

The framing of power in communicative planning theory: Analysing the work of John Forester, Patsy Healey and Judith Innes

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Abstract

In this paper, I analyse the framing of power in streams of communicative planning influenced by American pragmatism, sociological institutionalism and alternative dispute resolution. While scholars have heavily debated Habermasian communicative planning theory, the broader conception of power across these linked, but distinct, streams of the theory remains to be explicated. Through analysis of 40 years' of publishing by John Forester, Patsy Healey and Judith Innes – widely cited representatives of these three streams – a broader account of the treatment of power in communicative planning is established. The analysis shows that the streams of communicative planning provide distinct approaches to power with a joint focus on criticising conflictual *illegitimate power over* and developing ideas for how consensual *power with* might arise through agency in the micro practices of planning. Even if communicative planning thereby offers more for reflections on power than critics have acknowledged, the theory still leaves conceptual voids regarding constitutive *power to* and *legitimate power over*.

Keywords

participatory planning, facilitators, frame analysis, collaborative planning, critical pragmatism, planners, sociological institutionalism, alternative dispute resolution

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Introduction

Communicative planning theory is influential in planning thought and practice. The theory includes a diverse set of approaches that share an analytical focus on communication in the micro practices of planning and a normative preference for inclusive dialogues (see [Forester, 1999](#); [Healey, 1997](#); [Innes and Booher, 2018](#); [Sager, 2012](#)). The core idea is that planning can become more democratic and just through enhancements of the quality and quantity of communication between planning actors such as planners, politicians, citizens and private sector representatives ([Mattila, 2019](#)). Scholars in communicative planning draw on different theoretical traditions, but have in common an interest in furthering planning processes that approximate [Habermas \(1984, 1985\)](#) discourse ethics for open, undistorted and truth-seeking communication ([Sager, 2018: 93–94](#)).

Communicative planning has a central position in planning theory since its inception in the 1980s and 90s. Even so, the treatment of power in the theory is heavily criticised in academic discussions. Drawing on the work of [Foucault \(1970, 1982\)](#), critics argue that communicative planning is weak in explaining power relations in planning, due to a reliance on ‘power-free’ communicative ideals à la Habermas. Such ideals can allegedly never be realised in the power struggles that characterise planning ([Flyvbjerg, 2004](#); [Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000](#); [Richardson, 1996](#)). More recently, other scholars deliver critique towards the perceived over-reliance on agreement and consensus in communicative planning and the practices the theory underpins ([Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012](#); [Gualini, 2015](#); [Purcell, 2009](#)). Here, communicative planning is portrayed as unwittingly depoliticising planning and maintaining neo-liberal hegemony by including alternative voices in token participation with the function to smooth over conflicts and legitimatise an unfair status quo.

The power critique towards communicative planning mainly targets its common roots in Habermas’ theory of communicative action ([Mattila, 2019](#)). However, as communicative planning scholars have pointed out, this theory cannot be reduced to an application of Habermas’ ideas to planning (see [Forester, 2000](#); [Healey, 2003](#); [Innes, 2004](#); [Sager, 2012](#)). Communicative planning is a diverse theory that also includes streams influenced by American pragmatism ([Forester, 1999, 2019](#); [Harper and Stein, 2006](#); [Hoch, 2007](#)), interest-based negotiation and alternative dispute resolution ([Innes, 1995](#); [Innes and Booher 2018](#); [Susskind et al., 1999](#)) and sociological institutionalism ([Healey, 1997, 2006](#); [Puustinen et al., 2017a](#)). Even if the leading communicative planning scholars have elaborated on how their particular version of communicative planning deals with power ([Booher and Innes, 2002](#); [Forester, 1982, 1989](#); [Healey, 2003](#); [Innes, 2004](#); [Innes and Booher, 2015](#); [Sager, 2012, 2018](#)) a broader account of the conception of power across the different streams of communicative planning is still lacking. This lack of a fuller picture of the treatment of power in communicative planning makes it difficult to access, use and further develop the conceptual tools that the theory offers for understanding power relations in planning ([Westin, 2019](#)).

As a response, the purpose of this paper is to analyse notions of power across different streams of communicative planning theory. I conduct an analysis of the communicative

planning streams influenced by American pragmatism, sociological institutionalism and interest-based negotiation and alternative dispute resolution. The methodology used is a longitudinal frame analysis (Hulst and Yanow, 2016; Schön and Rein, 1994) of 40 years' of publishing by three widely cited communicative planning scholars: John Forester, Patsy Healey and Judith Innes. Forester is a scholar in the US pragmatism tradition, Healey writes in the European sociological and institutional tradition and Innes' work revolved within the theory and practice of interest-based negotiations and alternative dispute resolution. I selected these scholars for two reasons. They represent the two geographical areas where communicative planning was developed: northern America (Innes and Forester) and northern Europe (Healey) and they represent three distinct, but related, streams of communicative planning theory with distinct approaches to power. As such, analysing these three scholars' lifetime work arguable can supply a broader account of the treatment of power in communicative planning including and going beyond its Habermasian roots. The analysis is guided by the question *how is power framed in communicative planning theory?*

I present the argument by first explaining the approach taken to analyse the core publications of Forester, Healey and Innes. Next, *Analysing the work of Forester, Healey and Innes* presents the findings: the three streams of communicative planning offer distinct approaches to power with a shared focus on criticising top-down *illegitimate power over* and developing ideas for how bottom-up *power with* might arise through agency in the micro practices of planning. In the concluding section *Discussion* I explain how the three streams of communicative planning offer more for reflections on power than the critics of the Habermasian roots have acknowledged, while still leaving conceptual voids regarding constitutive *power to* and *legitimate power over*.

