RETHINKING PLANNING THEORY AND PRACTICE: A GLIMMER OF LIGHT FOR PROSPECTS OF INTEGRATED PLANNING TO COMBAT COMPLEX URBAN REALITIES

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Abstract
Throughout the past half century, there has been a growing and persisting demand towards developing more integrated approaches to planning as a way to combat the notoriously complex and chronic urban problems. Cognizant of this need, this paper, while offering justification for such a planning approach, discusses problematic aspects of current planning practice and highlights key lessons and parallels from past experiences regarding the idea of planning comprehension, rationality in planning, and the role of power and politics in plan-making and plan implementation. Drawing upon recent debates in planning theory, this paper further presents an agenda for building a new integrative approach to planning, discusses major issues that planning theorists need to address in terms of functional integration, decision-making processes in planning, and political and institutional challenges to such integrated planning approaches, and offers a series of propositions to remedy these challenges. The adaptive sustainable planning model is suggested and amply delineated as an effective overarching normative framework for the development of an integrated planning approach that provides organization to the field and guides practitioners towards realizing their role as effective decision makers. The key contribution of this paper is not its reliance on the typical notion of sustainability *per se* but rather its unique and thorny approach of how it ought to be used as a way of moving forward with planning and policy-making to ultimately enhance a better urbanism.
Keywords: integrated planning, sustainability, comprehension, rationality, power.

1. Why Theory?

Although not useful on its own merits, theory is crucial in providing the needed frame of reference. The reliance on theory tends to provide organization to the field and a systematic guidance in cases of disagreements. It also provides a system of knowledge organization to clearly delineate the boundaries and parameters for each distinct subject, which provides a knowledgebase for the development of future research and the expansion of the field. With the help of theories, future research can build upon theories of the past that have been developed as a reaction against previous and existing planning thinking and practice. Otherwise, an intellectual community at a given time, not fully aware of what has been already done before, will always tend to start from scratch in their quest for new knowledge.

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2. Why Planning Theory?

Planning is unique and its uniqueness stems partially from the inability to be defined in a single, narrow definition that fits it all. This is because planners are not a single entity that could fit into one category, nor can they fully agree on what planning really is. Rather, planners can vary across a continuum of interests, ranging from environmentalists and advocates, to even developers. These aspects of planning appear to differ, or even contradict each other, a great deal. For instance, environmentalists often clash with developers regarding issues pertinent to preserving the integrity of the environment. Although both sides theoretically agree on the principle of environmental protection, practical application almost always suggests otherwise. Recognizing the aforementioned difficulty in defining the field of planning, a number of reasons are identified to support the definition of a clear planning theory. First, the defining differences that strongly characterize planning personify an enduring *tension*, and some times an *overlap*, between planning and other disciplines. Due to the fact that there is no such thing as indigenous planning theory, planning tends to borrow ideas and principles from other practices, which caused *confusion* about the very purpose, role, and task of planning as a profession (Allmendinger, 2002). This trifecta of *tension*, *overlap*, and *confusion,* calls for the need to develop a sound and independent body of thought as planning theory. A well-defined planning theory is, therefore, an essential component of the planning profession.

Theories of planning, however, mean different things to different people. Practitioner planners tend to generally view theories as useless in their practical endeavors. Conversely, planning academicians tend to view, and heavily rely on, theories as an integral part of the planning profession. Put differently, academicians seem to be more inclined to employing a great deal of theories, regardless of their practical benefits, whereas practitioners have more propensity towards avoiding theories in general, regardless of how beneficial they could be to their practice. This partially contributed to the gap between theory and practice. Having said this, a second reason is related to the fact that fostering a well-defined planning theory tends to narrow the gap between theory and practice, which originated, for the most part, because of lack of an appropriate body of theory, accompanied by the tendency to undermine the importance of theories in general. With this in mind, defining a body of thought for planning theory serves as a vehicle to enhance the ability of planners in comprehensively addressing important practical issues based on a holistic understanding of the larger picture within which these issues are often generated and evolved. Consequently, I argue that, contrary to popular belief, current and future planning practice would benefit greatly from theory and contribute to the expansion and development of existing theories.

