

**Aksel Hagen**  
**Striving for The Rationality in Planning Theory: Logical Constructions of "The Grand Theory», or / and Painting Pictures of "God"?**  
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### **Summary and Introduction**

This working report is based on a paper presented at a Symposium on Planning Theory, Current International Trends. FUS / University of Tromsø 19 - 22 August 1993  
This working paper begins with three assertions:

A. In The World of Planning Theory there seems to be a need for or love to deal with normative more than descriptive issues. It is taken for granted among most of the theorists that planning is an activity that always intends to change societies and organisations into something "better". The challenge is therefore to create theories and methods that make the planning process as excellent as possible. The main interest is to prescribe planning more than understand planning.

B. The World of Planning Theory seems to depend on a vision of and a strong need for A Grand Theory. This Grand Theory seems to emerge from a logical thinking process. My expression is that many of these logical theory constructions often in fact are a sort of religious musing; a need to believe in something pure placed above all the mess that we find out in The Reality .

C. These two approaches seem to me to both be unproductive and veiled. Many theorists and theories claim that without logical developed normative fixed points and / or holy theory pictures, planning cannot function out in the society. To me only a reality without such fixed points makes sense. To me these ideals, logically and / or more religiously developed, are more like tautologies.

In this working paper I will try to systematise the planning theorists in two main blocks: The Believers that need A Grand Theory / Grand Theories, and The Non-Believers that don't believe in such logical and / or religious constructions. From my point of view most of the problems and dilemmas the mainstream theorists are dealing with have no finite solutions. After 40 years with planning theory debate we are still trying to build up answers to questions that logically have no answers. Social systems as organisations have some inherent conditions. These inherent conditions are a part of the system, are the system. We seem to hope that the theorists will find the Big Theory, which we can implement out in the society, and then per definition A New World will emerge. My opposite point of view is that against inherent features with social systems, ought also planning theorists give up.

Planning is, to me, an activity where truths, right/wrong and good/evil are elusive phenomena, very much contextually and individually related. To me, it makes sense to draw upon the concept of rhetoric (Ramírez 1995, Throgmorton 1996). Meaning is created through dialogue. The point is to communicate to improve, not in order to find or develop the objectively right answer, but to develop, together with others, meaningful solutions and answers to the many planning tasks in a local community or a whole county (Hellspong 1995). The wise decisions are both the result of the traditional production of knowledge through different kinds of research and of the dialogues in planning processes. Such dialogues will be an

arena for policy, professional knowledge and common sense. Moreover, this has nothing to do with relativism, you do not decide such cases by chance. Wisdom teaches us how to use practical experience and at the same time to evaluate the concrete situation on its own terms.

*Key words: Planning theory, Planning rationality, Planning ideals*

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**Foreword**

This working report is based on a paper presented at a Symposium on Planning Theory, Current International Trends. FUS / University of Tromsø 19 - 22 August 1993

The "Planning Theory"-editor, Prof. Luigi Mazza, has given me several good and necessary advices. His main advice is "...to reduce the provocative impact, changing style, not the content..."

Before I do this, I publish the manuscript as a working paper.

Lillehammer, August 1998

Aksel Hagen

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**INTRODUCTION**

I have frequently been walking in the Planning Theory World for eight years as a lecturer at Oppland College from 1987. During that time my back pack was filled with experiences and knowledge from my Master of Science in Land Use Planning, five years as a Municipal Planner and some political work. None of these three experiences had given me insight in planning theory. However, the same three had built up a curiosity to and a strong faith in the importance of planning theory. As a non-workaholic person, and marked by the fact that being a lecturer is a multifarious activity, these walking tours have only happened sporadically, not by 100 % alertness, and to a large extent in the Norwegian part of the theory world. I would like to invite you to share some of my expressions from the Planning Theory World.

**THREE ASSERTIONS**

A. In The World of Planning Theory there seems to be a need for or love to deal with normative more than descriptive issues. It is taken for granted among most of the theorists that planning is an activity that always intends to change societies and organisations into something "better". The challenge is therefore to create theories and methods that make the planning process as excellent as possible. The main interest is to prescribe planning more than understand planning.

