

**Aksel Hagen**  
**Human-scientific Planning Theory**  
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<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Foreword .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Three prejudices.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The ideals of planning .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Realities and truths in planning.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Planning as action .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Planning as rhetoric.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Closing remarks .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>13</b>

**Summary**

This working report is a paper written to XII AESOP Congress 22 – 25 July 1998, Aveiro, Portugal. It is a presentation of human-scientific action theory and its linkage to planning, both planning theory and planning practice. Human-scientific action theory is created by professor Gunnar Olsson and professor José Luis Ramírez, Nordic School of Planning, Stockholm.

Planning is primarily a practical and reflective activity. The notion "Planning" may, therefore, describe the activity "planning" or the reflection about this activity. The last one is what planning theory is about.

My presentation of this theory will be structured around two main aspects; planning as action and planning as rhetoric.

2. Planning as action

The human-scientific action theory looks at the world from a perspective of actions. Human-scientific planning theory may be regarded as a use of this action theory in the field of planning. We always act, as a member of a society, as a member of an organisation, as a planner, as a politician. Only in some situations, often the most important ones, we give it a thought, we reflect before acting,- or in acting . Both these reflections and these actions is the core of planning.

Understanding planning demands that we give attention to the planning products, the planning processes and, as an independent part of planning, the actions where we chose which processes to initiate.

## 2. Planning as rhetoric

Public planning is an activity that includes a co-ordination of the knowledge and actions to many different actors. Ramírez claims that it makes no sense to talk about a collective action. The only possible is joint actions among individuals that have agreed upon some goals, means, - to follow some rules.

The dialogue gets a crucial position in such action processes. Ramírez take us further from the dialogue to rhetoric: From this point of view a vital part of the core of planning is precisely discourses of rhetoric. The wise decisions are the result of both the traditional production of knowledge through different sorts of research and through 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. 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 to others, discussing with others, and developing functioning truths together with others. Experience is both social and communicative. Dialogue is understanding through communicating.

Key words: Planning theory, human-scientific action theory, planning rhetoric

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## **Foreword**

The Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) arranges annual conferences about planning theory and planning practice. The 12<sup>th</sup> Congress took place in Aveiro Portugal , 22 – 25 July, 1998.

This paper about human-scientific action theory and its linkage to planning was presented at this 1998 conference.

Lillehammer, August 1998

Aksel Hagen

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## **Introduction**

This paper is a presentation of human-scientific planning theory and its significance for planning theory and planning practice. In part one of this paper I will present the theory itself. In part two I will take a closer look at some main features of this theory. Keywords in part two are "realities and truths", "planning as action" and

*Aksel Hagen: Human-scientific Planning Theory. Lillehammer college: Working paper no. 70, 1998.*

"planning as rhetoric".

Professor Gunnar Olsson and Professor José Luis Ramírez at the Nordic School of Planning <sup>1</sup> in Stockholm have developed a theory they have named human-scientific action theory. Human-scientific planning theory may be regarded as the application of this action theory in the field of planning.

Human-scientific planning theory is primarily a tool for:

- attaining a better understanding of what is going on in practice between the various participants,
- accepting that many problems can never ever be solved. Therefore, the intention of planning at any point in time is to find solutions which function then and there, and to be satisfied with them. We cannot come any further in practice.

Planning is primarily a practical and reflective activity. The notion "Planning" may, therefore, describe the activity named planning and the reflection on this activity. The latter is what planning theory is all about. This human-scientific planning theory describes more than prescribes, and it describes planning well - at least for me.

Human-scientific action theory looks at the world from a perspective of actions. We always act, as a member of a society, as a member of an organisation, as a planner, as a politician. Only in some situations, often or at least hopefully the most important ones, do we think about our actions, do we reflect before acting - or while acting. Both these reflections and these actions are the core of planning.

To understand planning we must focus our attention on the planning products, the planning processes and, as an independent part of planning, the actions by which we choose which processes to initiate. It is important to distinguish between process and action according to Ramírez. Process is an objective event which may be described in abstract terms - as is done in the social sciences. Nevertheless, these processes also have an inner aspect, which not only rests on causal relations, but also on more or less well-founded intentions and acts of will.

