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Context and Power in Contemporary Planning
Towards Reflexive Planning Analytics

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction 1

2. Critical Analysis of the Communicative Approaches to Planning Theory 2
   A. The Habermasian Stance of the Communicative Approaches 2
   B. Limits of the Communicative Approaches: Context and Power 5
   C. Collaborative Planning: Healey Sophisticates the Communicative Turn 6

3. Towards Reflexive Planning Analytics with Bourdieu and Foucault 8
   A. Bourdieu Recasts Context in Planning Theory 8
   B. Foucault Recasts Power in Planning Theory 13
   C. Reflexive Planning Analytics 15

4. Conclusion 15

Bibliography 17
1. Introduction

Planning is an interventional activity concerned with transformative action that shapes society’s future through perennial recreations of its structures and institutions. In that sense, striving to reconstruct socio-economic and environmental structural configurations using collective capacities for human agency within unavoidably multidiverse societies, its interventions are unquestionably political (Harvey, 2000a; Tewdwr-Jones, 1999). This means that planning is not only a means of social and ecological restructuring action, but also a value-laden political activity within which collective and interactive processes of negotiation take place “between persons seeking to change each other and the world, as well as themselves” (Harvey, 2000a: 235; Healey, 1985; Tewdwr-Jones, 1999). I would argue here (alongside with many others) that, as such its restructuring political practices must be guided by a principle of social justice. This is not saying that other principles, like efficiency, should not be considered as providing essential guidance for transformative action. It does, however, imply a view of planning as an activity primarily orientated to change to world towards a more socially just society. But what does social justice means in the context of planning? What does it entail?

The first utilizations of “normative social justice theory as a guide to planning practice” (Visser, 2001: 1675) were foundationally set in Harvey’s (Social Justice and the City, 1988) attempt to incorporate considerations of social justice to geographical methods of analysis in which, even though the supporting conceptualisation of “a just distribution justly arrived at” (Harvey, 1988: 98) expanded the notion of social justice by providing it with the inescapable political dimension of developmental processes, the framework of analysis was undeniably distributive. In fact, embedded in a “distributive paradigm” (Young, 1990: 16), Harvey’s concept of social justice followed a broader perspective which defined it “as the morally proper distribution of social benefits and burdens among society’s members” (Young, 1990: 16). It is in this wider context that Young’s sophisticated views on social justice emerge in 1990 as profoundly innovative. She displaces the ‘distributive paradigm’ by highlighting its ignorance of the institutional contexts and social structures, and also the limitations of its extended notion of distribution which represents nonmaterial social goods “as though they were static things, instead of a function of social relations and processes” (Young, 1990: 16). Subsequently social justice is conceptualised by Young (1990) as an institutional condition to participate and to overcome oppression and domination through the achievement of self-development and self-determination. This means that, in order to contribute to more socially just urban societies, planning needs to include a preoccupation with, not only patterns of distribution but also “attributes relevant to how these come about” (Smith, 1994: 26).

The main question to planning theory is then the following: how can we envision a way of doing planning that permits us achieve “simultaneously distributional and relational” (Smith, 1994: 26) social justice in cities and regions? Or rather, taking a more critical perspective: is this possible within the dominant view of planning theory and practice? Do communication and collaboration allows us to achieve truly socially just urban societies? In relation to this, I have my doubts. Being strongly influenced by Habermas’ theory of communicative action, the communicative approaches to planning theory and practice do not properly acknowledge either the importance of context or the actual workings of power and therefore cannot successfully contribute to the construction of truly socially just urban societies. Coming back to the main question, I would then argue that Bourdieu and Foucault provide much better indications on how to analyse and transform urban development processes in a way that equality and justice, in the terms I have defined it, can be effectively attained in cities and regions.

Trying to provide theoretical and conceptual evidence to these arguments, this paper is then constituted by two main argumentative moments, one critical and the other productive. The first constitutes a critical analysis of the communicative approaches to planning theory in which is argued that the foundation on Habermas’ social theory misguides them towards a poor
conceputal treatment of both context and power. The second indicates a path towards the recasting of both context and power in contemporary planning theory that runs directly through the projects of Bourdieu and Foucault. It is not intended with this arguments to provide a comprehensive critique of the communicative approaches (not even of their Habermasian characteristics), either it is to propose or defend a particular theoretical view of planning. Instead, the objective is to contribute to the conceptual treatment of both context and power in contemporary planning theory, deconstructing the pillars of the communicative approaches and reconstructing them “as pontoons rather than pillars” (Sandercock, 1998: 169) while pointing a way towards reflexive planning analytics.

2. Critical Analysis of the Communicative Approaches to Planning Theory

Planning, as a pluridimensional “field of endeavour” (Healey, 1997: 7) with “no widely accepted canon” (Campbell and Fainstein, 2003: 1) and a cluttered history of ideas and practices, is intellectually informed by a cohesively fragmented landscape of theoretical traditions (Allmendinger, 2002a). This historical landscape can be perceived as an evolving intellectual stockpile of planning thought in urban affairs: “a store of experience, of myths, metaphors and arguments, which those within the field can draw upon in developing their own contributions, either through what they do, or through reflecting on the field” (Healey, 1997: 7). Dissecting this intellectual stockpile, three main clusters of planning thought traditions can be identified (Safier, 2000): physical, applied and transformative. Each new theoretical approach to planning can then be understood as constituting a circumstantial hybrid formation with a specific bidirectional pattern of intellectual connections with this clustered landscape of traditions (Harris, 2000).

The “communicative turn in planning theory and practice” (Healey, 1992: 143) and the multitude of approaches encompassed by it have Safier’s transformative traditions at the very core of their conceptual connectional pattern (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 2002). As a group of traditions inspired by the postmodernist cultural critique and by the philosophical escape from logical positivism and instrumental reason, the transformative traditions demonstrate a critical concern with public policy and the development processes (Allmendinger, 2002b; Fainstein, 2000; Safier, 2000). This concern provided the primary pointer for the reframing of the “debates over methods and programs to encompass issues of discourse and inclusiveness” (Fainstein, 2000: 451), and consequently triggered the decline of the rational comprehensive model. Rejecting the idea of planning as an expert driven scientific enterprise capable of neutrally coordinate the city as a whole on behalf of a unitary public interest, the communicative turn, facing the political realities of spatial settings, evolved in a profoundly democratic effort to “allow people to shape the places in which they live” (Fainstein, 2000: 472; Forester, 1989; Allmendinger, 2002a). Subsequently, planning is generally perceived as a form of social action: a political activity “though which ways of thinking, ways of valuing and ways of acting are actively constructed by participants” (Healey, 1997: 29; Taylor, 1998). Following such perception, this theoretical turn begins with the “fundamental observation that planning is, above all, an interactive, communicative activity” (Sandercock, 1998: 175).