Approach to analyse three streams of communicative planning

The discussion about power in communicative planning theory

Power is one of the most central and contested concepts in social science (Clegg and Haugaard, 2009). While many scholars and practitioners might agree about the importance of power, there is controversy about how to define it, how to study it and how to normatively appraise it (see Lukes, 2005). The longstanding discussions about social power revolves around key distinctions between legitimate versus illegitimate power; coercion versus authority; collective systemic versus individual agent-specific power; constitutive power versus repressive power; conflictual versus consensual power and enabling versus constraining power (see Clegg and Haugaard, 2009: 2). These contested distinctions in the wider power literature are reflected in the entangled debates about power in communicative planning theory.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a new generation of planning scholars developed communicative planning theory with Habermas' (1984, 1985) theory of communicative action as a common source of inspiration. In the US-streams of communicative planning, the American pragmatism tradition (e.g. Dewey, 1997; Rorty, 1982) was influential. Notably, John Forester (1989) merged his pragmatic interest in planning practice with Habermas'

validity criteria (managing truth, consent, truthfulness and comprehensibility) to conceptualise how planners might counteract powerful actors' attempts to 'distort' communication on the expense of marginalised communities. Forester's focus was on agent-centric as well as systemic power, both of which he deemed to be illegitimate by combining Habermas' ideas with Lukes' (1974) three dimensions of power. In a related US-stream of communicative planning, the practices and theories of interest-based negotiations and dispute resolution (e.g. Susskind et al., 1999) was combined with Habermasian discourse ethics to develop a distinct version of the theory. One of the prominent scholars was Judith Innes who, frequently writing together with David Booher, focused her work on how purposeful process design and facilitation might create conducive conditions for negotiations and agreements between diverse stakeholders (Innes, 1995; Innes and Booher, 1999). In terms of power, this stream of communicative planning revolves around ideas about how conflictual illegitimate power can be turned into consensual legitimate power: the kind of power relations that include agreement and concerted action across different interests. Meanwhile, in the European context, another kind of communicative planning emerged through a merger between the sociological and institutional tradition (e.g. Giddens, 1984) and the new generation of critical theory (Habermas, 1984, 1985). A prominent representative of this stream was Patsy Healey (1997) who took a relational perspective on planning by focusing on how planning cultures, infused by expert rule and top-down power, could be transformed through agency in the micro practices of planning. Healey used Habermasian discourse ethics to critique repressive power relations by way of argument and Giddens' structuration theory to explain reproduction and transformation of planning cultures. Even if Healey rarely conceptualises her work in terms of power, her focus on the interplay between structure and agency resembles the distinction between systemic and agent-specific power in the power literature (Westin, 2019).

In spite of the variety of approaches to power within communicative planning, critics of the theory have mainly targeted its common Habermasian roots. The first wave of critique came from planning scholars who drew on the work of Foucault (1970, 1982). They claimed that Foucault's power analytics of real rationality is a much more fruitful basis for understanding power relations in planning than Habermas' communicative rationality.

Instead of side-stepping or seeking to remove the traces of power from planning, an alternative approach accepts power as unavoidable, recognising its all-pervasive nature, and emphasising its productive as well as destructive potential. Here, theory engages squarely with policy made on a field of power struggles between different interests, where knowledge and truth are contested, and the rationality of planning is exposed as a focus of conflict. (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002: 52)

More recently, scholars drawing on work on agonism (e.g. Gualini, 2015) and post-politics (e.g. Purcell, 2009) levels a similar, yet distinct critique towards what they see as the overly consensual understanding of power relations in communicative planning and the practices the theory underpins. In terms of power, these critics, from their different

vantage points, claim that communicative planning in theory and practice negates conflictual power by overly promoting consensual power relations. Instead, these critics stress that planning will always involve conflict between people who are shaped through different cultural, societal and personal experiences.

What the neoliberal project requires are decision-making practices that are widely accepted as 'democratic' but that do not (or cannot) fundamentally challenge existing relations of power. Communicative planning, insofar as it is rooted in communicative action, is just such a decision-making practice. (Purcell, 2009: 141)

The leading communicative planning scholars have responded to the critique by both modifying how they relate to Habermasian ideals and by elaborating on how their respective versions of communicative planning deal with power relations (Booher and Innes, 2002; Forester, 2000, 2001, 2013; Healey, 1999, 2003; Innes, 2004; Innes and Booher, 2015; Sager, 2012, 2018). Even so, it is still communicative planning's consensual Habermasian roots that are brought to the forth in planning discussions (e.g. Gualini, 2015; Kühn, 2020; Mattila, 2019).

A conceptual framework including power to, power with and power over

As displayed in the brief review above, the discussions about power in communicative planning theory is rather difficult to make sense of due to differences in terminology between the proponents and critics. Adding to the entanglement is the lack of an integrated conceptualisation of power across the different streams of communicative planning. To address this problem, I have developed a conceptual framework, which provides an analytical language to guide my analysis of notions of power in communicative planning. The framework is intended to include the concepts of power that are emphasised by the communicative planning scholars themselves as well as the concepts of power that the critics bring to the forth. Thereby the framework is capable of accommodating analysis of notions of power ranging from: enabling and constraining; illegitimate as well as legitimate; conflictual and consensual as well as constitutive and repressive. When developing the framework I drew on scholars in the power literature who have synthesised and rendered commensurable different concepts of power (Allen, 1998; Haugaard, 2003, 2012, 2015; Morriss, 2002).

Drawing on Haugaard's (2003) synthesis of theories about power creation, I define *power to* as a dispositional ability to act derived from the (re)production of social order (see also Morriss, 2002). Many power scholars who, in their different ways, theorise power beyond the conventional coercive notion share this constitutive understanding of power (Arendt, 1958; Barnes, 1988; Giddens, 1984; Luhmann, 1979; Parsons, 1963). *Power to* is created through processes of socialisation where actors learn to take certain kinds of behaviours and understandings for granted. When actors habitually reproduce the taken-for-granted social order, they render interactions predictable and create conditions for social action. This (re)production of social order through shared meaning works to both constrain and enable actions. As pointed out in the Foucauldian critique of communicative

planning, *power to* is in itself not good or bad, but productive and constitutive of society (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Social practices such as planning require ‘a particular order of things and the settling down of governing into subtle, day-to-day, taken for granted reproduction of power relations by disciplined subjects’ (Richardson and Cashmore, 2011: 107).