When a process arises because of human intentions and choices, then we have, moreover, an action. An action may thus be linked to a process, without being one. Through selecting one or the other action, we may trigger causal processes. Planning consists first and foremost of the ability to imagine and then choose the process which is to be initiated; not to select "the right one", but one which works. This is not an objective event, but is the result of wise assessment. "Robots do not plan, they only execute" (Ramírez 1996, p.113). To plan is to establish goals, to examine alternatives and measures. These examinations are not the specific planning event; rather the choice of process. The action of selection represents the genuine planning action, Ramírez tells us.

Public planning is an activity which includes coordination of the knowledge and actions of many different actors. Ramírez claims that it makes no sense to talk about collective action. The only thing that is possible is joint actions among individuals who have agreed upon some goals, some means, and to follow some rules.

Dialogue occupies a crucial position in such action processes. Ramírez takes us further from dialogue to rhetoric: From this point of view a vital part of the core of planning is precisely discourses of rhetoric.

### Three prejudices

I encountered human-scientific planning theory for the first time eight years ago at Nordplan and I was immediately fascinated by this unique way of regarding planning. It made sense to me, both in terms of the planning theory I had read and worked on and the experiences I had gained as a planner and politician. The reason why I became so fascinated of this theory most probably lies in the prejudices and opinions I had and

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<sup>1</sup> From 1997 Nordregio

*Aksel Hagen: Human-scientific Planning Theory. Lillehammer college: Working paper no. 70, 1998.*

still have:

1. In The Community of Planning Theory there appears to be a need or preference for dealing with normative more than descriptive issues. It is taken for granted among most theorists that planning is an activity that always intends to change societies and organisations into something better. The challenge seems to be to create theories and methods which make the planning process as excellent, as brilliant, as possible. The main interest is to prescribe planning more than describe planning <sup>2</sup>.

2. The Community of Planning Theory appears 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 appears to emerge from a logical thinking process. In my experience many of these logical theory constructions often in fact are a kind of religious musing; a need to believe in something pure placed above all the mess that we find in reality. It is therefore also extremely important to talk and write optimistically about planning. Never claim to be a pessimist <sup>3</sup>!

3. These two approaches appear to me to be unproductive and blurred at best. Many theorists and theories claim that without logically developed normative fixed points and/or holy theory pictures, planning cannot function in society and/or organisations. 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. What makes sense to me is, to some extent and within a certain frame <sup>4</sup>, "Anything goes! The fake is real, and the real is fake" <sup>5</sup>. I try both to understand and appreciate the religious flavour in planning theory more than grasping for pure logic; most cultures and human beings seem to have a need for a religious approach to life <sup>6</sup>. It is not easy, however.

## The ideals of planning

The core of the normative approach for me is that it signals an ambition to improve on current planning practice. Inspiration and association are individual processes which are difficult for others to understand and for which it is dangerous for others to validate or evaluate. It is correct, but at the same time unfair to validate the individual's evaluation of what functions normatively.

Here I will look a little more closely at what type of perspective on planning practice should emerge from a normative approach. I like Charles Lindblom's approach when he places some of the issue outside of the planning process. He does this by stating that he realises the individual's need for:

*"... a broad (and some would say "higher") set of lasting ambitions or ideals. I am myself committed to some such ideals: that is; I make use of them". (Lindblom 1979, p. 519)*

Everyone could have wanted:

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<sup>2</sup> *The Planet list debate on internet about Bent Flyvbjerg's book «Rationality and Power» clearly underlines this need for prescriptions, and a fear of «dark» descriptions*

<sup>3</sup> *In the plenary session at the planning theory conference in Oxford April 1998 Bent Flyvbjerg had to answer several times if he was an optimist or not. He answered, or I feel he got forced to answer «yes». However, why is it so important to be optimistic?*

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion about intersubjectivity p. 7 (Brummet 1976)

<sup>5</sup> A quotation from John Friedmann, 1989: Planning in the Public Domain: Discourse and Praxis, p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> I use the expression religious to characterise a longing for something basic, something deeply normative. E.g. an ideal, a situation which per definition is impossible to implement or reach. 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.

