Project and process: A note on two commonly used notions in planning theory

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Abstract

Project and process are two useful notions in planning theory and studies. However, the latter is more common than the former and in its use it seems to be the generic term for anything from routine action to quite innovative events. Not only are there no distinct boundaries between them in the current use, but the former seems to be swallowed by the latter. This is not a mere terminological problem, it is argued, but points at a more general issue in the social sciences on how to understand stability and change. In this note, then, a distinction between projects and process is proposed which is helpful in the analysis of plannin g practice and in the generation of planning theory. The importance of this shift for how to understand sustainbility is also outlined.

Introduction

Planning is all about change, as Friedmann (1987) wrote. Sustainability is also, perhaps ironically, all about change. What the notion of sustainability points at is that we know we have to change, and we even have to change to keep what we find precious. Yet this change is usually considered problematic when dealt with in the social sciences, conceptually in order to explain and normatively in order to recommend implementation. Especially change as problematised in terms of innovation or

creativity is still, in many schools of thought, hard to get a handle on. But clearly, if we are going to study the activity of planning and of how sustainability is folded into our societies, then we probably could use tools which do not have a problem with innovation or creativity.

The endeavour to develop concepts in what I call a human geography of planning projects might prove helpful. A central concern for this perspective comes via Hägerstrand's idea on what the core area of investigation for geography is:

> The aim of the type of core area I have suggested could hardly be to discover adherence to laws in the common sense – we have learned that by now. Rather, it is a question of understanding the principles for how the ideal is deformed by the crowded reality. Seen from this perspective, geography's core area is the study of the struggle for power over existences' and events' admission to space and time. (Hägerstrand, 1986: 43, my translation)

In this sense, geography's core area to investigate is easy to recognise as a central concern in understanding planning practice as well. If we do not strive to understand this, then all efforts at planning theory is in vain. I believe a good starting point to be with the notions of process and project. Interrogating or exploring these two notions brings us to the need to shift the problematisation away from the problem of change to one of stability – the problem of sustainability. It is a proposition made in order to articulate a tiny, but perhaps vital, part of the quest for a re-enchantment of planning theory and 'becoming-planning' (Hillier, 2005) – although the transcendence/immanence vocabulary is not used here as it is not intent on setting up the normative dimensions for planners. This note is at best prescriptive in an epistemological sense: how do we and how should we understand planning practice? What does our tools allow us to do? What happens if we start thinking (and investigating) change as the normal case and non-change, routine, and stability as a special case?

The sense of process

There are at least two common uses of the notion of process in and around planning theory. It can be used as shorthand for anything between standardised mechanics to quite turbulent and/or innovative activities, i.e. from 'due procedure' to 'the messy reality of practice.' The notion is sometimes used synonymously and

sometimes used in contrast with project (sometimes in a confusing mix).[1] On the one hand, process is used to denote a procedural movement in planning, as in 'decision-making process', 'planning process', 'policy process.' Within this use there are the attempts to model the practice of planning – the regulation of, the formalised sign-posts of the path, the checks and balances of creating and implementing plans.

For instance, Allmendinger (2002) proposed a post-positivist typology of planning theory which does away with the dichotomies substantive-process and theory-practice. The former sets itself roughly between 'what to plan?' and 'how to plan?'. Whereas, as Allmendinger argues, a post-positivist perspective states that substantive and procedural theories 'blur into one as they both exhibit prescriptive and analytical elements' – it is simply a false dichotomy (Allmendinger, 2002: 84–86). The proposed post-positivist typology? is a 'socially embedded and historically contingent understanding of planning theory' which works 'in the spirit of the collaborative project that equally tries to tread the path between difference and sameness' (Allmendinger, 2002: 86, 97). Hence the collaborative project of planning theory equipped with this self-reflection implodes into one the 'what and how to plan' as a process of theory and practice: the progress of theorising and practising planning.