A. The Habermasian Stance of the Communicative Approaches

The foundational significance given to interaction in contemporary planning theory is intellectually nourished by Jürgen Habermas’ groundbreaking conceptualisation of communicative action. In fact, the communicative turn in planning theory has fundamentally developed around the Habermasian intersubjective rationalisation of society which, in the words of Healey (in Fainstein, 2000: 454), “refocuses the practices of planning to enable purposes to be communicatively discovered” (Allmendinger, 2002b). At the same time, it is the deployment of Habermas’ social theory that is at the core of many of the critiques made to the communicative approaches in planning theory (Mäntysalo, 2005). In that sense, in order to critically analyse these approaches, it is crucial to perform a selective characterisation of Habermas’ theory of communicative action.

Redrawing Modernity through Communicative Action: the Habermasian Project

Perceiving modernity as progressively emancipatory, Habermas discards all intellectual confinements of what he understands to be the “unfinished project of
the Enlightenment” (Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 3). Instead he embarks in a critical analysis of that project and redraws its path towards a universal and rational constitution of society by presenting an elaborate refinement of the ideas of the Frankfurt School (Delanty, 2005). Ideologically located “midway between utopian anarchism and historical materialism” (Friedmann, 1987: 55), this radical school of critical theory was engaged in the emancipatory development of restructuring challenges to the multifaceted capitalist systems of domination and alienation (Harris, 2002). This provided the “critical, analytical and normative” (Huxley, 2000: 371) settings for Habermas’ utopian effort to rebalance the unequal relationship between the dominant system, the structures of political and economic objective order, and the colonised lifeworld, the immediate milieu of personal existence (Habermas, 1987; Healey, 1997).

The intention of Habermas’ project was then to reconstruct the modern public sphere, while preserving the assertion of the “critical-transcendental power of reason to ground claims to truth and to normative rightness” (Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 2). In that sense, in his attempt to rebalance system and lifeworld through a renewed rationalisation of modern society, Habermas seeks to strengthen its democratic foundations by expanding the notion of reasoning from the established instrumental-technical perceptions, to an integrative conceptualisation in which moral and emotive-aesthetic forms are equivalently included (Habermas, 1984; Healey, 1997). This conceptual expansion questions modernity’s reliance on functionalist reason and draws attention to the multitude of forms that different claims can take when shared concerns are discussed in democratic societies (Flyvbjerg, 1998b; Habermas, 1987; Healey, 1997). In the face of such multiplicity, Habermas’ main concern in the rationalisation of modern society was to “reconstitute the public realm through open, public debate” (Healey, 1997: 49).

Sustaining this discursive reconstitution of the public sphere, Habermas presents the notion of intersubjective consciousness as inherent to human beings, who he subsequently defines as homo democraticus: democratic individuals that create “ways of validating claims, identifying priorities, and developing strategies for collective action through interaction, through debate” (Healey, 1997: 53; Flyvbjerg, 1998b). This universal perception of intersubjectivity leads Habermas to reorientate modernity’s focus on subjectivity and to pragmatically “identify and reconstruct the universal conditions of possible understanding” (Habermas, 1996a: 118) in the “intersubjectively shared lifeworld [that] forms the background for communicative action” (Habermas, 1984: 82).

Focusing on “how political communities communicate in public arenas, how participants exchange ideas, sort out what is valid, work out what is important, and access proposed courses of action” (Healey, 1997: 53), the theory of communicative action outlines interactive procedures of collective reasoning based on open communicative exchanges and orientated towards the goal of coming to a mutual rational understanding (Habermas, 1996a; Huxley, 2000). Emphasizing his view of language as “the key normative medium of social interaction” (Delanty, 2005: 279), this mutual understanding is perceived by Habermas as a “discursively and collectively achieved” (Huxley, 2000: 370) form of rationality, which he terms communicative rationality, “the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjectively views and in favour of a rationally motivated agreement” (Habermas, 1984: 10).

Operationalising his ideas in order to guarantee the “discursive redemption of [the] normative claims to validity” (Habermas, 1996b: 187) that constitute that argumentative speech, Habermas puts forward the principle of discourse ethics and provides the practical discourse, a “procedure for testing the validity of norms that are being proposed and hypothetically considered for action” (Habermas, 1996b: 187). Not providing substantive guidelines, this procedure purely entails that participants must presuppose certain procedural requirements, a set of commonly agreed criteria designed to “guarantee the impartiality of the process of judging” (Habermas in Flyvbjerg, 1998b: 189; Habermas, 1996b). In that sense, communicative exchanges are required to assure the linguistic validity of the different claims involved through four main criteria: comprehensibility, truth, legitimacy and sincerity (Ashenden et al, 1999; Flyvbjerg, 1998b; Wolter, 2000).

However, practical discourse cannot guarantee the required non-coercive intersubjective understanding. In fact, as Habermas is clearly aware, communicative
rationality is persistently subverted by the dominant systems in modern societies and as such constitutes an idealised type of rationality (Flyvbjerg, 1998b). Nevertheless, deeming it unavoidable and universally inherent in human social relations, Habermas perceives this consensus-bringing force as a privileged conceptual platform to coordinate political action and to promote social change through the argumentative unconstrained construction of consensus (Flyvbjerg, 1998b).

In that sense, he deems that the achievement of communicative rationality requires processes that, “identifying sources of systematically distorted communication” (Huxley, 2000: 370), aim at ideal speech situations, or “unlimited communication [communities]” (Ashenden and Owen, 1999: 5) in which “self-reflexive, communicatively competent, and rational human subjects can achieve consensus” (Huxley, 2000: 370). These aimed ideal speech situations are not conceptualised as a possible reality, but as critical positions “with which to evaluate instances of governance interaction” (Healey, 2003: 110). Following that, the validity and truth of decisions and actions determined by rational argumentation in cooperative constructions of consensus can be critically assessed in relation to the ideal speech situation, “where nothing coerces anyone except the force of the better argument” (Habermas in Flyvbjerg, 1998b: 188). In the Habermasian ideal, consensual agreement is then exclusively dependent on “the public and nonviolent strength” (Rundell in Huxley, 2000: 370) of the different valid claims involved in the debate.

Habermas’ effort to redraw the project of the Enlightenment and to rebalance the relationship between system and lifeworld is then based on a tension between rationalities. In his view, the system, driven by instrumental rationality, colonises the lifeworld of intersubjective rationalities, distorting communication efforts and ensuing social pathologies (Delanty, 2005). Nevertheless, Habermas argues that “the lifeworld has the capacity to resist colonisation by the system” (Delanty, 2005: 281) through the deployment of practical discourse that aims at the ideal speech situation where the force of the better argument determines the revolutionary grounds of a strengthened rationality, communicative rationality.

**Planning Theory: Incorporating Habermas through Communicative Rationality**

The tension between rationalities that animates the Habermasian project is assimilated by the communicative approaches to planning theory during their underlying critique of system’s instrumentality, and their profound reliance on lifeworld’s inherent intersubjectivity as an elementary prerequisite for the transformation of systemic inequalities within cities and regions (Huxley, 2000; Sandercock, 1998, 2003). In that sense, the notion of communicative rationality works as a primary conceptual hub in the theoretical incorporation of Habermas’ social theory by the communicative approaches. In fact, relying on agreements argumentatively attained in public deliberative forums, the communicative processes of decision making in urban affairs are fundamentally founded on this crucial notion of intersubjectively and politically achieved rationality (Forester, 1989; Huxley, 2000; Wolter, 2000).