Third, the purpose of defining this body of thought for planning theory is to delineate clear boundaries to such a unique profession that are missing and needed, within which planners can recognize and solidify their identity as *planners* and find guidance to the many problems confronting them. The usefulness of defining these boundaries is to chart a distinctive path for both planning theory and practice, which lies in their ability to, first, provide a deeper understanding of the processes that planners habitually engage in and, second, address the question of how to consciously achieve widespread improvement in the quality of human life. Both concerns should be addressed in light of a contextual understanding of the dominant global political economy within which planning operates. To that end, planning theory seems to be of great value in helping planners pinpoint major problems facing their communities and anticipate significant corresponding outcomes. It further serves as a warning sign that tends to continuously direct practitioners' attention and channel their efforts towards important matters, setting the stage for developing contingent strategies and appropriate responses.

Finally, a fundamental reason for defining planning theory as independent from any other forms of thought is related to the gap between attaining adequate planning processes and desirable outcomes. This tension between means and ends caused planning theory to be narrowly defined as concerned with either procedural or substantive frameworks. Consequently, this instigated planning theory to discuss what planners do, or ought to do, to yield desirable future conditions with little reference to contextual differences confronting them. For example, planners who focus on the procedural aspects of planning seem unaware of, or disinterested in, the success of the outcome. This procedural tendency disregards the extent to which successful results are achieved as long as the process utilized follows rational justification. In fact, successful outcomes are considered trivial as long as rational processes were followed. On the contrary, many others tend to justify their process (although may appear to be wicked or unethical) on the basis of achieving desirable outcomes. The kind of issues that planning tends to address and the kind of methods it opts to utilize suggests the need for a well-defined planning theory. Defining a theory that combines diverse planning traditions and methods into a distinctive body of knowledge is a necessity to distinguish these traditions from other unrelated paradigms. This makes it easy for planners to identify with, reject, or delimit them, and adopt what they perceive appropriate and useful to accomplish their goals regardless of how diverse they might appear.

3. Why Integrative Approaches to Planning?

In recent years, planning practice has been characterized by its heterodox nature of many different specializations and disciplines working in separation of one another on different scales. With so many disciplines and diverse experiences, cities still suffer from many chronic urban problems. Because of the

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inadequacy in planning practice and processes, many urban problems related to social justice, spatial segregation based on socioeconomic classification of the population, inequitable distribution of resources and services, unemployment, traffic congestion, urban sprawl and fragmentation, environmental pollution and degradation, resources depletion, and unsustainable nature of urban form have occurred (Visser, 2001). With the lack of an overarching multi-scalar planning framework, many of these severe problems will continue to occur, grow, and fester. Based on this realization, in the past half century there has been a recent push in the planning community towards formulating more integrated approaches to planning to deal with complex urban realities.

Recognizing the proliferation of the aforementioned urban problems, two key reasons are identified to support the formulation of a new integrated planning practice. First, planning practice is heterogeneous. There are many competing, evolving, and complementary sets of ideas and subjects that are scattered across a continuum of different specializations. This evident isolation and segregation of different and separate planning disciplines seems to hinder planning practitioners to confront the notoriously complex urban realities and interrelated and messy urban problems. The challenge that these problems pose is not confined to the fact that they are messy and complex, but it also stems from their cross-disciplinary nature. This means that a single problem, although it has its roots in a single field, context, or scale, can extend to affect many other areas, planning aspects, and scales. This trans-disciplinary nature of city and metropolitan problems calls for an interdisciplinary bridging in planning practice, without which practitioners will grow unable to engender consensus over important planning decisions, what to do, and most importantly, what *not* to do.

Second, plans and projects are conducted in many planning fields and sectors for different purposes, at different times and on different scales, which produces high levels of dysfunctionality and institutional and decision-making fragmentation (Pieterse, 2002). Because these projects are usually bound to the scale and magnitude they are attempting to approach, seldom do they account for each other. However, urban problems do not have boundaries to their impacts or effects which permeate across all scales varying from local to regional, and even national, or in some known cases global. In fact, these urban problems perpetually extend across space and time. Planning issues that seem to have local impacts can also have more serious and detrimental regional and national impacts when considered in aggregate. This suggests the importance of across-space and time planning approaches that account for short and long-term consequences and multiple levels of impacts of city and metropolitan scale problems including local, regional, and national levels.

