practice, along with reflections on them. While CP theorists each took a different angle, they became a community of sorts, sharing drafts of manuscripts, discussing ideas on panels and in personal correspondence, building their work on one another's ideas.^{3 4}

As CP theorists proliferated, their work drew increasing attention in the planning academy. This came to a head in response to an article in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (Innes 1995), which asserted that CPT could become the dominant paradigm in planning theory.

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3 A storm of criticism broke out, surprisingly not primarily from the rational model theorists
4 whose work they had challenged, but from the political economists and neo-Marxists, whose
5 work had also been an important part of planning thought since the 1960's. Panels and
6 conferences were set up to "debate" CPT, and proceedings were published in journals.⁵ Writing
7 articles critical of CPT became almost a cottage industry. CP theorists continued to focus on their
8 own projects rather than responding to what they largely experienced as spurious attacks. The
9 few who offered limited responses⁶ appeared unable to alter the situation.

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12 Today planning theory seems to have become a set of dividing discourses.⁷ People talk past one
13 another. Blame, criticism, and incivility often crowd out scholarly dialogue and inquiry (e.g.
14 Bengs 2005). Theorists belong to discourse communities which employ different languages and
15 methods toward different ends. Students are often confused and frustrated, craving a way to
16 make sense of the differences. While the brouhaha may have started as a war over turf and over
17 which views will be dominant, the result today is that we, as theorists, have little ability to learn
18 from our differences. The situation is neither conducive to constructive conversation, nor to
19 building richer and more robust theory. The most difficult obstacle to such conversation is that
20 the critiques have framed a set of dichotomies among perspectives, making them appear
21 incompatible.

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 **Purpose and outline of the paper**

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53 This paper takes on the project of helping the field move toward a common discourse through
54 which we can explore and learn from our differences. We will not try to merge the perspectives-

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3 -rather we will identify tensions among them as evidenced by the dichotomies and use these
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5 tensions as fuel for new ways of see our common enterprise. Along with the Frankfurt School of
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7 Critical Theory (Bernstein 1976), we contend contradictions are normal and that we must not
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9 only accept, but embrace them if we are to learn and move into new territory. Our situation is
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11 similar to that of physicists trying to resolve the contradictions between quantum theory and
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13 general relativity, where research shows mysteries and paradoxes. The contradictions offer the
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15 opportunity for discoveries which can transform our understanding of the universe (Overbye
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17 2013). Dualities and contradictions are equally part of planning, and we believe that a focus on
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19 them can lead into new intellectual territory.
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27 In this paper we will offer a way to move forward by applying the lens of Castells' theory of
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29 communication power (Castells 2009). We start with brief summaries of the so-called rational
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31 model, contrasting it with CPT, then moving on to the major critiques and to Castells' basic
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33 theory. We then examine four seeming contradictions that emerge from the critiques: community
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35 knowledge versus science; communication power versus state power; collaboration versus
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37 conflict; and process versus outcome. Finally we offer thoughts on how planning theory can
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39 move beyond dividing discourses to richer theory.
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46 **The rational model**

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50 The "rational model" was a major preoccupation of planning theory from the 1960s, and by the
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52 1980s it had become deeply integrated into planning education.⁸ In this model planning was
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54 supposed to proceed somewhat like science, at least in its ideal type version (Mitroff 1974), in
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3 that it would use logic, focus on the measurable and on what could be verified through
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5 hypothesis testing and data. It would start with goals, proceed to generating alternatives,
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7 evaluating them, choosing solutions and implementing them. The public's role would be limited
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9 to advising on values and preferences. The epistemology was profoundly positivist, relying on
10
11 theorists like Karl Popper, Herbert Simon, and decision theorists. This simple, but powerful,
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13 model envisioned planners as first and foremost neutral analysts. Its meaning as the correct way
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15 to do planning was to become embedded in the minds of countless practitioners, even when they
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17 found it difficult to follow the precepts (Howe 1980, Baum 1996). Planning educators teaching
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19 substantive topics such as housing and transportation typically trained students to apply the
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21 model. At the same time it became inextricably intertwined with the norms of bureaucracy,
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23 which needs certainty to operate and straightforward ways to demonstrate accountability. The
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25 underlying theory of change was that if you speak truth to power, the powerful will act
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27 (Wildavsky, 1987). This theory offered little or nothing about politics, ambiguity, or conflict
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29 because these are supposed to be outside of the scientific process. The rational model is for
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31 when values and goals are settled.
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41 **How CPT challenged the rational model**