*Aksel Hagen: Human-scientific Planning Theory. Lillehammer college: Working paper no. 70, 1998.*

*"... an ideal, a marvellous logic, a capability to do the maximum. However, this doesn't exist in human systems. " (Lindblom 1979, p. 519)*

Even more, because this is simply the way it is, asserts Lindblom, that such ideals do not exist, they do not function as normative inspiration:

*"They do not represent, as has been suggested, a distant synoptic guidance of incremental analysis, for synopsis on values remains impossible. Perhaps they enter into our thinking most significantly through posing trade-off problems, in which incremental gains on one front are traded against decrements on others." (Lindblom 1979, p. 519)*

Hence, even if I do not want to validate in terms of principle the way others experience the normative approach, I still cannot manage to discard my own pre-judgements on such theoretically constructed ideals where all the questions appear to have been posed and furnished with the optimal answers.

As I see it, it is Jürgen Habermas with his concept of communicative rationality who in a dominating way gives inspiration to the prevalent normative theories in planning today; to a degree as an alternative to the rationalism ideal which Banfield prescribed for us<sup>7</sup>, but to a greater degree as a supplement to this technical-economic, synoptic ideal. I in no way intend to present this concept of rationality, rather I can say briefly that he tries to construct an alternative to the modern subject-centred rationality<sup>8</sup>. The concept of communicative rationality is based on the fact that we relate to the world together with others, not alone. Through language we try to take a stance as to what this reality is and how it in turn should be. If we go into such discourses with honest intentions, then Habermas feels he can show that it is possible to maintain modernism's idea that:

*" ... the possibilities of reaching agreement... even in the multicultural society, there exists a universal capability for taking an intersubjective stance and for individuals to thus reach agreement on moral issues ". (Nylund 1995, p.102)*

But how do we accomplish this in practice? How do we promote or create "shared beliefs", how do we create a consensus in the planning and decision-making processes?

Let us first look at such planning ideals more generally. The common approach seems to be to search through the field of practice and find that there are so many problems in organisations and societies in general, and that these problems remain despite extensive and continuous planning. Thus we turn to planning theory to find the answers, i.e. we search from theory to theory to check if they are aware of the problems out there in the field of practice and whether they have prescribed the proper answers.

If such is not the case, then a new answer is constructed within the existing theories and/or a new theory is developed; the theory is accordingly labelled normative, the theory is meant to be perfect. If one questions the theory in relation to practice, then one is told that it is not meant to describe practice. "Remember, it's normative." And we do need an ideal to reach for. Or, in the words of:

*Banfield, where he lays down the final decisive argument for his rationalism theory (Banfield 1973, p. 149):*

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<sup>7</sup> Banfield (1959)1973

<sup>8</sup> Habermas 1990, Nylund 1995

*Aksel Hagen: Human-scientific Planning Theory. Lillehammer college: Working paper no. 70, 1998.*

"But if the interest is normative ... 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".

- Sager (Sager 1992), where he constructs a new and liberating normative ideal which generally includes both an optimal ability to calculate and communicate by
  - reintroducing the possibility of unrestricted rationality<sup>9</sup>
  - basing itself on Jürgen Habermas' concept of communicative rationality

- agreeing with John Forester's assertion that dialogue based on communicative rationality, can break down the political obstacles to rational planning<sup>10</sup>.

Thus theories are constructed which, true enough and enticingly enough, are impeccable when seen from the field of practice. They can only be discussed if they hold water in a logical-theoretical sense. Such discussions are less interesting to me in this context.

I feel that Charles Lindblom's arguments against the instrumental/synoptic rationality ideal may also be applicable and must also be valid for the communicative ideal. This ideal may be even more beyond the pale of "reality" or placed in "the range of impossibilities" than the synoptic ideal. Figure 1 is my attempt to follow up Lindblom's figure in his article «Still muddling, not yet through» (Lindblom 1979, pp. 518, 519) and in this way try to visualize how the synoptic and communicative ideals find each other in "the range of impossibilities". In this light they do not represent two opposite extremes, two central dichotomies. Quite the opposite, they represent a common set of ideas, where only what is ideal will suffice as an ideal.

