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## **Portland's Green Machine: Planning for Sustainability** *A Case Study 1972-2007*

### **Introduction**

#### *Background*

This case study recounts how planners across the Portland region implemented sustainability in the years 1972-2007. Framed within a modern interpretation of a classical Aristotelian concept, this research recognizes practical wisdom (*phronesis*) as a key factor underlying professional actions—in addition to scientific (*episteme*) or technical (*techne*) knowledge. Simplified, it is the "*know-why*" rather than the "*know-how*" among Portland planners in planning for sustainability across three decades. In addition to operationalizing "*sustainability planning*" as a useful term for planning researchers and practitioners, this research will explore the values and relations of power underlying the judgments and decision-making of Portland 's planners as experts and political agents. This research documents Portland's process an exemplar case for other cities attempting to plan for sustainability using a mixed methods approach to data collection including content analysis of documents and archive data, interviews with sustainability planners, observation of current sustainability planning efforts, and quantitative survey of Portland planners' values, as warranted. The results of this research will be valuable to Portland 's planners, bringing to

light trends in their sustainability planning, the possible impacts of these trends on various groups, and raising possibilities for improving sustainability planning in the region

### ***Problem Statement:***

No standards exist regarding the definition, range, or scope of sustainability planning, making it difficult to carry out and evaluate. However, it is generally accepted that planning for sustainability is most effective at the local or regional scale. Thus, local planners wield a great deal of influence in shaping the meaning of sustainability and in developing and executing sustainable plans and strategies for cities and their inhabitants. Despite the progress made through application of Habermas's theory of communicative action in planning research and practice in recent decades, this focus on public participation, discourse, and consensus leaves little room for examinations of the power relations underlying attempts to plan for a sustainable future in a pluralist society (Hoch, 2007). Furthermore, the powers that planners maintain in discretionary decision-making and agenda setting may privilege the values and needs of some groups over others. Given it is widely regarded as a model of sustainability planning, Portland presents an exemplar case for examination of the processes involved in sustainability planning as well as the ideologies and relations of power at work beneath them.

### **Research Goals and Questions**

I will ground this study of the relations of power in Portland's sustainability planning by placing the social context of planners' values against the historic lens of their actions. In this case, practical wisdom becomes both the observed and the method of observation.

Following the work of Flyvbjerg on Danish planners (1998), I will examine Portland planners' implementation of sustainability while asking the following values-rationality questions:

1. *Where is sustainability planning in Portland headed?*
2. *Who gains, who loses, and by what mechanisms of power in this instance?*
3. *Is this trend desirable?*
4. *What should be done?*

## **The Phronetic Method: An Overview**

Before I can argue the merits of undertaking of this research, it is necessary to explain the position from which this argument stems.

At its roots, planning was a modern endeavor—sharing modernity’s attendant faith in objectivity, technology, and reason—intended to establish a clear boundary between Man and nature, with Man and his cities emerging superior in the conflict (H. Thomas, 1994). In the last half-century, philosophical turns including the rise of identity politics, feminism, and cultural pluralism, have challenged planning’s rational model, raising questions whose answers led to developments like advocacy planning, communicative action planning, and New Urbanism (Fainstein, 2005).

Despite the progress made by planners (some would call it a return) in the practice of social reform in the last fifty years, debate continues about both the substantive and procedural aspects of planning practice with planning for sustainability at the top of planning’s agenda for the new millennium (Jepson, 2001). However, there continues to be very little engagement, in social science broadly and in planning research specifically, with the relationship between rational knowledge and context, experience, and intuition, or what

proponents of deep ecology would call "ecological wisdom" (Wight, 2005).

Flyvbjerg (2001), questions the value of aspiring to rationality in studies of society and suggests that rather than emulating natural science, social scientists should begin tackling social problems in ways that matter to and in cooperation with communities. Drawing on the work of Weber, Habermas, and Foucault, Flyvbjerg contends that despite Sisyphean efforts to the contrary, social science cannot contribute to "normal science and predictive theories of scientific development" any more than natural science can contribute to the "reflexive analysis of goals, values and interests that [are] a precondition for enlightened development in any society" (167). Rather than attempting to fit social science into the instrumental reality of positivist natural science, it should focus on the values-rationality that preceded it. He asserts that we must look for guidance beyond the boundaries of our current ways of thinking "so dominated by universals and means-end rationality" to the values-rationality that preceded it when conceptualizing alternative approaches to relevant contemporary social science (53).

