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Planning for social justice: Strategies, dilemmas, tradeoffs

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Abstract

This article charts predicaments and conundrums associated with the ambition to plan for social justice. Drawing from classical theory on the roles of intellectuals, we identify what we call the “power of representation dilemma.” This dilemma arises because the credentials, knowledge, and skills of intellectuals (like urban planners) make them into powerful agents of social justice but at the same time can put them in a position of power in relation to the very communities they represent and serve. We develop a typology of various strategies for contending with this dilemma and conclude there are no clean ways to resolve the dilemma as each strategy has significant tradeoffs. We encourage a “*realpolitik* of social justice,” whereby planners become cognizant that there are only imperfect strategies to engage in the politics of social justice. Recognition of their fallibility in the pursuit of noble ideals will make them more reflexive and capable of responding to the inevitability of new injustices and silencings that arise when planning for social justice.

Keywords

dilemmas, public intellectuals, social justice, social movements, urban planning

Introduction

While the question of how just societies and cities can be organized has long been central to the planning profession, recent years have seen renewed engagement with the role

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planners can or should take in the pursuit of social justice. Prominent figures in the field have provided explicit and extensive accounts of how planners might promote social justice, including Susan Fainstein's *The Just City* and Edward Soja's *Seeking Spatial Justice*. Planning professionals also made important contributions to the debate on what the "right to the city" entails and how that right can be enshrined in law and harnessed through planning practices (Fernandes, 2007). Yet another development is the proliferation of platforms striving to create synergy between community activism and research, including numerous "urban labs" and research networks like the Urban Research-Based Action Network (URBAN). Spurred in part by movements demanding housing improvements and equal treatment (Mitlin and Mogaladi, 2013), recent years have also seen an outpouring of work at the intersection of critical development studies and planning which has developed concepts like "insurgent planning" to reconceive the relationships between planners and their subjects (e.g. Miraftab, 2009). The renewed buzz around social justice suggests that, at least in some corners of the planning profession, criticism of instrumental and neoliberal reasoning is gaining ground. Instead of accommodating economic growth and serving dominant elites, these planners are seeking to promote and implement visions of the just city.

What dilemmas do planners face in the pursuit of social justice? And what strategies have they developed to handle these dilemmas? This article reviews a number of contributions that seek to answer these questions. We are especially interested in contributions that discuss how planners relate to marginalized communities, that is, communities suffering from stigmatization and multiple forms of deprivation. Working for or with marginalized communities raises distinct and vexing questions. We address some of these questions through a discussion of what we refer to as the "power of representation dilemma." This dilemma arises from the relatively privileged position of the planner compared to marginalized communities. On the one hand, planners can decide to use their status, knowledge, and professional skills to the fullest. In this way, they effectively promote their view of social justice in the planning process and can assertively represent the interests of marginalized communities to administrators and other influential actors. However, when they wield power in this way, they run the risk of assuming positions of superiority during struggles for equality and sidelining segments of marginalized communities with different conceptions of what justice entails or how it should be achieved. On the other hand, planners can decide not to capitalize on their privileges. Instead of promoting their own views of social justice, they can aspire to be servants of marginalized communities by communicating their views and translating their ideals into concrete programs. However, this may mean that planners swallow their own ideas of what social justice entails or forego opportunities to capitalize on their privileges. Moreover, while planners who adopt a role as servants of marginalized communities may not ostentatiously usurp power and assume leading positions, they inevitably will be selective in promoting some interests and ideas rather than others. Since marginalized communities do not speak with one voice and will always be heterogeneous, even the most self-effacing planners will bring their own views and interests to bear on the planning process.

We argue that the power of representation dilemma can be handled in different ways but it cannot be fully resolved. It is a genuine dilemma because status, knowledge, and skills are necessary in struggles for equality but the unequal distribution of these resources

produces new hierarchies during the process of achieving equality. While their status, knowledge, and professional skills make planners into effective “agents of social justice” (Krase, 1997: 17), their control over these resources puts them in a position of power in relation to the very communities they represent and serve. Different strategies for handling the power of representation dilemma produce different tradeoffs, with planners and communities having to decide which of these are the most acceptable to their own values and political goals.