B. The World of Planning Theory seems to depend on a vision of and a strong need for A Grand Theory , either as The One and Only or a Rational Combination of Many Different Theories . This Grand Theory seems to emerge from a logical thinking process. My expression is that many of these logical theory constructions often in fact are a sort of religious musing; a need to believe in something pure placed above all the mess that we find out in The Reality . It is extremely important to talk and write optimistic about planning. Never claim to be a pessimist.

C. These two approaches seem to me to both be unproductive and veiled. Many theorists and theories claim that without logical developed normative fixed points and / or holy theory pictures, planning cannot function out in the society. To me only a reality without such fixed points makes sense. To me these ideals, logically and / or more religiously developed, are more like tautologies. For me only "Anything goes! The fake is real, and the real is fake" (1) makes sense. I try both to understand and appreciate the religious flavour in planning theory more than the pure logical grasps; most cultures and human beings seem to have a need for a religious approach to life. It is not easy, however.

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## HIKING EXPERIENCES FROM THE WORLD OF PLANNING THEORY

### *A religious approach - an explanation*

I want to use the expression religious (2) to characterise a longing for something basic, something deeply normative. E.g. an ideal, a situation which per definition is impossible to implement or achieve. However, it is regarded to be both suitable and necessary to strive after this ideal. The alternative is a dangerous relativism and a situation where planning is per definition non-existent.

It is difficult for me to understand this approach. To me planning only makes sense in a world without such ideals, without such planning paradigms as the Instrumental Rationality, the Political Rationality, Communicative Rationality, "Combined Rationality" etc. However, I am aware that the majority of human beings seem to need religious thinking. I have to respect. I hope, on the other side, there will occur in The Planning Theory World an equivalent understanding and respect the opposite way: It is possible to believe in planning in a world without these absolute fixed points, - logical and / or religious. I will her systematise the planning theorists in two main blocks: The Believers that need A Grand Theory / Grand Theories, and The Non-Believers that don't believe in such logical and / or religious constructions.

### *The Believers - a bunch of articles and authors*

Banfield (1959) seems to have given us the recipe for how to write an article about planning theory: First, present a normative ideal and claim that to have such an ideal is an inherent part of all planning. Second, discuss the situation out in The Real World and conclude that there are some difficult tensions between this normative ideal and The Reality. Third, conclude that if we are looking for the normative aspects of planning:

*"... it is hard to see how references to such a model can be avoided or, indeed, why its lack of realism should be considered a defect".*

*(Banfield 1959, p. 149)*

When practitioners and theorists the following years repeatedly try to show how far from reality this instrumental ideal is, this is not an attack on Banfield's way of arguing. This is in fact exactly what Banfield tries to tell us. The interesting and crucial discussion is about the need for such a normative model that Banfield very shortly presents for us. And, - he is definitely right when he claims that it is hard to avoid referring to this rationality model; -"all" later participants in the planning theory debate do that.

One example, one decade later, is Rabinovitz (1973). Where Banfield claims a need for a deeply normative, holy planning ideal, Rabinovitz argues for a holy planner ideal. The planner shall represent the public in planning processes where the other actors are self-striving, shall help the powerless and build coalition among diverse power centres to carry it out, shall be an open participant staking his values in competition with others and openly striving to achieve his ends (Rabinovitz 1973, pp. 271-273).

Kravitz (1970) is arguing for a more Liberatory Planning: It is important to radicalise individuals by enabling them to create new possibilities beyond those defined as "feasible" by traditional political, economic, or even technological constraints. People shall participate in the planning process on their own premises. The planner shall place herself both outside and above the Real World and from this Tower create the good planning processes (Kravitz 1970, p. 266). To me, this doesn't make sense. It is impossible for the planner to place both herself outside the situation and act like an agent in the same situation. It is also illogical, from my point of view, to claim that the planners must change side from the "evil" to the "good and nice guys". Planning and planners will, shall and ought to be on both sides / all the different sides of "this struggle".

Alexander (1979) admits that there are some problems out in The Real World with e.g. goal articulation; - how to translate vague, incoherent goals into operational objectives. However, when this is not done, serious dysfunctions may result. Alternative models have been proposed, and there is considerable evidence that they are better descriptions of the way decision making actually takes place. Nevertheless,

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the planning process grounded on instrumental rationality is still the prevailing paradigm (Alexander 1979, p. 117).