The social ordering of relationships provide actors with varying degrees of dispositional *power to* which they can, either exercise in the form of *power over* others or towards shared objectives as concerted *power with* (see Allen, 1998; Haugaard, 2003, 2012, 2015).

Power with refers to the consensual interactions which often is associated with communicative planning. Such notions of planning relations are rarely conceptualised in terms of power, instead they are often understood á la Habermas (1984, 1985) through discourse ethics for open, undistorted and truth-seeking communication (Forester, 1989; Innes, 2016; Sager, 2018). Due to my interest in enabling as well as constraining forms of power, I instead follow Haugaard (2015) to signify concerted action towards shared objectives through the concept *power with* (see also Allen, 1998; Arendt, 1970). According to Haugaard (2015: 156–157) ‘[...] this entails that procedural devices, or normative ideals, such as the original position (Rawls) and ideal speech (Habermas), should no longer be considered spaces where power is absent: quite the contrary, they are places of concerted power’.

In contrast to consensual *power with*, *power over* entails conflict over meaning or planning objectives (see Allen, 1998; Haugaard, 2012). This form of power is essentially about some actors attempting to get other actors to do what they else would not have done (see the debates about the ‘faces of power’: Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Dahl, 1957; Lukes, 1974, 2005). Deviating from the everyday understanding of power over, I do not reduce this form of power to be merely undesirable. Instead, I distinguish between *illegitimate* and *legitimate power over*. Hence, *power over* is viewed as an empirical process which carries both negative and positive normative potential (see Haugaard, 2012; Mansbridge, 2012). Seeing *power over* in this way enables a more nuanced understanding of conflictual power in planning, beyond the common sensual view that equates *power over* with reprehensible relationships (Haugaard, 2015; Morriss, 2002). Following from this dual conception of *power over* is the complex task of ‘deciding when the very same process of power is desirable and when it constitutes domination’. (Haugaard, 2015: 147). In my framework, this task is about separating *legitimate* from *illegitimate power over*.

Distinguishing *legitimate* from *illegitimate power over* is difficult due to the contested nature of conflictual power. According to Haugaard (2012), most of the influential contributors to the power literature (e.g. Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Dahl, 1957; Foucault, 1979; Lukes, 1974, 2005) leave us without an answer to the question of what *legitimate power* might be. These scholars have not, for various reasons, seen as their task to theorise *legitimate power over*. Instead, they have mainly focused on critiquing *illegitimate power over* as reprehensible domination. This tendency in the power literature is mirrored in the reluctance among proponents as well as critics of communicative

Table 1. The conceptual framework.

Concept	Definition
Power to	A dispositional ability to act which planning actors derive from (re) production of social order
Power with	Planning interactions where actors use their <i>power to</i> act in concert towards shared objectives
Legitimate and illegitimate power over	Planning interactions where actors use their <i>power to</i> in order to get other actors to do what they otherwise would not have done in a manner that actors can assess either as acceptable or as unacceptable according to local or universal criteria

planning theory to conceptualise legitimate conflictual power (Westin, 2019). Nevertheless,

solving collective action problems [...] requires coercion – getting people to do what they else would not otherwise do through threat of sanction and the use of force. The work of democracy is to make that coercion somewhat more legitimate. (Mansbridge, 2012: 1)

Since my purpose is to analyse notions of power in communicative planning theory, a task that does not entail development of normative planning theory, the conceptual framework does not include criteria for separating *illegitimate* from *legitimate power over*.¹ However, I do, as implied by the reasoning so far, subscribe to the position that conceptualising legitimate conflictual power is necessary in planning thought and practice.

Instead of stipulating detailed definitions of *legitimate* and *illegitimate power over* my conceptual framework broadly delineates the conceptual space covered by the two concepts (see Table 1). In line with Haugaard's (2012) rethinking of power over, the empirical process of power over is defined as being about actors attempting to get other actors to do what they else would not have done. As explained in the debates about the faces of power, the process of power over can be more or less agent-centric and more or less accessible for observation: ranging from direct observable power, agenda-setting power to hegemonic power. Planning actors can deem the process of power over as normatively legitimate or illegitimate. Such normative assessment can be done according to local, often tacit, criteria by the actors in a specific planning context or according to more universal criteria by actors, for example, researchers, with an outsiders' perspective. In either case, the legitimacy of power over is frequently contested and, even if legitimacy criteria that transcend context is needed, much planning research underscore that legitimacy is situated in a specific context (see Campbell, 2006; Connelly et al., 2006). Hence, in my framework, the concepts *legitimate* and *illegitimate power over*, signifies two contrasting general ideas of conflictual power in planning, which can be filled with different local meanings in specific planning contexts.

In sum, I argue that the conceptual framework that I have developed, consisting of *power to*, *power with*, *legitimate power over* and *illegitimate power over*, provides a

broad, and intentionally general, understanding of how different notions of power in planning can be defined and related. Therefore, I find the framework to be capable of guiding an analysis of how power is framed in communicative planning. The concepts in the framework are not meant to be understood as distinct forms of power, instead they represents analytically discernible features that may be present at the same time in a planning interaction. As Allen (1998: 37) puts it: ‘All features may be present in one interaction: an action that involves power-with, which presupposes power-to, may also be used as a means to achieving power over others’.

Frame analysis of communicative planning theory

I apply the conceptual framework to analyse selected publications by John Forester (1980, 1982, 1989, 1993, 1999, 2001, 2009, 2013, 2015, 2019), Patsy Healey (1992a, 1992b, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2009, 2012, 2015) and Judith Innes (Booher and Innes, 2002; Innes, 1995, 1998, 2004, 2016; Innes and Booher, 2015, 2018). To select publications from the long works of these productive scholars, I identified the most influential publications from each, informed by citation indexes. I then singled out publications where the scholars are explicit about their view of power, and included work from the 1980s to the 2010s. In order to understand the academic and planning contexts where Forester, Healey and Innes’ framings of power was developed, I also read their autobiographical essays about their careers (Haselsberger, 2017).