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46 CPT research showed, among other things, that, while planners may espouse the rational model,
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48 they seldom actually apply it because necessary conditions such as agreement on values and
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50 goals are rarely found. Matters planners attend to are often not amenable to quantification or
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52 formal analysis. Interaction among players turns out to be central to understanding and
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54 conducting planning. CPT introduced practical heuristics alien to the model, such as listening,
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3 inclusion, dialogue, and deliberation among diverse stakeholders. The research demonstrated
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5 what Habermas had claimed—that communication is a form of acting on others, rather than a
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7 clear channel through which one conveys facts (Habermas 1989). It shows how those “facts”
8
9 themselves are socially constructed. Some CP theorists contend, on the basis of their research,
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11 that more robust, feasible, just, and even more rational outcomes could be achieved through
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13 collaborative planning or pragmatic joint inquiry (Healey 2006, Innes & Booher 1999a, Hoch
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15 2007) than by relying on a neutral analyst. They found that planning takes place not only in
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17 formal government, but throughout networks including other players, both public and private.
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19 Every situation is unique in the CP theorists’ view, so they have resisted offering guidelines or
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21 handbooks for communicative practice. They propose rather that pragmatic interaction and
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23 learning, situated in the context of a specific time and place, must be joined with informed
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25 judgment to produce tailor-made responses to each issue. CP theorists do not see values and
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27 interests as given and immutable, and the research shows that participants can rethink their
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29 positions, interests, and even values in the course of dialogue (Barabas 2004).⁹ The tacit theory
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31 of change behind much of CPT work is that deliberation shapes understandings, giving meaning
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33 to potential actions which in turn motivates players. The theory of change is that communication
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35 has power.
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45 46 **The critiques** 47

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50 The critiques came from a variety of quarters, most prominently from political economists and
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52 European scholars who were more accustomed to top down planning and powerful central
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54 governments than CP theorists, who were predominantly from the U.S. and U.K.¹⁰ Some,
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3 coming from a positivist position, objected to the relativism of the social constructionist view,
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5 insisting that interests are predetermined and that deliberation cannot produce knowledge or
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7 change fundamental values. Believers in the power of rational analysis and planning in the public
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9 interest contended that deliberation and inclusion would be inefficient compared to a more
10
11 standard top down approach. Political economists and neo-Marxists contended that CPT ignored
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13 power and made undue assumptions about communicative planners' ability to make much
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15 difference in the face of the structures of domination in society (Harvey 1978, Fainstein 2000,
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17 2010). Critics tended to view communication as simply talk or a clear channel through which
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19 facts and opinions would flow without changing anything or anyone. Because many critics made
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21 broad and, in the eyes of CP theorists, inaccurate generalizations which mischaracterized their
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23 claims, they mostly did not try to engage in debate. The fact that a number of critiques were
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25 condescending if not downright uncivil (e.g. Feldman 1997, Huxley & Yiftachel 2000, Fainstein
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27 2000) also interfered with any potential for constructive dialogue.
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36 The ideas about collaboration and consensus building have come in for the vast majority of the
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38 criticism—so much so that these have become equated in many minds with CPT. While
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40 collaboration means simply to co-labor on a task, consensus building is a special type of
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42 collaboration involving structured dialogical process engaging a diverse range of stakeholders
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44 and involving ground rules, a facilitator and a search for a consensus¹¹ on how to move forward.
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47 The idea of consensus building came in for much of the criticism in part because it is often
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49 poorly done and in part because it is foreign to the standard ways Western societies engage in
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51 public decision making.
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3 Research on collaboration and consensus building often used Habermas' notion of
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5 communicative rationality to argue that such processes could result in well informed and socially
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7 desirable outcomes. Many critics scoffed at the notion that Habermas' ideal speech conditions
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9 could be approximated in practice, essentially dismissing claims by CP researchers that
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11 facilitators' ethics and best practices mirror Habermas' ideas (Innes & Booher 2010). The
12
13 concept that power can and should be equalized around the discussion table to achieve a
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15 communicatively rational dialogue came in for special scorn, given large power differences
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17 among stakeholders away from the table. Many criticized CPT for what they regarded as the
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19 failings of Habermas' theory, not understanding that neither CPT nor collaborative practice
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21 derived from this theory, though CPT researchers found it helpful to interpret and evaluate the
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23 practices they observed (Mantsalyo 2002).¹² Moreover the practices were not about searching for
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25 a truth in the Habermasian sense, but about finding practical solutions to shared problems in the
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27 ways Dewey advocated.
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36 One of the most common critiques was that consensus building necessarily involved peer
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38 pressure and resulted in lowest common denominator decisions. Others said it would marginalize
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40 or co-opt weaker groups, while legitimating the results. Still others contended that collaboration
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42 was unrealistic because it would require altruism on the part of participants. Mouffe (1999) and
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44 Hillier (2003) contended that collaboration and consensus building would paper over conflict
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46 rather than acknowledge and confront it, failing to allow the agonism necessary for legitimate
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48 decision making. A major additional worry was that collaboration would not result in the "right"
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50 outcomes. Deliberations could end up with solutions that oppressed some groups, failed to
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52 protect the environment, or simply were not the best ways to address the issues. This concern
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3 was heightened by what critics saw as an inappropriate emphasis on process, to the neglect of
4 theorizing about such matters as the good city. Ultimately some complained that CPT was not
5 critical enough. It needed to step outside the micro practices and become more aware of how
6 planning activities were enabling the neoliberal state (Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger 1998).
7
8 It is not difficult to see where the critiques are coming from as many “collaborative” processes
9 do involve peer pressure, or do co-opt or ignore the poor or marginal groups. Because Habermas
10 seemed to be talking about participants who would have the public interest in mind, some critics
11 assumed that altruism would be needed, though in practice successful collaboration depends on
12 participants working to achieve their interests. It was true that CPT theorists tended to focus on
13 process rather than theorize about good outcomes and true as well that they tended not to ask
14 questions about how planning practices might be enabling the neoliberal state.
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32 **Communication power as lens**