Some years later Alexander (1984), claims that planning is situated in a period of paradigm breakdown. This situation creates different responses which are competing and often mutually exclusive. His conclusion is to ask for a contingency approach, a meta theoretical framework that commands respect as a true account of social and individual relationships and interactions in the process of transforming ideas into reality (Alexander 1984, p. 67). From this he derives a set of contingencies useful for both exploration and prescription. For each of these contingencies he is asking for a normative decision making model that would be sufficiently concrete for it to be made operational and used in real life problem solving and decision making situations, yet abstract enough to be applicable over a range of substantive contexts. He follows up by asking that perhaps this is to ask for the impossible (Alexander 1984, p. 67). I believe my answer to this question is "yes".

Christensen (1985) makes a systematising of The Uncertainty, both regarding to goals and technology. However, she yields scared away from a situation she calls Chaos, a situation characterised by unknown technology and goals that are not agreed upon. This is a situation that is "outside" what planning / the planner can deal with. To me, however, this is both the situation (my descriptive argument), and a normative feature with the society. To me unknown technology and goal conflict is an inherent part of a living society. To me a situation with both known technology and goals agreement, is more a terrifying state of a society than a description of an ideal.

Friedmann (1989) also makes a clear statement about the need for a normative /holy theory:

*"The postmodern temper tells us: Anything goes! The fake is real, and the real is fake. All standards, all absolutes have been relativised. It is therefore not surprising that a vulgar pragmatism has moved to centre stage: what works, works. And what works is money, technology, brute power, the magic of the media to create believable worlds. But that road leads to nihilism and, ultimately, self-destruction".*

(Friedmann 1989, p. 128)

Friedmann argues that planning is an inherently moral practice, and how shall we ensure a morally defensible practice in the absence of absolutes? Social change, willed or intended, must be good. This good situation can't be assumed a priori, nor can it be determined by research. The Public Good is a notion of process; it emerges during planning itself, as a egotiated process among affected parties who have different values, concerns, and interests at stake (Friedmann 1989, pp. 128, 129).

I think Friedmann makes some unclear statements here. First he throws relativism in the garbage can. Then he describes a planning concept that seems to be much of the same as the concept lying created in the garbage can? Or, perhaps the planner will solve this problem by keeping us on a moral defensible track: Planners have a certain knowledge of things without which they would not have a moral praxis at all (Friedmann 1989, p. 128). It is difficult for me to understand such arguing. It is difficult to accept a normative theory where the planner is regarded to be more "moral" than the other participants in the planning process.

By walking further in The Planning Theory World we will meet different Mega Attempts to construct new paradigms. It begins, perhaps, some years earlier with Forester (1980). He focuses on the systematically but unnecessarily distorted communications in the society (Forester 1980, p. 276). His solution is to look to the ordinary, common sense communication of mutual understanding and consensus. From this we can develop rules for how we have to communicate: comprehensibly, sincerely, legitimately, and the truth. These norms are usually taken for granted. If we violate them, or when we do, we face puzzlement, mistrust, anger, and disbelief. As these pragmatic norms are broken, our shared experience and our social and political world disintegrate (Forester 1980, p. 278).

I here basically disagree with Forester. I don't think these norms are taken for granted. I can't understand why it is adequate to operate with ideals for communication which is outside all reality, which is far away from common sense on what is considered to be reasonable, strategic thinking, which is irrational to follow for the participators in planning processes. Such theories have no function as guidance to practice for me. They give bad advices to those who want to succeed in a planning process.

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Forester (1989) gives me a beautiful description and assessment of the planners' practical world. My problem is therefore only connected to this need for painting The Big Solutions and Answers. This painting takes us to formulations as:

*"... many distortions are avoidable, politically contingent, and thus alterable. These distortions are artificial... the self serving legitimization of great inequalities of income and wealth, the consumer ideologies, the manipulation of public ignorance in defence of professional power, the stultifying racial, ethnic, and sexual typecasting... they can be overcome."*

(Forester 1989, p. 140)

For me it is naive to believe that these "distortions" are something artificial, not wanted conditions in the society.

