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Spatial Planning: the Promised Land or roll-out neoliberalism?

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Introduction

The new millennium marked the revival of strategic spatial planning in many parts of the world (Albrechts *et al.*, 2003, Sartorio, 2005; Healey, 2007; Davoudi and Strange, 2009; Friedmann, 2004; Watson, 2002; Gunder, 2010). In defining what spatial planning is and promoting its virtues, commentators often contrast it with traditional land use planning, master planning, and/or project-based planning. They argue that spatial planning is a long range and strategic approach to place-based integration of sectoral policies. Some suggest that the revival of spatial planning marks a paradigm shift, while others argue that it has introduced a slippery concept. For the former spatial planning approach is “the Promised Land”, while for the latter it is a “mirage” (Cullingworth *et al.* 2015:4). Concerns are also raised about having “too little or too much” of spatial planning and “the dangers of spatial planning” particularly when “the question of space and spatial organisation is treated separately from other considerations, or when it assumes primacy over these” (Parr 2005:120). The terminology itself has been subject to debate, too, and seen as an example of ‘Euro-English’, referring variously to *l’aménagement du territoire*, *Raumordnung*, *pianificazione territoriale*, and urban and regional planning (Salet and Faludi, 2000).

In this chapter I would argue that firstly, the revival of spatial planning in the 2000s was a belated response to the growing realisation that place matters. Secondly, it coincided with and informed by two sets of theoretical developments. One is relational space and deals with the object of spatial planning and its substantive focus. The other is communicative action and deals with the normative aspects of spatial planning processes. In practice, while the latter has influenced the discourses of spatial planning at least at a rhetorical level, the former has been hardly taken up. Thirdly, I would argue that certain interpretations of spatial planning and its theoretical underpinnings have led to its alignment with neoliberal policies and practices.

Place matters: The ascendance of spatial planning

The latter part of the 20th century saw a renewed interest in the critical role played by places and localities in the understanding of social, economic, environmental and cultural relations and in policy decisions. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Davoudi and Strange, 2009), this realisation was interpreted differently by different disciplines. Economic geographers considered the turn to spatiality as the outcome of transition from the Fordist mass production to the post-Fordist flexible specialisation whereby place adds (or takes away) value to new cycles and patterns of productions and consumptions. They argued that place-quality could be an asset for pinning down footloose globalised capital. For political scientists, the trend epitomised the transition from the universal Keynesian welfare states to the competitive Hayekian neoliberal states in which places and territories become key sites of localised service delivery and political contestations. For cultural analysts, the turn to spatiality was a

sign of transformation from modernism to post-modernism and the growing diversity of lifestyles and identities. Here, place-quality becomes an important component of the quality of everyday life. Ecologists put the emphasis on the significance of locales in responding to global environmental crises and adapting to climate change. A parallel debate highlighted: the profound restructuring of the state, the move from government to governance, and the emergence of multi-level and networked governance. In this perspective, place is seen as a site for integrating fragmented policy sectors and governance networks and as an organising device for institutional coordination (Nadin, 2007).

All these highlighted how the shifts in social, political, environmental and institutional contexts were challenging the traditional sector-based policy making and implementation, and called for place-based policy formulation. Similar ideas about “the defence of locale, of their meaning, of their uses” were stressed by scholars such as Manuel Castells who considered the role of planners as being the making of “new spaces, meaningful places with connecting capabilities” (Cuthbert 1996:8). By the 2000s, the call on planning to become ‘more spatial’ had become pervasive. In response to the disillusionments with land use, master and project-based planning, it was argued that the traditional ways of preparing plans were being replaced with proactive place making (Healey *et al.* 1997). In Europe, an important mobilising force was the process that culminated in the publication of the European Spatial Development Perspective in 1999 (Faludi, 2007). In the UK, the growing attention to spatiality was reflected in and reinforced by the Royal Town Planning Institute’s change of corporate identity to: ‘making of place and mediation of space’ and the redefinition of its “basic discipline” as “spatial planning” (RTPI, 2004: 1).