Given this understanding, he conceives of a practice-research based social science rooted in a contemporary interpretation of the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, translated roughly as prudence or practical wisdom. *Phronesis* goes beyond analytical, scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and technical knowledge (*techne*) to include judgments and decisions made in the manner of an adept social and political agent. He argues that *phronesis* is an essential component in social action, and that any attempts to understand society epistemologically or technologically in the absence of *phronesis* are inevitably hollow.

Let us consider the quote below, culled from a scholarly report of empirical research

done on the role of politics in professional planning, as an example of the type of social science research Flyvbjerg argues we should leave behind:

"The element that best distinguishes a profession from an occupation is that of expertise...based on a body of specialized theoretical knowledge.... His approach is both intellectual and technical and it is the combination of these attributes which contributes to the professionals' favorable status in society" J. Vincent Buck, *Politics and Professionalism in Municipal Planning*, 1976

Here Buck characterizes the combination of intellectual [*episteme*] and technical [*techne*] knowledge as the core of planning's professional success. Whether or not this is accurate is irrelevant. Within the phronetic framework, it is inherently false because it overlooks the facet of planning practice in which planners exercise their expertise in context based upon the values they hold.

Even if Buck had considered phronesis, perhaps through observation of expert decision-making in the planning profession, Flyvbjerg contends there is more to consider. Where the Aristotelian model falls short is where the power Flyvbjerg's phronetic research strategy lies. While the relationship between phronesis and social science is clearly strong and where phronesis clearly provides the link between technology and scientific knowledge, these connections remains tenuous in the absence of a "well-developed conception of power" (110). To reconcile this inadequacy, Flyvbjerg argues that the goals of planning research look beyond the *episteme* of Habermas's communicative rationality and, building on Foucault's ideas on power and rationality, toward a phronetic methodology of case research that examines values and relations of power in a concrete, socio-historic context (107).

It is this phronetic approach to acquiring detailed, concrete knowledge of a specific

case to which I aspire here. My goal is not theory development but rather "to contribute to society's practical rationality in elucidating where we are, where we want to go, and what is desirable according to diverse sets of values and interests...contributing to societies capacity for value-relational deliberation and action" and to alleviate "incursion of a narrow means-rationality into social and political life" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.167). I will outline the specific steps I will undertake in conducting this phronetic case study following a review of the pertinent literature.

## **Research Rationale**

This cursory treatment of the concepts related to sustainability is to define them for discussion purposes in this proposal; I will elaborate them through the research process. Bear in mind that the goal of phronetic research is not to develop theoretical concepts for testing but rather to understand and clarify the values and relations of power expressed in planners' words and actions.

### ***Defining sustainability, sustainable development, and sustainability planning***

Sustainability is a term frequently employed yet rarely circumscribed. Meaning literally the power to keep some thing or state in existence, sustainability first appeared in an ecological context in the 1970s alongside the emerging environmental movement (Litke, 2006). In subsequent decades, it evolved to widely connote the recognition that we must "strive to achieve a decent standard of living for all people and live within the limits of natural systems" (Berke & Conroy, 2000). Based on this definition, sustainable development may be

considered the professional development of strategies for achieving this goal, in large part through the resolution of social conflict (Jepson, 2001; Campbell, 1996). In this research, I will explore the interplay and applications of these concepts as ideology underlying contemporary urban and regional planning.

If sustainability is truly a "chaotic, bewildering social experiment" then planners face a recondite task in translating this concept into effective practice (Litke, 2006). "Sustainability planning," although little more than adjectively embedded in discussions in the sustainable development literature, has emerged in recent years in the planning profession as the task of integrating diverse planning practices under the umbrella of a comprehensive sustainability strategy (for instance in job postings seeking a "Sustainability Planner") (See Lake Oswego, OR, and Bridgewater, NS). In this case, "sustainability planning" nominatively indicates planning undertaken to promote sustainability; the more general sustainable planning is reserved for substantive assessment of planning practices over time within a framework of sustainability.

Beyond the aforementioned semantic complexity, this opacity with regard to scale, range, and scope significantly limits development of clear mandates in planning for sustainability. Current research asserts that despite the importance of developing sustainability strategies at the state and federal levels, planning for sustainability is most effectively undertaken at the local or regional scale (Berke & Conroy, 2000; Beatley, 1995; Arefi & Triantafillou, 2005 ; Campbell, 1996). These authors carefully point out the importance of relating these local planning activities to global concerns without explicitly

characterizing the nature of this relationship or offering concrete solutions for planners trying to navigate across these realms. Given the lack of empirical evidence supporting their conclusions about the appropriate scale of sustainability planning, their consensus on the superiority of the local scale may be based in an understanding of the relationship historically between the land-use and development control functions of local plans in support of implementation of larger strategic plans (Bracken, 1981; Beatley & Manning, 1997). Beatley (1995) suggests that it is in this local realm where "a different (or improved) professional planning paradigm can most effectively take shape" (383). My research will observe how planners respond to and exert the power of the "Think Global, Act Local" edict in order to develop suggestions for critically shaping and executing effective sustainability plans at the local level.

