PLANNING THEORY

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It is common for AICP exam takers to think that their study in preparation for the planning theory portions of the exam ought to focus on theorists’ names and brief descriptions of major theories. This is not the best strategy. While it may help in answering the few exam questions in this category, it does little to prepare the exam taker for the numerous exam questions in which planning situations, behaviors, and outcomes must be diagnosed, predicted, and assessed. A solid grounding in planning theory’s concepts and its claims and assertions is of immense help in correctly answering the other exam questions. Achieving such a solid grounding cannot be accomplished in a night or a week, however. It requires careful reading of original works, contemplation and discussion of the claims made, as well as achievement of one’s own way of cataloguing and synthesizing the subject. This chapter is intended to remind the accomplished student of the terrain of planning theory for review, or to lead the novice to appropriate sources for first study.

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Depending on your perspective, planning theory is either the marginalized preoccupation of a few professors or the engine that drives renewal of planning practice through reflection and the generation of new ideas. Truth probably lies somewhere in between. Some planning theories neither stimulate action nor describe it effectively. Much of what planners do today reflects their understanding of practice and their aspirations as molded by the planning theories they have read or heard about, or by the ideas of others which, in turn, were molded by theories (Beauregard 1995; Sandercock 1998).

The Birth of Modern Planning Theory

Theorizing about planning goes back to the first days of the profession. However, the earliest theories still influential date only to the New Deal era. President Roosevelt’s famed Brain Trust included Rexford Tugwell, former Governor of Puerto Rico, who championed planning as a so-called “Fourth Power” of government. New Deal experiments with planning, guided by emerging Keynesian economic principles, included the National Resources Planning Board, the Resettlement Administration, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. These programs championed a kind of planning that was rooted in the collection and examination of data, the evaluation of alternative courses of action and the creation of systems for implementation. They expanded planning’s definition as a design activity and incorporated scientific techniques. The New Deal’s Demonstration Cities program was perhaps the most influential on the urban planning profession, because it illustrated this new (social) scientific model at the urban level.

While Americans were busy with these planning experiments, sociologist Karl Mannheim, a German exile, was preparing what would become a highly influential statement of why planning was necessary to free and open societies. Mannheim’s (1940) Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction distinguishes four social structures resulting from variations in participation and centralization:
1) Dictatorship is the result of low levels of participation and high levels of centralization.
2) Anarchy results from high levels of participation and low levels of centralization.
3) Anomie results from low levels of both participation and centralization.
4) A “democratically planned society,” Mannheim’s clearly favored outcome, is a result of high levels of both participation and centralization.

Mannheim believed that planning was inevitable due to technology and population growth. The only relevant question was “who would plan?” Would it be fascist forces of dictatorship or democratic participatory institutions? Mannheim went on to caution planners against over-reliance on functional rationality, or mere attention to means, by demanding attention to substantial rationality, the definition of correct end states or goals.

Mannheim’s book triggered what became known as the Great Debates. These debates were both scholarly and political. Planners favoring increased levels of government organization and influence in the economy were pitted against laissez-faire advocates such as Frederick Hayek (1944). Hayek saw government at best as clumsy and inefficient, and feared the power of stronger government. The U.S. Congress, too, entered the fray by refusing to reauthorize the National Resources Planning Board amidst considerable publicity in 1941. One important insight from the Great Debates was the distinction drawn between freedom from and freedom to. Barbara Wooten (1945) argued that it was a mistake to focus only on freedom from the exercise of coercion by government. She further argued for the need to also recognize that through the creation of social organizations not otherwise possible, government affords us freedom to do things that we would be unable to do in its absence.

Rational Planning
After World War II, Tugwell joined the University of Chicago’s newly created Program in Education and Research in Planning, where his colleagues included Harvey Perloff, Edward Banfield, and Julius Margolis. This program, lasting only nine years, was enormously influential in setting the direction of planning theory. Perloff, a Keynesian economist, pushed the faculty to define and systematize core areas of knowledge in planning, perceived essential to practice. It was the search for this core for the profession that led to the development of a generic model for planning in capitalist democracy and incorporation of ideas from various social scientific disciplines, including economics and political science. Banfield’s (1955; 1959) new generic model, the rational planning model, became a guide in the profession and beyond as an approach to problem solving in the public sphere. Margolis later carried the model into the emergent profession of public policy analysis as its guiding principles (Garcia 1993; Sarbib 1983; Perloff 1957).

