



# **Field Area Statement: Transforming Planning**

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## **Primary Field Area: Planning**

### **Subfield A: Planning Theory & History--The Power to Transform**

Early planners like Howard, Wright, and LeCorbusier concerned themselves with transforming whole societies by rethinking the principles of urban planning and reshaping urban form. They were not concerned with incrementally alleviating social problems, but with entirely reconstructing society through the extensive rebuilding of cities. Implicit in this early conception of planning was the idea that structural changes, literally, could affect the social and economic health of cities and their inhabitants. For them, transformation of the built environment brought about and reflected the transformation of urban society.

Developments in planning theory over the last 50 years have shifted our understanding of the means and potential of planning to transform society and its institutions. In the 1950s, planners were largely understood as rational experts who developed comprehensive plans and innovations in planning practice. In the 1960s, the planning agency as actor emerged in planning theory with some theorists considering the "mutually adjusting" relationship of planning agencies with each other and their environments as a source of transformation in social-spatial conditions and governance. The political economy approaches that emerged soon after injected class struggles over the power of planning into macro-level examinations of planning institutions and ideas, alternatively viewing planning largely as reinforcing state interests rather than realizing its potential for social transformation. Although these developments raised awareness of

the structural forces shaping planning goals and practices, by the 1970s the focus began shifting from the institution to the individual planner as the primary shaper of planning processes and outcomes. Although certain approaches of this period, including regulation theory and regime theory, continued to examine planning's potential for change at the structural level, since the 1970s theorists have increasingly focused on the micro-level discourses and practices constituting planning institutions.

These micro-political approaches, influenced largely by Habermasian communicative action theory, are arguably the dominant mode of thought in planning studies today. Supplemented by social constructivism and Foucaultian power analyses, this "Collaborative" or "Communicative Turn" in empirical planning research and theory development has advanced our understanding of the interaction between specific planning practices and social processes; however, it has done little over the last three decades to further our understanding of how the micro-processes of planning relate to institutional processes and structural change. The primary debates that have emerged in planning theory between technical and communicative rationality, between rationality and power, between critical materialist and micro-political approaches, and between planning as government and planning as governance have fostered inquiry into the complex social relations underlying planning processes and policies, yet these conversations generally elide early planning's project of social transformation through planning.

A small but growing body of theory, building on regime, regulation, communicative action, and organizational theories, is invigorating a subsequent turn in planning theory which explores ways that structural forces are moderated or counteracted toward more just and sustainable planning outcomes. Like their Utopian predecessors, these theorists actively incorporate a prescriptive component to theory in addition to its explanatory, analytical, normative, and critical aims, by developing a framework for planners and theorists to recognize and test multiple epistemologies while conceiving of and bringing about more just, sustainable places through research and through engagement with planning as everyday governance. The planning field area in my case, then, consists of situating shifting conceptions of the transformational power of planning in the debate over structure and agency across the history of planning theory and practice.

Potentially significant in this examination is the ontological shift Hillier (2005) characterizes as the movement from rationally objective, transcendent theories that conceive of planning as fixed in space in time--the planning of "being"--toward a framework

in which planning is considered relationally across multiple horizontal and vertical networks that are fluid and ever-changing--the planning of "becoming." One implication of this complexity, for example, is elaborated by Alexander (2007) who suggests that acknowledging the false dichotomy of "planning" and "market forces" necessitates a shift toward consideration of both aspects under the umbrella of "governance" beneath which the various waves of Twentieth Century planning theory (deliberative, interactive, coordinative) are integrated and viewed as complimentary rather than competing.

By exploring these shifts in planning theory over time, I hope to better understand why planners plan as they do. This entails exploring the history of the planning profession alongside the evolution of planning theory, and related to this, the relationship of planning professionals to the organizations, institutions, and systems within which they operate and seek to transform.