Following Habermas’ expansion of the notion of reason, the communicative approaches perceive all forms of knowledge as being socially constructed within specific contexts of human interaction and as such recognise that “the knowledge of science and the techniques of experts are not as different from ‘practical reasoning’ as the instrumental rationalists had claimed" (Healey, 1997: 29; Forester, 1989). Subsequently, and acknowledging that people’s interests and expectations over spatial and environmental matters are substantially diverse, these approaches to planning theory seek to reconstitute public policy making that is “concerned with managing co-existence in shared places” (Healey, 1997: 29) through contextual social processes of “making sense together” (Forester, 1989: 119) in participatory interaction and dialogue (Wolter, 2000). In resemblance with Habermas’ theory of communicative action, these are conceived as general processes of collective transformative reasoning in which uncoerced consensual agreements are politically constructed between all different stakeholders and interest groups, in an attempt to rationally co-ordinate their spatially bounded actions (Forester, 1989; Healey, 1997; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 2002).

In what concerns the operationalisation of these practices of interactive consensus-building, the
communicative approaches acknowledge that “the development and communication of knowledge and reasoning take many forms” (Healey, 1997: 29) and therefore utilise the Habermasian general principle of discourse ethics in order to “transcend the relativism of different perspectives” (Healey, 1997: 53) and to ensure fairness and impartiality in the decision making (Huxley, 2000; Watson, 2003). But like Habermas, admitting that practical discourse alone cannot assure the intended non-coercive character to the mutual agreements, the communicative planning theorists do their utmost to “make sure all the major points of view are heard and not only those of the most articulate or powerful” (Sandercock, 2003: 67; Forester, 1989, 1999). In fact, recognising that “relations of power have the potential to oppress and dominate not merely through the distribution of material resources, but through the finegrain of taken-for-granted assumptions and practices” (Healey, 1997: 29), the communicative approaches intend to anticipate and recreate those structural power relations by “paying attention to imbalances of information [and] to lack of representation” (Sandercock, 2003: 67) during planning practices with an abstract analytical aspiration to Habermas’ undistorted speech situation (Forester, 1989; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 2002; Watson, 2003). In that sense, by allowing “differences between actors to occur only at the level of speech and ideas” (Watson, 2003: 398), it is expected that the force of the better argument can be utilised “to challenge established power relations and transform material conditions” (Strömgren, 2004: 14) of cities and regions.

B. Limits of the Communicative Approaches: Context and Power

In their Habermasian quest for communicative rationality the planning approaches under analysis demonstrate several conceptual restrictions. Despite their many limitations, two interlinked concepts seem to receive a fairly poor conceptual treatment in almost all the approaches: context and power. In fact, the communicative approaches are constantly criticised for directing insufficient attention to the contextual settings of planning practices and for addressing inadequately the question of power in their theoretical insights. It is argued here that both these characteristics are directly inherited from their Habermasian foundation.

The Treatment of Context in the Communicative Approaches

In its fierce struggle against substantive moral exhortations, the Habermasian communicative turn took planning theory in a universalising ethnomethodological journey that led it to generalised normative positions with a “substantively vacuous focus on the planning process” (Lauria and Whelan, 1995: 9; Huxley: 2000; Watson, 2003). Consequently, the communicative approaches can be perceived, through Harvey’s (2000: 174) critical lenses, as “utopias of social process” that “are literally bound to no place whatsoever and are typically specified outside of the constrains of spatiality altogether”, and which subsequently “lose sight of the important interconnections between individuals, institutions, and society” (Lauria and Whelan, 1995: 19). In fact, the overuse of agency micro-interpretative methodologies and the development of a general procedural ethic aiming at ideal speech between allegedly social competent actors and promoted by planners with a suspicious “special claim on disinterested morality” (Fainstein, 2000: 456), undermines the critical position of planning theory in relation to the circumstantial strengths of wider economic, institutional and social relations, and the specificity of local conditions and effects (Fainstein, 2000; Huxley, 2000; Huxley and Yiftachel 2000).

As it is manifest in Forester’s (1989) foundational project, despite the acknowledgement of the importance of these structural constrains, the communicative approaches to planning concentrate on Habermas’ theoretical legacy, portraying it “as an unproblematic global activity, adhering to (…) [a] logic of communicative rationality wherever it is found” (Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000: 336).

However, given that “the particularity of the body cannot be understood independently of its embeddedness in socio-ecological processes” (Harvey, 2000a: 16), constraints and opportunities for individual agency derive from the highly contextual and specific circumstances of their broader settings (Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000). As Huxley (2000: 372) points out, “the situatedness and embeddedness of human life in history, custom, and tradition create conditions (…) that are contingent and beyond individual or collective will”. In that sense, Lauria and Whelan (1995), demanding the reintegration of urban political economy and contemporary planning theory, argue that those circumstances shape what
Healey (2003: 109) calls “the windows of opportunity through which active agents can innovate”, and therefore defend that planning theory cannot be solely concerned with interpersonal politics and unstructured discursive agency. In a political economy perspective, these concerns have to be conceptually articulated with the multiscaled structures of prevailing capitalist economic hierarchies (Lauria and Whelan, 1995; Harvey, 2000a). From a complementary theoretical position, the postmodernist school emphasises the crucial importance of “other forms of oppression, domination and exploitation, such as those based on gender, race, ethnicity and sexual preference” (Sandercock, 1998: 173) on the conceptual structurations of contexts of planning practices (Allmendinger, 2002a; Oranje, 2002).

**The Treatment of Power in the Communicative Approaches**

Downplaying contextual and specific circumstances in planning practices, the communicative approaches cannot adequately recognize the operation of power in the multiplicity of planning endeavours. In fact, the tendency to conceptualise planning as a normative and procedural activity that promotes idyllic Habermasian public spheres undermines the importance of the contexts of governance and consequently neglects the realities of power and inequality in which all societal processes of transformation are unequivocally enmeshed (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002; Fainstein, 2000; Huxley, 2000). As Fainstein (2000: 455) points out, "when the ideal speech situation becomes the objective of planning (…) its proponents seem to forget the economic and social forces that produce endemic social conflict and domination by the powerful".

In perceiving power as a repressive and outer distorting force, the Habermasian communicative turn in planning theory confines its understanding of power “to the system and specifically the hierarchical powers of the state and bureaucracy” (Huxley, 2000: 372; Mäntysalo, 2005). In fact, in a “Habermasian leap of faith” (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002: 46), the communicative approaches believe on the absence of power from lifeworld’s communicative rationality. This is not to say that the importance of power in planning is not acknowledged in the communicative approaches. In fact, as it has been pointed out and Forester’s conceptual work “in the face of power” (1989, 1999) well exemplifies, power is one of the central issues in many of these approaches. Nevertheless, under a characteristically Habermasian view, their conceptual treatment of power is often blatantly idyllic as “consensus-seeking and freedom from domination” are generally perceived to be “universally inherent in human conversation” (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002: 47; Huxley, 2000; Mäntysalo, 2005).