Banfield’s rational planning model had five steps:
1. Ends reduction and elaboration;
2. Design of courses of action;
3. Comparative evaluation of consequences;
4. Choice among alternatives;
5. Implementation of the chosen alternative.
The five steps were later simply described as "Desires, Design, Deduction, Decision, and Deeds" (Harris 1967). Reproduced, more or less, in countless presentations since, these steps describe a problem-solving framework for complex human enterprises. The model is both self-evident due to simplicity and unachievable due to its demands on resources and expertise. Banfield recognized complexities, including the elusiveness of the aim of serving the public interest and politics' resistance to scientific analysis.

Even before publication, the rational planning model had its critics. It has suffered battering from countless quarters since. Yet, for about 20 years it remained the most widely subscribed planning theory. To this day, its logic can be found in the justifications and methodological outlines given in the introductions to most plans. It remains a major underpinning of planning school curricula. It spawned the principal language urban planners use in methodological discourse (Baum 1996; Dalton 1986). Moreover, theoretical and methodological work detailing and extending the model continues. This includes efforts to compare alternative rules for aggregating individual preferences, examination of the implications of risk and uncertainty, and consideration of the impact of new and faster computers on our abilities to ascertain public preferences and completion of the necessary calculations (Sager 1997; Fischoff 1996; Klosterman 1994).

By drawing on Keynesian economics and policy studies in political science, the rational planning model led to the incorporation of numerous social scientific concepts into planning offices. It highlighted planning's role in correcting market failures related to externalities, public goods, inequity, transaction costs, market power, and the non-existence of markets. Justifications for planning included reduction of nuisance and congestion, protection of resources, reduction of taxes or of public costs, provision of a stable business environment, and the improvement of environmental quality and livability. Planning borrowed the tools and language of cost-benefit analysis and operations research, including notions of decision criteria, multiple objectives, constraints, shadow pricing, willingness-to-pay, optimization, and minimization (Weimer and Vining 1992; Klosterman 1985).

A fundamental aspect of planning in the rational mode is the disjuncture between individual rationality and collective rationality. Microeconomics has long spoken of rationality as a concept applied to individuals and firms, but the transfer of the concept to complex public entities is difficult. Individuals may know what they want, but how do cities and regions decide what is in their best interest? According to Thomas Schelling (1971), in certain situations, individual preferences aggregated to a societal level produce illogical or undesirable outcomes, including rubber-necking delays on highways and hockey players' reluctance to wear helmets. In such situations, if the group made a decision as a whole, it would be far different from the sum of the individual decisions of the members. In a market-oriented economy, planning's reason for being is fundamentally tied to this disjunction between individual rationality and collective rationality.

Criticisms and Extensions of Rational Planning
The incrementalist critique of rational planning gained wide circulation by the early 1960s. Political scientist Charles Lindblom (1959) suggested that comprehensive or "synoptic" planning, as he called it, was unachievable and out of step with political realities. He argued that political leaders cannot agree on goals in advance, as the rational model requires. They prefer to choose policies and goals at the same time. He
rational model requires. They prefer to choose policies and goals at the same time. He thought that the rational model's preoccupation with the comparison of all possible alternatives and their comprehensive assessment on all measures of performance exceeds human abilities. The relationship between science and policy choice was oblique at best. The real measure of "good policy" is whether policymakers agree on it. Lindblom's alternative, incrementalism, calls for the simultaneous selection of goals and policies, consideration of alternatives only marginally different from the status quo, examination of simplified, limited comparisons among the alternatives, and the preference for results of social experimentation over theory as the basis of analysis.

Lindblom's critique was powerful and influenced many planners. Amitai Etzioni's (1967) *middle range bridge* was an effort to reconcile rational planning with incrementalism. The strategic planning movement drew heavily from Lindblom's ideas, arguing for a focus on organizational survival rather than societal benefit, short- rather than long-range time horizons, and the use of impression in the absence of hard data (Bryson and Einsweiler 1988; Kaufman and Jacobs 1987). But in the late 1970s, Lindblom argued that he had been misunderstood. Incrementalism really had three meanings planners had blurred:

1. *strategic analysis*, or any attempt to simplify complex policy problems;
2. *disjointed incrementalism*, or analysis carried out without the advance determination of goals, with few alternatives considered, and modest complexity of data;
3. *simple incrementalism*, where the alternatives considered are only marginally different from the status quo.

Planning had embraced the third meaning, *simple incrementalism*, while Lindblom claimed he had been arguing for *disjointed incrementalism*.