Another example of how process is used is Moulaert and Cabaret's (2006) focus upon planning processes and how to conceptualise power relations within them. They identify in many network-based perspectives a silence on the question whether they are normative or analytical in their goal to find a way to describe real-life planning and decision-making processes. To overcome the misapprehension of 'the over-estimated perfectibility of real-life social systems' they argue that the distinction between normative and analytical statements should be clearly made (Moulaert and Cabaret, 2006: 53).

On the other hand, process is also used to describe an effort of implementation, standardisation, or routinisation in practice. Process here has a strong sense of an effort to set up a working order. Here, Gunder and Mouat's (2002) analysis of the effort to handle planning practice under the New Zealand Resource Management Act is illustrative. The act is intended to facilitate an open process of public participation in and its ability to resist proposed development or change in a neighbour-

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[1] At risk of offending the authors highlighted below in this section: this is not an attack on their competence or intellectual rigour. Their work remains informing and fascinating reading. It is merely for practical reasons I have decided to keep the somewhat arbitrary sample within the journal of Planning Theory.

hood or community. In effect, it acknowledges only anticipated objections or manageable resistance and generates a 'bifurcation in democratic process' where only 'well-resourced stakeholders can resist and the less resourced majority cannot' (Gunder and Mouat, 2002: 129). Thus, the shaping of planning into a process of regulated procedures and a predefined set of steps which, because of and at the same time contradictory to its stated aims, tends to exclude most of the possible issues or concerns the plan might raise. Instead of staying true to its program, then, the tendency of the act in action is to shift into an exclusionary practice in order to keep the process governable (Gunder and Mouat, 2002: 130). Thus, enacting and stabilising a process at best counter-productive to its own stated agenda, at worst a sinister device to strip planning practice of its innovative character by diminishing the amount of possible objective actors.

Similarly, Albrechts (2003) tells the story of the new strategic plan in Flanders, the Spatial Structure Plan Flanders. Here the activity intended to set up a procedural regularisation of how to plan is analysed, an activity which in turn entailed anchoring the new plan among decision and opinion makers. This activity does not run smoothly: the new plan is an institutional innovation and hence not without antagonists among various actors such as politicians, mass-media, and so on. Tellingly for the reasoning in this note, the activity to ready the plan is interchangeably called a process and a project (e.g. Albrechts, 2003: 253–257).

Process is hence used as a generic notion for anything that develops, takes shape, for particular events, for innovation, but also for routine movement and procedure in planning theory. Given the variety of use, the problem seems to be that the notion is as blunt as 'interaction' or 'institution'; it is mostly too general, too wide, too vague and all encompassing (cf. Becker, 1998). We could compare it to the contemporary use of sustainability – sustainable being the ability to maintain something at a certain level or ratio, that is, to stabilise an organisation – which Taylor (2003) claims to be a key concept in urban planning theory and practice. In arguing for a precision and clarity in the use of key concepts, Taylor's point is that sustainability in many uses 'licenses all manner of things' to count as sustainable development (Taylor, 2003: 97). Seems like we have a similar problem with the key concept of process. Could this confusion be solved or somewhat clarified with a better understanding of the concept of project?

A practical use of projects

But wait a minute. As with the notion of sustainable development, why shouldn't process merely mean an unfolding event, a progression in whatever way? Maybe there is no acute problem in the use of process and project in planning studies? Maybe their usability and ubiquity derives from this fuzzy use: once the studied events or activities become detailed analysis the fog is cleared and phenomena find their conceptual hinges, lending themselves to discussion and knowledge production. Maybe they are best kept as 'porridge words,' since these types of words, according to de Bono (1971), make us very agile in our practical, everyday thinking. But if my query and the claim that they are actually different porridges is legit, then there are also ontological and epistemological issues in the wake of such an articulation.

What I believe the problem of the various senses of process above points at is a particular trouble in planning theory, and in general for the social sciences, in how to conceptualise and understand creativity and innovation. It seems important since there has been and still is a struggle to 'processualise' the social sciences away from snapshots and freeze-frames, towards embracing becoming places and planning (cf. Hillier, 2005; Wallerstein et al., 1996). The problem has bearing on what Becker (1998) identified as the conceptions of action and development in the 'mechanic' metaphors in the social sciences. A mechanic conception works 'best when the social world acts in a very repetitive way, delivering essentially similar products by following a systematic procedure, no matter how complicated that might be…' (Becker, 1998: 40–41).