However, “discourses and practices of power are continuous with the social” (Huxley, 2000: 372) and as so, real oppressions occur within the lifeworld. Communication is in reality “characterised by non-rational rhetoric and maintenance of interests” (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002: 47) and rationality in the communicative approaches is therefore “often determined by power” (Yiftachel and Huxley, 2000: 910). In that sense the understanding of power held by the communicative approaches to planning theory is meaningless, insufficient and unfruitful (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002; Mäntysalo, 2005).

**C. Collaborative Planning: Healey Sophisticates the Communicative Turn**

Within the vast array of approaches encompassed by the communicative turn in planning theory, Patsy Healey’s (1997) elaborate conceptualization of collaborative planning represents a conspicuous sophistication which attempts to step beyond the Habermasian rationale of the communicative approaches by using Anthony Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory as a primary theoretical foundation (Healey, 2003).

In this renewed approach to social theory, Giddens combines interactionist and phenomenologist thinking with structural functionalism, emphasising the importance of social life sustained by individual human actors in continuous interaction, while it draws attention to the functional operation of interdependent systems and structures in the study of society (Giddens, 1984; Healey, 1997; King, 2005). His domain of study is then “neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time” (Giddens, 1984: 2). In that sense, discarding any views of structure “as ‘external’ to human action, as a source of constraint on the free initiative of the independently constituted subject” (Giddens, 1984: 16), he argues that the relation between structural forces and active human agency is recursive and mutually
constitutive (Giddens, 2004; Healey, 2003). Under this view, the culturally-bound structures of rules and resource flows, working through the relational webs within which we live our lives, are constantly reshaped by the knowledgeable activities of situated human agents, just as they in turn continuously change ourselves and our cultures, drawing upon those rules and resources in diverse institutional contexts (Giddens, 1984; Healey, 1997). Giddens is therefore concerned with “studying the modes in which [social systems] (...) are produced and reproduced in interaction” (Giddens, 1984: 25).

This intellectual redesign of the relation between structure and agency inspired Healey to take collaboration beyond the agency centeredness of communicative practices and motivated her to delineate “an institutionalist approach to spatial change and environmental planning” (Healey, 1997: 31; Watson, 2005). In that sense, under this approach, the communicative works of active social constructivism are conceptually interlaced with the powerful structuring forces of wider social, economic and institutional settings, which therefore are understood to be relentlessly (but not determinably) implicated in interactive “relation-building processes” (Healey, 1997: 57) as they are “present in, and actively constituted through, the social relations of daily life” (Healey, 1997: 57, 2003). The objective of Healey’s approach to planning theory is then to provide a framework to understand the unbalanced conflictual encounters between the culturally and structurally embedded relational networks which transect the urban “with their own time horizons and spatial reach” (Healey, 2000: 519), and to operate on the possibility of generating social dynamics through interactive governance processes aimed at sustain or transform those networks (Healey, 1997, 2003). Collaboration in spatial and environmental planning can then be perceived as the effort of (inter)actively shaping specific urban and regional dynamics, forging the institutional capacity of a place while building up the interconnectedness of disparate relational networks to accommodate shared concerns about local environments (Healey, 1997; Huxley, 2000). In a Habermasian tradition, it consequently relies on interactive processes to “[maintain and enhance] the qualities of places and territories” (Healey, 2003: 104).

Being strongly committed to this institutionalist approach to spatial change and environmental planning, Healey readjusts the normative position of communicative planning while explicitly informs its treatment of context and power (Watson, 2005). In fact, perceiving the inevitability of having to deal with the wider structural forces of contemporary cities, Healey becomes “deeply interested in the interaction (...) between structuring driving forces and what people do in specific episodes of governance” (Healey, 2003: 109). However, her uniform view of this bidirectional constitutive interaction downplays the significance of the theoretical insights on structuring processes in urban regions. Relying on the “creative power of local agency” (Healey, 2003: 105), Healey perceives the “innovations [that] are occurring all the time in the fine grain [of the daily routines, discourses and practices of governance]” (Healey, 2003: 109) to “have the potential to challenge the driving forces to which local initiatives find themselves subject” (Healey, 2003: 109). Furthermore, this bidirectional conceptualisation of the relation between structure and agency “provided [her] with a window on the social embeddedness of power relations” (Healey, 2000: 106). Under the conceptualisation of collaborative planning, the multileveled working linkages between the relational networks in our social worlds are invariably penetrated by power relations in a continuous “dialectic and ‘restless’ flux, due to struggles in various arenas at various levels at once” (Healey, 2003: 113) which, in Healey's view, grants considerable potential to argumentation and critical reflexivity (Healey, 2003). In that sense, collaborative planning works within interactively constructed contexts to promote strategic consensus-building through 'quality' inclusionary argumentation, which ensures governance processes (and outcomes) that are not only fair and just, but also empowering (Fainstein, 2000; Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002; Healey, 1999, 2003; Watson 2003). However, the Habermasian assumption that structural differences, community divisions and clashing rationalities can be accommodated through the exchange of ideas in consensus-seeking processes remains (Fainstein, 2000; Watson, 2005; Strömgren, 2004).

In that sense, with the foundational acknowledgement of the importance of understanding context and power, Healey takes a step further within the communicative turn. However, a profound “preoccupation with the mechanics and dynamics of
communication” (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002: 58) remains. Collaborative planning, like its communicative predecessors, is still misled by Habermas.

3. Towards Reflexive Planning Analytics with Bourdieu and Foucault

It is then the foundational reliance on Habermas’ theory of communicative action that originates the poor treatments of both context and power in the communicative approaches to planning. This means that an alternative, or for this matter, a conceptual enrichment, has to deal with those two concepts from their philosophical and social-theoretical inspirations. In that sense, what is needed for planning theory is a non-idealistic point of departure or, in other words, a foundation that lays closer to what really happens in the processes of urban development. It seems to me then that the fundamental conceptual recasting of the notions of context and power can be provided by the works of Bourdieu and Foucault. In fact, while the former outlines a reflexive sociology which can be utilised to reorientate planning in its conceptual treatment of context, the latter performs an analytical reconceptualisation of power that still needs to be fully accepted in planning theory and practice. In that sense, rescuing the notions of context and power in contemporary planning theory means abandoning Habermas to adopt the path indicated by Bourdieu and Foucault in the direction of what, after their respective concepts of reflexivity and analytics of power, can be called reflexive planning analytics.