If Lindblom's late '50s critique had shown a chink in the armor of rational planning, the social unrest of the 1960s brought a full frontal assault. Alan Altshuler's (1965) doctoral dissertation examined the experience of land and transportation planning in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region. He found that planners were seldom able to achieve their objective, scientific aspirations. Their claims to comprehensiveness were not backed up by reality. Decision-makers often ignored their recommendations in favor of the wishes of politically connected stakeholders. Organizers of citizen input to planning processes rallied against the often-futile nature of public participation (Arnstein 1969). Marxist-inspired analyses of planning outcomes argued that planners were the handmaidens of downtown development interests and seldom really addressed meaningful policy choices (Kravitz 1970; Goodman 1971).

The most influential of the 1960s challenges to rational planning came from a Hunter College professor who had worked with poor communities in Philadelphia and New York and believed in their lack of representation in the planning process. Paul Davidoff's (1965) article, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning," resonated with the frustration of many planners in their inability to meaningfully address the social and economic issues tearing at the fabric of American cities. Davidoff called for the distribution of planning services into low-income, minority neighborhoods through a cadre of *advocate planners* who would be physically located in neighborhoods and would represent the interests of neighborhood residents in city-level planning processes. Based on analogy with the legal advocacy system, Davidoff thought that many neighborhoods would arrange their own advocates. If these were not forthcoming, it was the duty of the city
government to appoint advocates to represent the neighborhood. Debates among the various advocate planners would take place “in the coin of the public interest,” so that the prevailing positions would be those showing themselves as the most closely aligned with the broader needs of the city.

The federal Model Cities and Office of Economic Opportunity programs enacted structures close to Davidoff’s proposal. Storefront planning services offices surfaced as part of “little city halls” in many of the nation’s poorest and most troubled districts. Non-profit advocacy planning firms and cooperatives emerged in conjunction with universities, social welfare organizations and independently (Heskin 1980).

The results of these initiatives were mixed. Much of the previous assumptions of city planners became the subject of conscious discussion and debate. Many new resources were targeted to low-income neighborhoods. Many poor residents became emboldened and later influential in city politics. But, the victories were often won at great personal expense on the part of the planners involved. More often, there were defeats of equal or greater magnitude. Reflections from the advocate planners showed their work to be enormously difficult and conflicted. Critics pointed out tendencies of advocate planners to be demographically quite different from the residents they served. Advocacy planning seemed to raise expectations that could not be met in those communities. It seemed to lull the residents themselves into lowered political action profiles as a result of the belief that the city was working in their behalf. Ultimately, Davidoff was moved by the argument that you have to be from a community to effectively advocate in its behalf. He relocated to the suburbs where his organization, Suburban Action Institute, became influential in promoting federal fair share housing requirements (Needleman and Needleman 1974; Mazziotti 1974; Davidoff, Davidoff and Gold 1974).

The advocacy planning movement liberated planners from positions labeled as comprehensive or public interest defined. It quickly spread well beyond the inner city. Advocate planners became common in the service of environmental groups, trade associations, and even corporations. The use of publicly supported advocates spread even beyond the realm of planning. In Wisconsin, the state Utilities Commission appointed a “public staff” to represent consumers in rate change deliberations.

By the early 1970s, it was normal to distinguish procedural planning theory focusing on planning process from substantive planning theory focusing on the growth and development of cities. Andreas Faludi, the Dutch planning theorist labeled these two subjects, theory-of-planning and theory-in-planning (Faludi 1973). The distinction was and remains controversial, with many scholars and practitioners arguing that one cannot study process without an understanding of substance, and vice versa. One aspect of the controversy is the tendency of the procedural emphasis to separate planning theory from design approaches to planning which are so rooted in the physical aspects of cities (Hightower 1969; Fischler 1995).

A Crisis and New Directions
Following the first experiences with advocacy planning, planning theorists began diverging in many directions. The rational planning model gradually lost ground. Indeed, in the late 1970s, it was common to talk about a “crisis in planning theory” resulting from the loss of a center to the field (Goldstein and Rosenberry 1978; Clavel, Forester and Goldsmith 1980).
The criticisms of advocacy led to a wave of radical approaches to planning for the underprivileged. Stephen Grabow and Alan Heskin’s (1973) “Foundations for a Radical Concept of Planning,” was the best read of a series of polemics on the inabilities of the current planning framework to respond to the needs of the poor. They called for a systemic change including decentralization, ecological attentiveness, spontaneity, and experimentation. The radical literature was more a critique rather than a road map. Yet, it spawned the progressive planning movement seeking out incremental changes that over time would result in structural changes promoting equality, participation, and legitimacy. Progressive planners promoted public ownership of land and job generating industries, worker-managed enterprises, tax reform, community organizations, and leveraging of public resources through partnerships with private organizations that would agree to serve public purposes. Notable examples include Berkeley, California; Hartford, Connecticut; and Burlington, Vermont. Some progressives worked outside the mainstream government doing opposition planning or organizing community self-help initiatives (Krumholz and Clavel 1994; Friedmann 1987).