To that end, there is an increasingly perceived need for a multidisciplinary integrated planning approach to provide better tools to guide actions towards the development of healthy cities, improvement of human conditions, and ultimately a better urbanism. By thoughtfully employing elements of integrative planning in the decision-making process, decision makers can focus their attention on identifying the real current and foreseeable future needs of the community and channel their efforts towards satisfying these needs through the physical development of the city and the reordering and rectification of urban space.

4. Lessons from Past Experiences

4.1. Planning Comprehension

Echoing the trend of many fields, planning has numerous areas that seem to overlap amongst each other. If dealt with separately, these individual sectors of planning can only achieve certain progress in plan making and implementation. The divergence, segmentation, and segregation of planning efforts of different agencies that may result in duplication of analyses and waste of time and resources are prime driving forces for streamlining these efforts. Many sectors of planning, which tend to have their own goals, visions, policies, and strategies, need to be combined together and linked to one another. Under different names, such as comprehensive, regional, or master plans, comprehensive planning originally emerged to meet this particular need.

However, planning literature is sharply divided into two distinct streams of thought regarding comprehensive planning; the first of which, reflecting an older school of thought, is in support of comprehensive planning and the second, reflecting a more recent school of thought, opposes it and further views it as an unequivocal failure. Proponents of comprehensive planning perceive it as a necessary rational tool that incorporates multiple essential elements of planning including physical land-use planning and social, economic, and environmental aspects to safeguard public interest and guide the city's long-range future (Friedmann, 1971). Conversely, accusations of comprehensive planning failure made by its opponents rely on a number of reasons in support of their argument. Opponents of integrative comprehensive planning approaches ground their argument on the practical difficulties in coping with multilayered problems and cooperating with multiple policy domains that makes crafting adequate plans prohibitively insurmountable. These difficulties stem from the limitation of individual planners and institutional settings that seem to be overwhelmed by numerous practical complications. As such, integrative comprehensive planning is often accused of offering an impractical and overly ambitious approach. It reflects unrealistically ideal assumptions of human capacity and socioeconomic,

structural, and organizational settings. The rational-comprehensive approach neglects quintessential characteristics of real-world decision-making situations, namely the fallibility of human comprehension ability, the limitation in resources, time, and access to information, the multiplicity of competing rational actors and power structure imbalance (Forester, 1989). The assumption of comprehensive intellectual human abilities is an invidiously problematic one. Humans cannot comprehend everything nor can they even fully comprehend one planning aspect (Lindblom, 1959). They tend to rely on simplification of intricate issues to reach satisfactory decisions rather than optimal solutions, based on which process important possible outcomes, alternative potential policies, and affected values are often neglected or overlooked (Lindblom, 1959). As such, planning comprehensively seems beyond human cognitive ability and institutional, technical and organizational capacity (Lindblom, 1959).

Another lesson stems from the fact that planning in real-world settings does not confirm to the image of the systematic occurrence of problems and the purely rational response embedded in comprehensive planning, but it rather suggests continuous, evolving, and interlinked networks of deeply contextualized problems that appear to be necessary or transient, systematic or *ad hoc*, avoidable or unavoidable, and therefore can be both solvable and unsolvable. As such, it is also criticized based on its centric nature of decision-making which depends on a "one strategy fits all" approach. This hinders its ability to incorporate the diversity of perceptions, interests, and values into a single plan. Its pure instrumentalism of functional rationality and utilitarian and optimization tendency resulted in a lack of understanding of local needs and contextual differences and contributed to its inability to generate meaningful alternatives (Altschuler, 1965). As a result, critics of the rational-comprehensive planning stress the lack of political interest and commitment to implementation and the apparent public opposition to such plans which challenges planners' false claims of representing the public interest (Friedmann, 1971). Stressing the need to develop alternative approaches, critics censure comprehensive planning for solidifying new forms of authority and power by way of technical elitism and universal rationality. This is precisely why comprehensive planning did not fully achieve its goals of serving the public interest, given that it is greatly diverse.