So, how can we distinguish conceptually between process and project? To give a more precise sense to the intuitive use of them we need to know how to sort out what qualifies as a project and what as a process. I propose the use of project as a shorthand for experimental intention: innovation and the collective design or shaping of for example an institution, a place, a policy, a building, a curricula. I propose process to be used for fairly predictable events or trajectories, with or without readily identifiable enunciators. The distinction between process and project can be seen as a tension between the figures of Daedalus and Sisyphus: the figure of Daedalus, on the one hand, literally stands for creativity, invention, and craft. Sisyphus, on the other hand, although shrewd, connotes an endless and vain repetitive action, routine and measurable events.

Screwdrivers and black boxes

If the distinction is to be of any use, then we have to ask: what qualifies if a practice or a gesture is innovative or not? We might do well in borrowing the answer from science and technology studies, where the study of how innovations are made is a central topic. Innovation does not run according to the calendar or a known market but to the uncertain nature of human and nonhuman actors. Hence there are rarely stable patterns to count on (Akrich et al., 2002a; Latour, 1996). Innovation is here seen as a 'programme of action' where a script is made entailing goals and means, i.e. a change or a modification. The effort of establishing a new programme of action makes up a project, which allow for a wide range of ontological variability – if you follow them without much preconceived ideas on what they should be or behave. Ontological variability can be seen when a project has been running in a certain direction, with certain attachments or elements, suddenly change direction or shifts elements central to the endeavour because of an obstacle (or two, three) that came in its way – a sudden, unanticipated counter-programme changes the project's shape. A counter-programme may include all kinds of obstacles and things that might shut a project down or alter it to an unrecognisable shape compared to the initial script, to force it to make greater or lesser detours. From the project-initiators point of view, even if all the 'big' counter programmes can be accounted for, the problem with innovative projects is that the actors come with a variable geometry – in one situation their argument or counter movement might be irrelevant or quite manageable, in another the very same actor suddenly presents an insurmountable barrier and making the cost of assimilating or neutralising the obstacle high or impossible to pay (Latour, 1996).

The British campaign against the Zulu in the 1870s is a telling event. For all the technical and strategic magnificence of the colonial power, they were halted because of the sudden displaced little banal instrument: they were stuck since it was impossible to open the ammunitions cases without a screwdriver (Englund, 2003). Problem is, to paraphrase the proverb, a small tuft may overturn the load. Whether the planners innovate (as in Albrecht's story on Flanders above) or improvise, there are detours all the time. If there are no detours, then there are no new things. Or the other way around, if everything runs according to plan, then the tracks are already laid and no new surprising things are produced.

Innovative projects, what de Bono (1995) called 'serious creativity' in contrast to the unintentional novelties, are thus far from calculable events: 'A project is called innovative if the number of actors that have to be taken into account is not a given from the outset' (Latour, 1996: 72). When we describe projects this definition of innovation makes process in the sense of procedure – which per definition lacks unscheduled detours – awkward, as '… innovation looks nothing like a linear process consisting of a series of compulsory stages moving, for example, from basic research to development' (Akrich et al., 2002b: 189). That is, there is no way of mapping in advance for innovations, because the beneficent or obstructing actors – allies or counter programmes – are not a priori fixed in size or effect. Any actor with the intention of planned action (even if trying to processualise) is caught in the necessity of dealing with conflict, compromise, and entanglement of a multitude and unpredictable number of other actors (some seemingly stronger, some seemingly docile) as long as they want to change any given order of things.

How then could we characterise process? We can keep the notion of process for due procedure, provided we limit and stay somewhat consistent to this sense. Processes are dependent on provisional orders of fixes and flows. They are perhaps best seen as sedimentation, mechanisms for sorting things out under fairly stable but provisional conditions (De Landa, 2003). That is, they become input-output mechanics which are fairly predictable causal relations describable with the mechanic-metaphor. Here there are commonly black boxed effects, the workings of the 'cogs' and 'wheels' are hidden under a smooth surface of taken for grantedness.