Thus, by the end of the 20th century spatial planning became *a la mode* (Parr 2005). However, the extent to which its ideals and progressive intents managed to change planning practices is questionable. Indeed, in many parts of the world (including some countries in Europe) master planning remained the dominant mode (UN-Habitat, 2009; Watson, 2002; Cerreta *et al.*, 2010). For example, Hajer and Zonneveld (2010:350) argue that in the Netherlands “the old idea of ‘survey, analysis, plan’ still looms large in the style of planning”. Others caution that attempts to find evidence that match spatial planning ideals can result in “shifting our gaze too far from current realities of planning practice” (Newman, 2008:1372). More importantly, there is a growing concern that spatial planning has become the carrier of neoliberal values, a point to which I will return.

Theoretical contexts of spatial planning and their critiques

Two sets of theoretical developments provided the intellectual contexts of spatial planning. One was planning scholars’ belated engagement with the substantive theories of planning and particularly the theorisation of absolute and relational space. The other was their long established interest in procedural theories of planning. I will discuss these in turn but before that, it is important not to conflate the theories about space and place (i.e. the substantive question of *what*) with the theories about planning processes (i.e. the procedural question of *how*). Also, critiques of these theories should not be confused with the criticisms of the ways on which spatial planning has been interpreted and implemented in practice, while acknowledging that aspects of these theories have unintendedly helped the appropriation of spatial planning into the neoliberal practices.

Relational space and place-bundles

A significant theoretical contribution to the spatial turn in planning came from a relational conceptualisation of space and place which although was new to planners and geographers its history goes back to modernity and its origin in the Enlightenment project (Agnew 2005). In the 17th century a radically new worldview emerged which was premised on Cartesian duality and its attempt to split the concerns about *why* the world exists from *how* it works. The latter became the domain of scientific endeavours which started with discovering the physical world and expanded into exploring the social world in the 18th century. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of modernity is its focus on conceptualising space with the help of foundational contributions from philosophy, physics and geometry and by intellectual giants such as Descartes, Newton, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Minkowski and Einstein. Geometry and the work of Euclid, in particular, played a defining role in the conception of space as *absolute*. The absolute space enjoyed a long uninterrupted currency and was seen as a leading example of how *a priori* intellectual intuition can be the main source of scientific knowledge; an idea which was strongly supported by Emanuel Kant. Space, defined by the Euclidean dimensions of “height, depth, size and proximity” (Murdoch 2006:12), was seen as the container of the objects. The longstanding influence of Euclid’s geometry was due to its incorporation into Newtonian physics (Scruton 1996:361). Newton portrayed space as an infinite container in which objects could be positioned at any point. As Agnew (2005: 83) put it, “in the Newtonian view, space is absolute in the sense that it is an entity in itself, independent of whatever objects and events occupy it, containing these objects and events, and having separate powers from them.”

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Euclid’s geometry was challenged on a number of grounds by scholars such as Riemann, Minkowski, and Lobachewski but, it was not until Einstein’s space-time theory that space was firmly conceptualised as interdependent with objects and events, and that space is not an abstract entity out there but is socially and culturally produced. As Harvey (1996:53 original emphasis) suggests,

“Space and time are neither absolute nor external to processes but are contingent and contained within them. There are multiple spaces and times (and space-times) implicated in different physical, biological and social processes. The latter all *produce* –to use Lefebvre’s (1974) terminology –their own forms of space and time. Processes do not operate *in* but *actively construct* space and time and in so doing define distinctive scales for their development.”

What gave the relational space a new salience in the 1970s was the work of Henri Lefebvre who rejected the structuralist readings of absolute or abstract space and argued that every society and every mode of production produces its own space. He advocated a multi-dimensional space (which he called ‘trialectic’) consisting of: *conceived* spaces of cartographers, planners and property speculators, *perceived* spaces of artists’ and writers’ imaginations, and *lived spaces* of everyday life (Lefebvre, 1974). However, it took nearly twenty years for Lefebvre’s pioneering ideas about relational space to be translated into English and, hence, influence the work of geographers such as David Harvey and Ed Soja. This partly explains why the legacy of Euclid and the Newtonian view of spatiality remained the dominant geographical imaginary in planning well into the second half of the 20th century (Davoudi, 2012). Indeed, Friedmann (1993:482) cautions that “the conventional concept of planning is so deeply linked to the Euclidian mode that it is tempting to argue that if traditional model has to go, then the very idea of planning must be abandoned”.