4.2. Rationality in Planning

Neglecting context and assuming that decisions can be made in a vacuum strikes a utopian chord and reflects an unequivocal misunderstanding of how planning works in different contexts and the intricacy and context-dependent nature of planning itself. Expecting that everyone can, and should, accept and adopt one form of universal values and beliefs is simply a tragic misinterpretation and betrayal of a non-dichotomous alternative far richer and more in touch with reality. Relegating this rich alternative for a

utopian universalism has made for a very impoverishing dialectic and has allowed for regressive doctrinal and ideological hobble. This obscure and problematic polemic of universal rationality reflects an undesirably vague abstraction of the concept as if it is no more complicated a matter than a simple declarative phrase and reductively provides a ludicrous curtailed diminution of monolithic and homogeneous human ideologies and values.

Both truth and rationality are context-dependent and mean different things to different people. Although it exists in separation from our seemingly neatly compartmentalized and deeply conflicted belief, universal rationality is received, filtered, interpreted, manipulated and constructed differently, reflecting the diversity of frame of reference of each individual. Because of its constructed nature, universal rationality cannot be realized as, or in, a single form. This divergence in views of rationality is greatly influenced by personal values, experiences, and power relations (Camillus, 1982). There is a struggle between power and reason which results in the prevalence of power over rationality whenever they clash in practice. Rationality alone seems insufficient to assuage power. With the presence of power, the role of rationality is usually underestimated and diminished or, worse yet, utilized to serve hegemonic interests. In fact, universal rationality has long been used by technocratic elites to solidify superiority over others as a way of manipulation, intimidation and exclusion. In this regard, decisions are not made based on facts, but rather facts are often made based on predetermined decisions. This does not mean that planners cannot act rationally or rely on a certain degree of common rationality and reason. This is because acting rationally and sensibly is different than relying on universal rationality. Conflict occurrence does not necessarily indicate our inability to reach consensus, and the absence of universal rules that can be applied in every situation does not necessarily lead to a lack of consensus on common foundations of rationality and reason. However, this common rationality and reason, which can only go as far as common sense, is not elaborate enough to act in separation of contextual details of planning practice in different jurisdictions. As such, rationality beyond common sense is hard to gain wide acceptance and therefore its generalizability and universality is simply beyond the realm of possibility.

Evidently, context does matter. Solutions that work in specific cases or on certain levels might not work somewhere else or, worse yet, may produce catastrophic ramifications. Contextual differences are profound, decisive, and cannot be ignored or evaded by claims of universality. This is because planning is equally concerned with science and culture, development and conservation, humans and nature, private and public, past and present, East and West, right and wrong, good and bad, and now and then, all of which can be socially constructed differently based on factors of context rather than accurate depiction of reality and universality. As such, defining problems and suggesting solutions and plans are

contingent upon context. This context-laden nature of planning problems and solutions suggests that truth or rationality depends primarily on the context within which these problems were generated. Ignoring the importance of context by relying on allegations of monolithic planning rationality allows no room for public participation and only hinders the planners' ability to innovate new ideas.

This suggests the reliance on alternative narratives that are cognizant of contextual differences and attentively cautious in interpreting certain narratives, claims of truth and universal rationality. Contextualization of planning problems suggests orchestration and facilitation of efforts and participation in order to generate much needed debates about the appropriateness of solutions, and nature and scale of response. Debate does not necessarily mean undermining other points of view or that quarreling would ensue. Through debate and consensus building, brilliant ideas can surface and only the most effective argument can prevail. Further, best alternatives can be evaluated, arguments can be sharpened, and good ideas can also be improved by discussion and feedback from each other. Questioning who wins and who loses based on what decisions and by what mechanisms helps deconstruct and debunk allegations of spoken and unspoken universal truth that often produces such mechanisms and patterns. Without this counter-hegemonic discourse whose goal is to unmask taken-for-granted truths, hidden constructedness will remain ever hidden and legitimized by political and bureaucratic constituents for the purpose of only self-aggrandizement (Robbins, 2004).