From this basis it is possible for Forester to work out rules for how the planner can "organise" practice. They shall cultivate community networks, listen carefully, notify less-organised interests, educate citizens and organisations, supply technical and political information, emphasise to community interest both the importance of building their own power before negotiations begin and the importance of effective participation and negotiation, etc. (Forester 1989, p. 140).

The picture of The Planner as God is painted. I can understand these thoughts as a beautiful expression of the religious flavour in planning theory. It is much more difficult for me to handle it as a "scientifically" result of a logical thinking process. Many theorists follow up the same way of thinking and arguing. Lim (1986) wants to create a synthetic framework for planning theories. Dalton (1986) argues that we need a "critical comprehensiveness solution". Innes (1990) aspires to a model of knowledge development and use which has the following characteristics: All important stakeholders are involved; all have equal power; all have equal information; all are able to communicate jointly in some kind of arena etc. (Innes 1990, pp. 57, 58).

Sager (1993) tells us why it is necessary with a rationale for planning: The rationale allows the planners to direct energy towards debating issues of the plan in question instead of repeatedly having to legitimise their profession. The rationale shows planning novices their function in society and helps them understand what is expected of them. The rationale is an ideological compass for the planner. The rationale sustains principled choice of direction when a workable compromise is hard to find. The main argument is related to the planner's need for a Rationality Paradigm. Sager wants to solve the problem with how can different rationality types be used simultaneously / what is required to arrange for easy alternations between them? In this effort he takes support from Seel (1991) faculty of judgement and Habermas (1991) interrational judgement provided by a flexibility of mind. Sager's grasp is to put the different rationalities together in one Combined Rationality: A fusion of mixed social scanning and Forester's critical and "Habermasian" theory of planning.

Is it possible to construct a more comprehensive and ideal / holy planning paradigm? I have my doubts. Does this theoretical, normative construction give any guidance for practice? I have my doubts. For me, this is more "religion" than "science". McDougall (1990) claims that planning theory must be able to answer a set of questions: why, what, and how do we plan?. The first thing that planning theory must do is to leave the world of "Wicked problems" i.e., ill defined yet unique (Rittel and Weber 1973) and return to that of the grand narrative. He underlines the same as Banfield in Banfield (1955); we need a theory with "Answers and Solutions".

### ***The Non-Believers - a bunch of articles and authors***

The Non-Believers look at conflicts as conditions more than problems. They argue that it doesn't make sense to logically build up theory constructions outside The Reality and / or to paint Holy Pictures of The Reality and The Planning Instrument / The Planner. It is releasing to meet theorists that ask for conflicts instead of sublime consensus. Davidoff (1973 pp. 278, 279) claims that appropriate planning actions can't be described from a position of value neutrality. Values are inescapable elements of any rational decision making process. Alinsky (1971) claims that tactics mean doing what you can with what you have.

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Alinsky's concern is with the tactic of taking; how the "Have-Nots" can take power away from the "Haves".

Meiller and Broom (1979 p.78) claim that we have much false consensus in both planning processes and documents. Where The Believers try to define and moralise conflicts away, Meiller and Broom are worried about that we have too much consensus which hinders creativity. Benveniste (1989) claims that to be a planner is to behave strategically, and without a connection to a holy ideal. Beauregard (1991 pp. 191 - 193) claims that planners are not technical analysts, but authors that create texts through imaginative acts. Knowledge is inherently unstable. We only know the world through our arguments about it. Knowledge is therefore not necessarily a reliable guide to effective action. There is no master narrative, but only multiple narratives, a multiple of language games. Mandelbaum (1991 p. 211), argues in the same way; - we are all bound to struggle with competing stories.