**Associated Courses:** *Planning Theory & History; Values & Ethics in Planning; History of the Planning Profession; Planning: Institutions and Governance*

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## **Subfield B: Planning for Sustainability**

If researching and theorizing planning practice and institutions is the means, creation of just and sustainable cities and societies is the goal of my studies. Near the end of *Towards Cosmopolis* (1998), Leonie Sandercock identifies two questions humankind must answer in the 21st century:

- *How might we live with each other in peaceful coexistence in the cities and regions?*
- *How might we live well and sustainably on the earth?*

Asking these helps us begin to regard "sustainability" not as a means/ends proposition of human survival but rather as development of principles and practices that allow us to maximize human experience through appreciation of diversity, complexity, and uncertainty. Given planning's Utopian roots and future-oriented approaches to bringing about a better quality of life, a relevant third question emerges that shapes my field of inquiry: How does planning contribute to the development of just, sustainable cities?

Sustainability is a term frequently employed yet rarely clarified or 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. 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).

Few standards exist regarding the definition, range, scope, or scale 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; Beatley, 1995; Berke & Conroy, 2000). Beyond these substantive concepts, however, lies the problem of identifying which procedures best address these problem areas. Answering the question of how planning effects a just, sustainable future gives rise to several related questions that I will address through this field of study:

- *How does the planning field define sustainability?*
- *How does planning field currently operationalize (measure and assess) sustainability?*
- *Is there consensus regarding the appropriate scale, range and scope of planning for sustainability?*
- *What is planning's agenda with regard to sustainability?*
- *Does the planning field consider sustainability as exclusively place- and context-specific or are there universal principles they have adopted?*
- *Finally, how is the planning field researching, developing, and implementing more just, sustainable planning practices?*

**Associated Courses:** *Sustainable Cities, Planning for Sustainability: Theory and Method*

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## **Secondary Field Area: Urban Placemaking**

While neo-structural approaches to planning theory and practice illuminate the necessity and means of large scale social transformation toward a just and sustainable future through planning, micro-processes in space and of place remain the building blocks of planning for social change. In recent years, a body of literature has emerged that explores placemaking as one such socio-spatial planning strategy.

As with most phenomena in Western liberal capitalist societies, divergent placemaking discourses have emerged. On the one hand, placemaking is the set of processes by which cities shape their position and identities in the global political economy, generating economic growth by attracting desirable populations and creating cities as tourist destinations. The alternative discourse posits placemaking as the grassroots process of place creation through which people create and assign meaning to spaces. These homographs pose a theoretical and empirical challenge inasmuch as in addition to divergent definitions they actively contradict each other--one recognizing and reinforcing the dominant ideologies of global capitalism with the other directly opposing them.

Drawing on the diverse fields of social geography, community development, urban design, and political science, the body of knowledge on placemaking is understandably disparate and diffuse. Thus, my research in this area is largely exploratory. My goal is to evaluate placemaking as an urban planning strategy, operationalizing the term for empirical investigation through research into the relationship between professionals and communities in placemaking, between planners and placemaking, and between the planning field and placemaking. Additionally, I will explore the scale at which places are made and evaluate whether grassroots placemaking efforts should be considered planning and, if so, how they might be integrated into planning's institutional design.

I have elucidated through a review of the existing literature a preliminary framework through which I can begin to explore the various aspects of how places are made:

- *urban design: the technical process of how places are made*
- *urban development: the economic processes of how places are made*
- *communities and meaning: the social processes of how places are made*
- *public participation: the political processes of how places are made*

It was engagement in grassroots placemaking that initially raised my awareness of the need for transformation in our planning policies and practices if we are going to realize a more just, sustainable future. This suggests the power of placemaking as a transformative planning strategy. What sorts of institutional changes in planning will be necessary to help us realize the transformative potential of placemaking? How can placemaking help us re-envision planning as everyday governance, as local resistance to globalization, as a democratic, oppositional, collective politics, as force of social transformation? What is the power of place?

**Associated Courses:** *Urban Placemaking: The Power and Politics of Transforming Urban Space*

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## **Journals of Interest**

- *City and Community*
- *Environment and Planning*
- *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*
- *Journal of European Planning Studies*
- *Journal of the American Planning Association*
- *Journal of Planning Education and Research*
- *Journal of Planning History*
- *Journal of Planning Theory & Practice*
- *Journal of Urban Affairs*
- *Journal of Urban Design*
- *Journal of Urban and Regional Planning*
- *Planning Perspectives*
- *Planning Theory*
- *Urban Geography*
- *Urban History Review*
- *Urban Studies*