Ideals placed in "the range of impossibilities" are uninteresting to me, indeed they are virtually provocative because it appears so simple to merely theorise oneself away from the basic questions. For me this constitutes digression and escape, not guidelines for practice.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 1 Planning theories in the range of impossibilities and possibilities

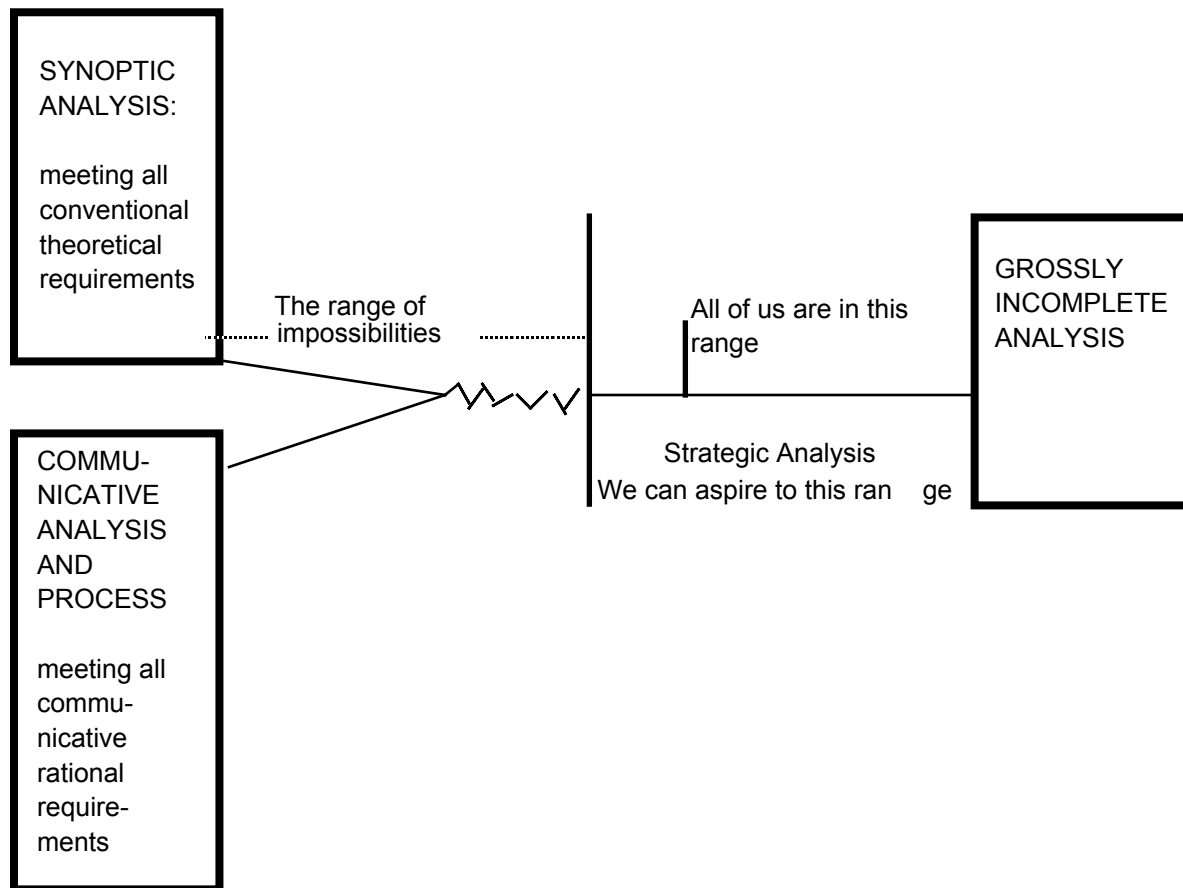
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<sup>9</sup> Incrementalism is founded on «bounded rationality»

<sup>10</sup> Forester 1982

<sup>11</sup> Excuse me, I seem to have forgotten what I claimed in prejudices no.3 about understanding and respecting the need for a strong, a grand normative theory

*Aksel Hagen: Human-scientific Planning Theory. Lillehammer college: Working paper no. 70, 1998.*



## Realities and truths in planning

It follows from my prejudices and from what I have written about the ideals in planning that it makes sense to believe observations cannot be made without being tainted by values. If objective reality exists, people will never know it. Direct observation is an unproductive and misleading construct.