As mentioned above, geometry played a critical role in the debate about space. A prominent critic of Euclid was Minkowski and his theory of n-dimensional (as opposed to three dimensional) geometries. His work was a source of inspiration for Einstein's theory of relativity which is often considered as the foundation for the *relational* view of space. However, the idea that space is relative, and not absolute, has a longer history and played a major role in the development of Leibniz's philosophy. He suggested that "spatial properties are relational, and the position of any object is to be given in terms of its relation to any other objects" (Scruton 1996:362). This implies that space does not exist independent of objects and events but is constructed from the relations between them. Harvey's above suggestion that space is not a container but made of processes and substances is, in some ways, a reflection on Leibniz philosophy. Furthermore, in rejecting the structuralist understanding of space, Harvey also asserts that space is not made by underlying structures but by diverse social, economic, cultural and physical processes which themselves are "made by the relations established between entities of various kinds" (quoted in Murdoch 2006:19).

One of the important differences between the Newtonian absolute space and the Leibnizian relational space is their conceptualisation of *place*. For the former, space and place are either synonymous or binaries. For the latter, their relationship is dialectical. They represent "simultaneity of multiple trajectories" (Massey, 2005: 61). The relational perspective underpinned the postmodern consciousness of the LA School of geography and particularly the works of Michael Dear and Ed Soja who exposed the contingent nature of space and place and their binary oppositions and instead promoted notions of "fluidity, reflexivity, contingency, connectivity, multiplicity and polyvocality" (Davoudi & Strange, 2009:37). Doreen Massey, a significant contributor to the rise of relational thinking, suggests that, "instead of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around them, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understanding" (Massey, 1993: 66). This way of knowing places affirms that people live not "in a framework of geometric relationships but a world of meaning" (Hubbard *et al.*, 2004:7). Places are both real and imagined assemblages of material, events, discourses and practices. Space and place are socially and culturally produced and their production is infused with power and politics. Although sense of place and affective experience of being here and now play a significant role in framing and making places, affective experiences are themselves iteratively created through social and political processes (Martin, 2003). Relational places are "bundles of space-time trajectories" that individuals and systems bring together through systemic, cognitive and emotional processes (Massey 2005: 119). These individually made and multi-scalar "place-bundles are socially negotiated, constantly changing and contingent" (Pierce *et al.*, 2011: 58) and are influenced by systemic and multi-scalar changes. Harvey's description of place-making and its ephemeral character is apt.

"The process of place formation becomes a process of carving out 'permanences' from the flow of processes (that are) creating spaces. But the 'permanences' –no matter how solid they may seem- are not eternal; they are always subject to time as 'perpetual perishing'" (Harvey 1996:261).

Drawing on a number of case studies, Pierce *et al.* (2011:67) affirm Harvey's temporary permanences by suggesting that, "*all* places are relational, and are always produced through networked politics". It was this inherently political nature of place formation which was at best overlooked and at worst ostracized in implementation of spatial planning and hence formed the basis of its criticisms.

Critiques of relational spatiality

Embracing relational space in practice even after the revival of spatial planning has not been easy. The difficulties are evident from a number of empirical studies. For example, a study of six spatial strategies produced in British Isles after the revival of spatial planning shows that “new ideas about relational geography has rarely erased the previous paradigms” (Davoudi, 2009:241). It reveals the difficulties of translating relational space into planning practices whose spatial imaginary is still dominated by fixities and certainties of absolute space and bounded place. It concludes that “planners’ conceptual interpretations of the socio-spatial processes have remained surprisingly similar to the ones formed in the mid-twentieth century by a positivist view of the world” (Davoudi, 2009:243). Jensen and Richardson (2003) draw similar conclusions in their analysis of the European Spatial Development Perspectives (ESDP). Furthermore, a study of regional plans and interviews with planners in Finland also confirms the mismatch between absolute and relational space in everyday planning practices. It demonstrates that “despite the current emphasis on networks, flows and connectivity, planning occurs in many respects in a ‘regional world’ that is perpetually characterized by a sort of boundedness and a certain degree of fixity” (Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2016:90). It shows that “while borders may be porous or even fuzzy in certain cartographic representations as well as in planning rhetoric, they are often less porous in planning practice that is embedded in statutory contexts” (ibid).