Even if the scholars are at times explicitly defining power, their notions of the concept are frequently tacit: expressed in the topics they include and omit, in the way they identify problems and solutions and in the metaphors they use. Therefore, I conduct a frame analysis (Hulst and Yanow, 2016; Schön and Rein, 1994), a methodology capable of analysing not only explicit definitions of power, but also notions of power relations ‘that lie beneath the more visible surface of language or behavior, determining its boundaries and giving it coherence’ (Rein and Schön, 1996: 88).

In the analysis, the term *framing* signifies how the communicative planning scholars make certain features of power relations salient and combine them into a more or less coherent pattern with the purpose to guide planning thought and action. In accordance with frame analysis, I searched for how framing performs two functions in the publications: to formulate *problems* which makes certain *solutions* seem logical (Hulst and Yanow, 2016; Schön and Rein, 1994).

I analysed each selected publication focusing on how the scholars frame two *topics* (Hulst and Yanow, 2016) that are central in planning: power in participatory planning and planners’ roles in power relations. I chose these two topics due to the centrality of participation in communicative planning and due to the theory’s focus on planners’ everyday practices. In the analysis, I identify how the scholars formulate *problems* for each topic and how this makes certain *solutions* seem logical. The conceptual framework – *power to*, *power with*, *illegitimate power over* and *legitimate power over* – provide an integrated analytical language that makes it possible to interpret the framing of power relations in communicative planning (Table 2).

Table 2. Analytical categories and questions (adjusted from Westin, 2019).

Topic	Problem framing	Solution framing
Power in participatory planning	Which problems do the scholars formulate regarding power relations in participatory planning?	Which solutions do the scholars prescribe regarding power relations in participatory planning?
Planners' role in power relations	Which problems do the scholars formulate regarding planners' role in power relations?	Which solutions do the scholars prescribe regarding planners' role in power relations?

Guided by these analytical questions, I conduct the analysis of the selected publications to interpret which concepts of power that are employed – tacitly as well as explicitly – in the scholars framing of the two topics. Following the methodology of frame analysis, I pay attention to how the scholars' use definitions; narratives; metaphors; terms of praise and belittling; recurrent vocabulary; and how they omit certain notions of power (Hulst and Yanow, 2016; Schön and Rein, 1994).

Analysing the work of Forester, Healey and Innes

John Forester

My 'bias for practice' has led me to ask how planners can work in politically realistic and ethically progressive ways. That bias presumes that we can learn from planning and related practices that have effectively engaged power and conflict, bureaucratic challenges, racial and gender exclusions, and more. (Forester, 2017: 280)

John Forester has, throughout his career, criticised misuse of power and sought to explain how planning and planners can make a difference for marginalised communities. In the earlier stages of his career, Forester's work was affiliated with Habermas' (1984, 1985) version of critical theory. Forester then focused on how planners might counteract communicative distortions to empower marginalised communities. In his later work, he has leaned more towards American pragmatism and focused on planners' narratives from everyday planning practice.

Forester's framing of power in participatory planning. The early Forester (1980, 1982, 1989, 1993) framed planning organisations as embedded in the 'system world' of market economy and bureaucracy that tended to colonise the 'lifeworld', where ordinary citizens lead their lives. 'Thus, planners can expect (with a few exemplary, democratically structured exceptions) that the organisations in and with which they work will systematically reproduce socio-political relations [...]' (Forester, 1989: 78–79). In his early work, Forester draws on Lukes (1974) and Habermas to theorise how power distort communication in planning. '[...] misinformation is often not an accidental problem in planning, but rather [...] that such distortions of communication are systemic, structural and institutional problems to be addressed and counteracted on that basis'. (Forester,

1982: 70). This is an example of how the early Forester frame a problem around the *illegitimate power over* that is exercised by corporate and bureaucrat actors over marginalised communities.

The early Forester's critique of top-down power makes the solution to democratise planning from the bottom-up logical. He frames participatory planning as capable of empowering citizens, transforming power relations and thereby carrying potential to play a '[...] counterhegemonic or democratising role [through]: the exposure of issues that political-economic structures otherwise would bury from public view, the opening and raising of questions that otherwise would be kept out of public discussion [...]' (1993: 6).

Forester's later work, after his Habermasian period in the 80s and early 90s, takes shape as 'critical pragmatism', and Habermas' influence is less explicit. 'We really need less often to keep rediscovering politics and 'power', and more often to carefully assess forms of power and their specific types of vulnerabilities, for only where dominating power is vulnerable is critical resistance possible' (Forester, 2000: 915). Hence, the later Forester is sceptical of the universal theorising à la Habermas and prefers situated analysis. Nevertheless, he maintains his view that participatory planning is about minimising the negative effects of 'power', a concept that he tacitly confines to be *illegitimate power over*.

So, when we read critical analyses, we need to learn how, in the face of power and deep difference, our lives can be better, not just to hear once again that who gets what is political, that the ruling rule, the powerful have power, that racism and sexism shatter lives, that environmental injustice is widespread. (Forester, 2009: 11)

The later Forester pays attention to eliciting and analysing planners' own stories of encounters with power in participatory planning (Forester, 1999, 2009). While he sheds light on many aspects of planning, he refrains from theorising power beyond his earlier framing of power as a distortion of authentic communication, as *illegitimate power over*. Hence, Forester's account of power is about how incremental improvements of planning practices might lead, not all the way to, but towards, *power with*: concerted action towards shared planning objectives. Hence, Forester does not provide us with elaborate conceptualisation of the manner in which power relations are constituted in planning (the concept *power to* in my terminology) and refrains from supplying definitions of conflictual, yet *legitimate, power over*.