Not a dualism

As conceptual, technical notions, it would be wrong to use processes and projects as a new dualism. They are two aspects of becoming. The roots of 'practice' – to perform, to carry out; to fold and unfold, if we were talking with Deleuze (1991) – is stronger than the sense of process: it is open for both project and process. The argument is similar to de Landa's on strata and meshworks: in reality it is hard to find pure states of either one and we would loose the sense of how they generate each other (De Landa, 2003). The antonym to process is stasis, not project – but they still point at different kinds of activities.

The point being that one might draw on the other to work. They are not mutually exclusive or clear-cut defined from each other. (While this may not contribute to the precision of the notions, one could say that there are degrees of them.) To-

gether they can fold into one another. They can be nested into each other, take over each other. What starts as a process might end up a project. A project within a process might be initiated to keep stabilise the process. And so on. It is an empirical question whether an act, a gesture, is a project or a process at a particular point in space-time. Otherwise it would be like asking whether the world is green or red? To which the baffled person answers: Well, there's probably a lot of nuances in between depending on our ability to name them. But to pre-view the second claim for this note (dealt with below): it seems to be a lot more green than we usually think, still we keep stating a priori that it is predominantly red! The only thing to remember, as place-holders or shorthand, we should not be too quick to designate events, becomings, practices as one or the other.

A simple case of a process or an intention turned into a project can be illustrated by the everyday life activity of commuting to work (for a white, 30-something, male, post-doc, in contemporary Stockholm): after breakfast I make my way to the nearest commuter-train station, which is about seven minutes walking distance. The train takes me almost to the entrance of my work-place and takes about 24 minutes. There is usually a seat available and thus time to pick up on some reading. At the station of my workplace I disembark and walk for three minutes, passing some security checks. Once in my office I log on to my computer, fetch a cup of coffee, perhaps greeting some colleagues, and pick up work where I left it yesterday or prepare for teaching. A smooth path, comfortable and no inconveniences, allowing me to be in focus for my work. Thus, every work-day I mobilise a programme of action drawing mainly on the anticipated support from collective transportation infrastructure.

Alas, too often for my taste this trip turns into a project. There are frequently disruptions along the commuter train line. It is not unusual that I find myself disembarking at an earlier station and try to figure out where the substitute buses are located, if and how they might manage the volume of commuters (now standing in the October rain, muttering, instead of sitting quietly in the sheltering, humming train), trying to decide whether to take a taxi, which the regional public transport company guarantees to reimburse, and, if so, figure out where the taxis are at this station. Again, not uncommonly, the buses are too crowded and trying to stand in line for a bus is in vain since all sense of queuing breaks down. An official might inform us that the trains will start running in five minutes. All the people who hasn't got a place

on the buses or taken a taxi now head back to the platforms, where after some wait-ing (*not* five minutes) a crowded train comes along.

Even if trains, metaphorically, are an epitome of predictability – they do not take a sudden turn instead of following their tracks, they comprise whole systems describable in formal logical notation – these events are crisis and exception. But in Stockholm they are not exceptional, and Italian or French commuters might share this experience. No, the point is, from the perspective of an enunciator (me) stating a program (get to work), a process might suddenly turn into a project. Instead of counting on bits and pieces to carry on as supposed, a situation necessitating make-shift and ad hoc solutions, creativity, ensues. And the other way around: learning how to fly is a project, but piloting an Airbus for a commercial company is process as much as possible. Learning how to cook is a project, but many skills in cooking are processualised – first time with a recipe might be a project, the nth time less of one.

A world on the move

Planning theorists write a lot about the planning process while running the risk of missing the ubiquitous project qualities of this practice. A project is commonly seen as short term, limited, and with a clearly defined goal. But this is no different than a process. A planning process is never free from intention, at the last instance professional planning in the West is still grounded in some idea of public interest or societal well-being (whether in terms of economic growth and/or human-human solidarity). A process never escape the intention of change and has projection. Proc-esses are scripted, that is, they can be de-scribed, as much as anything else. For in-stance, any policy written in a process could be described as a project, since it is an hypothesis on how the world works and how to manage it (whether change it or not).