It is releasing to meet theorists that don't create The Grand New Paradigm. Galloway and Mahayni (1977 p.68) argue that the plurality of planning theories perhaps is in a much better position to address the long-standing question of planning in democratic societies; planning for diversity. Healey, McDougall and Thomas (1982 p.14) claim that ideological procedural planning theory rests upon a consensus view of society where major conflicts over values and interests and consequently over social distribution are absent. Its operating values are technical and conservative and deny the political nature of planning practice. Milroy (1991) asks for shifts in planning from causal reasoning as a basis for plan making to discovering and confirming meaning. Sandercock and Forsyth (1992 p.52) present a feminist epistemology where knowledge is gained through talking and listening, where knowing is also tacit or intuitive, where creating symbolic forms through painting, music, or poetry is an important way of knowing and communicating. Brooks (1993 pp. 143, 144) concludes that it is perhaps time for us to abandon our search for a single, overarching, discipline -defining paradigm. Instead we should celebrate our diversity, our flexibility - and our continued survival.

It is releasing to meet theorists that don't construct or paint a picture of A Holy Planner placed between the people and "God". Baum (1983) claims that there are thousands of practitioners, many of them do not call themselves planners, carry out planning activities in both public and private organisations. If the planners want to be effective, they must sacrifice the autonomy as a profession, they must not claim to have a unique position in the planning process. Fulton (1989) underlines that the planners are one among many actors in the planning and decision process. Planners today are a group of large educational and practical diversity. It is, therefore, naive to ask for a new area where the planners are replaced up in their Tower.

This makes sense to me. The planner must to some extent intervene in the political process; planning is deeply a moral and political activity. The important question for the planner is

*"The question becomes one of making a "choice": How best should they allocate their energies to increase their ability to influence decisions?"*

*(Kaufman, 1978, p. 198)*

The planners are one among other players in a game, not a "Half God" placed outside or above the game. Howe (1992) is talking about the Good Reasons Approach to the public interest. It requires planners to work within the ordinary values of the public, but does not deny them the possibility of having some autonomy and some rather different values of their own. The public interest is a normative judgement, and:

*"It is certainly no accident that planners do not have much power or autonomy."*

*(Howe 1992, p. 241)*

Howe's answer is clarity and openness and not to provide the final and definitive answer.

## **SOME AFTER THOUGHTS**

### **To read *The Believers as the devil reads the Bible?***

To read is to interpret, and to interpret is a process that can't happen detached from my own values. I know that e.g. Habermas, Forester and Sager repeatedly underline that it is impossible to avoid all distortion of communication, to avoid all power structures; - to create in the real world these situations they build up as logical constructions, - or paint as holy pictures. From the perspective of critical theory there is no truth out there independent of those who think and argue about it. There is, instead, a set of "claim to truth" that allows us to decide what to take as valid. Judith Innes de Neufville claims already in 1983 that critical theory is a source to enrich and revitalise planning thought. She was right in her prediction. I know that most of *The Believers* primarily are dealing with how planning should be conducted, and not how planning should be described. I know that many of them don't believe it is possible today to create The One and Only Paradigm: "There is nothing to indicate that planning will stop being a multi paradigm field." (Sager 1992, p. 19). What these Believers still are asking for, however, is some theoretical constructions where all the unsolvable problems out in The Reality, is defined away: *"A prime goal should be to create a new imagery of what planning is and what planners do. Research should draw on such fields as political economy, anthropology, history, organisational behaviour, and political science for methods and theories, and grow from phenomenological thought and critical theory more than from positivist analysis. Topics which demand particular attention include problem defining, language and symbols, values analysis, knowledge for interactive planning and unique settings, communicator roles, and planning ethics."*

(Innes de Neufville 1983, p. 35)

### **What are alternative ways of thinking, for us The Non-Believers ?**

From my point of view most of the problems and dilemmas the mainstream theorists are dealing with have no finite solutions. After 40 years with planning theory debate we are still trying to build up answers to questions that logically have no answers. Social systems as organisations have some inherent conditions. These inherent conditions are a part of the system, are the system. We seem to hope that the theorists will find the Big Theory, which we can implement out in the society, and then per definition A New World will emerge. My opposite point of view is that against inherent features with social systems, ought also planning theorists give up. I totally agree with Healy (1992, p. 9) that communicative skill is now recognised as an important quality of a trained planner. However, this is not an argument for painting pictures of the planner as The Holy Communicator. The problem seems not to be that The Planning Theory World doesn't know about what is going on out in practical planning. The problem is that despite all these facts, we have an inherently need to fall back to asking for A Grand Theory. To me this deep longing for A Grand and Holy Theory is our prevailing planning paradigm.