There are multiple reasons for the persistence of absolute and bounded spatial imaginaries in planning practices. Some commentators blame planners’ limited engagement with theorisation of space and place. Others blame the difficulties of disentangling the absolute from the relational space in planners’ imaginaries. Regarding the former, although social theorists, sociologists and cultural geographers have engaged with spatial theories since the middle of the 20th century, planning scholars have been slow and missed a number of opportunities to do so. One historical opportunity came about in the 1920s when Patrick Geddes offered to the utopian idealism of the time an underpinning of social philosophy and a sociological, rather than merely physical, reading of the city. Another was the introduction of systems theory which led to the so called ‘paradigm shift’ in planning in the 1970s. The shift had two dimensions: one was the positivist view of space and place and the other was the perception of planning (and policy making in general) as a rational process. While the former is about the object of spatial planning and relates to the ‘substantive’ planning theory, the latter relates to ‘procedural’ planning theory and is about the processes of spatial planning and the role of planners in it. Although the rational planning process attracted considerable criticisms from planning theorists (discussed below), the positivist view of spatiality crept almost uncritically into planning thoughts and practices. This led to decades of theoretical disengagement with spatial theories and a disjunction in the development of planning thoughts and practices in which “a predominantly positivist planning content stands alongside an emerging poststructuralist planning process” (Davoudi, 2009:242). A more recent example of a missed opportunity in the UK was when “critical thinking about space and place as the basis for action or intervention” (RTPI, 2004:1) was misinterpreted as re-introducing physical design into planning rather than a conceptual engagement with relational space. Therefore, the intellectual and practical challenges of embedding relational space into spatial planning practices have remained under-developed.

The second line of reasoning for the limited uptake of relational space in daily spatial planning practices highlights the necessary entanglement of relational and bounded (territorial) space. While the boundedness is temporary, contingent and always becoming, it

nevertheless produces powerful spatial imaginaries and shape the ways in which relations are understood and acted upon. Cochrane and Ward (2012:7), therefore, argue that,

“Policy making has to be understood as both relational and territorial; as both in motion and simultaneously fixed, or embedded in place. The conventional distinction that is often made between the two misses the extent to which each necessarily defines and is defined by the other”

A similar argument is put forward by Passie and Zimmerbauer (2016:90) who suggest that,

“Despite the new planning lexis accentuating fluidity, fuzziness, and connectivity, neither the networks of governance nor the planning itself are able to escape the penumbra of the politico-administrative units. [...] Relational and territorial should therefore be viewed not as entirely commensurable categories, but as sometimes, but not always, mutual and intertwining, contextual, dynamic, and contested dimensions in planning practices”.

Communicative and collaborative planning

The second theoretical contribution to the spatial turn in planning came from the *communicative* conceptualisation of planning processes. Procedural planning theories have a long history dating back to the introduction of systems theory into planning in the 1970s and its subsequent criticisms. Systems theory introduced scientism to the understanding of not only space and place, but also policy making itself (Taylor, 1998). It conceives of planning as a rational process of decision making in which technical experts follow a cycle of logical steps to reach an optimal rational decision. The critics of rational instrumentalism were quick to highlight the mismatch between how decisions *ought to* be made with the disjointed, incremental and partial processes which characterise how decisions *are* actually made in practice (Lindblom, 1959). They argue that the ‘messy’ world of planning does not match the neatly defined and sequential steps of comprehensive rational planning in which planners are portrayed as value-neutral and objective experts (Davoudi, 2006). In the 1990s, a new wave of criticisms of rational planning emerged which although was inspired by multiple sources of philosophical inspirations it shared a common affinity to Jürgen Habermas’ communicative action. Planning theorists drew on Habermasian deliberative democracy and pragmatist tradition to develop the communicative / collaborative planning theory (CPT) which by the 2000s dominated planning literature and discourses.

At the heart of CPT is Habermas’ deliberative democratic response to an age old question: how to reconcile competing agendas, contrasting interests, conflictual objectives and aspirations of different factions of the governed and the governing in liberal democracies (Horowitz, 2013)? Habermas’ response is to establish a system of governance whose aim is to achieve consensus, not through trade-offs and compromises but through convergence of preferences towards a socially optimal decisions. Such convergence would be achieved through argumentation and opinion / will formation in the public domain. To make such deliberation and consensus possible he advocates ‘communicative action’ defined as: “freedom of access, equal rights to participate, truthfulness on the part of participants, absence of coercion in adopting positions, and so on” (Habermas, 1993:31). This ‘ideal speech situation’ would arguably enable participants to work together “in a cooperative search for truth, where nothing coerces anyone except the force of the better argument”