More contentious than scale are debates over the range of planning for sustainability. While most planners and planning scholars would agree that "planning is present action toward the making of a better future," and as such, inherently backward looking and future oriented simultaneously, the matter of in what ways and how far forward to plan for sustainability varies greatly (Spatt, 1971; Birkeland, 2002). In the literature on planning for sustainability, "long-term" stretches from the present generation to the next, from "seven generations" down the road to as far as five-hundred years from now (Wheeler, 2000; Berke & Conroy, 2000; Beatley, 1995). Traversing otherwise divergent planning traditions, the modern ideology of progress is woven firmly within the fabric of planning, with the conservation of resources its universal goal (H. Thomas, 1994). With resource scarcity a constant, variations

in perceptions of the range of planning emerge according to differences in cultural understandings of time. In the past fifty years the linearity of Modern time embedded in the ideology of planning's systematic "progress thinking" has given rise to a range of spatial-temporal conceptions evident in the literature (M. Thomas, 1994). How planners' exercise sustainability is inevitably determined in some part by their values concerning time, heritage, conservation, progress, and the future. Throughout this research, I will examine the extent to which these values influence how backward or forward looking are these planners and the plans they develop.

Finally, and the least agreed upon, is the scope of sustainability planning, at both the procedural and substantive levels. Influential is the "Three Es" model of sustainable development which outlines the substantive areas of sustainability across which planners attempt to strike a balance: environmental protection, economic development, and social equity (Jepson, 2001; Berke & Conroy, 2000; Beatley, 1995;). Beyond these concepts, however, lies the problem for planners of identifying which procedures will best address these problem areas (Hudson, 1979; Czech, 2001 ). Exploration of these aspects of planning for sustainability central to this proposed research project are discussed in greater detail below.

### ***Why research sustainability by looking at planners?***

Recognizing the necessity of local planning involvement in sustainability efforts, Jepson (2001) examined the role of planning in sustainable development by extracting thirty-nine local procedural strategies reflecting the "current state of sustainable development" from seminal sustainable development books and websites. He then surveyed local and policy-

makers, including politicians, administrators, and planners to assess the extent of local implementation of these procedures and identify barriers to their adoption. (Perhaps unremarkably, planners had by far the highest response rate of all respondents in this study). Jepson concluded that a more consistent, thorough application of the established sustainability tools is called for—emphasizing that planners may need to lead the way: "Planning--perhaps more than any other profession--is closely associated with sustainable development in terms of principles and the requirements of professional intervention" and is closely associated with processes crucial in resolving conflicts encountered in implementing sustainability. "For these reasons, the extent and nature of local planning office involvement in the enactment of sustainable development policies are of essential concern" (230).

He admonishes planners to move beyond the traditional planning realms of land-use and development control toward a holistic, community-focused practice. Given the questions of scale and range raised previously, planners clearly have to examine their approach to sustainability at the institutional level, while reducing cultural and political barriers to implementing sustainability planning. Planners unquestionably play an important role in the development of sustainability; how they do so is the focus of this study.

Beatley, whose book, *The Ecology of Place* (1997), Jepson looked to when developing his sustainable development strategies, outlines for planners steps they must take to practice sustainable planning. He positions these strategies within an environmentally ethical framework that assesses conventional planning strategies alongside "alternative visions" of a more sustainable future concerned with the "Three Es" of environmental conservation,

economic development and social equity. He calls for planners to begin developing concrete strategies for assessing their sustainability planning efforts, and to foster meaningful relationships that encourage growth of grassroots community groups. The pursuit of sustainability is a cooperative endeavor and, accordingly, Beatley stresses the need for development of a multi-level "policy matrix" that promotes rather than undermines local sustainability efforts. Additionally, he calls for further scholarship "documenting (quantitatively and otherwise) the experiences of communities, from Amsterdam to Curitiba, to Portland, that have sought to implement an alternative vision. The ingredients of such comparatively successful places remain poorly understood" (392). By examining the interplay between individual planners and the structures within which they act and are acted upon throughout Portland's sustainability planning efforts, this research endeavors not only to document experiences of those who have, at times, successfully navigated the complexity of sustainability planning but also to develop recipes for other planners attempting to do so.