I agree with Wildavsky (1973), and may I give a long quotation that you ought to read carefully:

*"Planning concerns man's effort to make the future in his own image. If he loses control of his own destiny, he fears being cast into the abyss. Alone and afraid, man is at the mercy of strange and unpredictable forces, so he takes whatever comfort he can by challenging the fates. He shouts his plans into storm of life. ... For if "God" is dead, only man can save himself"... "The greater his need, the more man longs to believe in the reality of his vision. Since he can only create the future he desires on paper, he transfers his loyalties to the plan. Since the end is never in sight, he sanctifies the journey; the process of planning becomes holy. Since he is the end of own striving, his reason becomes the object of his existence. Planning is reason and reason is embodied in the plan. Worshipping it, he glorifies himself. But a secular idolatry is no easier to maintain than a religious one. Rather than face up to actual conditions, planners are tempted to wish them away." ... "Planning is not so much a subject for the social scientist as for the theologian."*

Wildavsky (1973, pp. 151 - 153):

What he writes here in 1973, as a remark to rational comprehensive planning, is an even better remark to the new and even broader rationality paradigms that have been developed the last two decades .

I agree with Lindblom (1979) who claims that the purpose with an ideal in planning theory must be that it gives us inspiration and guidance, it is something that we should try to do in practice. Lindblom's arguments against the instrumental rationality must also be valid against the communicative rationality ideal and/or the other ideal constructions that are presented above. This ideal, especially when combined with the synoptic ideal, is even more far beyond all logical reality. Lindblom tells us that he is loosely influenced by something higher, some values. However, he doesn't need a theory that connects these high thoughts / values / principles / goals to practical planning and implementation.

I agree with Kleven (1990) when he writes that there seems to be a fundamental, almost unbridgable divergence between planning rationality and political decision processes. Planning and decisions seem to be loosely coupled.

The apparent defeat for the reason, for rational thinking, in planning today, is due to this understanding of only one type of accepted rationality. Kleven criticises the planning field to have discovered this much later than social science more generally. What is conventional wisdom for other professional fields of social science are new for the planning segment. However, what is more important to me is that Kleven avoids connecting these to rationality concepts, the instrumental and the political, to find The Big Solution for this problem (3)

The best article that I have walked through is 20 years old, Rittel and Webber (1973):

*"The search for scientific bases for confronting problems of social policy is bound to fail, because of the nature of these problems. They are "wicked" problems, whereas science has developed to deal with "time" problems. Policy problems can't be definitively described. Moreover, in a pluralistic society there is nothing like the indisputable public good; there is no objective definition of equity; policies that respond to social problems can't be meaningfully correct or false; and it makes no sense to talk about "optimal solutions" to social problems unless severe qualifications are imposed first. Even worse, there are no "solutions" in the sense of definitive and objective answers."*

*Rittel and Webber 1973, p. 155)*

To me "wicked problems" is a "to the point"- expression. However, this is not an "even worse"- situation for me. It is a feature with our society. Rittel and Webber (1973, p. 161) claim further that it becomes morally objectionable for the planner to treat a wicked problem as though it were a tame one, or to tame a wicked problem prematurely, or to refuse to recognise the inherent wickedness of social problems. I will claim that this is exactly what The Believers are doing. There exists no unitary "public welfare", no theory about how to find out what might be considered a societally "best" state, no theory about "the best society", the "best organisation". The expert, the planner is also a player, in a political game, seeking to promote his private vision of goodness over others. (Rittel and Webber 1973, pp. 167 - 169).

I agree with Krieger (1987 p. 5) when he claims that

*"What is taken as scientific and secular seems often to be religious and theological".*

*(Krieger 1987 p. 5)*

To Krieger planning thought is deeply theological in its concern and form. Planning practice is ritualistic and sacralizing. We ought to admit that we still, as planners, are motivated by "God". We are placed "inside" a theological and religious tradition. The main point for Krieger, as for me, is that we must be able to discuss this separately from a quite another question: Ought planning thought and practice share many of the features of religion?