A. Bourdieu Recasts Context in Planning Theory

Argumentatively founded on the liberating critique of analytical and rule-based rationality in modern society, the attempt to recast context in planning theory and practice has to be positioned within the wider theoretical endeavour that epitomises much of the contemporary scientific research in human affairs. Distinctly characterised by the growing importance given to experience-based, situational and intuitive behaviour in the social sciences, this endeavour provides the conceptual setting through which Flyvbjerg (2001) is purportedly ‘making social science matter’. In his innovative project Flyvbjerg is theoretically inspired by Bourdieu’s (1977) insight of the social practices of ordinary actors and by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) five stages’ model of skill acquisition and human learning, to accept the Nietzschean suggestion that “the central task for human beings is not the Socratic one of making knowledge cerebral and rational but instead one of making it bodily and intuitive” (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 24), and argue for an “open-ended, dependent relation between contexts and actions and interpretations” (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 47-48). This can only be achieved, in his view, through the theoretical rebirth of the Aristotelian concept of phronesis as an intellectual virtue “reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad for a man” (Aristotle in Flyvbjerg, 2001: 56), and the subsequent establishment of practical value-rationality as a foundation for social and political inquiry (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

In the planning field, this is translated by Flyvbjerg (2004: 288) in a call for ‘phronetic’ research and “value judgment in specific situations [of planning]”. In a similar analytical fashion, Howe and Langdon’s (2002: 210) proposal for a reflexive approach to planning suggest that “planning as both an intellectual endeavour and as a vocational practice should be aspiring to enhance understandings of how planning [truly] operates”. This reinforced theoretical and practical aspiration of planning research is masterly informed by Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of reflexivity as the systematic exploration of the unthought, intuitive and embodied categories of human judgment which delimit the thinkable and predetermine conscious practices (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Howe and Langdon, 2002). In fact, given the deterministic role of social (and scientific) location in contemporary societies and the crucial importance of the different values and biased dispositions in any type of human development processes, the deployment of reflexivity as a foundational conceptual guide can only be perceived as undoubtedly fundamental for the practical carrying out of urban planning and policy-making, and in particular for their emancipatory purposes (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 2004; Howe and Langdon, 2002).

Bourdieuian Framework for Planning: the Habitus, the Capital and the Field

Generally characterised as generative structuralism or, alternatively, as structuralist constructivism, the Bourdieuian project of reflexive sociology aims at “escaping from the choice between a structuralism without subject and the philosophy of the subject”
Giddens calls the and Calhoun, 1993: 2) by “[illuminating] what Giddens calls the duality of structure and Bourdieu calls double structuration” (Friday, 1990: 202, emphasis in original) through a sturdy argument for the existence a mutually constitutive interaction between social structures and human agency (Friday, 1990; King, 2005). There are, in that sense, significant propositional similarities between a potential Bourdieuian framework for planning and the Giddensian skeleton of Healey’s institutionalist approach highlighted in the previous chapter.

However, conceptualising structures as rules and resources in institutional contexts and therefore as “properties of social systems of collectivities” (Friday, 1990: 202), Giddens has a “static and simplistic” (Stokke, 2002: 5) perception of “the situated activities of subjects” (Friday, 1990: 202), which contrasts with Bourdieu’s innovative insights into the “dynamic intersection of structure and action” (Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993: 4). In fact, concentrating on the subtle nature of human practices, Bourdieu develops a conceptual apparatus which gives emphasis to the coordinating role of embodied dispositions and therefore “does not abstract structure from the social practices of individual agents” (Friday, 1990: 202; Bourdieu, 1994; King, 2005). In that sense, Bourdieu’s project can be portrayed as moving beyond the Giddensian theory of structuration that supports collaborative planning: firstly, it perceives human agency not to follow rules, but to be strategically governed by a set of dispositions which Bourdieu terms the habitus; secondly, it provides an important understanding of the range of resources utilised in social practices through a broad conceptualisation of capital; and thirdly, it replaces the static notion of institution for the conceptualisation of a dynamic site of interaction between forces and positions which he calls the field (Bourdieu, 1994; Friday, 1990; Howe and Langdon, 2002; Stokke, 2002). The proposed Bourdieuian framework for planning is then founded on a threefold conceptual apparatus formed by the notions of habitus, capital and field.

**The Habitus**

Focusing on the regularities of everyday social practices, Bourdieu perceives individual agency as existing within a durable and transposable system of embodied dispositional attitudes, habits and principles which “generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (Bourdieu, 1990: 53, 1977, 1994; Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993). This system of “structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 1990: 53) constitutes the habitus, a mediating link between structure and agency which is unequivocally “constituted in practice and is always orientated towards practical functions” (Bourdieu, 1990: 52), while operating within actors both as “classificatory principles and organizing principles of action” (Stokke, 2002: 6, emphasis in original). Subsequently, the habitus, as “both the product of social conditions and past practices and the producer of strategies acting upon those conditions” (Stokke, 2002: 6), is “the pivotal concept in attempting to reconcile ideas of structures with ideas of planning practice” (Howe and Langdon, 2002: 215).

There is also an important correspondence between this concept of habitus and the previously mentioned notion of phronesis which delineates a contextually bounded foundational renewal for planning theory (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Indeed, the specificity of the impulsive and intuitive behavioural regularities of the different actors and interest groups involved in spatial change requires planning analysis to incorporate the notion of habitus through a phronetic focus on their values and habits of action (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Howe and Langdon, 2002). This conceptual incorporation, given that “the habitus of those in subordinate positions will generally equip them with the desires, knowledge, routines, actions and skills that will reproduce their inferior status” (Howe and Langdon, 2002: 216), has the potential to consolidate the integration of planning in a constructive critical endeavour not only to understand, but also to transform the reproduction of inequality in contemporary urban societies. In fact, enabling a strategic focus on the continuous renovation of consciousnesses in relation to what really happens in the urban development processes, the concept of habitus assumes a
crucial role in the fundamental contextualisation of planning practices aiming at establish genuine urban democracies (Flyvbjerg, 1998a, 2004; Howe and Langdon, 2002).

**The Capital**

Dissecting the operational mechanisms of the habitus, Bourdieu reconceptualises the Marxian notion of capital as a multiform “resource which yields power” (Calhoun, 1993: 69) and “entails the capacity to exercise control over one’s future and that of others” (Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993: 4) through both material and immaterial varieties of itself (Bourdieu, 1994; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Three fundamental forms of capital are then understood to coexist and interact in everyday social practices and more specifically, in their urban manifestations: economic, social and cultural (Bourdieu, 1990; Howe and Langdon, 2002). Being directly convertible into material wealth, economic capital is characterised as a “measure of the financial resources that an interest can bring to land-use development process” (Howe and Langdon, 2002: 216, Stokke, 2002). Social capital, on the other hand, is understood an immaterial value measure of the sum of “resources in the form of networks and contacts based on mutual recognition” (Stokke, 2002: 8) and group membership in the urban areas (Calhoun, 1993; Howe and Langdon, 2002). Also an immaterial variety, cultural capital is conceptualised as “informational assets in the form of knowledge and skills” (Stokke, 2002: 9) which are embodied into “distinctive and distinguishing sensibilities and characteristic modes of action” (Calhoun, 1993: 70) in the processes of planning and urban development (Howe and Langdon, 2002).