In the late 1970s, Molotch (1977) argued that pro-growth interests dominated city councils and planning boards across America so strongly as to constitute a growth machine. This growth machine was making it hard for environmental or other opposition groups to win decisions, partly because boards and commissions would not even understand the arguments opposing growth. Empirical data began to flow on this issue, expanding the claim. The urban regime theory holds that in certain places, community leadership has a certain framework, or regime, for examining issues. Individuals or interest groups that argue from outside that regime will find it very difficult or even impossible to win decisions. This results in an effective disenfranchisement of the outsiders. Implications for planners are both descriptive and normative: power lies in speaking the language of the dominant regime(s). If planners want to influence decisions, they will have to make arguments in a manner that the dominant regime(s) will understand and be responsive to (Lauria 1997).

During the development of the radical critique, other planning theorists were reconsidering the overtly political directions of planning theory. A series of new directions emerged, focusing on planners’ facilitative roles in shaping decisions emerged. Often referred to as social learning theories, these contributions emphasized planners’ roles in bringing stakeholders together, gathering and sharing information, and helping social structures to learn from their experiences. John Friedmann’s transactive planning emphasized that citizens and civic leaders, not planners, had to be at the core of planning if plans were to be implemented. Others defined a social experimentation process using elements of incrementalism. Chris Argyris and Donald Schon began to articulate a theory of action in which the planner, acting as catalyst and boundary spanner, strives to create a self-correcting decision structure capable of learning from its own errors (Argyris and Schon 1974; Friedmann 1987).

**Toward Unification**

By the late 1970s, planners recognized that the completeness with which they had embraced notions of science in their work had exacerbated their isolation from political decision-makers. Planning theorists began drawing from political philosophers who questioned mainstream social science, particularly Jurgen Habermas, a so-called critical theorist from Germany. Cornell professor John Forester’s interpretation of Habermas
was key to uniting social learning theories and progressive planning theories. Forester suggested that ensuring widespread availability of data and understanding of public decision processes would help to enfranchise the underprivileged. His communicative planning theory (1989) asserted that through communicative strategies complementing their technical work, planners can alert citizens to the issues of the day, arm them with technical and political information, and otherwise encourage community-based planning actions. It would then be necessary for them to work in the midst of the wide variety of views expressed by diverse interest groups to formulate new consensus policies that might be widely supported (Hemmens and Stiftel 1980; Sager 1994).

Forester's philosophical justification for consensus building was supported by a more problem-oriented approach to the use of mediation in planning under development by Larry Susskind and others. Susskind (Susskind and Ozawa 1984) argued that the technical analytic skills of planners were highly useful to fulfilling the traditional aims of mediators given complex problems complex and numerous stakeholder groups. He suggested that if planners learned the interpersonal skills of mediators at identifying interests (goals), crafting options (alternatives), and finding "fair" decision rules (criteria), they would improve their effectiveness (Healey 1997; Innes 1995).

At the same time, a research tradition of closely following practicing planners in order to stimulate new planning theoretical knowledge was growing. Since Banfield's efforts, practice had served as an empirical basis for planning theory. But in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a cadre of researchers consciously endeavored to build a systematic base of field information about planning process. Studies emerged detailing the inner workings of planning offices in never before understood, even among practitioners themselves. Elizabeth Howe's and Jerry Kaufman's widely discussed national survey of planners' roles distinguished technical and political planning activities in light of the advocacy revolution. They found that these behaviors were often complementary rather than competing. Howell Baum's interviews with Maryland planners documented mismatch of planners' self image and public expectations. Charles Hoch showed that planners frequently are embroiled in conflicts but have uneven success at persevering (Dalton 1989; Hoch 1994).

Planning theory seemed on a heady course toward a new consensus to replace rational planning. Forester's tour de force pulled together the concerns of progressive planning and social learning. Susskind's mapping of a skill set that might make it possible to carry out Forester's suggestions offered added encouragement. Finally, a growing empirical literature seemed to be producing useful conclusions. Only fragmenting multicultural debates in our country and abroad, combined with increasing attention to the post-modern ideas of French philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida were standing in the way.