Flyvbjerg (1991) underlines that the study of human beings and their society goes through different phases, where different waves of power and fashion are dominating. The change from one of these phases to another can seem to be a paradigm change. However, it is only a change from a increasing wave to a decreasing one (Flyvbjerg 1991, pp. 45, 46). The main argument for keeping the prevailing paradigm, - to believe that "normal science" (4) gives scientific identity, is that this take us away from "relativism and nihilism". However, a bulwark against relativism and nihilism can't be found in theory of social science and epistemology, - this simply doesn't exist as a possibility and truly will never do so in the future either (Flyvbjerg 1991, p.66). Flyvbjerg suggests that we have to go back to Aristotle and his three

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types of rationality : epistémé (science, scientific knowledge, universal knowledge), techné (art and craft, production of things), phronesis (action with regard to things that are good or bad for man). An analysis of values and their implications for action, forms the basis for praxis. This requires experience and practical common sense, and this applied ethic according to these methodological guidelines is called Progressive phronesis. He claims, by referring to Foucault, that discussions are tactical elements which operate in a field of power relations (Flyvbjerg 1991, p.122). Power produces rationality and truth; rationality and power produce power. Science is not able to speak truth to power. Every society has their own regimes for truth and its policy for truth; i.e. types of discussions that the society accepts and makes function as truth. Political questions are not "wrong", illusions, false conscious, or "ideology" ; they are simply The Truth itself (Flyvbjerg 1991, pp. 126, 127).

Hoch (1992) describes a postmodernistic view on planning. Planning fosters power. Instead of seeking to solve the great paradoxes, planning creates plurality and differences. Postmodernism offers planners a provocative and potentially useful way out of the liberal paradox. Instead of a modern planning theory that promises to reduce uncertainty, a postmodern planning theory invents ways to live with and even celebrate multiple forms of uncertainty. In his Commentary on Forester (1990) Hoch writes that postmodern critics have raised important questions about the efficacy of the sort of rationality that planners rely on to formulate and justify their actions. What will Forester say to those postmodern critics who contend that his effort to provide a general theoretical justification for organising attention and listening, offers a misleading reassurance that consensus-oriented rational argument is benign and progressive rather than controlling and regressive (Hoch 1990, pp. 4, 5)? Forester's critical planners take a position of apolitical objectivity, - otherwise how can they separate lies from truth ? Forester begins to criticise and abandon essential elements in the modernist planning project. The divorce, however, is not finalised. Where many theorists are talking about many different competing or compounded paradigms, Hoch's conclusion is that planning theory is in the verge of a paradigm shift and that no one has made a breakthrough (Hoch 1990, pp. 10, 11)

Luhmann claims that modern societies are differentiated according to subsystems that concentrate on one specific and primary function. In modern society there is no subsystem that represents the whole society, no centre. Such subsystems, called function systems, are e.g. Economy, Politics, Religion, Science, and Education (Luhmann 1990). A function system plus its environment ( all other function systems) is identical with the world as a whole. This is a world formula. (Thyssen 1992, p. 28). This gives us no fixed point, from where we can observe the society as a whole. All assessments about the society as a whole have to come from one of their subsystems. It is, whether you like it or not, impossible to place yourself outside the society as a whole or outside a function system. A common language doesn't exist , "where" the subsystems can communicate with each other. One subsystem can communicate about other subsystems, but not with other systems. The One and Only Objective Truth doesn't exist. However, this mutual observation of each other and own system can result in some stabile conception about each other. This is the way to avoid chaos, and this is the only way (Thyssen 1992, p. 25 - 27). Meaning is not substantively a property of system components, but functionally as the constituting and integrative relations among them (Luhmann 1990, p. x.) What is interesting with the truth is only that somebody considers it as truth, so others can do the same:

*"The truth works: Like hearing aid"*

*(Thyssen 1992, p. 56)*

From this follows that the different subsystems operate from their own logic (Luhmann 1990, p. 135). Luhmann, therefore, as Hoch as mentioned above, criticises Habermas for not having given up the idea about one common world. The One and Only Reality doesn't exist, only numerous realities, which perhaps can stabilise to each other. This is Luhmann's counterpart to Habermas' communicative rationality idea and the appeal to the better argument. All statements about the society are localised to a subsystem and therefore get restricted. To consider, or to "regard" one's surroundings also means that there are some blind spots within the subsystem from which the consideration is undertaken. These blind spots are and remain blind. This means that each subsystem must choose some spot which it must avoid questioning, which it will take as given (Thyssen 1992 in Jacobsen (ed. 1992, p.31).