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36 In our effort to encompass these critiques and the dichotomies they suggest between CPT and
37 other theory in planning, we propose to build on Castells’ theory of communication power
38 (2009).¹³ He argues that in today’s network society communication is powerful because it
39 shapes shared meaning and accordingly influences action. Power, he contends, “is not located in
40 one particular social sphere or institution, but is distributed throughout the entire realm of human
41 action.” While power can be exercised through coercion, it is also exercised through the
42 “construction of meaning on the basis of discourses through which social actors guide their
43 action.” This can be on behalf of specific interests and values, and the more powerful these
44 meanings are, the less the state or interests need recourse to coercion. Such meanings and their
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3 implicit power can become crystallized into institutions that in turn can exercise domination. For
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5 example the equating of the market with freedom and innovation supports the power of
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7 corporations and capitalism. Power is not something possessed by institutions or individuals –
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9 rather it lies in specific relationships in specific times and places. It is “conditioned, but not
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11 determined, by the structural capacity of domination.” Moreover these relationships always
12
13 involve reciprocal influence between more and less empowered subjects. Even the weakest can
14
15 resist in one way or another. “When micro power relationships enter into contradiction with the
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17 structure of domination embedded in the state, either the state changes or domination is
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19 reinstated by institutional means.” (adapted from Castells 2009, pp. 10-19).
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27 Castells shares Habermas’ view that communication itself is a form of action that changes the
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29 realities of the social world, including power relations. The complex adaptive system that is
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31 contemporary society is in constant evolution. Conflicts never end, though they may pause
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33 through temporary agreements and unstable contracts that can be transformed into institutions of
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35 domination by powerful social actors. Habermas’ theory of legitimation argues that this
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37 domination is stabilized in the face of change through a process largely relying on the consent
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39 created through the construction of shared meaning. Thus for example belief in representative
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41 democracy is a product of centuries of debate and discussion in the public sphere. Civil society
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43 offers a network for communicating information and points of view (Habermas 1996, p.360).
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46 Thus dialogue and debate in the public sphere ensures democracy and creates the conditions for
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48 the legitimate exercise of power as a representation of the values and interests of citizens.
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55 **The contradictions**

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6 The critiques seem to have framed a set of dichotomies posing CPT ideas against those of critics
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8 as if they are mutually exclusive--as if one must choose sides. We will argue, however, with the
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10 help of the concept of communication power, that these presumed dichotomies can be
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12 understood in a way that allows us to embrace contradictions and move toward new conceptions.
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14 We will explore four dichotomies which are necessarily simplified, but which capture the major
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16 issues in the literature.
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22 *Community knowledge vs. science*
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27 Even those without conscious belief in the rational model are likely to dismiss laymen's
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29 knowledge as less "true" than science because the rational model is so deeply integrated into our
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31 education and institutions. What laymen "know" may not be regarded as knowledge and
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33 certainly not as "truth." In deliberative processes and public hearings planners and other experts
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35 often dismiss citizens' comments as "anecdotal" and take the view that their job is to educate
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37 citizens rather than to learn from or with them. Some regard much of what community members
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39 bring to the process as emotion, misinformation, and self interest, none of which they consider
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41 relevant to a decision.
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48 Environmental impact assessment (EIA) in the US is an example of the dominance and
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50 institutionalization of the rational model and of its limitations as a planning tool. EIA is a linear
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52 process starting with goals, assuming values are given, looking at alternatives, assessing them in
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54 largely quantitative projections about specific measurable impacts, like the quantity of air
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3 pollution or the number of endangered species. More qualitative social issues are not part of
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5 these studies, such as how or whether a development will disrupt the sense of community or
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7 result in impacts unevenly distributed among ethnic or income groups. They do not address the
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9 meanings of the projects or of the impacts in the community context. The process often generates
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11 lawsuits and development stalemate, with neither the environment protected nor the project built.
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17 Citizens and community members on the other hand often regard what scientists or planners say
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19 as irrelevant to their concerns or the reality they experience. They often distrust experts' motives
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21 and methods. For example citizens called on a colleague of ours to facilitate a conversation with
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23 transportation planners because the technical questions to which the planner wanted responses
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25 were irrelevant to citizens' transportation needs. Community members may justifiably regard
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27 many participation processes as attempts at cooptation. The Tea Party movement in the U.S. has
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29 targeted smart growth planning and Local Agenda 21 as a U.N. plot to control how they live.
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34 They have succeeded in disrupting public hearings in part because their complaints about not
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36 being listened to resonated with the experience of many of those in attendance. It has been a
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38 legitimate concern of critics that science itself and its products like the technical fixes for sprawl
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40 of building infrastructure or transit villages can help to empower the state and control citizens'
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42 behavior in the ways Foucault (1980) has described.
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48 The dichotomization of knowledge into scientific and lay categories disempowers both planners
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50 and community members, making planning goals difficult to achieve and keeping the community
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52 marginalized from the decisions that affect their lives. This opposition between hard "scientific"
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54 data and the more qualitative "soft" knowledge in the community is unnecessary and
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3 counterproductive. These knowledges can be integrated through communication power without
4 making one trump the other. With communicative action among scientists, planners and laymen
5 all can learn and take advantage of what the other does best, and the resulting knowledge can be
6 both more accurate and more meaningful. Great scientists, it should be noted, rely on dialogue to
7 develop ideas, face to face and in print (Bohm 1996) but they also use their intuition to go
8 beyond or even ignore the data (Mitroff 1974) and come up with new and more powerful theory.
9 Similarly planners need to hear and take into account many relevant knowledges (Sandercock
10 2003) in making proposals for particular times and places. While elected officials may want
11 scientific reports and analyses, they are as likely to be swayed by stories which tap into meanings
12 of potential policies and decisions. It is a case of both/and—both community knowledge and
13 positivist data and analysis (Innes & Booher 2010, Chapters 6 & 7).