The Post-modern Challenge and Response
Reaganomics, economic globalization, and corporate downsizing placed increasing pressures on poor communities in the U.S. in the 1980s and early 1990s. Substantial immigration and growing conservative political forces contributed to greatly heightened awareness of ethnic, racial and gender differences in our society, creating additional stresses. Multiculturalism became a leading political force, touching many political campaigns and many institutions. Illegal immigration, welfare programs, and affirmative action took center stage, as did questions of the domination of school curricula by White
Europeans. Ethnic wars in Africa, Asia, and Europe only reinforced the sense that differences among sub-groups within a country matter much more than collective interest. In this environment, planners were receptive to the importation of post-modern philosophy. This stance highlighted diversity in points of view about social and political issues, rejected notions of human progress, and saw domination of one group by another at every turn.

Despite the French post-modern philosophers' high pessimism about the prospects for positive social change, planning theorists who have drawn upon them actively look for the solutions to this pessimism. They call for acknowledging and respecting diversity and difference, recognizing the varying forms of evidence persuasive among different populations, as well as meaningfully involving communities early in planning processes and sharing both power and theorizing activities with those they plan for. Still, the post-modern challenge is considerable and planning theorists are not at all clear about meeting them (Harper and Stein 1995; Mandelbaum 1996; Sandercock 1998).

Much recent activity has surrounded identifying better ways for planners to present arguments so that they will be persuasive in political and multicultural environments. One promising direction proposes that the often-quantitative orientation of urban planners matches poorly with the needs of decision-makers who are often moved by stories that convey human behaviors in terms they can understand. Storytelling is a proposed serious planning method that can accomplish what statistical analysis may never do. Other theorists are drawing on turn of the century American pragmatist philosophers to suggest that the emphasis on deductive reasoning in our statistical training is out of step with the more pragmatic, problem-solving orientation of most public decision makers. These theorists of critical pragmatism are calling for planners to use a blend of inductive and deductive reasoning they call abduction (Throgmorton 1997; Blanco 1994; Verma 1996).

Theories of social capital are a recent development to capture the imaginations of planning theorists as a response to the multicultural challenge. They have not yet been applied to planning settings in a full way. They emphasize the complexity and effectiveness of social networks and community leadership in moving a community toward an operable response to new challenges (Briggs 1997; Putnam 1995).

Feminist planning theory, comfortable operating within the post-modern critique, calls planners to task for valuing economic production while undervaluing or ignoring familial and community re-production, as well as ignoring the different ways men and women use space. The feminist theorists argue that economic efficiency measures used in planning analyses attach zero value to home child care, or to volunteer work in community organizations, among others. They also cite transportation models as oriented around the journey-to-work. Women, in particular, tend to make more trips other than the conventional journeys from home to workplace (Moore Milroy 1991; Ritzdorf 1995).

Planning theory has long been at tension over its normative versus descriptive/predictive nature. Is planning theory philosophically oriented toward laying out the correct way to plan, in an ethical sense? Or is it scientifically oriented toward showing the likely implications of undertaking various planning behaviors? Both traditions have always existed, but movement seems to be away from philosophy and toward science. The
notion of a contingency use of planning theories has accompanied this trend. In the 1970s, Hudson (1974) published a widely cited article likening the planning theory universe to an Indian sitar whose strings represent synoptic, incremental, transactive, advocacy, and radical planning. The practitioner plays the strings at appropriate times. Later more sophisticated contingency tables were produced suggesting the use of different planning approaches under different circumstances of goal agreement, uncertainty, consensus versus accomplishment orientation, community size, and posture toward the ideal (Christensen 1985; Alexander 1996).

While mainstream planning theory has increasingly focused on the procedural side of planning, external developments on the substantive side are increasingly pushing the profession in new directions and demanding responses. The self-proclaimed new urbanism of Peter Calthorpe (1993) and Andres Duany (Duany and Plater-Zyberk 1992) has captured the imagination of public officials and homebuyers. Their essentially physical design oriented proposals are justified largely by claims about enhancing civic life and social capital, entering the procedural realm. The sustainability movement which has grown to enormous international proportions since the 1987 Brundtland Commission report (Krizek and Power 1996) appears to focus on resource renewability and preservation, with as much concern for the relationship of rich to poor. The movement proposes new decision criteria and models based on global cooperation and advancement of equity. Finally, recent explorations into environmental justice issues have potential to lead to a new understanding of the nature of social divisions in both rich and poor countries (Petrikin 1995). Procedural planning theory must respond to these ideas but has yet to do so.
SUGGESTED PLANNING THEORY READINGS FOR EXAM PREPARATION

Texts and Summaries:


Anthologies of Short Writings:


Statements of Current Theories:


Empirical Applications of Current Theories:

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