Forester's framing of planners' role in power relations. Forester frames planners as working in contexts distorted and/or shaped by *illegitimate power over*; 'in the face of power' (1989). Thereby, his account of planners and power is usefully critical, yet, leaves conceptual voids when it comes to *power to* and *legitimate power over*, due to the tendency to use power as a merely negatively loaded concept or see it as a necessary evil.

When Forester leans on Habermas, working 'in the face of power' means that, '[...] planners serving the public face particular special, private, or class interests (e.g. corporate development interests), which may work systematically to violate [the] norms of ordinary communication' (1980: 278). Forester then makes salient how the biases of planning

organisations influence planners' dealings with power. '[...] planners will often feel compelled to be less frank or open than they might wish [...]' (1980: 279).

When Forester draws on critical pragmatism, he poses questions about planners and power.

In a world of conflicting interests – defined along lines of class, place, gender, organization, or individuals – how are planners to make their way? [...] When planners are mandated to enable “public participation” even as they work in bureaucratic organizations that may be threatened by such participation, what are planners to do? (Forester, 1989: 5)

This quote captures the essence of Forester's early and more contemporary framing of planners' role in power relations: planners are restricted and influenced by *illegitimate power over*. Planners 'may be conservative, resistant to change, captured by conventions and language, habits and frameworks that may not truly reflect “all they can do”'. (Forester, 2013: 7). Even so, Forester's planners desire to and are capable of making a difference.

Forester places his planners at the centre of his vision of planning as the organisation of hope. To him, planners are capable of levelling the playing field to the advantage of marginalised communities and minimise repressive power, or in small steps, decrease the misuse of power. He tells us to 'spend less time rediscovering that power of course matters, and let's spend more time exploring how we can do better, less time presuming impossibility and more time exploring actual possibility' (2013: 7). This quote exemplifies how the concept power plays a negative role, as *illegitimate power over*, in Forester's optimistic framing of planners who are capable of empowering citizens.

Since Forester largely treat power as a negative concept or as a necessary evil, he does not theorise what legitimate power might be. Nevertheless, his accounts of planners' practices are full of practical examples of when planners use their ability to act, their *power to*, to get people to do what they otherwise would not have done. Forester is thereby tacitly demonstrating what he sees as *illegitimate* or *legitimate power over*. As Forester explains, rather than theorising the legitimacy of power he wish to 'show how planners and community leaders might work practically in the face of power and value differences to *achieve* such ends—more just and beautiful, sustainable, and liveable places and spaces'. (Forester, 2009: 6).

Perhaps one might say that Forester is, by way of instructive examples, showing when planners' exercise of power is legitimate, without providing legitimacy criteria? Nevertheless, Forester's preference for practice, useful as it is, does not fulfil the need for concepts of *power to* and *legitimate power over* that can transcend context. Even if power relations are situated, we cannot do without a general language of power and widely accepted legitimacy criteria, if we are to justify planners' exercises of power.

Patsy Healey

I was interested in the power dynamics in the many different webs of relations, how these interacted with each other and how in turn these interactions shaped the terrain through which future interactions evolved. (Healey, 2017: 118)

Patsy Healey writes in the European sociological institutionalism tradition. She approaches power relations from a critical stance. She is interested in how planning cultures that reproduces unjust power relations might be transformed through agency in the micro practices of planning. Her approach to planning is, among many other references, inspired by Giddens' (1984) structuration theory and Habermas' (1984, 1985) theory of communicative action.

Healey's framing of power in participatory planning. Healey frames power as embedded in social structures through 'implicit and explicit principles about how things should be done and who should get what' (Healey, 1997: 45). Thereby, she makes salient how structuration practices 'carry power relations from one period to the next' (Ibid.). She characteristically sees how 'power over the formation of rules of behaviour, and power over the flows of material resources' shape human actions and thoughts (Ibid.).

To Healey, planning cultures are based on shared assumptions, which constrain, but do not determine, the ways in which agency works in human relations because,

[...] some [taken for granted assumptions] may endure and get [...] inscribed in routine. [...] Structuring power is carried through the medium of these ideas and routines, shaping how agency invents ways to use, develop, and distribute the material resources available in any situation" (Healey, 1999: 1132).

This quote shows how Healey's framing of power, in contrast to Forester's, brings possibilities for explaining the creation of *power to* beyond Habermas' communicative distortions and Lukes' three dimensions of *illegitimate power over*. Healey's affinity with Giddens and sociological institutionalism provides tools for a more elaborate analysis of power. Nevertheless, she has primarily paid attention to how *illegitimate power over* can be transformed into more enabling planning cultures that allows for concerted action, that is, relations of *power with*. Thereby, her account of power in participatory planning is usefully critical, yet constrained by the same down playing of *legitimate power over* as Forester.

Healey's emphasis on problematic power relations leads to a solution that is to transform power relations through human agency in the micro practices of planning. She explains how people can be reflexive, with the capacity,

[...] to penetrate below direct interpersonal and deliberate strategic manipulation, to access an awareness of deeper cultural concepts and practices, and the relations of power that they embody. [...] people can become aware that what they do in routine ways is not inherently 'natural', but has become 'natural' through a social history of acceptance and embedding. If so, it can also be disembedded, though this may involve a long process of cultural readjustment [...] to a different kind of governance organization. (Healey, 2003: 113–114)

Healey combines the Giddensian dynamic and situated diagnosis of power with Habermas' (1984, 1985) universal theory of communicative action. Drawing on Habermas, she diagnoses power relations through a critique of how the Enlightenment, in

spite of removing other forms of inequalities, created ‘new bastions of power’ by which ‘people are made unequal’ (1997: 39). Healey (1992: 145) explains how a ‘logic coupled with scientifically constructed empirical knowledge, was unveiled as having achieved hegemonic power over other ways of being and knowing, crowding out moral and aesthetic discourse’. Thereby, she draws attention to how the ‘competitive market’ and the ‘hierarchical bureaucracy’ are responsible for the reproduction of inequality (Healey, 1997: 40). Habermas provides Healey with conceptual tools to critique power, yet her tendency to conflate power over with undesirable coercion, leaves a void when it comes to conceptualising *legitimate power over*.