For the same reason I do not want to share Habermas' faith in consensus through discourse. It is far more productive for me to follow the lead of Luhmann who states that such an ideal discourse per se is impossible (Harste 1992, Jacobsen (ed.) 1992, Luhmann 1989). Luhmann recognises no objective reality which authoritatively may claim its superiority. Meaning, the truth, is not lying out there waiting to be discovered.

One can and should preferably attempt to develop common thinking and understanding through dialogues. However, perfect mutual insight into each other's thinking can never be attained, it is simply beyond what is possible. It is simply beyond what should be possible considering the liberty of the individual. In this light, ideals about perfect communicative rationality are both simplistic and dangerous.

Realities cannot be evoked, rather they are created, for example, in the communication between individuals. We can develop something jointly through speaking to each other, but we cannot attain objective knowledge about what our discourse partner actually believes and thinks.

*"There is no objective knowledge, knowledge is always given in a subject... Meaning is merely what is thought by somebody. Meaning is primarily an opinion, an action." (Ramírez 1995b, pages 50 and 58)*

People have to make their own reality. People find reality through or in dialogues with other people, through communication. Reality is meaning. Meaning is not discovered but "created by rhetors" (Brummet 1976, p.29). Participation in planning, which is regarded as critically important in Norwegian planning, is about sharing and creating opinions about the past and the present, and sharing and creating visions, goals, strategies and means concerning the future. We do not communicate to create a world, nevertheless, our world is created through language. The world comes about through language and ideas. We all contribute in different ways to the creation of the world (Ramírez 1995b).

Brummet labels this way of thinking intersubjectivity. This intersubjectivity is different from subjectivity, which in its pure form is solipsism (Brummet 1976, p.30). It is not possible to conjure up, experience or sense any reality I want. "Experience is sensation plus meaning. Sensation alone is meaningless" (Brummet 1976, p. 289). Reality is something shared, it can be changed and often will be changed in planning processes. The planner and the politician, all participants in planning, have no choice but to be creative. Nothing is given. Art, science and planning are very much alike: they seek to create and unify experiences rather than simply report them "... this means that science, like art, will be a creative process" (Brummet 1992, p.42).

What is interesting about truth is that some people consider it to be true and thus have expectations for it. A functioning truth must be constructed. What is written and spoken will not become truth before it is believed (Ramírez 1995, p. 13). As planners, or as other participants in a planning process, we must thus seek to "discover" or develop what we believe to be solutions /answers/ truth. Thereafter these need to be given underpinnings, later to be argued for. We must create confidence in our assessments.

For me it makes sense to consider it impossible for us to fully understand either ourselves or each other. Such thinking corresponds well with the knowledge I have gained from my experiences from work, from my political activity and, more generally, life itself. An approach which is meaningful to me, to follow up my prejudices, is Luhmann's system theory approach to this issue (Luhmann 1989 and Jacobsen (ed.)1992). Luhmann rejects the possibility of the «One Redeeming Theory» about society, rejects the viability of developing and living with "Grand Theories". Rather

the opposite, Luhmann claims that it is a sign of stability when society no longer can agree on describing itself and its environment using the one and only proper theory (Luhmann in Jacobsen (ed.) 1992, p. 20). The main issue for Luhmann is that:

- in today's complex society there is no subsystem which can represent society as a whole, and there is no centre.
- the various subsystems cannot communicate with each other. Communication can only come about within each of the individual subsystems, and preferably in such cases about the other subsystems, or about the surroundings as a whole.
- to consider, or "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).