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32 Scientific method, in its search for facts and relationships among variables, necessarily abstracts
33 and simplifies. It involves choices about assumptions and measurements (Ozawa 1991). Lay
34 knowledge is more holistic, though less precise, and it can give the “feel” of a situation. Planners
35 thus not only study the demographics and economic information about a downtown, but they
36 also visit it, talk to people and get a sense of how it works—a sense of all that cannot be captured
37 by an armchair analysis of data. Neither type of knowledge can stand alone. While most of us
38 recognize that citizens’ “knowledge” can be grounded in anecdotes and outlier examples, it is
39 less well recognized that laymen possess knowledge that can correct the assumptions of
40 scientists if the two groups collaborate. For example in a major project to protect the waters of
41 the San Francisco Bay and Estuary, scientists did not know that certain fisheries had declined,
42 but the fishermen themselves did (Innes & Connick 1999) and working together they developed
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3 more sound information. Similarly in the case of the Love Canal environmental disaster it was a
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5 local housewife who recognized the problem and local people who first gathered the data (Gibbs
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7 1982). In Cumbria in the UK scientists who arrived to treat soil that had been irradiated by the
8
9 Chernobyl nuclear fallout, ignored the sheep farmers' knowledge and made decisions that
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11 unnecessarily cost the farmers their herds (Wynne 1982). In each case it was a struggle to get
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13 the scientists even to attend to this local knowledge, much less to respect or respond to it.
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20 The most powerful knowledge makes use of both local knowledge and science, but it requires
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22 mutual education and cooperation. For example neighborhood residents in New York City were
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24 able to work with the city environmental agency to develop documentation of pollution hot spots
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26 at a fine-grained level. This allowed identification of specific pollution sources endangering
27
28 particular residents (Corburn 2005). Fischer (2000) and Wilson (2003) offer parallel examples in
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30 agriculture and fisheries management, respectively. This kind of effort has been termed
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32 coproduction, and it offers promise for improving information in planning.
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39 Such citizen-science collaborations reflect Habermas' concept that there are three kinds of
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41 knowledge interests: technical/instrumental driven by interest in knowing how something works
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43 and what causes it; practical/interpretive driven by interest in understanding a situation; and
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45 critical/emancipatory driven by interest in surfacing truths hidden by socially constructed
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47 measures and analyses. In collaborative dialogue all forms of knowledge play a part.
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50 Stakeholders want hard data and scientific projections, but they also use personal and other
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52 stories to move the dialogue forward and to identify possible actions (Forester 2009, Innes &
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54 Booher 1999b). Emancipatory knowledge can be most important of all—the moment when
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3 someone effectively challenges a taken-for-granted assumption and reframes the problem so the
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5 most intractable of wicked problems can become amenable to joint action.
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10 Ultimately information influences most when least visible--when it has become a part of shared
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12 meaning and does not need to be invoked (Innes 1998). This influence becomes possible after
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14 there has been plenty of dialogue around the research and data so it is meaningful, accepted, and
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16 understood by all sides (Innes 1990) including scientists and citizens. It happens without our
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18 noticing when meanings become embedded in institutions and practices.
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22 23 24 *Communication power vs. state power* 25 26