With the modified definitions we could now state the following: descriptions based or framed as process have a problem with creativity or change, and most clearly with radical innovations. Descriptions based on the project-approach, on the contrary, have no problem with processes in principle. If there are processes in-volved, then they are describable in terms of their mechanics or effects during the course of the project. But it seems counter-productive to assume processes a priori. Why? It has to do with our common view upon the balance of order and change. Or put another way, the second claim here is thus because of the complexity in our col-lective life. Processes are always in the last instance a project of keeping itself up, of keeping it stable – sustainable – in the long run. Rushdie captured it as:

Stability is what's rare. The abnormal, the extreme, the operatic, the un-natural: these rule. There is no such thing as normal life. Yet the every-day is what we need, it's the house we build to defend us against the big bad wolf of change. (Rushdie, 2000: 517)

The quote points at two commonly held convictions, in the social sciences as well as by a general discourse: that the everyday is stability and routine, and that change is frustrating. Yet it also points at the rationale of planning, of creating and stabilising societies through all kinds of artefacts and regulations in order to allow for certain wished for changes and controlled circulation. The problem of change is that this sought for stability is not so stable after all. Or perhaps a bit more complex than to allow an easy label of firmness or fixity. Change is often claimed as a problem to explain in the social sciences as a special case, a special problem of renewal, innovation, redevelopment, reconfiguration, and so on. Because the distinction between process and projects points at a more general problem than one of theory or model of implementation.

Don't we recognise this – the difference between what the model or plan states and all the extra measures needed in order to make it work or risk producing drastically different and unwanted outcomes? That which suddenly turns a supposed process into a project? In development aid technology transfer (de Laet and Mol, 2000; Akrich, 1992). In the everyday management and planning in organisations (Czarniawska, 1999; Dant and Francis, 1998)? In the modernists' grand schemes of housing and city-building and their present condition (Maspero, 1994; Sennett, 1990; Holston, 1989)? In going to work and wondering whether the local public transport will work as planned today? Indeed, in all cases of intention and desired outcome there are more or less externality and contingency.

Let us take the much criticised but in practice stubbornly held idea of rational planning. The epistemology for rational planning in theory can be stated as the following:

For calculative agents to calculate the decisions they take, they must at the very least be able to a) draw up a list of possible world states; b) hierarchize and rank these world states; c) identify and describe the actions required to produce each of the possible world states. Once these actions have become calculable, transactions and negotiations can take place between the different agents. (Callon, 1998: 260)

This operation is rational planning in a nutshell. The ranking of possible world states supposes a set of stable processes or states. But the planners are always more or less in a project situation, in which they or any experts cannot make an issue calculable through the steps of a, b, and c, since there is no stabilised knowledge base when counter-programmes suddenly enter the stage. These unanticipated events are in other words characteristic of a controversy or a technical problem to solve. And here, to prolong the parable of a rational transaction, there is the problem of overflowing or externalities: the calculable situation always reduces the event. That is, the framing necessarily leaves things outside the frame. You can't put the whole thing into it, cannot capture everything on a piece of paper, never escape the betrayal of such a translation. The experts thus become part of the planning problem the instant they are recruited. This has been said quite a lot and the tendency to rely on experts or their models is nowadays commonly denounced as 'instrumental reason' in planning theory. As an aside, we see here a justification of *why* public participation and the mediating role of the planner is necessary, ontologically and not only ideologically (cf. Sandercock, 2003). A planner is not merely the loyal, right hand of the politician or the state, not even if s/he wants to be, since a policy cannot be rolled out or passed on, shift to a different materiality – the physical 'built environment' – without translation between formats, materials, texts, and so on.