In Bourdieu’s conceptualisation, each of these three varieties can be directly converted into the other, taking the form of symbolic capital “once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (Bourdieu in Calhoun, 1993: 79) and consequently “granted a special symbolic efficacy” (Stokke, 2002: 10; Bourdieu, 1990). This conversion of capital, as Howe and Langdon argue (2002: 218), “can either facilitate changes to the power relationships within planning or else it might further cement domination of one particular group over another”. In that sense, it is deemed imperative to discern the particular and contextual abilities of urban societies to “extent and ease of convertibility of capital” (Calhoun, 1993: 68) in order to analyse the operation of planning and to act in relation to the reproduction of inequality in the urban development processes (Bourdieu, 1990; Howe and Langdon, 1993; Stokke, 2002). The fact is that, ultimately, what is at stake in these processes is the symbolic mastery of its different participants and the way in which they are able to convert ineffective forms of capital into constructive and transformative ones (Bourdieu, 1990).

**The Field**

The remaining component of Bourdieu’s threefold conceptual foundation for a reflexive sociology refers to the objective configuration of the various arenas of human activity as relational sites of struggle constituted by a socially and historically dependent range of positions (Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993; Bourdieu, 1990; King, 2005). Each of these unbounded arenas composes, in a Bourdieuan perspective, a field of social “positions (occupied by actors) and relations of power (forces) between these positions” (Stokke, 2002: 7) that provides a specific setting for the operation of the habitus and the distribution of the various forms of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993). This means that the positions in a field “stand in relationships of domination, subordination or equivalence” (Jenkins, in Stokke, 2002: 7) to each other by virtue of their relative access to the dynamic structure provided by the interplay between the different forms of capital which are at stake within that field (Bourdieu, 1990; Howe and Langdon, 2002; Stokke, 2002).

In that sense, this notion of field constitutes a privileged conceptual platform for the constructive analysis of everyday social practices and their “dynamics of power, in the form of various capitals at play” (Howe and Langdon, 2002: 219), while it enables a powerful interpretation of the social world as being comprised of “multiple fields with varying degrees of autonomy in regard to each other” (Stokke, 2002: 7; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). It is, consequently, a particularly useful concept for planning theory and practice as each particular endeavour can be perceived to constitute its specific field (of analysis and action) in interaction with other related fields at a variety of spatial scales and contexts (Howe and Langdon, 2002; Stokke, 2002). As a result, the understanding and subsequent transformation of the reproduction of
inequality in urban development processes are determinably informed by the field as this “provides the framework and guides the strategies of those within it” (Howe and Langdon, 2002: 219).

Sitting at the abstract interaction between these three essential concepts for a reflexive exploration of everyday social practices, the proposed Bourdieuian framework for planning presents a set of “open thinking tools” (Stokke, 2002: 14) that are capable of providing a valuable lens through which planning agents can, not only understand but actively intervene in the processes of urban development (Howe and Langdon, 2002). In fact, underpinning a view of planning that, in a phronetic effort to seek out “information that will answer questions about the intermeshing forces of actors and structures in actual settings” (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 300), represents it as a particular field of socio-cultural positions occupied by actors with dissimilar habitus in dynamic struggles over specific forms of capital, Bourdieu’s sociology sets up “a powerful basis for understanding the way in which different actors fit together, interpret and negotiate their way through the social practices that constitute planning” (Howe and Langdon, 2002: 221). This allows the establishment of a relation of dependency between the interpretations of agents, their actions and the contexts of practice that has the potential to reinforce planning’s abilities to transform the reproduction of inequality in the urban development processes (Howe and Langdon, 2002; Flyvbjerg, 2004).

Nevertheless, functioning “between empirical and theoretical practice” (Friday, 1990: 203), the proposed tools "should not be understood as comprehensive substantivist theory but rather as analytical guidelines that can inform more concrete theoretical and empirical investigations” (Stokke, 2002: 14). The Bourdieuian framework for planning works, in that sense, as a loose foundation for the crucial “return to the concrete” (Watson, 2003: 396) needed in contemporary theory and practice. In fact, the employment of Bourdieu’s sociology to recast context in planning theory and practice puts an emphasis on intellectual devices which, incorporated in the “minutiae, practices, and concrete cases” (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 298), provide the “feel for the game (…) [that] enables an infinite number of ‘moves’ to be made, adapted to the infinite number of possible situations which no rule, however complex, can foresee” (Bourdieu, 1990: 9). This means that the best way to counter assumptions made by the different agents about “values, beliefs, or rationalities of those for (or with) whom they plan” (Watson, 2003: 404) is to explore “the power of the example” (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 66) to interpret and transform contexts of planning practice. This is not a mindless return to empiricism, but an appeal for the use of case studies that employ the proposed Bourdieuian framework in planning analysis as a way of stimulating “ideas and propositions which can more adequately inform practice” (Watson, 2003: 396; 2002). It is then imperative to outline the operational mechanisms through which the utilisation of Bourdieu’s conceptual apparatus in the study of concrete cases can generate contextualised action.

Utopian Genealogies of Planning Practice

Studying the local character of postmodern critique as “an autonomous, non-centralised kind of theoretical production (...) whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought” (Foucault, 1980b: 81), Foucault (1980b: 81, emphasis in original) argues that this has proceeded by means of a “return of knowledge” which is fundamentally supported by the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges”. By subjugated knowledges Foucault means here those with historical contents that have been recursively concealed by functionalist and systematising theoretical endeavours, and which are traditionally disqualified as insufficiently elaborated, nonconceptual knowledges that can not achieve the required level of scientficity (Foucault, 1980b, 2004). Reflecting what people know, these particular and therefore dissimilar knowledges are incapable of unanimity as well as they are opposed by all the other knowledges surrounding them (Foucault, 1980b, 2004). It is then possible to interpret the foundations of the proposed Bourdieuian framework for planning and in particular the notions of habitus and phronesis as Foucauldian subjugated knowledges. The argument that it is only through the reappearance of subjugated knowledges that “criticism can perform its work” (Foucault, 1980b: 82) can then be perceived to be in harmony with the appeal made for the study of concrete cases through Bourdieu’s analytical tools. This means that we can use the help of Foucault’s philosophy to envision the necessary mechanisms for the operation of Bourdieu’s conceptual apparatus in the field of planning.
Exploring the nature of subjugated knowledges, Foucault (1980b: 81) argues that their fundamental insurrection is primarily an "immediate emergence of historical contents (...) simply because only the historical contents allow us to rediscover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle that the order imposed by functionalist or systematising thought is designed to mask". The reappearance of these buried, subjugated knowledges is then fundamentally "concerned with a historical knowledge of struggles" (Foucault, 1980b: 83, emphasis in original), or what Foucault calls "a genealogy, or rather a multiplicity of genealogical researches" (Foucault, 1980b: 83; 2004). These genealogical researches are then emancipatory antisciences that, reactivating "local, discontinuous, disqualifed, illegitimate knowledges" (Foucault, 1980b: 83), enable the historical contents of subjugated knowledges to dismiss universalities and oppose "the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse" (Foucault, 1980b: 85; Flyvbjerg, 1998b). This means that, if archaeology is the method to analyse local discursivities, genealogy is the micro tactic which, based on the ensuing analysis, brings into play and releases subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980b, 2004; Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1983). In that sense, Foucault’s genealogical researches, by allowing us to make use of the particular historical knowledge of struggles in contemporary tactics, have a strong potential to constitute a superior operational body for the proposed Bourdieuan framework for planning (Foucault, 1980b, 2004; Flyvbjerg, 1998b, 2001). But, what exactly is genealogy in Foucault’s conceptualisation?