Despite the widespread acceptance of sustainability as central goal of current planning efforts, little consensus emerges about how to execute and evaluate these efforts. Perennial debates about the nature and priorities of planning raise concerns about the sufficiency of the "Three Es" model for addressing the complex conflicts facing industrial society. Campbell argues that current implementations of sustainability in planning may be both too vague and idealistic and suggests that beyond the Three E's, another letter, P--for politics and governance--is essential to complete the model of sustainable planning practice (1994). He constructs a "Planner's Triangle" which illustrates the interdependence of these structural

concerns as points spanned by procedural conflicts over property, resources, and development. At the confluence of these conflicting and complimentary concepts emerges "sustainable development" (synonymous here with "sustainability planning"). He elaborates that for planners to effectively negotiate these concerns in their plan for sustainability, they must first identify their orientations as professionals and individuals with regard to these conflicts; however, he offers no practical solutions for engaging in this process of self-evaluation (Campbell, 1996). This research will outline and define for Portland's sustainability planners their values and orientations toward sustainability with the goal of enhancing their substantive praxis. But perhaps more importantly, by engaging reflectively in this research, Portland planners will have an opportunity to hone the skills necessary for bringing about changes based not only on cognitive understandings of the world as they would have it, but with deeper understanding on an effective level of why they would have it be otherwise (Bracken, 1981).

Berke and Conroy (2000) also place sustainable development at the center of their discussion of planning for sustainability and, like Campbell, they agree that despite the apparent simplicity of the term "sustainable development," no clear strategy has emerged for bridging planning theory and practice in this area. Through a content analysis of thirty comprehensive plans they developed six defining principles of sustainable development in local planning efforts. Remarkably, their analysis revealed no significant differences between plans that clearly integrated sustainability principles and those lacking any reference to sustainability. This raises many questions about the extent of planners' understanding of tools

at their disposal in planning for sustainability. They suggested that while this may be due to planners' lack of familiarity with the core concepts of sustainability, it may also be attributed to the influence a single planner may wield in the sustainability planning process, for instance by working sustainability principles into plans "under the radar" when the "code words" for the sustainability principles are not commonly agreed upon by their colleagues (28). Their research suggests the need for deeper understanding of sustainability by planners, but also for research into how these planners understand the core sustainability principles and deploy them. Furthermore, they call for comprehensive research into the "critical role" that individual planners play in "promoting the dialogue about sustainability" (30).

### ***Why research the planners in Portland?***

In case study research, a single case study is rarely adequate unless the case under investigation critically tests a significant theory (least likely case/most likely case) or represents an extreme or unique case (Yin, 2003). Our case relies on the latter rather than the former: Portland is an exemplar case of planning for sustainability. In "Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research," Flyvbjerg (2004) explains these paradigmatic cases represent a situation that clearly "highlight more general characteristics of the societies in question" with "metaphorical and prototypical value" that "transcends rule-based criteria" (p. 80). Often, these exemplar cases can be difficult to identify and their selection is often intuitive. Fortunately, we face little uncertainty in this instance. With regard to sustainability and planning, it is not unimaginable that one day the events occurring and techniques emerging in Portland between 1972-2007 will be called "The Portland School" in

planning textbooks.

Portland's reputation as a paragon of urban livability looms large in the American popular conscience. In an informal web survey of "Top Ten" lists under the search terms "Livability," "Sustainability," "Green," and "Eco-friendly," Portland consistently appears near the top in both national and international polls. Defined as imminently "livable," Portland is a model in the realms of civic participation, transportation planning, regional growth management, and innovative place-based design. This Portland-style planning has been the object of much scholarly research and professional discourse (Walton, 2004; Hovey, 2003; Stephenson, 1999). Chapin (2005) believes other planners are inspired by Portland's success in this arena:

"[T]he city of Portland is widely idealized as a "city on the hill" where good planning has contributed to a vibrant downtown, excellent public transit, and dense and compact urban development, all supported by a strong and widely held environmental ethic. For many planners, the very idea of Portland sustains them. Even after long, fruitless public meetings to promote compact development, or the approval of a new power center with 1,000 parking spaces on the site of an old, beloved farm, they can take refuge in the thought that Portland has embraced planning and enjoyed the benefits of doing so" (453).

While I am sure much of the acclaim reflects at least a portion of the truth about Portland's success in planning for sustainability, we must pause in our adoration of the subject, to paraphrase Byron, lest we inflate this *beau ideal*. Reiterating a question raised by a renowned local planner, Nohad A. Toulan, Walton (2004) asks, is Portland "living off [its] legacy?" (128). This research proposes to ask the same by exploring, through analysis of values and power relations at work among Portland's planners and its planning structures, how Portland's sustainability planning is both accomplishing *and* falling short of its claims.