Throughout her career, Healey’s prescription for transforming power relations is to use criteria that resemble Habermas’ evaluative concept of the qualities of “speech situations” [as] a valuable tool of critique in [...] [power] struggles’ (Healey, 2003: 113). She suggests that power ought to be criticized by way of argument, and thereby opening up possibilities for reflexivity and change of *illegitimate power over*. Healey stresses how instances of reason carry the capacity for transforming culturally embedded power relations (Ibid.).

Healey emphasises how reflexivity can expose repressive power relations of *illegitimate power over* and how changes in micro practices might lead to shared meaning and concerted action: *power with*. Following Habermas, Healey argues that the transformation of planning cultures should create a more communicatively rational public realm because, ‘If based on principles of honesty, sincerity, and openness, to people’s views and to available knowledge, then these truths and values can transcend the relativism of different perspectives’ (Healey, 1997: 53). This is, in my interpretation, a call for participatory planning to transform planning cultures infused with *illegitimate power over*. Clearly Healey’s critical analysis is a necessary part of the answer to the question, *when is power legitimate?* Yet, it leaves us without a concept of *legitimate power over*, which is needed in contested episodes of planning.

Healey’s framing of planners’ role in power relations. Healey emphasises that planners, in their micro practices, can reproduce or transform power relations because ‘[...] in the finegrain of planning practice, planners not only bring power relations into being, as Foucault describes. For Giddens, they also have the choice to change them’ (Healey, 2003: 117). Due to Healey’s use of Giddens’ version of sociological institutionalism, her account of planners, in contrast to Forester’s, provides a theorised understanding of how planners’ ability to act, their *power to*, is created through an interplay between structure and agency ‘in the finegrain of planning’.

Drawing on structuration theory, Healey explains how planners’ identities are shaped through social relations. At the same time, she also emphasises how planners carry the capacity to transform the power relations that shape their identities. Hence, her analysis complements Forester’s focus on minimising communicative distortions, resisting *illegitimate power over* in Lukes’ three dimensions and his later preference for accounts of planners’ work, without theorisation of power.

Healey frames planners as capable of seeing through assumed relations and practices. Nonetheless, Healey (1997: 85) also acknowledges that for planners,

To change systems, and to re-make structures, requires an effort to challenge the relations of power on all three of Lukes' levels, the formal, the 'behind the scenes' and the embedded dimensions of power; and a recognition, as Foucault argues, of the power relations of the finegrain of practices.

This reasoning demonstrates the possibilities with Healey's analysis of planners and power, but also its boundaries. She pays attention to the different dimensions of power and recognises how power is ever-present. This framing provides useful tools for power analysis. Even so, as exemplified in the quote, Healey's theorisation is based on the same negative definition of power as Forester's. If power is confined to be a negatively loaded concept or a necessary evil, it limits the possibilities to understand planners' roles in power relations.

Flowing from Healey's critique of power is the prescription for planners to develop the ability to be reflexive.

[...] to reveal when communicative and collaborative processes are likely to [...] improve life conditions for the diverse groups and communities of interest in cities and regions, and when they are likely to be merely mechanisms to sustain old and well-established power relations. (Healey, 2003: 112)

Hence, Healey recognises that established structuration practices, which include injustices, will make it challenging for planners to transform planning cultures. Nevertheless, she maintains her trust in agency. 'Because people are inventive and creative, and because structuring forces cannot precisely determine events, there is always some scope for innovation' (Healey, 2003: 105). Thereby, she suggests that planners, by being reflexive, can transform power relations in the micro practices of planning.

Healey recommends that planners should be reflexive in order to reveal when oppressive power (*illegitimate power over*) can be transformed to concerted action towards shared objectives (*power with*). This is certainly an important task for planners, but they also need to know what to make of situations when shared meaning is not possible and relations of *power over* are inevitable. On this question, Healey does not provide an answer.

Judith Innes

[...] dialogue and debate in the public sphere ensures democracy and creates the conditions for the legitimate exercise of power as a representation of the values and interests of citizens. (Innes and Booher, 2015: 201)

Judith Innes challenged the dominance of rational planning by developing the ideas of consensus-building and collaborative rationality. She was throughout her career, frequently writing with David Booher, concerned with supporting the collaborative planning practices that emerged during her career. Innes sought to bring Habermasian ideas of

authentic communication into contact with innovative collaborative practices originating from the US alternative dispute resolution tradition.

Innes' framing of power in participatory planning. Following Habermas, the early Innes (1995: 186) diagnoses how power relations construct 'concepts [that] can colonise the lifeworld, blinding us to the deeper reality of our own experience'. Later in her career she pursues a similar diagnostic focus by drawing on Castells' (2009) concept 'communication power' since he 'shares Habermas' view that communication itself is a form of action that changes the realities of the social world, including power relations' (Innes and Booher, 2015: 200).

Even so, Innes' preference is for practice. She argues that her own and others' practical experiences of planning show how 'old' hierarchical forms of power lose ground to the kind of power that is created through collaborative practices (Booher and Innes, 2002: 224). According to Innes, 'the world is too complex, too rapidly changing, and too full of ambiguities for this sort of mechanical power to produce consistently what the player wanted or to produce sustainable results' (Booher and Innes, 2002: 222). Hence, Innes' framing of power is based on the same kind of negatively loaded definition of power over as Forester and Healey's.

When framing power in participatory planning, Innes consistently uses a distinction between 'power around the table and power outside the dialogue' (2004: 12). This distinction enables her to problematize power relations outside the planning process as permeated by *illegitimate power over*, in contrast to the possibility of 'consensus building' (Innes, 2004; Innes and Booher, 1999) and 'collaborative rationality', her versions of *power with*, inside the process of participatory planning (Innes, 2016; Innes and Booher, 2018). Hence, Innes' framing of power in participatory planning resembles Forester and Healey's focus on criticising *illegitimate power over* by contrasting it to *power with*.