To chart the stakes and the tradeoffs involved in planning for justice, this article examines how recent theorizing conceives social justice and community engagement. Its first section, “Intellectuals and marginalized communities: toward a typology of justice strategies,” examines the position of planners within wider contexts by drawing upon general theories on the relations between intellectuals and the marginalized people they seek to represent and serve. This theoretical excursion results in a typology of four different conceptions planners can have with respect to the meaning of social justice and their relation to marginalized communities. These four different conceptions are then examined in the subsequent sections and illustrated with examples from the planning literature. Our purpose is not to argue that one position is intrinsically better than another; each position has specific tradeoffs in the sense that achieving certain goals comes at the cost of other goals. The tradeoffs imply that important choices have to be made. We therefore encourage planners to embrace a “*realpolitik* of social justice,” whereby they become cognizant that there are only imperfect strategies to engage in the politics of social justice.

Intellectuals and marginalized communities: toward a typology of justice strategies

Throughout the years, intellectuals have devised and debated strategies concerning intellectual interventions in the struggles of marginalized people. The central issue fueling the debates was how to put the special assets of intellectuals (credentials, knowledge, and skills) in the service of their quest for social justice (Nicholls and Uitermark, 2015). These discussions are important for planners because planners are specific type of intellectuals as they have credentials, specific forms of knowledge, and professional skills that most people in marginalized communities lack. This section therefore places the dilemmas facing planners within the broader and longer lasting debates concerning the roles of intellectuals in movements for social justice.

Intellectuals and social movements

Although Vladimir Lenin’s ideology has been widely discredited, the question posed in the title of his best-known essay—“what is to be done?”—still serves as key reference in debates on the role of intellectuals. Lenin embraced a classically Jacobin view of the intellectual and formalized this view into a concrete strategy of political action (King and Szelényi, 2004; Mayer, 1994). Lenin believed that “scientific knowledge” allowed Marxist intellectuals to analyze the *essential* causes of inequalities, identify the *true* interest of the working class, and fashion long-term revolutionary strategies on their

behalf. By contrast, the squalid conditions of the working class made it difficult for them to transcend the particular struggles of daily life and understand the deeper causes of inequalities. The constraints imposed on the working class tempted most to forego the distant goal of true equality for short-term bread and butter concessions. The working class, in other words, suffered from “trade union consciousness,” which hampered its abilities to achieve true equality on its own (Mayer, 1994: 673). Intellectuals produced the ideas needed to allow the working class to see the general truth in their particular situations and guide them toward a truly just society. In assuming this role, dedicated intellectuals would become the vanguard of the proletariat. While this position is strongly associated with Lenin, others have also argued that intellectuals uniquely possess transcendent knowledge. For instance, utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer (1972) is rooted in a very different political tradition but similarly argues that some people, that is, professional philosophers, are better placed than others to arrive at sound conclusions about moral conduct. Professional philosophers, according to Singer (1972), can transcend “unreflective intuitions” (p. 117) because they have the time to collect facts and the competence to think through the moral course of action. The idea that a true sense of the just society can be achieved by detachment from people’s particular features and conditions (such as race or class position) also informs Rawls’ (1971) thought experiment of the “veil of ignorance.” Just as “bread and butter” issues hamper the ability of the proletariat to envision “true” equality, context-specific particularisms also limit the abilities of people to conceive and enact social justice. The intellectual’s role is therefore to recover the hidden truth from the multiple struggles that encumber people in their everyday lives. In this view, detachment from people’s experiences in everyday life is a necessary tradeoff for achieving a superior sense of what social justice entails and how it can be achieved.