Thus this involves an alternative to both the deductive approach; moving from the general/the whole to the particular/the part, - and the inductive approach; moving from the particular/the part to the general/the whole, and then back to the particular (Ramírez 1995a, p.39 and 225).

The alternative proposed by Ramírez is the dialectic and rhetorical approach. The dialectic method focuses on the connection between general assumptions and science/theories, while rhetoric focuses on the



connection between general assumptions and practice. Both methods lend themselves to working with topic areas which are ambiguous and disputable. As I understand it,

these do not lead to a particular planning method, or to a number of methods. The point is more that they imply a set of attitudes, a profound and fundamental understanding, which one adopts and tries to use in the various concrete planning situations. They represent a form of meta theory which is meant to influence all concrete applications of method. The rhetorical approach must colour other applications of method, rather than directly exclude.

The intersubjective truth, using Brummet's expression, is still the correspondence of ideas to reality; but reality is now a different truth. Truth is relative because it is man-made. "Truth lies in man" (Brummet 1992, p. 33).

These creative dialogical processes are human-scientific constructs and constitute a core element of human scientific planning theory.

## **Planning as action**

Human-scientific action theory says something about what it means to understand, describe and deal with concrete problems and to find acceptable solutions in concrete action situations,

Social planning is seen as a complex system of conscious, reflected actions for attaining particular results or reaching established goals (Ramírez 1995a).

The main challenge in the majority of planning processes is to determine which measures are needed if certain types of goals are to be attained. How these goals have been created, why they are wanted, how these goals and the planned measures must be formulated in terms of concepts and language so that no valuable element is overlooked, require value assessments which in turn are based upon reflection on language, concept formulations, argumentation etc.

Such considerations belong in a theory on how people act (acting) and not only on what people do (making). Acting is what goes on between people within a web of human relationships, using language. Each action is a singular event. The results are never predetermined. Communication is unavoidable. Coordination of action inevitably calls for rhetorical communication (Summa 1993, Arendt 1958, Ramírez 1995a). Making proceeds according to a predetermined model; is to follow some preexisting rules or directions

The difference between acting and making, or between action competence and professional skill, is

a relevant Aristotelian distinction which should be actualised, says Ramírez. This involves two different but complementary perspectives on knowledge and action which require each their own respective treatment in concrete situations. Concrete situations contain human aspects which general technical rules and planning models do not take into consideration. This is where human-scientific theory comes in as it does not lay down any universal action rules, but allows the acting person to be confronted with particular problems which can arise, and which develop his or her ability or skill to find the particular solution which is needed in each situation.

Human-scientific action theory is about how experience knowledge and personal competence are developed. We can also describe it as a theory about ethic, a form of ethical competence. Ethics is seen today as a theory about morals, but in the Aristotelian meaning (the word "ethics" was of course created by Aristotle) ethics implies reflective knowledge about how we act and how and why we choose to act in one or another way. Moral knowledge applies only to certain types of social actions bound by norms; a general action theory is called ethics and does not apply to only so-called moral actions, but also to wise actions in general. These are actions which are right and can be accepted on the basis of other criteria than purely moral ones.

Choosing a suitable occupation is, for example, not a moral question, but is based on wise decisions and is therefore ethical.

The activity we call social planning is permeated by decisions based on action competence, both in a moral and in other respects. Much of the actual political debate deals, for example, with the sustainable society and with protecting a good environment. This does not deal exclusively with moral issues, nor does it deal with merely technical questions, even if these are included in the

discussion. We do have adequate knowledge about environment issues, but nevertheless we often act inappropriately. This concerns a way of finding convincing arguments which can induce people to take responsibility for acting wisely.

The human-scientific perspective represents an understanding that society and organisations cannot be explained causally. In the human-scientific perspective, the positivistic approach, meaning is something objectively inherent in reality. In this perspective planning is finding and constructively using this meaning. In the human-scientific perspective, however, actions and human intentions are central elements. Meaning, such as truth, is constituted only through action. Everything that is written and spoken, all theories, first become true when they are believed. Meaning and truth are produced in the actions, and are not something out there waiting to be captured by the planners in order to be presented in their plans and decision-making processes as absolutes.