The argument here is simple and not particularly new. Is change a problem? No, change is the normal case, not a special problem which social scientists have to tackle after the 'main theory' is composed. Change as a problem theoretically is an effect of social theory itself. There is a difference in trying to understand 'general change' as ontology and trying to understand 'how to change' as human intentional. The former is a problem for the social sciences. The latter is a problem for innovators such as planners in the sorting out of what to keep stable and what to change.

Hence, there is a tendency to base the understanding of societies, or planning, in the process frame. Histories and analysis of planning are many times framed as basically input-output devices, where action and change easily fall into a posteriori rationalisations and where – if it was actually a project to realise a goal[2] – contingencies might disappear altogether, turning into teleological stories. Whereas it might be more useful to base it in the sense of projects.

[2] As Boyer (2000) stated it, that, when dealing with theories of urban design, 'architects tend to introduce a degree of formalism post facto, making ad hoc collections of objects look like informational processing systems.'

For instance, in an exploration of how the ever becoming organisation could be represented by its students, Tsoukas and Chia states that it 'is now realized, across scientific fields, that we are lacking the vocabulary to meaningfully talk about change as if change mattered – that is to treat change not as an epiphenomenon, as a mere curiosity or exception, but to acknowledge its centrality in the constitution of socio-economic life…' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002: 569). Chia (1999) has traced the conceptual deficiency to the Western philosophical roots where the two competing cosmologies providing 'the most general conceptual categories for organizing thought and directing human effort' are the Heraclitean one (all is flux) and the Parmenidean one (the permanent, fixed, and unchangeable nature of true reality): 'The history of Western thought, ever since Plato, has, therefore, been little more than a continuing series of footnote attempts at synthesizing these two great but apparently irreconcilable intellectual traditions' (Chia, 1999: 214). Unfortunately, the Parmenidean mindset has prevailed over the Heraclitean:

> The consequences of this for the direction which management and organizational change theorizing has taken must not be underestimated. Indeed, it has instilled a set of instinctive 'readinesses' … amongst Western management academics to construe organizational change as a 'problem' which needs to be 'managed' (Chia, 1999: 214).

Whereas organisations are better seen as entities or actors striving for stability, for non-change. The problem then is not one of change, intentional or not, but of stability, durability – with or without innovation. The organisation's holding-together of itself. Which might be routine maintenance or innovative problem solving and many detours – but how would we know in advance?

The tendency to do process-based instead of project-based descriptions might have to do with what Serres put as our tendency to misunderstand or confuse time with the measurement of time (Serres and Latour, 1995). Time is not to follow, but to maintain – just like climate is not to follow for us but to maintain, in the present vexes of climate change (Serres, 1992). Time is more vivid than a metronome. This confusion also lends a hand in the representation of an event or phenomena as a frozen cross section, a snapshot, a slice of time and space. Of course, these snippets are easy to organise, reshuffle, and tinker with on a desk. From that, or a series of them, processes are then extrapolated – as when looping bits of music in the software Logic – and a nicely coherent narrative is hammered out. This points at the

social sciences' problem of handling, describing, or dealing with complexity. Generally, we can handle complicated issues quite well – just take the time and sort it out. Complication is still one thing after another, whereas complexity is simultaneity and/or contingency (Latour, 1996: 219). The latter is quite difficult to represent or describe in the linear form of a text (Mol and Law, 2002). And yet this, the dynamics of complexity, is very much the kind of change we would like to capture and account for in planning theory. If we succeed, then we are a lot closer to plausible or accurate representation of planning practice, if not of life (cf. Kwa, 2002; Bauman, 2001).

A similar perspective is also held by practitioners of ANT or 'sociologists of associations,' here contrasted by Latour to sociologies vested in ostensive explanations – the 'sociologies of the social': 'For sociologists of the social, the rule is order while decay, change, or creation are the exceptions. For the sociologists of associations, the rule is performance and what has to be explained, the troubling exceptions, are any type of stability over the long term and on a larger scale' (Latour, 2005: 35; see also Byerley, 2005).

This is not to say that framing in terms of calculability is wrong or a fruitless endeavour.[3] It is merely taking the stance that the situation in which you can calculate is only a special case of reality and an effect of framing in societies.