### ***Why research these planners' values in planning?***

The proposition that individual planners are instrumental in developing and carrying out plans is clearly evident in the articles above and echoes throughout the planning literature (Buck, 1976; Hovey, 2003; Wheeler, 2000; White & Mayo, 2004, Bracken, 1981; E. Howe, 1994; Guttenberg, 1993; McLoughin, 1973; Alexander, 2006; Hartman, 2002). Forsyth (1999) explored the nature and implications of this influence by looking at various types and levels of administrative discretion wielded by planners and at the ways they might plan that reflects their "deeply held" values. Using progressive planning as the analytical framework, she investigated the relationship between planners' values and those of the bureaucracy of which they were a part. "Value-based planning," she explains, happens in three situations: with the approval of those in power above you, based on the powers granted your position/job description, or in cooperation with non-profit or activist groups. This discretion basically occurs positively (pursuit of goals) or negatively (through gaps in the system of rules), and in the realms of setting guidelines through policy, through establishment of options, or through service provisions (12).

Discretion is power and power is granted by power from above, moving ever downward in its exercise (Foucault in Flyvbjerg, 2001). In the hierarchical structure of the planning bureau or agency, planners exercise power in several ways, including decisions to follow (or not) established rules, decisions to act in the absence of rules, and in the interactions they engage in by virtue of their position within the bureaucracy. Although planners generally share the goal of planning for the public good, the values upon which their

actions are based can vary significantly, leading to remarkably different outcomes (Forsyth, 1999).

However, planners do not only exercise power based on values in their active decision-making. Bracken (1981) sees individual planners exercising power through their contextual agenda setting, a process he calls "perceptual filtering" through which planners decide what problems to tackle based on their experiences of the "ecosystem" in which they operate. In this "complex hierarchy of activities and processes," planners negotiate and are influenced by their place in the system and learn through experiences modified by their values and worldview. Thus, he concludes: "the nature, purpose and meaning of any individual action can only be understood in relation to a context involving other actors and actions" (24).

Given the negotiating and agenda-setting power constituted in the values of individual planners, it is remarkable the planning profession historically failed to recognize values as a factor meriting investigation. In *Values and Planning*, Hew Thomas writes:

"[P]lanners generally eschewed any significant discussion of values while generally accepting without question key modernist tenets regarding the essential perfectability (through the application of reason, science, and technology) of society, and (in practice) the universal applicability of [Western] mores and technical principles" (4).

In this vein, other scholars have attributed this absence of values research to planning's emphasis on rational decision-making as the premise of its actions, long a defining characteristic of the profession (Hudson, 1979; M. Thomas, 1994; Hovey, 2003; Hoch, 2007; Alexander, 2006).

However, as Davies (1972) pragmatically observes in *The Evangelistic Bureaucrat*: "the

ideological impulse to avow a divorce of the technical from the evaluative did not mean the practice of planning was somehow purged of values.” And it is a thorough examination, historically and presently, of the relationship between values, power, and rationality in sustainability planning in Portland that forms the basis of this research. In an early empirical study on values in politics, Rokeach (1973) defines values as the “multifaceted standards” that form the basis of our actions, judgments and rationality (13). Before describing how we should go about studying these fundamental standards as the basis of planners’ actions, judgments, and reasoning with regard to sustainability, we must first briefly discuss the role of the planning profession relative to individual planning practice.

### *A Note on Professional Planning and Values*

By virtue of its status and role in society, buffered by many organizations dedicated to its progress, planning appears (to the uneducated observer) a profession in every sense of the term. Prior to undertaking this research, not only had it had not occurred to me that planning might not be a profession, but I had not considered that its status as a profession could be detrimental to helping planners plan. Most of the controversy lies in the definition of “profession” as an occupation characterized by a specialized body of knowledge or expertise, that operates autonomously in service to society and whether or not planning fits these criteria (Buck, 1976). For our purposes here, I support the position of planning as a profession given the constraints of this proposal in proving otherwise. However, determining whether planning qualifies as a profession is ultimately irrelevant to our case—since the possibility that *it might not be a profession* is enough to drive those interested in acquiring and

maintaining the legitimizing power of professional status to prove that it is (Argyris & Schön 1992).

Previously I discussed the powers that planners exercise individually, such as discretionary decision-making and agenda setting. However, planners also exercise power as a professional group by setting codes of conduct, enforcing standard practices and procedures, and generating goals and objectives. In sum, the profession largely determines what concerns—and what does not concern—planning (McLoughlin, 1973). There exists a large body of literature and set of practices dedicated to developing techniques and models that define the work of planners. These procedural theories guide planners as they tackle the substantive problems that lie in the world outside their field (Hudson, 1979).