4.3. The Role of Power and Politics in Plan-making and Plan Implementation

Power and politics have a significant role in plan-making and implementation. Planning inherently relies on means of communicative and interactive discourse, through which hegemonic power habitually permeates. The misconception of planning as a merely scientific and technical endeavor resulted in planners' inability to deal with, and confront, the many types of power. Due to this evident political illiteracy, many planners fail to gain political interest and in turn their plans appear to lack, in many cases, proper implementation. The lack of engagement in political processes and the failure to manage successful plan implementation represents poor practice and a misconception of planners as technically-astute individuals whose field of influence is confined to their workstation located in their cubical. This technocratic confinement of planning and planners created a gap between what's being done, which is merely influenced by political forces; and what people want to see happen in their communities in the future, which planners often claim to capture and engender in their plans.

Making influential decisions means making action-oriented decisions, on one hand, and being able to successfully implement them, on the other. This however cannot be attained without realizing and utilizing both soft and hard power as a means to arrive to this end of being influential. By relying on

elements of soft power, including discussion, negotiation, mediation, diplomacy, and even argument, people can reach agreements and common ground on some of the most formidable and severely disputed issues. In contradistinction, hard power personifies operation-oriented actions and plans, implementation and enforcement mechanisms, political clout, economic incentives, collective social actions and even revolutions, and *any* other necessary means to *change* undesirable conditions. Hence, planning should depart from the idealized notion of neutrality or the notion of being inherently consensus-based.

The challenge remains for planners to be able to develop expertise and skills not only to anticipate and respond to future power influence and agenda setting, but also to counteract its implications on democratic planning practice. This calls for the realization that neither the utter dominance of the power approach nor the complete elimination or negligence of the existence of the power approach work in practice. The need to be in touch with reality (Flyvbjerg, 2001), with its wicked face and the existence of power dynamics and relations, calls for the insightful understanding of power structure by acknowledging its existence and impacts, on one hand, and the innovation and employment of creative integrative planning tools that utilize power to delimit, counteract, and neutralize power, on the other hand. This requires proactive involvement in the political and social arenas of decision-making. Wielding power for planners, on one hand, means being able to make decisions that have the potential to change reality; and to wield power, on the other hand, planners should become an active part of the "game" not just the audience, or worse yet, cheerleaders.

5. An Agenda for an Alternative Path to an Integrative Approach to Planning

In light of the aforementioned theoretical debates and practical merits of planning, there is ample justification for the need to develop a new agenda for an alternative planning theory that recognizes the uniqueness and challenges of planning as a discipline and, at the same time, provides guidance for practical planning matters in terms of functional integration and enhancing decision-making. The usefulness of defining these new boundaries to shape a distinctive path for both planning thought and practice lies in their ability to first, provide a deeper understanding of the processes that planners habitually engage in and second, address the question of how to consciously achieve widespread improvement in the quality of human life and urban from. Both concerns should be addressed in light of a *contextual* understanding of the dominant global political economy within which planning operates. Thoughtful formulation, coherent evolution, and *adaptive* application of alternative theory serve as a warning sign that tends to continuously direct practitioners' attention and channel their efforts towards important matters, setting the stage for developing contingent strategies and appropriate responses.

Proposition (1): with this in mind, a mature *adaptive* application of planning theory should incorporate an examination of the development of cities in the past, the relationship between political and economic forces and cultural and social structures, and understanding of how power relationships shape political realities and decision-making. While discourse can provide part of the explanation, a further step is to engender a deep understanding of the structures of power that not only guide discourse but in many cases generate it. Eradicating the deep obsession with mere processes, a major task for planning theory should be to focus on both normative and explanatory grounds. Working towards this goal requires planning theory to incorporate elements of functional integration in describing desirable future conditions, suggesting appropriate means of attaining them, and exploring their defining context in which they can be engendered. This suggests the need to be critical and visionary, attentive to both process and discourse, and understanding of the political-economic structures (Fainstein, 2005).

Proposition (2): an effective planning theory should consider the adaptive sustainable planning model as an overarching normative framework and ideal of a useful integrative approach to planning problems. Under the auspices of the notion of adaptive sustainability, this model encompasses two key components (sustainable planning amalgamated to adaptive learning and consensus building), which makes it exceptionally functional and enhances its applicability. While sustainable planning provides process guidance, or "*rules of engagement*," adaptive learning and application provides institutional resilience and governance, or "*mechanisms of engagement*." This approach encompasses adequate procedural aspects, the institutional ability to create political alliances, and the power to influence outcomes with the flexibility to accommodate different social and spatial contexts, and the aspiration to promote legitimate public input in pursuance of the common good. Given its holistic merits, integrative adaptive sustainable planning is equally concerned with short and long-term consequences. Employing available resources and seeking to obtain new resources to satiate community's needs (Visser, 2001), this approach effectively aims to assess current and future community's needs, limitations, and opportunities and establish frameworks for collaboratively setting visions, goals, policies, and strategies to meet these needs in a timely fashion (Camillus, 1982).