In most cases, the notion of project allows for a more precise description of planning practice than process. Because planning is about change and innovation by definition: 'If we identify actions rather than decisions as the principal focus of planning practice, then being effective in the world becomes the decisive criterion. Planning that changes nothing of substance is scarcely worth talking about' (Friedmann, 1987: 44). And that which is worth talking about is innovation, by way of Friedmann's definition of action: '… action means to set something new into the world. Goal achievement is not an essential part of it' (Friedmann, 1987: 44). Thus when we study planning practice, we study how planners understand their world, explore it, and modify it. What planners do, in practice, is to zone areas for experimentation, displacing laboratories. Which is not wrong in principle, and it is needed, but in practice it is quite far from the rhetoric of the simple solution of smooth transactions depicted above. We can see this clearly if we, for a moment, compare the practices of scientists and politicians. The former has a laboratory or somewhere

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[3] And this argument is not post-structuralist or even anti-structuralist per se, it merely claims that most structures are still under construction or reconstruction (Law, 2002), never stop evolving or becoming (Hillier, 2005), until they crumble, die and loose any effect they might have had.

they can work to solve problems in a small scale, which allows them to produce devices to introduce to the real problem. Politicians, on the other hand, have no legitimate laboratory and are hence obliged to test solutions 'live' (Latour, 1983). The plan for planners is thus a laboratory in a sense, it can be used to test ideas in a small scale but will never, as for both politicians and scientists, shortcut the trial of space 'out there' (see Robbins, 1997 for an investigation into how architects use drawings to test their designs).

Project inquiries

How can we do this shift to project based understandings and still be relevant to the surrounding society? Won't we loose the ability to project, to anticipate, to tell the practitioners how to optimise their planning? The only answer to this is that we might have to discard our predictive powers in order to gain relevance. A counter-question: how could we 'rationalize' the practitioners work when they still, in any substantial planning, face the trial of space? Why should we try to short-cut their creativity? Of course, planners shouldn't be allowed to use any means, and checks and balances are needed. But that is what we have politics for and also why, we planning students, have to develop resources with which we can accurately deal with projects.

The sections above, in a nutshell, leads to the following: firstly, if we find innovation mysterious and change hard to grasp, then it is because we use a process based description, which does not capture most of planning practice very well. If we find the reality of societal change as a normal case (and stability as a special case) but mysterious and hard to grasp, then this is due to the same but generalised problem. The problem is not change per se but how we represent change, how we investigate it, and how we, in the process-based mode, pre-suppose a general stability. Secondly, if change, creativity, or innovation is the normal case and the planners are trying hard both to stabilise some and change other things, then this means we have to keep (and develope) the ability to describe both process and project. In other words, the central problem could be stated as: what resources can we use to account for planning in practice sensitive enough to deal with projects as well?

An obvious solution is to treat planning as a case of research and development, as a knowledge practice quite simply. If planning claims to be a science (why would it need theory otherwise?), then we could at least study this practice as a 'science in ac-

tion.' That is, we could probably use many of the insights and results, borrow and modify tools and resources, from science and technology studies. In particular, what we could (for now) call an 'epistemology of project inquiries.' Because a planner is a heterogeneous engineer. It is not even an analogy – just substitute 'scientist' and 'engineer' for 'planner' in the following quote and the quote still makes sense:

> Scientists and engineers are bricoleurs. They work by linking bits and pieces together. Heterogeneous bits and pieces. Human and non-human. For instance, they write and revise texts, modify instruments, and redefine social groups. They practise what is sometimes called 'heterogeneous engineering.' (Callon and Law, 1997: 168–169)

What are the (simplified) principles of an epistemology of planning projects? A point to keep on discussing, but for starters let us borrow some lessons learned from science and technology studies.