(Habermas, 1990:198). In this rational argumentation process “ear, voice and respect” are guaranteed for all participants (Dryzek, 1990) who themselves are not “primarily oriented to their own individual successes”. Instead they “pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions” (Habermas, 1984: 286). The consensus achieved in this way has ‘a rational’ basis because the ‘reflexive’ participants are able to “overcome their, at first, subjectively based views in favour of a rationally motivated agreement” (Habermas, 1987: 315). By minimising what Habermas (1984) calls ‘communicative distortions’ (such as acts of manipulation or misinformation), the power of ‘better argument’ prevails and participants are able to “make sense together” (Forester, 1989:119), create a “shared language” (Healey, 1997), act in a “shared-power-world” (Bryson and Crosby, 1992) and reach consensus.

Drawing on these ideas, CPT has criticised the instrumental rationality of modernist planning in which reasoning is based on scientific, empiricist knowledge. Instead, it has promoted communicative rationality in which reasoning is generated reflexively through intersubjective argumentation and deliberation. The normative aim is to democratise spatial planning processes by empowering the discourse communities and values that are excluded from the decision making around a particular place. The role of a communicative planner is that of a broker, a mediator, or a ‘critical friend’ who enables the process of consensus building. Planners are seen as “arbiters of normative standards and guardians of value” (McGurik, 2001:198). Their ultimate aim is to remove power and conflict so that consensual “ways of thinking, ways of valuing and ways of acting” (Healey, 1997:29) can be created. The influence of CPT in defining spatial planning is evident in the writings of both its proponents and critics for whom the essence of spatial planning is its participatory processes. As regard For example, Albrechts (2006:1152) argues that, “strategic spatial planning is [...] a set of concepts, procedures, and tools” for achieving “desirable outcomes”. It is “as much about processes, institutional design, and mobilization as about the development of substantive theories”. The emphasis on process is also evident from a study of Italian strategic spatial plans, Sartorio (2005:36) concludes that they refer “primarily to the process and that somehow the spatial dimension [...] has disappeared”. Similarly, its critics suggests that, “the failure to find evidence (of spatial planning) in practice is the outcome of the normative direction of the work (referring to CPT) and weaknesses in the theoretical underpinnings of this approach” (Newman, 2008:1372).

Critiques of communicative planning

Critiques of CPT have been diverse focusing on its: theoretical grounding (Huxley, 2000), idealistic perspective (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998; Gunder, 2003), normative prescriptions (Fraser, 1990), separation of rationality, knowledge and power (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Ploger, 2004), attempts to reason away powers, interests and inequalities (McGurik, 2001; Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2014), presupposed consensus which risks becoming “an instrument of discipline and a rather unbearable group pressure” (Foucault, 1986:247), portrayal of planners as “people of good-will [...] blessed with unusual reflexivity and insight into the constraints on their own and other people’s understandings and actions” (Huxley, 2000:376) and confinement of communicative action domain to opinion formation in everyday life which is assumed to be outside the system and the state (ibid).

Despite their diversity, these criticisms share an emphasis on theoretical and practical *impossibilities* of creating an ideal speech situation in which communicative rationality prevails and consensus emerges. Adding to these is a more radical critique of Habermas’

communicative action by scholars such as Chantal Mouffe and those drawing on Jacques Lacan. They question not just the *possibility* of consensus building, but also its *desirability*. Mouffe challenges the power-blind model of deliberative democracy and argues that the idea of “dissolving” power relations “through a rational debate” is not only illusive, it can also “endanger democratic institutions” (Mouffe, 2000: 17). This means that the problem with communicative action is not just that it cannot be delivered but that it is harmful to liberal democracy if it is pursued. Because “every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power”, and “it always entails some form of exclusion” (ibid).

Referring to the contested nature of politics and the political, Mouffe (2005:73) questions the ideal of a consensus-based politics and argues that “there is no consensus without exclusion, no we without a they, and no politics is possible without the drawing of a frontier”. She, therefore, advocates a form of ‘agonistic pluralism’ which keeps the democratic contestation alive and acknowledges “the dimension of undecidedability and the ineradicability of antagonism, which are constitutive of the political”. In this way, democratic citizenship can be envisioned by putting “the emphasis on the type of *practices* not the forms of *argumentation*” (Mouffe 2000:21 original emphasis). Thus, a consensus-oriented democracy risks becoming radically undemocratic because the search for consensus risks the evacuation of the political, de-politicisation of particulars, elimination of genuine political space for disagreement and contestation, renouncement or displacement of social conflicts, and foreclosure of “proper political framing” (Swyngedouw, 2010:2019). To avoid this, critics argue for the creation of agonistic arenas (Hillier, 2003), for “radical politicisation of planning”, and for “a reorientation of planning theory from normative to a political basis” (McGuirk, 2001: 214).