In a fundamental essay, Foucault draws on Nietzsche’s notion of 'effective' history to characterise genealogy as "gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary" (Foucault, 1991a: 76; McNay, 1994). Constructed on “discreet and apparently insignificant truths” (Nietzsche in Foucault, 1991a: 77) it scrupulously records the "singularity of events outside any monotonous finality (...) [seeking] them in the most unpromising places" (Foucault, 1991a: 76) like, for example, the habitus or the phronesis. However, differently from Bourdieu, who “[tries] to develop a genetic structuralism” (Bourdieu, 1994: 14, emphasis in original), Foucault’s genealogy is not a search for origins, which he depreciates as a metaphysical "attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their careful protected identities” (Foucault, 1991a: 78; McNay, 1994). In Foucault’s (1991b: 247) view, in the analysis of society “nothing is fundamental” and therefore there are not essential phenomena, “only reciprocal relations, and the perpetual gaps between intentions in relation to one another”. As a result, the analytical elements of a genealogy are discursive fragments of research that operate “in a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times (...) [and] consequently, [require] patience and knowledge of details, and [depend] on a vast accumulation of source material” (Foucault, 1991a: 76-77; 1980b). It is then based on these entwined fragments that a genealogy performs its practical and constructive tasks (Foucault, 1980b, 2004; Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1983). But the question now is: how do strategies emerge from these genealogical researches, particularly in the field of urban development planning?

In this matter, an open reading of David Harvey’s (2000a) *Spaces of Hope* suggests that geographical genealogies do not need to prescribe an abandonment of a utopian envisioning of the future. Through Harvey’s eyes, their constructive role can be to “to build a utopianism that is explicitly spatiotemporal” (Harvey, 2000a: 182), what Harvey (2000a: 182) calls “dialectical utopianism”. It is then possible to envision a kind of utopian genealogy to be utilised on urban development planning that, pulling together dynamic spatiotemporalities (open and directly), has its task “rooted in our present possibilities at the same time as it points towards different trajectories for human uneven geographical developments” (Harvey, 2000a: 196). In fact, as Harvey (2000a: 231) says paraphrasing Marx, “we architects all exercise the will to create but do so under conditions not chosen or created by ourselves”. The challenge for planning theory and practice is then to work out specific methodologies for these utopian genealogies that are “materially grounded in social and ecological conditions but which nevertheless [emphasise] possibilities and alternatives for human action through the will to create” (Harvey, 2000a: 231). Resembling an argumentative feedback loop, this take us back to Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology as a privileged methodological framework to ground contextual action. Utopian genealogies constitute then micro tactical mechanisms to analyse and recreate concrete cases of urban development
utilising reflexive sociology as a methodological framework.

B. Foucault Recasts Power in Planning Theory

Inspired by the socio-philosophical endeavour that instigates the preceding attempt to conceptually redesign context in the field of planning, the effort to position the inevitable question of power as the analytical and productive centre of planning’s multiple activities is necessarily nurtured in wider scientific undertakings. In that sense, being widely recognised as holding the most sophisticated account of the ubiquitous significance of power in contemporary societies, the revolutionary work of Michel Foucault is unavoidably central in grounding any redirective efforts of planning theory and practice. In fact, Foucauldian interpretations of power are extensively utilised throughout the postpositivist landscape of planning theory, particularly in many of the previously criticised communicative approaches (Allmendinger, 2002b). Nevertheless, in order to recast power as the core issue in planning theory and practice, I would argue that it is crucial to make use of the “full potential of Foucauldian analysis in enhancing our understanding of policy-making” (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002: 55), placing it at the centre of the Bourdieuan framework previously outlined. In that sense, following the path traced by Flyvbjerg (1998a, 1998b, 2004) after his own detailed study of the workings of rationality and power in the Danish town of Aalborg, the proposed conceptual reorientation to planning theory and practice draws intensively on Foucault’s analytics of power.

The portrayed characterisation of genealogy as the operative denial of an “immanent teleology to history” (McNay, 1994: 90) that provides a historical understanding of processes of struggle, induces Foucault (1980b: 87) to identify power as “what is at stake in all (...) genealogies”. This confirms the potential of Foucault’s genealogies as the operational mechanisms for proposed Bourdieuan framework for planning. In fact, not only Flyvbjerg’s (2004: 293) conceptualisation of phronesis is developed to a “more contemporary one, which accounts power”, but also “the concrete reality examined in most of Bourdieu’s work is the field of power” (Stokke, 2002: 14). However, despite the “revealing discussion of the sources of power” (Stokke, 2002: 14) presented, Bourdieu’s “singular focus on dominant groups” (Stokke, 2002: 14) is arguably insufficient for the pretended recasting of power in planning theory and practice. In this matter, Foucault’s insightful recognition “that there is no escaping from power” (Foucault, 1998: 82) since this “[permeates] all levels of social existence” (McNay, 1994: 90) emerges as providing more adequate accounts of the realities of power in our social worlds and in particular, in the complex processes of urban development (Flyvbjer, 2004; McNay, 1994).

Reckoning that “if one tries to erect a theory of power one will always be obliged to view it as emerging at a given place and time and hence to deduce it, to reconstruct its genesis” (Foucault, 1980c: 199), the aim of each of Foucault’s accounts of power is not to constitute a “context-free, ahistorical, objective” (Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1983: 184) theory but rather to move in the opposite direction, toward an analytics of power (Foucault, 1998; Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1983). Perceiving the realities of power as a “general matrix of force relations at a given time, in a given society” (Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1983: 186), Foucault understands that the only problem when studying power in our social worlds “is to provide oneself with a grid of analysis” (Foucault, 1980c: 199) which moves “toward the specific domain formed by relations of power, and toward a determination of the instruments that will make possible its analysis” (Foucault, 1998: 82). Led by his own foundational insight on the omnipresence of power, Foucault subsequently deems that this analytical grid “can be constituted only if it frees itself completely from [the traditional] representation of power” (Foucault, 1998: 82; McNay, 1994). It is then with that objective that he presents a series of propositions about power that can be perceived as the basic features of an analytics of power (Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1983; Foucault, 1998). These propositions can then be utilised in the analytical operations of the proposed Bourdieuan framework as a means to move toward the analytics of power in specific processes of urban development and to consequently recast the concept of power, bringing it to the forefront of planning theory and practice.