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29 We share Castells' view that in the network society a theory of power is "tantamount to a theory
30
31 of communication power" (Castells 2009, p. 5). The power relationship works through
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33 communication, which builds shared meanings of power—of who and what is powerful. Norms
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35 and practices develop through networks and, in turn, guide action and embed into institutions
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37 like the market. Such meanings and norms shape how individuals and institutions respond to
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39 what they understand as power as well as how they deploy it in relationships. The power is
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41 invisible, taken-for-granted, so it can be exerted without overt action or even evidence of its
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43 existence. Communication mediates the way these power relationships are constructed and
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45 challenged. Thus the power of the state and communication power are inextricably entangled,
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50 shaping and influencing one another.¹⁴
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3 This view suggests that planners and planning have power through the ways they shape
4 communication, although that power is shaped and constrained by the larger institutions. Bryson
5 and Crosby (1993), following Lukes, contend there are three types of power in society: deep
6 structure or the background setting of power; political power or the ability make decisions; and a
7 mediating power in between-- the power to shape ideas, frame problems, and set agendas. This
8 mediating role is the essential power of planners and other professionals who play a part in
9 public decision-making. Forester (1982), for example, demonstrates the importance of planners'
10 role in organizing attention, and Throgmorton (2003) shows that rhetoric, whether of planners,
11 business leaders or public officials can be crucial in shaping development decisions. Both he
12 (Ekstein & Throgmorton 2003) and Sandercock (2003) write of the power of stories in shaping
13 understandings and motivating action. In their history of U.S. housing policy, de Neufville &
14 Barton (1987) show how the founding myths of the frontier and the yeoman farmer been
15 foundational to that policy.
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36 While communication by itself does not change public actions or institutions, it plays an integral
37 part in such change by shaping the understandings of key actors and the public. Of course it does
38 not always influence. Claims and rhetoric may fall on deaf ears. The bully pulpit may not
39 persuade. Individuals may withhold reasonable consent for strategic reasons. External forces
40 such as propaganda or bullying may intimidate participants. When the communication is multi-
41 way rather than one way and authentic dialogue takes place, many of these issues may be
42 addressed.
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Collaboration vs. conflict

Critics often assume that collaboration is the opposite of conflict, but nothing could be further from the reality. Collaboration is about conflict. If players did not have differences they would not need to collaborate, but could march forward on their own. Conflict itself is a valuable resource in collaboration as efforts to overcome it can lead to a range of new options and outcomes that were not previously foreseen. Agonism--deep and seemingly irreconcilable conflicts among competing views, values and interests--is the reality of societies today and papering it over cannot work. Overt conflict may wax and wane or even be suppressed, but it remains under the surface. Deep divisions based on race, gender, culture and ideology are difficult and perhaps impossible to overcome. The questions becomes how to move forward in the face of agonism, assuring we do not tamp down meaningful differences, or lose the multiplicity of voices and creativity that emerge around such conflict.

Many scholars in Western societies contend that politics and formal government decision making are the correct ways to address societal conflict. Elected officials represent the public; bureaucracy can be even-handed in carrying out laws, and politics allows for conflict where pressure groups maneuver in electoral, legislative, agency, and judicial arenas to determine who gets what (Truman 1951; Schattschneider 1960). These are the legitimate decision processes established in nations' constitutions. Politics involves tradeoffs and compromise in a typically zero sum game. Winning for one's constituency is often the real goal, even at the expense of the greater good. Nowhere is there a better example than the mindless "sequester" in the U.S.--a massive across-the-board budget cut necessitated by the extreme partisanship of the political