It is worth stressing that although CPT has been influential in defining spatial planning, the two are not the same. Some recent critiques of spatial planning tend to conflate it with CPT (e.g. Allmendinger and Haughton, 2011). This not only ignores the contribution of spatial theories to the revival of spatial planning. It also perpetuates the over-emphasis on procedural aspects of planning and undermines its substantive aspects. Although, like relational space, communicative planning uses the poststructuralist language of fluidity, difference and place specificities, it should not be confused with spatial theories. Because, the former is essentially a normative prescription about *how to* do planning, while the latter is a substantive theory about the object of planning. As Huxley and Yftachel (2000: 334) suggest,

“The communicative planning field [...] shares [...] a tendency to see planning as a mainly procedural field of activity [...]. There is the same sense of searching for the right decision-rules be they rational-comprehensive or rational-communicative, universal or local”.

In fact, the two theories are so far apart that Harvey was surprised to see that CPT has taken its inspiration from Habermas because, "Habermas has, in short, no conception of how spatio-temporalities and 'places' are produced and how that process is integral to the process of communicative action and of valuation" (Harvey,1996:354).

Neoliberalisation of spatial planning

“The saying goes that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Planning theorists should therefore not ignore critique suggesting that their well-intentioned

reforms are being transformed and perverted by economic-political forces only to end up making society less rather than more democratic” (Sager, 2005: 7).

The history of planning is not short of examples of “the high-sounding ideals of planning theory” being “translated to grubby practices on the ground” (Harvey, 1985:184). Spatial planning ideals appear to have followed such a destiny. There is a growing evidence from various parts of the world (Cerreta et al, 2010; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2011; Murry and Neill, 2011; Olesen and Richardson, 2011; Van den Boeck, 2008; Waterhout *et al*, 2013) that shows how the progressive ideas which underpinned the revival of spatial planning have been “hijacked and misused to promote neoliberal models of spatial development” (Olesen, 2014: 289). In attempts to understand why and how spatial planning has become a carrier of neoliberal agendas, commentators have drawn on the above mentioned critiques of its theoretical contexts and particularly the CPT. It is argued that neoliberalisation of spatial planning is manifested in a) the shift in the purposes and values of planning, and b) the depoliticisation of the planning processes, with the latter enabling the former.

In many western countries spatial planning was a constitutive part of the post-war welfare state and its social democratic ideals. It was born out of the belief in governments’ right and duty to intervene in and regulate the free markets and use redistributive measures to seek efficiency, equity and socio-spatial cohesion. The purpose of planning was, therefore, to regulate the land and property markets, counteract their negative social and environmental impacts, and improve the quality of places and people’s lives. These social democratic intensions, however, were crowded by the formulaic routines, bureaucratic procedures and the shoehorning of diverse identities into universal prescriptions. In the midst of a widespread disillusionment with these overpowering tendencies, the revival of spatial planning was celebrated from across the political spectrum. However, the motivations for change and the prescriptions for the way forward differed considerably. Those drawing on relational spatiality and communitive planning were advocating a more creative, imaginative, transformative and democratic planning, while those with neoliberal mentalities were seeking further market freedom and toothless planning systems. For them, the purpose of planning is not to regulate the market and correct its failures and its excessive socio-spatial injustices but to enable it, to pave the way for it, and to become the delivery mechanism for pro-market strategies.

Despite their radically different motivations, it appears that the progressive critiques of land use, regulatory planning have been unintentionally aligned with neoliberal strategies and unwittingly provided the intellectual grounding for their regressive agendas. As mentioned above, neoliberalisation of spatial planning has been rolled out in many countries, albeit in different forms and with different intensity and speed. For example, in Nordic countries a “hybrid between traditional welfare state spatial planning ideas and growth-oriented neoliberal strategic planning approaches” is emerging (Olesen, 2014: 289; Ahlqvist and Moio, 2014; Andersen and Pløger, 2007; Galland, 2012; Mäntysalo and Saglie, 2010). However, perhaps nowhere the alignment between the progressive and regressive agendas was as pronounced as in the UK. Here, the collaborative planning’s emphasis on consensus mapped conveniently onto government’s ‘joined-up’ approach to policy and ‘Third Way’ approach to politics. The former echoed the definition of spatial planning as an integrative activity yet, one whose purpose was to enable and deliver market growth. The latter promoted a form of politics which like communicative action aimed at achieving consensus among traditionally opposite political perspectives by bringing them under a ‘big tent’ in the centre. Such alignments were probably helped by the fact that the structuration theory of Anthony