The implications of sustainability planning as professional practice are twofold in terms of this proposed study. On the one hand, since its inception the planning profession has avowed itself as dedicated to planning in the public interest (social justice, environmental preservation, and aesthetic design.) Since its reformist origins in the Progressive Era, these substantive concerns have provided the "motivating values in the profession," a feature that "distinguishes them from other professionals" (Howe, 1994, p.324). This supports the assertion that planners are among the groups capable of working toward sustainability. However, the gap that exists between what planners aspire to accomplish and what they actually do is vast—in many respects because of the forces exerted upon planners by the "culture " of the planning profession, which socializes planners, limits their options, and discourages planners from instituting "sweeping changes" (Howe, 1994, p. 326).

On the other hand, these professional parameters increase the validity of the individual planner as the focus of study in this case. While observing the relationship between planners and their professions will undoubtedly present a daunting task, planning’s well-defined and widely documented professional values serve as a control of sorts, enabling me to question which values are more widely accepted and reinforced by the profession and which are influencing the actions of planners apart from their professional values. Furthermore, in constructing a framework for multi-level cooperative deployment of sustainability strategies, the broad influence of the planning profession could prove invaluable—especially in the realm of educating current and future planners (D. Howe, 1991; Beatley & Martin, 1993; Seltzer & Ozawa, 2002; Jepson, 2001; White & Mayo, 2004).

## Research Procedures

The goal of this research, in the words of Flyvbjerg, then is to “explore historic circumstances and current practices to find avenues to praxis” (140). An example of research in the phronetic style is *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al, 1995). In it, the authors examine the tension between individualism and participation in American civic life. The research practices in *Habits of the Heart* that lend the study its phronetic character are as follows (adapted from Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.131-4):

- *The research focuses on values*
- *The researcher is close to the people and phenomena in the study*
- *The research focuses on the minutiae of everyday life*
- *The case study is applied in context*
- *Narrative is used as an expository technique*
- *Dialogic nature—many voices are represented*

The only component of phronetic research missing in *Habits of the Heart* is an examination of power. Like the authors of *Habits of the Heart*, I intend to paint a complete portrait of complexity in context. Additionally, I am attempting to gather case knowledge that includes explicit considerations of power in practice—that is, to understand the project of democracy and freedom through interpretation of the complex interplay of discourses, both hidden and superficial, that reveal the forces at work within them.

To accomplish this, I have designed as single, unique exemplar case study that holistically examines planners’ values alongside the plans they make and the actions they undertake in planning in the context of planning for sustainability in Portland (Yin, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2001).

### ***Data Collection Methods***

#### **Step 1: Documents and Archival Data**

The first step in data collection in this research design is to gather relevant documentation about planning for sustainability in Portland, Oregon. There are several items I will be looking for in the city plans and related documents, which may include related studies or evaluations, meeting notes, written reports, letters and other communiqués, newspaper articles (Yin, 2003). Foremost, I will analyze the content to extract “code words” that signify values related to sustainability (Berke & Conroy, 2000; Hadjistavropoulos, 1998). Additionally, I will begin creating a map of the emerging “circuits of communication” that locates the people involved in these plans and related process and also records the “channels and boundaries of social influence” in their relations to each other and the plans (Prior, 2004).

I will not be looking that closely at what the documents literally say, but rather at how what they say reflects the manner in which the plans were constructed and what values or relations of power are embedded within them.

This map of central figures in sustainability planning serves the important function of determining specifically who *does* sustainability planning in Portland. Given the limits of the definition of sustainability planning as a professional approach to sustainable development, I will develop a potential informant database beginning with government (City and Metro) planners, but anticipate, based on Hovey's (2003) historical analysis of Portland's planning culture, key actors in sustainability emerging from the following realms:

- *Community groups, neighborhood associations*
- *Grassroots organizations (ex. The City Repair Project)*
- *Quasi-governmental agencies (ex. PDC)*
- *NGOs (ex. 1000 Friends of Oregon)*
- *Other professional, non-governmental, planners, architects, and designers*

## **Step 2: Interviewing Sustainability Planners**

Based on the values, people, and relationships established initially, I will begin qualitatively interviewing planners about their experiences planning for sustainability in Portland. Again, I will not be seeking detailed accounts of events as they recollect them, but rather how they perceived their relationship to these sustainability efforts and how their values came to bear in the decisions they made and the actions they undertook in promoting sustainability in Portland.