First: rules of engagement*:* every decision made by planners and policy makers personifies a profound challenge of how to maintain a speedy growth pattern to keep up with cutting-edge technological advancement, population demand, and growth requirements, while at the same time safeguard social justice (for current and future generations) and promote environmental protection. These problems and challenges suggest the need to rely on new strategies of planning and development. Presumably, as a result of the multidimensional aspects of complex urban problems and realities, the new approach should reflect the merits and imperatives of a multifaceted approach as well.

As illustrated in figure 1, the sustainability model conceptualizes planning as a triangle that personifies a synergistic integration of three main competing interests including equity, economy, and the environment, or what is known as the "*3 Es*" (Campbell and Fainstein, 2003). Although planning is ideally intended to enhance economic growth, preserve the environment, and foster social justice, practically different planners, depending on their background, vision, and value system, act differently, which leads to one of these outcomes or another. This model suggests that sustainable planning can be attained through the mindful balance of these three conflicting planning goals within the society.

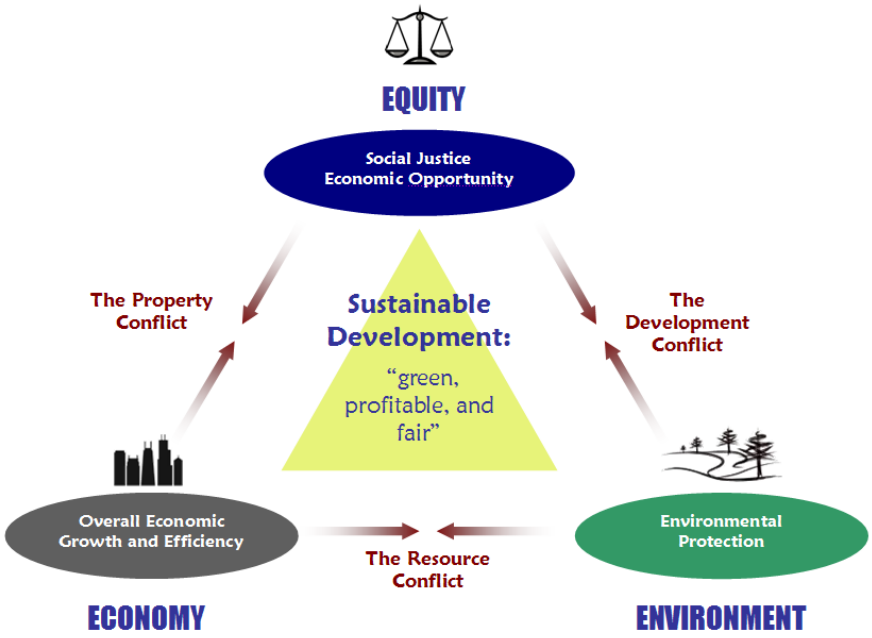

FIGURE 1: THE SUSTAINABILITY TRIANGLE OF THE THREE CONFLICTING PLANNING GOALS
Source: Campbell and Fainstein (2003)

Setting sustainability as a desired target has three practical benefits for planning. The first practical benefit is that sustainability can be used as a template against which to objectively judge certain plans, based on the extent to which they adhere to these sustainability concerns, and to confront and evaluate frequent claims and allegations of sustainability. The second practical benefit is, once a number of proposed plans, scenarios, or polices are identified to be sustainable based on the first measure, this model provides a reference point based on which we can assess them and select the most sustainable one based on its vicinity to attaining sustainability, which resides at the center of the triangle. Despite its incommensurable nature, sustainability is something that we can acquire more of. The closer a certain plan is to the center, the more sustainable it is deemed and therefore it is the more preferred one compared to other proposed sustainable plans. Sustainability provides a path to a desirable and appropriate outcome. It is therefore a means to an end, not an end by itself. It helps us set goals,