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3 parties, which were unwilling to compromise on the selective cuts and increased revenues that
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5 would be less harmful to the nation.
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10 Collaborative dialogue and planning emerged in the U.S. largely in response to government
11 failure to solve problems because of political stalemate or heavy-handed application of one-size-
12 fits-all policies.¹⁵ Collaboration among competing stakeholders can enlarge the pie, expanding
13 possibilities through cooperation so that, without compromising their interests, they can move
14 forward. Stakeholders and public agencies collaborate to develop tailor-made solutions to social
15 and environmental problems in specific times and places. In the course of their efforts they
16 engage in dialogue, which can result in reframing an intractable problem into one that allows
17 agreement on action (Innes & Booher 1999b). This dialogue builds new meanings of the
18 problems, creates recognition of shared purpose, and builds networks through which
19 communication can flow among diverse players.¹⁶ All this can be done without suppressing basic
20 interests or values of the various stakeholders. These stakeholders may come to reevaluate what
21 actions can best serve their interests during such dialogue and they may come to expand or
22 develop their own values as they learn about other's values and needs. Of course they can always
23 return to other arenas if they choose.
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46 In collaborative dialogues and consensus building run according to best practices (Susskind et al.
47 1999) or what Innes and Booher have dubbed "collaborative rationality"¹⁷ conflict is the central
48 dynamic that drives the process. Stakeholders would not be there if their interests did not differ.
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50 If everyone more or less agreed, normal governmental processes would be enough. Only when
51 deep differences exist over important issues is it worthwhile to seek ways to move forward
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3 through collaborative dialogue, which can be slow and costly. Though the term “consensus
4 building” suggests to some commentators a friendly discussion among those seeking the
5 common good, in practice it is quite the opposite. Stakeholder interests are at the core; conflict is
6 central to achieving robust solutions; and frank and impassioned discussions are the norm.
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8 Groups may seek the low hanging fruit at first—things on which everyone can agree--but they
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10 move on to more difficult issues, which can take months or years to work through. Conflict is
11
12 never stamped out. People agree on some ways to move forward together on things they care
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14 about without sharing values or interests. Even when a group reaches agreement and disbands,
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16 unresolved conflicts reemerge in other arenas. The Sacramento Water Forum, after the resolving
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18 the main conflicts over water allocation and facilities, moved to a smaller “successor” group to
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20 address conflicts and unresolved issues that would emerge in implementation (Connick 2006).
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32 In collaboratively rational dialogues stakeholders explain their underlying interests for all to hear
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34 and discuss how proposed actions will affect their interests. Altruism is inappropriate because
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36 stakeholders represent groups whose welfare is at stake. It is counterproductive because it
37
38 obscures differing interests and thus makes it difficult, if not impossible, to develop robust
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40 cooperation and decisions that will be feasible, widely accepted and long lasting. The rule in
41
42 consensus building is not only that everything is on the table, but also that participants must
43
44 challenge assumptions if they want to get past stalemate to practical action. Over time
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46 participants come to understand each other’s interests and try to make proposals that will
47
48 accommodate them. Nonetheless emotions can run high, and civility does not always prevail
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50 (Forester 2009, Innes & Booher 2010 Ch. 4). Trust can take months or years to emerge. But out
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52 of the tensions a group can gain insights into the nature of the conflict and what it may take to
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3 move forward. Experienced facilitators try to manage, but not to suppress, these conflicts and try
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5 to get participants to reflect on the sources of their differences.
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10 Collaboratively rational dialogue exists in a field of power external to the table, but at the table
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12 the power to speak and be listened to respectfully is equalized by the process manager. All
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14 stakeholders are provided with shared information and all are equally entitled to question
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16 assumptions and make objections or proposals. The greater power of some stakeholders outside
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18 the table is an explicit part of the conversation, but those stakeholders do not get to dominate the
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20 discussion. At the table it may be clear that a solution cannot go forward without their support,
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22 but it is also clear that powerful stakeholders would not be there if they could get what they want
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24 on their own. The power at the table is in the eloquence of some participants, the power of the
25
26 stories they tell, and how compelling their case may be to the group. The dynamic of decision in
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28 the group is not what Habermas posited as the force of the better argument or winning a sort of
29
30 debate. Rather it is a process of stakeholders laying out their narratives about the problem and
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32 how it affects them and listening to similar narratives from others (Innes & Booher 1999b). Peer
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34 pressure is never fully absent, but skilled facilitators can help assure that interests are genuinely
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36 addressed. Though participants do not come into the process looking for the public interest, as
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38 they accommodate diverse interests, the proposals come closer to something that can be viewed
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40 as in the common good (Innes 1996).
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50 Participants in collaborative dialogues understand that they live in two worlds, each with
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52 different rules—that of civil discourse, transparency, problem solving, and a search for joint gain
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54 on the one hand, and that of politics, competition, and the exercise of power on the other.
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3 Stakeholders may lobby for new legislation, sue other stakeholders or promote social movements
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5 in the political world, while still maintaining constructive dialogue at the table. They stay in
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7 these two worlds until they decide which will get them what they need. While these outside
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9 activities continue they change the dynamics at the table, often giving weaker interests more
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11 negotiating strength. Politics and collaboration have a symbiotic relationship.
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16 Plans and actions agreed on in collaborative processes seldom can proceed without politics and
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18 government. While critics hypothesize that agreement by stakeholders could overwhelm the
19
20 political process, it is far more common in our studies that politicians and bureaucrats balk at
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22 implementing such agreements because they want to be in charge. Today collaborative processes
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24 are less influential and less used than they could or should be in our view. Some challenges are
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26 more amenable to politics and top down fiats; others more appropriate for collaboration, but in
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28 either case government will be needed to enable or implement solutions.
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35 Solutions are never permanent, however –in fact the word solution is a misnomer. Problem
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37 solving, like making plans, needs to be regarded as work in progress. Agreements are
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39 punctuation points; a solution is for now but it soon creates the conditions that require new
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41 deliberations among new players. The danger is that temporary agreements may become part of
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43 the structure of domination and become fixed rather than adaptive. The antidote is to continue to
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45 surface and address conflict creatively.
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51 *Process vs. outcome*
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3 The fourth common critique of CPT is that it focuses on process rather than outcomes (Fainstein
4 2010, Ch. 1) as if these are mutually exclusive phenomena. It is true that most CP theorists do
5 not identify specific outcomes as goals. Their normative commitments are to what they identify
6 as good process—inclusionary, empowering, equitable, informed etc. To also describe desired
7 outcomes would be to undermine that very commitment. Some propose a pragmatic approach,
8 other critical/reflective, and still others deliberative or collaborative, but all focus on developing
9 their process ideas. CP theorists tend not to comment on the power of the state except indirectly.
10 It is a given--the setting for planning. Their focus is on what planners, planning organizations,
11 and other players can do and how, rather than on what constrains them or on what ought to
12 happen.
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29 Political economists and others more often focus on what kinds of outcomes are desirable, as
30 evidenced most recently in the “just city” movement (Marcuse et al. 2009). They research and
31 write very little about processes to reach these outcomes, though they sometimes mention social
32 movements or the need to convince government to act. Other planning theorists examine cases
33 where they can show how well intentioned projects end up being co-opted by the capitalist state.
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44 We see process and outcome as integral to one another. Iris Marion Young, for example, argues
45 that “social justice means the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression.” She
46 notes that the dominant distributive paradigm is only about outcomes, defining social justice as
47 the “morally proper distribution of social benefits and burdens in society.” This paradigm is
48 lacking because it focuses mainly on material goods, such as income, wealth or jobs. Even if it
49 extends the concept to nonmaterial goods, like power, self esteem or opportunity it “treats them
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3 as though they were static things, instead of a function of social relations and processes” (Young,
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5 1990, pp. 15-16). In other words these outcomes can shift throughout a process and *because of*
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7 the process.
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12 Process and justice are also closely linked because of what Young terms the five faces of
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14 oppression: exploitation; marginalization; powerlessness; cultural imperialism; and violence (Ch.
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16 2). These all involve meanings that have become embedded in the understandings and the
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18 practices of both oppressed and oppressors. Merely offering the disadvantaged a chance to speak
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20 at a hearing or be represented by knowledgeable professionals, is not enough. Nor is it enough
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22 to ask about preferences, as these are deeply mediated through institutional structures and
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24 prevalent meanings about what is possible and desirable. It is not enough to tell the
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26 disadvantaged that they are empowered because they need to build their own capacity to
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28 understand and fight for what they need and value. Processes like collaboratively rational
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30 dialogue or engagement of citizens in the gathering and interpretation of science and local
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32 knowledge are ways to help build such capacity.
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41 Process versus outcome is thus a false dichotomy. Stakeholders engage in a process because they
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43 care about the outcome. Aspects of process are part of the outcome through communication
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45 power. People who are brought to the table and heard and who learn, influence, and build
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47 relationships are changed and the power relationships themselves are changed. Over time players
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49 use their new social, political and intellectual capital. Some may even become part of the system
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51 of domination. What are often referred to as outcomes are but punctuation marks in a constant
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3 flow of activity. Process itself is part of the outcome as those who felt listened to and fairly
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5 treated and who felt powerful within a process will be more likely to support the outcome.
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10 This process-outcome dichotomy reflects a flaw in both perspectives. Those who pay attention to
11
12 process tend not to examine how the process affects the larger structure of domination, and those
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14 who talk about the importance of outcomes typically offer little in the way of processes to get to
15
16 those outcomes. Giddens (1984) offers a path to placing this contradiction into a common frame
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18 in his argument that structure constrains agency and agency alters structure over time. Shared
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20 meanings created through processes can find their way into norms and taken-for-granted ideas
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22 which in turn can become embedded in institutions. We believe this dynamic of structure and
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24 process deserves considerably more attention from planning theorists than it has had so far.¹⁸
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34 **Moving forward: Recommendations**