This makes it difficult to talk about rationality or shortage of rationality in the society (Thyssen 1992, pp. 42, 43.)

*Aksel Hagen: Striving for Rationality in Planning Theory. Lillehammer College: Working paper no. 66, 1998.*

This makes sense to me. This represents attempts to create theories in the real world, not a logical / scientific / religious escape out of The Realities.

### ***My position in the debate***

What is terrifying to me is a planning process where we have consensus about goals and means, about what is the public interest, about what are true information and knowledge, about what is the best solution in a situation with value-conflicts, about what is to speak comprehensibly, sincerely, legitimately, the truth, about what are symmetric power relations etc. What is terrifying to me are planners that claim they objectively know what people want and need, that The One and Only Public Interest exists out there, that the planners as a profession have the necessary skills to articulate and represent The best argument / The knowledge, in a discussion.

What is incomprehensible to me are statements like the aim of the planners would be the ideal speech situation in which only the compulsion of argumentation exists and in which genuine symmetry among all participants permits them to interchange role-taking completely (Sager 1993, p. 9). It is an ideal. I know. However, to me these are empty statements. They give no effective guidelines for practice. They represent more a theoretical escape from practice.

Planning is, to me, an activity where truths, right/wrong and good/evil are elusive phenomena, very much contextually and individually related. Creating understanding and meaning, both individually and socially, is about being able to use the opportunities of the moment to create a consensus, or majority decisions, about the present and future. Through the spoken and written language we try to capture what the reality is, and what it should be. To me, it makes sense to follow, for example, Wellmer's normativeness which has been labelled ethical discourse (Wellmer 1993). This is known to have no rules of ideal speech situations, principles of universality or theories of consensus. Reason is something purely subjective, something every individual must discover, then and there in the actual context (Lyotard 1982).

To me, it makes sense to draw upon the concept of rhetoric (Ramírez 1995, Throgmorton 1996). Meaning is created through dialogue. The point is to communicate to improve, not in order to find or develop the objectively right answer, but to develop, together with others, meaningful solutions and answers to the many planning tasks in a local community or a whole county (Hellspång 1995). Social planning is an activity which implies both co-ordinating the knowledge and actions of many actors, including the planners, and through dialogues create new knowledge. Where traditional planning mostly consists of one-way communication and the two-way exchange of arguments and mediation, the rhetorical approach offers a creative co-operation. The wise decisions are both the result of the traditional production of knowledge through different kinds of research and of the dialogues in planning processes. Such dialogues will be an arena for policy, professional knowledge and common sense. The right action is not a mimetic repetition or the mechanical adherence to a rule. Each individual must assume responsibility for his/her knowledge and develop this in consultation and interaction with all the other actors. Moreover, this has nothing to do with relativism, you do not decide such cases by chance. Wisdom teaches us how to use practical experience and at the same time to evaluate the concrete situation on its own terms.

What is good/not good, right/wrong, true/not true is a discussion each of us has to reflect upon, also in co-operation with others. Experiences are closely connected with advising others, discussing with others and developing functioning truths together with others. Experience is both social and communicative. Dialogue is understanding through communicating:

*" We do not speak to be understood, we talk to understand (both the others and ourselves)." (Ramírez 1995a, p.10).*

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1 A quotation from John Friedmann, 1989: Planning in the Public Domain: Discourse and Praxis, p. 128.

2 I am not the first one to use expressions like "religious" or "theological". See e.g. Wildavsky 1973, Lindblom 1979, Krieger 1987

3 I *know* that Terje Kleven suggests a solution where the planners follow *one* type of rationality and the politicians follow *another* one. However, Kleven underlines that this is not a final answer, only a preliminary suggestion.

4 ...which I call *The Believers*