When we speak of planning processes, Ramírez claims that it is important to distinguish between process and action, as mentioned in the Introduction p.1. When a process arises because of human intentions and choices, then we have, moreover, an action. An action may thus be linked to a process, without being one. Through selecting one or the other action, we may trigger causal processes. Planning consists first and foremost of the ability to imagine and then choose the process which is to be initiated; not to select "the right one", but one which works. This is not an objective event, but is the result of wise assessment.

## **Planning as rhetoric**

Thus we are dealing with a special form of logic which distinguishes action knowledge from factual knowledge. Traditional scientific logic is a formal calculus based on exactly defined concepts which are assumed to represent given facts and which follow rules, on the basis of particular given truths, to arrive at other truths, and which through accumulation can form a scientific system.

Ramírez' research has shown that the action logic which is the foundation of a human-scientific action theory understanding agrees with a knowledge system which was also developed by Aristotle under the name Rhetorical Art, and which has already been mentioned several times in this paper. Rhetoric is a hermeneutic logic.

In common use, rhetoric is often applied in the meaning of empty and bombastic talk. More usually, still as common use, rhetoric is used to describe language primarily of agitation and demagogy when speakers simply want to seduce an audience. Both these ways of using the concept of rhetoric are not faithful to the origin of the art of rhetoric. There is little disagreement among people who have worked on rehabilitating the concept of rhetoric over the last two decades. They all look upon rhetoric as a very important element in our society which is so dependent on the use of language. Parts of the discussion deal with the primary function of rhetoric. Is it mainly an art of persuasion, the art of arguing, or is it just the art of speaking? Many are prepared to take this a step further, claiming rhetoric is a system of knowledge in itself (Ramírez 1995a, 1995b, Summa 1993, Throgmorton 1996).

José L. Ramírez' concept of rhetoric contains:

- A logic component, i.e. rhetoric has the ability to develop reason, or to promote rational thinking.

- A component incorporating the ontological fact that we can never understand each other exactly or completely, neither in the relation between two or more people speaking together, nor in the relation between speaker and listener or between writer and reader.

Public planning is an activity that includes a coordination of the knowledge and actions of many different actors. Ramírez claims that it makes no sense to talk about a collective action. All that is possible is joint actions among individuals who have agreed upon some goals, means, to follow some rules. Wise decisions are the result of both traditional production of knowledge through different types of research and production of knowledge through dialogues in planning processes.

Such dialogues will be an arena for politic, professional knowledge and common sense. The right action is not a mimetic repetition or the mechanical adherence to a rule. What is good/not good, right/wrong, true/not true is a discussion each of us has to reflect upon, also in cooperation 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.

Ramírez (1995b) operates with two forms of understanding, e.g. intuition, representing an immediate understanding, and discourse, representing an indirect understanding, *dia logos*, i.e. through thought and speech. This form of dialogue is not just talking together. Dialogue is understanding through communicating. We do not speak to be understood, we talk to understand, both the others and ourselves.

The individual must take responsibility for his or her knowledge and develop this in consultation and action with all the other actors. The meaning is created through dialogue. This is partly a process within each individual to become more aware of oneself, partly a process between different individuals and also a process to develop a common meaning through individuals. Both text and speech are always created/take place in a social context. The point is to communicate in order to improve, says Hellspong (1995, p.2), not in order to discover 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 country. Rhetoric is the logic of practice. It gives advice, pointing to possible alternative ways of handling a planning task.

Many different models, methods and techniques for planning in practice have been developed. One example which is appropriate to use at this conference is Patzy Healy's (1995), who provides us with a list of recommendations of principles (pp. 65-66). Her normative approaches underlines the following crucial elements: 1. Arenas for discussion. 2. The scope and style of discussion 3. Sorting through arguments. 4. Creating a new discourse. 5. Agreement and critique.