Innes' framing of 'old' forms of power as inefficient and illegitimate leads to the solution to create conditions for authentic communication; producing what she calls 'network power' (Booher and Innes, 2002) and 'communication power' (Innes and Booher, 2015); her versions of consensual *power with*. Innes' fundamental idea, expressed in publications over the years, is that striving towards 'authentic' or undistorted communication can create conditions under which 'emancipatory knowledge [can] transcend [...] the blinders created by our conditions and institutions' (Innes and Booher, 1999: 418). According to Innes (Ibid.), such knowledge can be 'achieved through dialogue that engages all those with differing interests around a task or a problem'. To create such conditions, Habermasian criteria for comprehensibility, sincerity and inclusivity ought to be fulfilled, as exemplified in her later work. 'The group meets face to face for authentic dialogue, where all are equally empowered to speak, all are listened to and all are equally privy to data and other forms of knowledge on the issues' (Innes, 2016: 2). This way of reasoning leads to the same preference for concerted action through *power with* as Forester and Healey, and the same lack of conceptualisation of *legitimate power over*.

In the analysed publications, Innes consistently argues that process design and facilitation should provide conditions for consensus, or at least negotiated agreement, inside

participatory planning processes. She describes the work needed to create such processes as ‘skilful management of dialogue’ and ‘well-run consensus building projects’. These concepts appear intended to build a narrative around the possibilities to change relations of *illegitimate power over* into *power with*. Nevertheless, her framing leaves voids when it comes to explaining the *power to* and the *legitimate power over* necessary for achieving this result.

Innes’ framing of planners’ role in power relations. In her early work, Innes frame planners as designers of social processes, not as neutral experts following the rules of scientific inquiry. She claims that planners exercise power beyond established planning norms. Based on this diagnosis, she identifies a particular need for ethical principles to guide planners (Innes, 1995). In my interpretation, she thereby criticises planners’ exercise of *illegitimate power over* and calls for criteria to distinguish *legitimate power over*.

Instead of supplying such criteria, the early Innes develops a narrative about planners who are ‘[...] uncomfortable with the expert role for themselves, recognizing that they have their own biases and that expertise has its limits. They have strong beliefs about the kind of society that is desirable, but they do not know how to work toward this within their professional roles’ (Innes, 1995: 186).

Based on this claim about planners’ perceptions, she turns towards solution framing by linking the work of ‘innovative planners’ with Habermas’ ideas of communicative rationality.

[Habermas] ideas are attractive to planners because, rather than forcing them to try for a value-neutral, expert role in which they do not believe, they offer planners the possibility of an ethical stance within the world as they experience it. The principles for emancipatory knowing fit with the basic inclination of many planners. (Innes, 1995: 186)

Characteristically, Innes knits a narrative based on claims about planners’ views of themselves and their practices. What she offers seems to be a critique of the rational planners’ exercise of *illegitimate power over*, and a suggestion to turn to Habermasian criteria as an alternative vision of *power with*. Even so, this framing does not help explaining what planners might do to act legitimately when exercising power over is inevitable.

Over the years, Innes gradually modify this framing of planners and in her contemporary work she has a more pessimistic view of planners. ‘[...] planners themselves often stand in the way of collaboration, preferring to keep control, without recognising how collaboration can reduce conflict, prevent mistakes, enrich their thinking, offer new options and reframe difficult problems’ (Innes, 2016: 1). Based on this sceptical view of planners, the contemporary Innes place her hope in professional facilitators, coming in from outside the planning system, to create conditions for authentic dialogue or ‘network power’ (Booher and Innes, 2002) and ‘communication power’ (Innes and Booher, 2015). This move does not solve the problems with her original framing since her suggestion

does not rest on an elaborated idea of where these facilitators get their ability to create fair planning processes, their *power to*, and since she refrains from conceptualising the *legitimate* or *illegitimate power over* they exercise in contested episodes of planning.

Discussion

This paper provides a broad account of the framing of power in communicative planning theory. I have analysed how the communicative planning scholars John Forester (working within US pragmatism), Patsy Healey (drawing on European sociological institutionalism) and Judith Innes (writing in the US tradition of alternative dispute resolution) have treated power in over 40 years of publishing. I thereby took a novel analytical approach by including, but also going beyond the heavily debated Habermasian roots of communicative planning. The analysis confirmed that the theory, across the three analysed streams, leaves conceptual voids regarding constitutive and conflictual power. However, it was also revealed that communicative planning has more to offer for understanding planners' role in power relations than the critics have acknowledged.

In the three analysed streams of communicative planning – originating from American pragmatism, sociological institutionalism and alternative dispute resolution – power is frequently framed as a negatively loaded concept: as *illegitimate power over*. Forester, Healey and Innes, and the streams of communicative planning they represent, are thereby drawing attention to the power relations through which experts, bureaucrats and corporate actors get it their way at the expense of marginalised communities. Their core framing of power – shared by all three scholars but expressed differently – is that participatory planning ought to empower disadvantaged communities by including them in well-designed planning processes where the use of *power over* by powerful actors can be transformed into relations of *power with*; concerted action towards shared objectives. Thereby, communicative planning, across the three analysed streams, usefully criticise dominating power and develop ideas about how planning processes can become more inclusive. Nevertheless, the framing of power in the three streams of communicative planning also leaves crucial conceptual voids.