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objectives, and visions for the future. It also poses a reminder of what planning is most concerned with; spearheading the quest of satiating the interests of all groups, addressing and resolving conflicts, and promoting a better quality of life for all. Third, using this model helps not only in understanding planning and its priorities and successfully managing these common clashes of interest (Campbell, 1996), but also in providing an adequate normative framework to organize the practice and scholarship of planning, on one hand, and a stance that orients us, on the other. This does not mean that following the sustainability model will ensure elimination of these conflicts. On the contrary, following this model will in fact trigger conflicts and generate debate, which are *real* and *healthy*. They are *real* because they are inevitable and occur in every planning decision; and *healthy* because they tend to produce and carry on fruitful and meaningful debate among different actors and sectors of planning that boosts acceptance and willingness to question and be questioned, and in turn generate more robust and informed decisions.

Second: mechanisms of engagement*:* the second element of the proposed integrative planning emanates from, and responds to, the critiques of sustainability as an integrative planning discourse and its political and institutional challenges. Akin to other planning approaches, sustainability seems to provide an ambitious approach that attempts to cover a great deal of ground, which may impose difficulties in institutional settings, governmental cooperation, and decision-making mechanisms. Such integrated planning approaches are often challenged by political and institutional realities, established planning and decision-making practices and bureaucratic processes. Bureaucratic processes, which were once believed to stimulate and integrate local decisions into larger schemes, appear to not only limit the capacity and influence of these decisions, but may also resist such integrated approaches (Wank, 1996). The complex decision-making process related to the institutional configuration of each community, where organizations display complex hierarchal relationships, makes it hard for any new integrative planning approach to succeed. In particular, planning agencies operate under different jurisdictions with different legal and institutional basis. This divergence of different modes of government in various realms of social and institutional life of communities constitutes a major challenge to the integration of planning systems (Meadowcroft, 1997). However, this argument of cooperation mishaps can be turned on its heels. The fact that we have cooperation difficulties on both individual and institutional levels does not suggest that finding a meaningful resolution is insurmountable. On the contrary, these difficulties serve as the crisis/tragedy narrative that justifies developing this integrative approach. It is imperative for this approach to realize that real-life planning had, has, and will always have many obstacles in the way of making and adopting plans, which suggests that the assumption of a single approach capable of resolving all of these problems is unrealistic at best.

To be realistic and effective and to enhance its adaptability to, and compatibility with, a wide range of planning disciplines, adopting the sustainability model as an integrated planning system should incorporate a certain level of flexibility. This calls for the reliance on an *adaptive* learning and management approach that offers flexibility and joint action in governmental setting. *Adaptive* management incorporates an assessment of the past and current planning status and a formulation of a response to change the *status quo*. This requires the development of general rules and guidelines for urban affairs, free access of information acquisition and dissemination, and a developmentally incremental social learning process that encompasses technological, educational and information systems.

There is a pressing need for rapid changes in institutional arrangements that are able to incorporate sustainability as a guide for an integrative planning. To advance the sustainable development trajectory from repressing usual ambitious attempts at formulating alternative integrated approaches to making a meaningful contribution in planning practice, it should first recognize the inherent limitations of current planning institutions and second, promote the interaction of many agencies and actors through an astute institutional design. This necessitates the promotion of a fluent institutional structure that provides certain resilience and adaptability to new changes and the ambiguity and long-term consequences of planning decisions (Meppem and Gill, 1998). Complex bureaucratic systems that tend to slow the decision-making process make the case for the decentralization of formal authority and governments and the creation and integration of voluntarily inter-organizational decision-making processes on various scales. This ushers in the need for integrating new systems of interaction to enhance inter-agency cooperation, coalition, and partnership. Identifying and responding to problems represents a diverse range of involvement of different actors in shaping the overall decision-making process (Weimer, 1995). Inter-agency cooperation means more than just creating the usual communication channels among multiple agencies, but rather it indicates the proactive multi-scalar interaction among all affected and interested stakeholders and preparation and structuring of activities, which should be geared towards enhancing the process of learning and participation. Relying on technical, political and democratic participation processes, it integrates planning processes with the institutional structure of local, state, and federal governments to allow for more power and incorporate citizenry participation in the process. As such, it, building on the bottom-up perspective, serves as a device to facilitate communication across all levels of the government structures to ensure that the development of the city as an urban settlement is conducted in a way that benefits a broader range of its inhabitants (Visser, 2001).