Obviously, recruitment begins in the primary phase of document analysis, as key

questions emerge in relation to persons knowledgeable about the event in question. I will begin securing interviews with these people, especially where questions arise with regard to the relationship between core sustainability values and key decision-making processes where the agenda setting and discretionary powers (outlined above) were/are exercised. I will then use a purposeful sampling strategy to determine subsequent interviewees based on their proximity to the case and questions at hand.

It may be that the number of potential interviewees developed through in phase one is so great that I cannot contact each individual at a given proximity to the case. In this situation, I may need to develop a sampling method for determining who to interview. However, I do not anticipate this will be necessary because of the dynamic bureaucratic and political context in which this study functions. While a large number of potential interviewees may initially emerge, I imagine it will narrow quickly based on their actual availability and the diversity they bring to the case.

The interviews themselves will be open-ended and in-depth, with questions formulated based on a literature review and the document analysis undertaken in the preliminary phase. In keeping with the phronetic framework of the case, the focus of the interviews will be on the minutiae of the interviewees' day-to-day experiences planning for sustainability rather than the more general, abstract aspects of planning theory and practice. Often referred to as "thick description," the goal of this strategy is to extract the powerful practical knowledge underlying these planners' actions rather than the epistemological or technological expertise they exercise (Geertz in Emerson, 1983). Grounded in the phronetic

goal of relating the individual to the structure through analysis of power relations in practice, I will attempt to conduct interviews that are as thorough and wide-ranging as possible. Furthermore, I will not engage in discourse analysis of the interviews, but rather will focus on the concrete, the "practical activity and practical knowledge" of planning for sustainability (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

### **Step 3: Values Survey**

If I am unable to uncover or understand through interviews the core values of sustainability informing the planners' decision-making through a range of "complimentary and contrasting talk," it may be necessary to develop at least one survey instrument to clarify or elaborate measure planners values (Rapley, 2004). In a similar study on the relationship between planners and the commercial interests in Aalborg, Denmark, Flyvbjerg found it necessary to survey planners from time to time to clarify his findings (1998). Given the dialogic nature of phronetic research, different perspectives on the same event or issue can emerge in relation to the study and surveys may be necessary to distinguish the relative truth behind conflicting perspectives. In a phronetic study of power dynamics in planning restructuring in the Tshwane government, South Africa, Coetzee & Oranje (2005) distributed questionnaires to city planners that explored their perceptions with regard to the planning restructuring. To address inadequacies in the preliminary survey, they later distributed another, smaller survey that put these perspectives in context. This process should not be confused with triangulation, since the goal is clarification rather than corroboration (Yin, 2003). All necessary survey instruments will adhere to standard sampling procedures and

administration (Rokeach, 1973; Aust, 2004).

#### **Step 4: Researcher Participation and Observation**

Although I plan to immerse myself in the field of planning for sustainability in Portland, as a "non-planner" there is little chance I will identify too strongly with the planners under observation. Unlike prevailing modes of participant observation, the goal of the phronetic researcher is not to participate in the events as they unfold, but to use the research as a means of problem solving and proposing solutions for, in this case, more effective sustainability planning practice. The lack of identification of the researcher with the group under study is an important aspect of phronetic research: unlike action research, in which the researcher identifies with and shares the goals of the group under study in an attempt to achieve these goals, phronetic researchers work in close proximity to the people and processes under investigation through collaboration, sharing results, developing interest in the study, soliciting feedback, testing and evaluating progress—by fostering a built-in "learning effect" (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Flyvbjerg (2001) outlines the responsibilities of the phronetic observer (p. 134-5):

- *Researchers record practice in terms of detailed observations of events*
- *Researchers present "data, events, and phenomena" by virtue of their connection to "other data, events, and phenomena" (134)*
- *Researchers document incongruities and shifts in the "meaning of concepts and discourses"*
- *Researchers value practices equally*
- *Researchers' hermeneutic "horizon of practice" is at the level of individual practice*
- *Researchers evaluate individual roles within the "total system of relations"*
- *Researchers attempt to "remove the doer from the deed" (This also applies to researcher, who must observe her own actions not through moral judgment, but rather through observation of the forces at work in her research.)*
- *Researchers must face the "ugly" reality of oppression at work within systems of power*

### *Data Management and Sorting*

Given the vast amount of data collected through case research, Yin (2003) advocates compilation of a case database that stores the case notes, documents, quantitative data, and narratives in a separate, easily accessed database. I have experimented with digital data storage systems in the past and am currently developing a data management system that capitalizes on the latest networking and communication technologies for managing this case data.