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39 The dividing discourses of planning theory are counterproductive. This is not to say that
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41 planning theorists all have to share the same worldview. On the contrary, the differences are
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43 what will allow us as a field to learn and develop richer theory. We have much to learn from
44
45 trying to understand one another's perspectives as we in turn explain and clarify our own ideas.
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47 Learning from difference is an enterprise requiring mutual respect and avoiding glib
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49 misrepresentation, oversimplification, or painting of diverse work with a common brush. Ideally
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51 people from different discourse communities would read each other's work and attend each
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53 other's talks at meetings. Organizers can set up cross cutting panels rather than separating
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3 discourse communities into sessions that reinforce divisions and allow them to “speak to the
4 choir.” The encouragement for dialogue and face to face discussion can go a long way toward
5 building a more effective learning community and more robust theorizing.
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12 Secondly to bridge the multiple perspectives planning theorists should focus more research on
13 the role of communication in planning and incorporate into their thinking work already published
14 that can shed light on how communication has power. Most notable of course is Foucault’s work
15 on how knowledge and power work together through discourse (Foucault 1972, Foucault 1978).
16 Maarten Hajer (1995) has demonstrated the importance of language and discourse coalitions in
17 environmental policy making. His more recent work explores the variety of powerful ways that
18 discourse analysis helps in understanding politics and policy making (Hajer 2005, Hajer &
19 Versteeg 2006). Gunder (2011), following Lacan, has shown how popular communication media
20 influence public aspirations for the future of their cities. The building of popular concepts plays a
21 central part in planning. The iconic role of tulips in the Dutch economy and culture was central
22 to the emergence and institutional embedding of new forms of heritage and nature in a
23 controversy over the building of a new town near Leiden (Duineveld & van Assche 2011).
24 Detailed research on the history of the development of urban form and settlement patterns can
25 also illuminate the role of communication. Louise Mozingo’s book Pastoral Capitalism (2011)
26 illustrates how images of the suburban landscape and attitudes toward the city fostered the
27 exodus of major companies to isolated campus-like environs during the 1950s and 60s. Finally
28 in an excellent book that could serve as a model for others, Perin (1977) shows how the imagery
29 and symbolic meanings of single family houses and multi-unit housing influenced community
30 decision makers to try limit or exclude the latter. A great range of work is out there to be
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explored and integrated into planning theorists' thinking. This work can open new ideas for fruitful research that will help the field build a nuanced understanding of communication power in planning.

For Peer Review

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Notes

¹ A major thrust of the change was a concern that theory be linked to practice (de Neufville 1983, de Neufville 1987, Forester 1980).