One lesson is on how not to confuse the commissions. The confusion of proposing procedures ('theory for planners') and understanding how planning is done ('theory of planning practice') is perhaps similar to the problem science and technology studies encountered between 'shop-floor practice' and 'philosophy of science'? After entering the sites where science or innovations are made, they realised that there is a huge gap between the textbook instructions on how to be 'scientific' and how it was actually done (Becker, 1998; Haraway, 2004). Planning theory and the social sciences delivering knowledge for planning keep trying to do prescriptions and how-to-do formulae. And planners seems to keep asking for them (Archibugi, 2004; Sandercock, 2003; Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones, 2002), since the theorists in the social sciences keep producing knowledge on a process base even in instances when a project base would generate a more plausible account.

It might seem a weak proposition at first glance, but the problem is not one of 'mere' descriptions. Rather it is one of framing actors. Planning studies or theory of planning has to avoid 'framing,' avoid reductionism in cutting events and actors into a prescribed typology or set of possibilities. Why circumscribe in advance what actors are capable of? Frameworks to insert an event is clearly counter-productive, because they ascribe or detracts skills and competencies, taken-for-grantedness and possiblities, a priori (see Saunders and Bylund, Forthcoming). Hence the proposed solution is: not to state in advance, too early, too hasty what the planners and their disputes, negotiations, conflicts, problem-solving are made up of. Instead of frame-

works to explain, as they all too easily fall into ostensive explanations, we could do better with performative descriptions of practice without automatic explanatory power.

Which in turn allows for a stronger objectivity. The mainstream social science view on objectivity is a misunderstanding both of objects and subjects. To allow for the investigated to object does not require a dispassionate or disinterested observer . On the contrary: 'Objectivity is not about dis-engagement, but about mutual and usually unequal structuring, about taking risks in a world where "we" are permanently mortal, that is, not in "final" control.' (Haraway, 2004: 95)

One effect of this conceptual modification or clarification is that it might be helpful in the 'power analysis' as advocated by Foucault (Foucault, 1982) and Allen (Allen, 2004), among others. As long as power is misunderstood as something you can collect and pile up, it will lead to, both in investigations on planning's dark and brighter sides, ascribing a priori skills and competencies to planning institutions (e.g. dominance, or an all to easy view on how things get done). With the sense of general stability, 'power' is too easily rendered as a thing to have or not, whereas when order and stability is seen as a special case, an effort, then it is also easier to see power as the hard-work of making (influencing, forcing, teasing) other actors act in a particular way. It opens or allows for a greater sensitivity to how the 'input' of an intention, an effort of 'making do', is translated among quite heterogeneous actors and avoids any teleological or machinic causality too easily refined into recipies or formulas for 'certain actions', actions which effects particular outcomes with certainty. It will also help to reduce the risk of 'automated scapegoating' in planning theory and critique (Sandercock, 2003).

Conclusions

Peter Hall (1996) once commented on urban planning as having come full circle since its 'birth' in the 19th century. However, there is an obvious point to make here: planners have always tried to make things sustainable long before this notion made broad entrance into policy. The main difference from the moment of the 'birth of professional planning' is the vastly greater numbers of things to take into account (in various ways, with various devices and instruments), including the newer uncertainties of ecologies such as climate change or how to deal with diversity. To

better understand how planning and policy implementation works out in the sustainability genre, the notion of projects is more suited than processes.

By using insights from a field of research in which innovation was always a central concern, science and technology studies, it is possible to open up, allow for, and become sensitive to (1) the insight that change is not the problem, the problem is rather how society is modelled or framed in theory; (2) how to operationalise the distinction between project and process to explore and explain events where change is the order of the day.

Why shouldn't we be satisfied with 'process' as the generic notion against snapshots or frozen frames? Because it seems too wide; too much, too easily a 'mechanic' analogy, too close to 'procedure' (from their shared etymological roots in 'precedere'). Planners work to stabilise and destabilise, to say change is not the whole issue. This was not an argument stating nothing is predictable, only that fewer things than generally acknowledged are that certain and how to deal with the urge of fixing the anticipation of outcomes of innovation. It is obvious if we, the students of planning and policy and sustainability, develop tools for seeing stability and robustness as a special cases, and creativity and change as normal ones.

Acknowledgments

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