The first component of the data management consists of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) like NVivo or Nud\*ist, which I will implement to conduct systematic content analysis, coding, and cross-referencing of textual data. This is the mechanism I will use to code, store, and retrieve all interview transcripts, observation notes, archives/documents, and notes on the relevant literature. However, applicability of this software is severely limited by the high costs and steep learning curves of individual software packages in addition to the lack of compatibility across platforms and lack of transferability across networks for collaboration and sharing of data.

Given the importance of community collaboration in the process of phronetic research, I will reserve implementation of CAQDAS for those things requiring analytical coding and cross-referencing of codes, i.e. content analysis. For all other data storage and processing, I will use open source (or other widely available and accessible) web-based applications to create a comprehensive case database that incorporates and manages all case data, including CAQDAS processing reports, document and observation notes, reflective

writings, calendars and timelines, and research reports. These server-side applications (i.e. iGoogle, Zoho) facilitate sharing of documents during development and are accessible from any computer with a browser installed. I am considering publishing the reports in open-source wiki format (collaborative web-based content creation software) that will permit other case participants to comment on and edit the reports, and encourage readers to interact dynamically (through hyperlinks) with the permanent case archive. This would result in a functional, widely disseminated artifact and educational resource for sustainability planners, researchers, and the general public.

### **Data Analysis and Reporting**

In a recent article, Leonie Sandercock (2007) argues that "story has a special importance in planning that has never been fully understood nor sufficiently valued." In her estimation, stories are both constitutive of planners' experience of the city and an essential part of planning practice. Understanding how we tell and hear stories allows us to explore "how power shapes which stories get told, get heard, carry weight" (12). Narrative allows us to explore realms that would be hidden to other forms research, allows us to contemplate life in its contradictory complexity, allow us to tell stories about things that concern people's lived experiences (Coetzee & Oranje, 2005). Narrative also allows us to share our research with others. In this case, the stories can reveal how planners learn, negotiate conflict, make judgments, and deal with power relations (Forester, 1999).

Given the dialogic nature of phronetic research, narrative construction serves a primary function in analyzing as well as reporting case study data. To relay the story in a

truthful and reliable way, the researcher must characterize the relationships between actors and structures not as an "insurmountable duality" but rather as the indicative of the complexity of power relations. Working from the individual level, "phronetic researchers deliberately seek out information for answering questions about what structural factors influence individual actions, how those actions are constructed, and their structural consequences" (Bourdieu in Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.138). In essence, then, phronetic research is about minimizing duality—the duality of agent/structure, of general/concrete, of theory/praxis—by relating them through story. Attempting to minimize the divide between analysis and reporting further, Flyvbjerg (2001) integrates dialogue into the reporting process through a technique he calls "balloon" reporting. In order to engage with the community through the research process, he sends up parts of his research—the balloons—periodically for review and then integrates the commentary and feedback the work elicited (156).

I purposefully have avoided engaging here in the debate about reliability and validity in qualitative social science. Given the relationship between power and rationality alluded to in this proposal, it's obvious that normative scientific approaches to understanding society—despite their rationalized reliability and validity, or their claims to replicability or generalizability, for that matter—are no more indicators of truthful research than the context-specific values-rationality I've proposed here. For this reason, the indicator of "trustworthiness" relevant in this research is how truthfully the story I present resonates with those whom it concerns (Maxwell, 1990). Additionally, I commit to abide by the same rigorous standards in executing and evaluating my research practices as I apply in my

observation of the planners' execution of theirs—through critical application of the following questions:

1. *Where is this research headed?*
2. *Who gains, who loses, and by what mechanisms of power in this instance?*
3. *Is this trend desirable?*
4. *What should be done?*

## Final Thoughts

The complexity of this research design is a consequence of the complexity of the situation under evaluation. Despite the formal susceptibility of case studies to disorienting shifts and their tendency toward generalization and abstraction, the analytical framework of phronesis ground this work in basic questions of power relations in ordinary, concrete situations (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, the obstacles encountered when researching the values and actions of professionals or elites are mitigated in this case by the collaborative rather than evaluatory orientation of the research design as well as the goal of improving a practice among a group of practitioners committed *a priori* to improvement. The promises and the challenges implicit in the phronetic research proposed here, are touched on by Bertrand Russell in this excerpt from "Useless Knowledge":

"Both public and private misfortune can only be mastered by process in which will and intelligence interact: the part of will is to shirk the evil or accept an unreal solution, while the part of intelligence is to understand it, to find a cure if it is curable, and, if not, to make it bearable by seeing it in its relations, accepting it as unavoidable, and remembering what lies outside it in other regions, other ages, and in the abysses of interstellar space" (1974, p. 39).

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