However, as Malbert 1998 points out (p.74)

- how can these tasks be carried out?
- who are the people who can do this?
- how can necessary decisions and actions of the planning systems at different levels be

coordinated with decisions and actions of actors and other stakeholders outside these planning systems.

Planning, both in theory and practice, is torn between, on the one hand, trying to develop and then follow practical applicable processes, and on the other hand not forgetting that planning both is and must be an art form. Considering it as art, the challenge is to do it as well as possible. This in turns leads to the issue of finding a balance between making and acting.

Dialogue is not so much a process or following of rules, but a question of qualities of content, of exchange of meanings and creation of meanings.

Planning is not science, but an activity which makes use of science and much more. Rhetoric has never lent

itself to systematically compiling so-called objective data. Rather it builds on an open reflection around our own experience of talking and thinking.

## Closing remarks

If I, as a planner, politician, representative of an organisation etc., want to participate in planning, there are certain formal rules for planning which must be followed. I must work within certain common frames for what is perceived to be reasonable.

This basic frame (norms, interests, plans, scopes of action) is created in a language medium, in a communication between a large number of actors. We may refer to Luhmann's claim that society is communication (Luhmann 1989). This means that there must be a basic understanding-oriented and language action modus which supports the strategic space which is taken as a given above

(Arnesen 1989, p. 9 and 10). Without such a schematic common space, we cannot manage to communicate with each other or to understand each other. The basis for negotiation and dialogue is not there, and planning subsequently becomes impossible<sup>12</sup>. If planning is to function, it must in itself be perceived as a part of such a normative agreement, to a certain degree.

At the same time planning must dare to open up, to be creatively liberating. Planning is not arriving at unambiguous knowledge about society and organisations in the past and present, and using this as the point of departure for constructing the right future. We are not talking about compiling and processing objective facts. We are talking more about open and free reflection based on practical experience. The planner must have seen and experienced that there is no distinct difference between facts and values, between rationality and power and between technique and policy. According to Flyvbjerg this means that we have to abandon the idea of planning as our hope, setting us apart from pure Habermasians. We must detach ourselves from the "unreal reality" and step into the real one (Flyvbjerg 1991, pp. 400, 401). Social planning is to be seen as a form of action competence; Man creates his world in the act of giving it meaning (Ramírez 1995).

We have beliefs and we have reasons for them. But there is no point, and it is not possible to give an a priori account of what will count as a good reason in general. We may still speak of beliefs being true or false, but only in the context of a particular dialogue, in the context of giving reasons for your beliefs, not in general. Hence, truth is agreement. This notion of truth implies degrees of truth. The most fundamental truths are those meanings most universally shared. Yet agreement does not stand still. It is made and unmade by rhetorical discourses. The idea that truth is being argued, is being created as well as discovered, puts a greater responsibility on the rhetor. Awareness of other truths stems from an ethic in which truth itself is rhetorically made by agreement, not given or found absolutely. Such a rhetorical ethic is possible only in intersubjectivity. Truth which is rhetorically made encourages choice and awareness of alternative realities, claims Ramírez (1992).

Rhetoric is the logic of hermeneutics and practical reason, a logic which is not analytical, but rather synthetic and contextual, not deductive but discursive. Language does not depict or reflect, it creates, it creates meaning. It is important to consider knowledge more as assimilative than accumulative, that learning takes place through committed participation rather than through participatory observation, that all understanding is contextual, the method is that of interpretation.

Nevertheless, the hermeneutic approach does not imply a basic relativism, but rather belief in wisdom, phronesis (Ramírez 1992, p. 16):

*"It is wisdom that teaches us to make use of experience and also assess the particular situation on its own*

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<sup>12</sup> Apart from a ritual act (Enderud 1976)

*Aksel Hagen: Human-scientific Planning Theory. Lillehammer college: Working paper no. 70, 1998.*

terms."

If we go back to page 4 and figure 1 on page 5, an interesting question might be: This rhetorical approach, does it belong to «the range of impossibilities», - or «the range of possibilities»? Ramírez will definitely claim «the range of possibilities». I have tried to some extent to argue in the same direction. However, what would have been Lindblom's answer?

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