Giddens, a key intellectual advocate of the Third Way politics, provided an influential input into some accounts of CPT (e.g. Healey, 2007). The CPT's emphasis on consensus, interpreted as a search for win-win solutions to contested planning problems, has unintentionally legitimised the de-politicisation of the planning processes. Therefore, "carefully stage-managed processes with subtly but clearly defined parameters of what is open to debate" (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2011) have been pursued in the name of consensus building. Similarly, the ideals of relational space and its representation in the form of 'fuzzy maps' (Davoudi and Strange, 2009:38) have been misused to "blur or camouflage the spatial politics [...] and depoliticise strategic spatial planning" (Olesen, 2014:297).

Conclusion

The early 2000s witnessed the revival of spatial planning which was triggered by a growing recognition of the significance of place in understanding economic dynamics, environmental sustainability, social justice, and governance practices and processes. This was informed by two theoretical perspectives: one related to the object of planning and the other to the planning process. The former promoted a move from the understanding of space and place as absolute, bounded, fixed and neutral containers of people and activities towards a relational, fluid, contingent and socially constructed spatiality infused with power relations. The latter advocated a move from instrumental to communicative rationality and from exclusive to inclusive planning processes aimed at consensus seeking through deliberative democratic dialogues.

Both the theoretical underpinnings and the implementation of spatial planning in practice have been subject to criticisms. At the theoretical level, in line with a long established trend in planning theory of focusing predominantly on planning processes, CPT has attracted more critiques than relational space. The first wave of critiques focused on the practical impossibility of undistorted communicative rationality and informed consensus formation. The second wave has drawn on post-political literature to stress the undesirability of consensus seeking and communication action. Both have raised concerns about the perceived role of planners as 'super human', well-intentioned mediators and facilitators of deliberations. As regards relational space, Nyseth (2012: 41) summed up the key arguments by suggesting that, "Too much fluidity, or fluidity going 'wild', would mean not only losing control, but also, in a sense, giving up the ambition of steering, which would certainly give other forces more room to manoeuvre".

At the level of practice, the ideals of spatial planning have not lived up to their expectation, and their implementations are increasingly distant from the good intentions of their theoretical underpinnings. Planners find it difficult to translate the relational space into the administrative, legal confines of planning practice. The 'fuzziness' of relational space has become a mechanism for de-politicisation of competing and conflictual territorial claims. Similarly, the desire for collaboration and win-win solution has tended to circumscribe debate and marginalise the politics of place making. The role of planning has changed from the regulator of the market to its facilitator. It is more about delivering economic growth and competitiveness than ameliorating social and environmental injustices. In many ways the consensus seeking collaboration appears to have worked against the idea of relational space as being socially produced through inherently political processes in which planners are part of.

Finally, in criticising spatial planning practices, we should be careful not to ‘throw the baby out with the bathwater’. The term ‘spatial’ provided planners a way of breaking free from the theoretical rigidities of using bounded geographical units and binary concepts such as ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ or ‘local’ and ‘global’. The focus on spatiality has triggered debates about the production of space and the politics of place making. So, there is nothing wrong with ‘spatial planning’ *per se*. Spatiality matters and given that planning is a specifically spatial practice it is deeply embroiled in the politics of place making. Similarly, communicative action has provided an opportunity to challenge the idea of planning as an instrumentally rational process of decision making and advocated inclusive and democratic processes, even though its emphasis on consensus has been used to foreclose political debates. Therefore, the focus of the critique of spatial planning should be on its misinterpretations which a) portray it as a process which disciplines the adversaries towards a consensus and shrink the political space, and b) attempt to replace its social democratic values and purposes with neoliberal agenda of facilitating market transactions. It is the co-option of spatial planning into the dominating neoliberal agendas of economic boosterism and the stripping away of planning’s welfare values which should be the focus of critique.

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