No doubt, it often makes sense to emphasise the repressive capacity of power. Even so, to equate power over with undesirable domination is too reductive in planning. This is since planning is about making contested choices regarding places and societies (Campbell, 2002). To make choices involves exclusion of issues and voices, which will often lead to open or covert conflicts (Connelly and Richardson, 2004; Mouffe, 2005). Hence, if we want to 'get things done' in democracies (Mansbridge, 2012) through planning, we cannot do merely with a concept of *illegitimate power over*. Confining power over as undesirable is to imply that we might want to escape from conflictual power altogether, even if such an escape does not exist in planning (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002). Hence, the emphasis in communicative planning, across the three theoretical streams, on unacceptable conflictual power – *illegitimate power over* – hides the necessity of accepting that power over, in certain instances of planning, is inevitable and under certain conditions democratically desirable (see Haugaard, 2012).

The analysis also showed that the framing of *power with* in communicative planning downplays the ‘darker sides’ of consensual power. Drawing on Habermasian ideas of authentic dialogues, Forester, Healey and Innes have – in their different ways – largely theorised consensual planning interactions as spaces for open, honest and comprehensive discourse. Even if the communicative planning scholars certainly acknowledge that any consensus in planning is temporary and recognise that seemingly consensual processes might hide subtle manipulation by powerful actors (e.g. Innes and Booher, 2015; Sager, 2018), their framing, as all framings, omit certain features of planning realities. The flip side of the focus on the bright side of *power with*, is that communicative planning does not go into depth with the task of understanding when consensus works to stabilise illegitimate power relations through depoliticisation and well-choreographed processes of token participation (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Purcell, 2009). Even if those who search for sophisticated tools to unmask *power with* as hidden *illegitimate power over* will not find what they are looking for in the three streams of communicative planning, it does not mean that the communicative planning scholars have given a carte blanche for the darker sides of consensual power (Sager, 2018). The lack of focus on false consensus merely means that the framing of power in communicative planning, as all framings, is omitting certain kinds of power relationships and including others.

The analysis also confirmed the Foucauldian critique (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000; Richardson, 1996) that constitutive and productive *power to* is under theorised in communicative planning. Nevertheless, the analysis showed that Healey’s work within sociological institutionalism (e.g. 1997 and 2012) carries potential for explaining how *power to*, as the basic ability to act, is created through the interplay between agency and structure and the resulting predictability of planning cultures. Yet, the analysis showed that Healey’s work does not elaborate in depth on how a sociological institutionalism approach to planning might be used to understand constitutive power. The absence of conceptualisation of how *power to* arises from ordered social relations is problematic because understanding the established order is a necessary basis for making normative judgements about accepting or attempting to change this order (Haugaard, 2003; Richardson and Cashmore, 2011).

Importantly, the findings additionally shed light on how the relationship between different forms of power is treated across the three streams of communicative planning. The analysis showed that Forester’s critical pragmatism, Healey’s sociological institutionalism and Innes’ dispute resolution mainly have focused on how *illegitimate power over* can be transformed into concerted *power with*. No doubt, critiquing repressive power and moving towards agreement is a necessary part of progressive planning thought and the backbone of many ‘deliberative planners’ (Forester, 1999). Nevertheless, that *illegitimate power over* ought to be transformed into *power with* is not all we need to know about the relationship between different forms of power in planning.

Rather than merely critiquing *power over* by way of contrast to *power with*, we do well to also accept that planning actors, be it politicians, planners or others, might, in some situations, have to use conflictual power, which is to be considered legitimate according to local or general criteria. Whether we like it or not, *legitimate power over*, is necessary to stabilise planning relationships when there is conflict over meaning or planning

objectives. In this way, the relationship between conflictual *power over* and consensual *power with* is not merely one where it is desirable that the later replaces the former. As conceptualised in the power literature (Allen, 1998; Haugaard, 2015) and implied tacitly in Forester's (1999, 2009) pragmatic accounts of planners' stories, *power with* might not arise without some actors exercising *power over* other actors to stabilise power relations and create conditions for concerted action. Hence, in the situated interactions in planning, we might find that exercises of *power over* are preconditions for *power with*. This relation between *power over* and *power with* might be tacitly present in the three analysed streams of communicative planning, but Forester, Healey and Innes have not taken on the task to spell it out, leaving a crucial void in the conceptualisation of progressive communicative planning practice.

Finally, the analysis revealed how planners' role in power relations are framed in the three streams of communicative planning. Here, the analytical approach to go beyond the common Habermasian roots revealed that communicative planning has more to offer than the critics have acknowledged. Pragmatism, as expressed by Forester, and sociological institutionalism, as expressed by Healey, might actually provide the kind of critical orientation for planners that planning scholars have called for recently (e.g. Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2016; Grange, 2017; Westin, 2019). Besides the rightly critiqued construction of power-free facilitators (McGuirk, 2001; Purcell, 2009), communicative planning also includes promising ideas of critically pragmatic and reflexive planners (Forester, 1999, 2013, 2019; Healey, 1997, 2003). Forester's pragmatic accounts of planners who make a difference provide the kind of critical yet optimistic orientation that planners (as well as planning scholars) do well to nurture. Healey's work within sociological institutionalism provides complementary theoretical tools by explaining how planners, in order to make a difference, must, and under certain conditions can, develop the ability to see through and even transform taken-for-granted power relations. Additionally, Innes has showed how the ideas from alternative dispute resolution can provide planners with conceptual tools for crafting the agreements that planning by necessity requires.

The findings from this analysis of communicative planning theory point to three pressing tasks for strengthening the treatment of power in this theory. Conceptual work is needed on (i) constitutive *power to* (ii) conflictual yet *legitimate power over* and (iii) the relationship between *power over* and *power with*. For the broader discussion about power in planning, I hope to have demonstrated the advantages of treating power as a plural concept including, but not exhausted by, *power to*, *power with*, *illegitimate power over* as well as *legitimate power over*. Arguably, such a plural view of power provides future possibilities to clarify differences and commonalities between alternative approaches to power in planning.

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Notes

1. Useful work related to the legitimacy of power can, for example, be found in the fields of planning justice (Fainstein, 2010); public interest/common good (Puustinen et al., 2017b), planning rights (Alexander, 2007) and planning ethics (Campbell, 2012).

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Author biography

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