² While there are many more today, the pioneers in planning included John Forester, Patsy Healey, Charles Hoch, Howard Baum, James Throgmorton, and Judith Innes. All owed a debt to John Friedmann, among others of an earlier generation.

³ These scholars began to coalesce as a community at the first joint ACSP-AESOP Congress in Oxford in 1991, where, as they debated some senior theorists, they found kindred spirits among themselves and across the Atlantic. An edited collection of papers from that meeting became a well used text (Mandelbaum et al, 1996).

⁴ This community intersected with a parallel one emerging from public policy and public administration in the U.S. and Europe, including Maarten Hajer, Frank Fischer, Dvora Yanow, Eva Sorenson, Jacob Torfing, Christopher Ansell, and Nancy Roberts. Their terminology differed, but they focused on governance, deliberation, and inclusion and did case studies using interpretive methods on a wide array of policy issues. They have made great efforts to challenge the dominance of the rational paradigm in public policy and political science and eventually started their own annual conference on Interpretive Policy Analysis. A partnership between planner John Forester and political scientist, Frank Fischer, produced an edited volume of articles under the title *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning* highlighting Habermas' concepts of debate as a way of making choices (Fischer & Forester 1993). This was to become the first CPT text. It was widely used in planning and is now out in a new version (Fischer & Gottweis 2012).

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⁵ A series of additional Oxford conferences were set up primarily to pursue this “debate” (Yiftachel 1999; Throgmorton 1999). Panel “debates” at ACSP conferences were published in *Planning Theory* (14, 1995 and 17, 1997), and a symposium appeared in 2000 in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (vol. 19 pp. 331-377).

⁶ See Innes (2004), Healey (2003), Hoch (1997)

⁷ Major philosophical differences have always existed in planning thought, but the multiplicity of discourses is significantly greater than it was in the 1960s. For excellent overviews of some of the differences and critiques see Healey (2012) and Sager (2013).

⁸ In the field of public policy, which emerged in the US in the late 1960’s, the rational model and quantitative methods were even more central than in planning, which included topics like design and land use in which these methods were seldom used. public policy drew more on political science and economics than CPT, which tended to draw more on the “softer” disciplines of sociology and anthropology.

⁹ Argyris and Schon (1996) in their work on organizational development identified this phenomenon as “single loop learning” as participants revise their causal analysis when they discover their proposal will not work, “double loop learning” as they rethink their interests and goals in the face of continuous failure, and triple loop when they start to reframe their underlying values in response to what they learn as they work through tasks. Clearly this dynamic is incompatible with the rational planning model, which takes these as givens.

¹⁰ Both Sager (2013) and Healey (2012) offer excellent and more detailed overviews of the critiques.

¹¹ This consensus is typically defined as an overwhelming majority that does not exclude any major interests and that is only reached after every effort has been made to find a way to satisfy

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4 an interest in a way that also accommodates or is acceptable to others at the table. At best those
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6 who do not support the outcome may agree not to challenge it later because their interests have
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8 been sincerely considered and they recognize that another effort will not get them what they
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10 want (Susskind, et al. 1999).
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15 ¹² Harper and Stein (2006) discuss some of the many other influences on CPT thinking.
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18 ¹³ Castells has traveled a remarkable intellectual journey from his early book *The Urban*
19 *Question: A Marxist View* (1979) first published in French in 1972, to his detailed case studies of
20 social movements in *The City and the Grassroots* (1983) to his trilogy on the information age led
21 off by his widely read *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996). In many ways this was a logical
22 progression to his ideas on the centrality and power of communication. It also demonstrates that
23 it is possible for one's ideas and intellectual commitments to evolve in a way that builds on the
24 gaps in previous work toward new ways of seeing.
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26 ¹⁴ This is a view that has much in common with Giddens (1984). It also shares the view with
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28 Foucault (1980) that discourses, shape state power and vice versa.
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31 ¹⁵ Susskind and Field (1996) in a powerful book, demonstrate how and why industry needs to
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33 adopt collaborative approaches to conflict.
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36 ¹⁶ Pertinent case examples can be found in *Planning with Complexity* (Innes & Booher 2010)
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38 Chapter 3, in particular the Sacramento Water Forum and CALFED. In both cases collaboration
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40 allowed multiple uses of water and ended decades of paralyzing stalemate over water
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42 infrastructure needs.
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45 ¹⁷ Collaborative rationality is an adaptation from the idea of communicative rationality to real
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47 world practices of collaborative policy making with stakeholders. The basic idea is that a
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49 decision can be communicatively rational if it incorporates diverse and interdependent
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51 stakeholders who engage in authentic dialogue around a shared task. The ground rules of this
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53 dialogue establish expectations that participants will speak sincerely, be legitimate
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55 representatives of an interest, provide accurate and comprehensible information. Professional
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5 facilitators and members of the group make sure these conditions are met as they work through
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7 issues, and the practices become shared norms in the group. See pp 35-38 in Innes and Booher
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9 (2010).

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11 ¹⁸ Martinelli, et al (2013) have put together a volume that reflects the structure and agency
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13 perspective. Healey uses the concept in much of her work but both CPT scholars and their critics
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15 could benefit from incorporating this perspective in their wor.
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