Foucauldian Recconceptualisation of Power: Basic Propositions for Planning

Foucault’s radical reconceptualisation of power begins with the assertion that this “must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in
the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation” (Foucault, 1998: 92). In fact, construing its ubiquitous nature from the point of view that power “comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1998: 93) as opposed to interpret it as “[embracing] everything” (Foucault, 1998: 93), Foucault argues that “power in the substantive sense, ‘le pouvoir’, doesn’t exist” (Foucault, 1990c: 198) and therefore “is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is a certain strength we are endowed with” (Foucault, 1998: 93). Instead, he defends that power functions in the form of a circulating chain outlining “a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault, 1998: 92) where “individuals are vehicles of power, not points of application” (Foucault, 1990b: 98). This leads to a characterisation of power as a political technology that is “employed and exercised through a net-like organisation” (Foucault, 1990b: 98) and therefore should be perceived as an “organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations” (Foucault, 1990c: 198; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). In the multidimensional field of urban planning and policy-making this corresponds to a view of power as “a dense net of omnipresent relations” (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 293) between multiple actors (individual and collective) in complex and specific processes of development. Subsequently, in a Foucauldian interpretation, the central analytical task of planning is to identify “how power is exercised, and not merely who has power and why they have it” (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 293, emphasis in original; Foucault, 1980b, 1983).

Failing to acknowledge the crucial importance of this task in understanding the workings of power in our societies, most contemporary planning theorists and practitioners involved in communicative endeavours, like the vast majority of researchers in the social sciences, “regard power in an essentially negative manner, as a repressive force which is the property of an elite and is used to maintain social hierarchies” (McNay, 1994: 90). From the opposite perspective, Foucault (1998: 94) understands that “relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships …, but are immanent from the latter” and therefore argues that these relations “are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play” (Foucault, 1998: 94; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). This leads to a conceptualisation of power in the processes of urban development as “productive and positive and not only as restrictive and negative” (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 293) which underpins a critique of the “existing planning tools and processes, suggesting the need for a power-sensitized understanding of the nature of knowledge, rationality, spatiality, and inclusivity in planning theory” (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002: 59). This can then be perceived as a foundational proposition for the intended recast of power in planning theory and practice.

Also important, is Foucault’s (1998: 94) assertion that “power comes from below”, by which he means that “there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations” (Foucault, 1998: 94) but instead they are comprehensively diffused all through the social body (Foucault, 1998; McNay, 1994). Subsequently, Foucault deems that relations of power need to be traced down to their actual material functioning, at their most precise points of operation, in order to constitute a “microphysics of power” (McNay, 1994: 91; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). In the words of Foucault (1980c: 199), “one needs to look … at how the great strategies of power encrust themselves and depend for their conditions of exercise on the level of the micro-relations of power”. Flyvbjerg (2004: 293) interprets this in the field of planning as the necessity to study power “with a point of departure in small questions”.

Finally, Foucault (1998: 94) understands power relations as “both intentional and nonsubjective”. In fact, although he perceives power relations to be undoubtedly intentional because “there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives” (Foucault, 1998: 94), he downplays any attempt of subjectivation of those same relations by rejecting the idea that such exercise of power results from the choice or decision of an individual subject. Effectively, when we analyse a political situation or, for that matter, a process of urban development, “the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them, and few can be said to have formulated them” (Foucault, 1998: 187). The answer to this “intentionality without a subject” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 187) must lie in the practices themselves, in the “careful analysis of the power dynamics of specific practices” (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 293).
This basic insight into Foucault’s elaborate conceptualisation of power should not be seen as an attempt to establish a comprehensive set of propositions for an analytics of power in planning theory and practice. In fact, Foucault (in Flyvbjerg, 1998b: 207) himself declares that “[his own] analysis can in no way (...) be equated with a general analytics of every possible power relation”. In that sense, given that “at most points along the way to any postulated praxis of transformation, the question of power has to be engaged” (Huxley, 2000: 372), what is intended is to provide an understanding of the real workings of power as to be utilised in planning theoretical and practical endeavours. This necessarily depends on perceiving power, after Foucault, as a micro productive and practical relational force traversing the social body. As it was previously outlined, these Foucauldian views on power should then put in motion an analytics operated within the proposed framework for planning that will uncover the “conflicts of power which traverse [the processes of urban development]” (Foucault, 1980a: 65). Only after operating that analytics based on a Foucauldian view of power, planning will be able “to confront [those conflicts] and construct the instruments which enable [it] to fight” (Foucault, 1980a: 65) and to consolidate the aspiration to transform the reproduction of inequality in the urban development processes that trespasses the Bourdieuian framework.

C. Reflexive Planning Analytics

Identifying context and power as the two major conceptual weaknesses of the communicative approaches, I have predominantly drawn on the works of Bourdieu and Foucault to envision alternative philosophical and social-theoretical foundations with better possibilities to originate contextualised and power-sensitive interpretations and actions in planning theory and practice. This indicates a way towards reflexive planning analytics.

In this reflexive planning analytics, the methodological framework is provided by Bourdieu and its operationalising mechanisms are set as utopian genealogies that utilise an essential Foucauldian view of power. It is then a tightly-knitted interrelated foundational vision for planning in which context and power are perceived as mutually dependent attributes of planning practices. In that sense, the aimed reflexive planning analytics can be metaphorically described as a human being where the Bourdieuian framework is everything that constitutes the body, the utopian genealogies are the brain cells that operate the body and the Foucauldian power is the blood that runs all through it.

4. Conclusion

In the opening paragraphs of this paper, an understanding of planning as a collective, political activity concerned with ecological and social restructuring action and correspondently aiming at distributional and relational justice was established. The main issue in doing planning theory was then identified as being the envisioning of ways of achieving such justice.

The capability of the communicative approaches, the dominant view on contemporary planning theory, to do that was then put into question. Following the arguments of the second chapter of this paper, there is a foundational impossibility to effectively contribute to more socially just urban societies that undermines the conceptual strength of the communicative approaches. This impossibility is rooted on the utilisation of Habermas’ social theory and the consequent reliance on communication and interactive consensus-building practices to achieving rationality in the decision making processes. The two main reasons that are subsequently appointed are related with poor conceptual treatments given to context and power in these approaches. In fact, can effectively socially just urban societies be achieved if the development processes are planned in a decontextualised manner or with insufficient understanding of the real workings of power? I seriously doubt so. Saying this, I am not trying to completely downplay the role of the communicative approaches in achieving social justice in cities and regions. In fact, in this matter, some crucial contributions are made by these approaches. But their intrinsic neglect of the reality at play, namely the reality of power, is perceived to be a major drawback in planning’s ambitions at a more socially just society.

Responding to my own doubts on the capabilities of the communicative approaches to contribute to more social justice in cities and regions, I have then proposed a reading of the works of Bourdieu and Foucault to ground contemporary planning theory, or rather to conceptually enrich it. As it is argued in the third chapter, a non-idealistic point of departure for planning theory and practice can be set by
these authors. Indicating a way towards reflexive planning analytics, the application of Foucault’s analytics through Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology allows the contextualisation of planning practices around issues of power and consequently reinforces the ability to transform the reproduction of inequality. In that sense, there is little doubt that this conceptual vision can provide better capabilities to a planning theory aiming at socially just urban societies.

In that sense, what planning theory needs in order to contribute to a more socially just society is to follow the conceptual path indicated by Bourdieu and Foucault towards reflexive planning analytics.
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