With the same token, plans akin to “Envision Central Texas” are effective in handling contextual differences and providing room for incorporating elements unique to each locality. This is because it

provides governance, voluntary implementation and fixable adoption of these general rules and guidelines, rather than creating new forms of government which tend to add additional layers of complexity and rigidity. This calls for a revised process of participatory planning to allow for real cooperation, generate feedback mechanisms, and meet the need for flexibility and adaptability. Through participatory planning, the sustainable planning agenda can be shifted towards ongoing, evolving, and transformative learning, where insights from a broad range of stakeholders and disciplines can be garnered. By engaging in dialectic discourses, planners and their communities can learn about not only their arguments and that of others, but also about themselves as well as others and therefore can form and reform their social and political interactions and relationships. Through consensus building processes and inter-discursive communication that equally involve and inform all affected and interested stakeholders without the dominance of one over the other, all participants can freely speak, listen to each other, and question the *status quo*. To chart the course to a desirable and acceptable future for their communities, planners, working as facilitators, need to connect with their communities and work closely with people on identifying and addressing issues that most concern them.

Proposition (3): the creation of viable directions for new integrative planning paradigms is contingent upon the cultivation of locally engaged, yet regionally in tune efforts; the redefining of an ever-changing and impermanent language of planning difference; and the acknowledgment of global political and economic realities as connected webs of local transformations. Under these conditions, planning practice should be transformed from something transferable to something that emanates from within "here and now." While confining planning efforts to the local level will only foster fragmentation, working together in unity will build a planning community that perpetuates a larger scale effort able to confront power on its own terrain (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

Proposition (4): the value system, which appears to be highly diverse, poses a challenge of how such greatly diverse interests and orientations can come to terms with a distinct and conclusive definition of an integrative approach to planning practice that not only captures the essence of such a sophisticated, diverse, and mature field, but also satiates this heterogeneity in specializations, interests, and educational and practical backgrounds. Regardless of what definition we may produce, or how well the definition is able to precisely and comprehensively outline the new approach to planning, seeking consensus on what this approach is will always be a major challenge that calls for effective practical solutions. Consequently, the real challenge, reflecting the struggle that planners face everyday in their decisions, is to figure out ways for people to accept a definition of this integrated approach, whatever it may be, and live with it.

New issues arise and new circumstances become apparent with every passing day, which calls for innovative and flexible ways based on situational assessment of the types of issues to be addressed and prioritization of the most important factors or interests. By incorporating an ongoing, flexible situational assessment and prioritization of related issues and concerns according to their urgency, resolutions can be crafted to guide the planning process in the face of the ever-changing realities. Consequently, in keeping with the dynamic and developmental nature of planning, planners need not rely on static processes and rigid approaches. Each case is unique, and so should planning decisions be. This is a tradeoff, where planners have to develop criteria that reflect contextual details unique to each situation, weigh certain important factors based on their degree of immediacy and relevance, and finally make decisions that embody this systematic process of prioritization. Contextually identifying elements of sustainability and how these elements effectively work in certain contexts in different places helps in knowing the best alternative for particular planning problems. This way, compromises are made and benefit can be gained as well.

In a nutshell, undesired consequences often happen not because of lack of planning, but because of inadequacy in planning processes, decisions, policies, and outcome. This inadequacy includes intentional or unintentional separation of planning from the political process, planners' unawareness of power structures, inconsistency of decisions and segregation of planning specializations that tend to alienate different planning practitioners from one another. Planners need a well-defined frame of reference to what they *do*, and *not do*, based on which they can operate knowing what they can do, when to *do* certain things and when to *refrain* form doing others. Defining an alternative planning approach will provide planners with a comprehensive lens through which they can see the world and therefore insightfully interact with it. While integrative planning approaches are deemed necessary and desirable, the adaptive sustainability model emerges as a compelling and useful model in providing these important characteristics for the development of the field. Without such adequate approaches, it would be hard for planners to mark solid and firm ground, on which they can build, identify, and develop planning as a discipline and as a profession.

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