Many intellectuals have argued against the view that being embedded in everyday life facilitates rather than frustrates the pursuit of social justice. Antonio Gramsci (1971), for instance, questioned the assumption that intellectuals possess a monopoly on legitimate knowledge and argued that “all men are intellectuals but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (Gramsci, 1971: 121). For Gramsci, the problem is not the working class’ lack of knowledge but the obfuscation of this knowledge by ideology. Dominant bourgeois ideology produces a “common sense” that blocks workers from employing their inherent knowledge to identify their true, universal interests. “Organic intellectuals” (part-time theorists, organizers, teachers, religious leaders, planners, etc.) aligned with the working class play an important role because they can employ their skills and proximity to working-class communities to wipe away these ideological blinders. The “organic intellectual” is not teaching them what is good and bad but helping them to recover what workers already know for themselves to be true. Following Gramsci’s lead, Paulo Freire (1970) created a method (“pedagogy of the oppressed”) for organic intellectuals to “raise the consciousness” (“*conscientização*”) of marginalized communities. The method encourages organic intellectuals to use the in-built knowledge of these communities to identify and mobilize against injustices in their daily lives (O’Cadiz et al., 1998). Marginalized communities therefore had in-built knowledge that is largely consistent with the knowledge of Marxist intellectuals. These communities do not need intellectuals to lead them. They need organic intellectuals to help break through

ideological mystifications and guide them to what they already knew to be true and just. The idea that intellectuals are capable of helping people articulate what they already know can also be found in other traditions. For instance, Amartya Sen's Capability Approach is based on the idea that people should have the freedom to pursue well-being in ways they see fit. However, there is a caveat, because Sen argues that they should have the capability to achieve the lives they have reason to value, which may be something else than the lives they actually value (Sen, 1999). Sen believes that marginalized communities may internalize hardship, adapting their preferences to their conditions rather than the other way around. While Gramsci, Freire, and Sen value marginalized communities as sources of political action and knowledge, they continue to embrace a substantive and fixed ideal of social justice. This means that in the last instance traditional intellectuals possess the knowledge to distinguish between true and false consciousness (or, in Sen's case, real or adapted preferences). While this conception values marginalized communities, the tradeoff is that it does so selectively—the knowledge, aspirations, and insights of marginalized communities are only promoted and validated when they align with the historical mission that intellectuals have charted.

Opposing the denunciation of marginalized communities' understanding of their own position, Michel Foucault argues that it is not the task of intellectuals to promote conceptions of justice (Foucault, 1982, 1984; Foucault and Deleuze, 1977). Foucault believes that marginalized people already have full knowledge of their problems, interests, and grievances. They do not need intellectuals to guide them, reveal hidden truths or injustices, or raise their consciousness because that consciousness was already well developed (Eribon, 1991: 253). An extended quote illustrates well why Foucault feels that intellectuals should not define and impose a fixed ideal of justice on the communities they are working with:

In the most recent upheaval [May 1968], the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge: they know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves. But there exists a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and his knowledge, a power not only found in the manifest authority of censorship, but one that profoundly and subtly penetrates an entire societal network. Intellectuals are themselves agents of the system of power—the idea of their responsibility for “consciousness” and discourse forms part of the system. The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself “somewhat ahead and to the side” in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of “knowledge,” “truth,” “consciousness,” and “discourse.” (Foucault, in Foucault and Deleuze interview, 1977: 207–208)

While Foucault rejects the idea of the universal intellectual, he embraces the notion of the specific intellectual. Specific intellectuals are experts—planners, architects, teachers, psychiatrists, lawyers, and so on—whose work blurs the distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge. These specific intellectuals encountered countless problems in their practices, leading many to acknowledge and support the concrete struggles of those they were supposed to discipline. Specific intellectuals would not use their theoretical knowledge to reveal the universal and fixed truth underlying

specific resistances but play a supportive role by contributing their technical skills to advance the struggles of groups in particular institutional sites (Eribon, 1991).¹ His views are echoed by Gilled Deleuze and developed further by Jacques Rancière (1989, 1993, 2012) who both strongly criticize intellectuals who claimed to speak for others. While Marxist intellectuals feel that intellectuals have a superior understanding of social struggle, Foucault, Deleuze, and Rancière argue that workers and other oppressed communities know best what their struggles are about. What these communities need are technical skills and information to express their voices in more effective ways. In Foucault's view, the role of the intellectual therefore resembles that of the worker in Marxist theory: intellectuals may not have an exceptionally profound understanding of what the social conflict is about but they have specific skills and knowledge that can be used to advance the cause (Nicholls and Uitermark, 2015). While Foucault, Deleuze, and Rancière resolved some problems associated with strong conceptions of justice, their solutions also involve important tradeoffs. One such tradeoff is that their insistence on local and sectoral struggles makes it difficult to conceive of broader struggles transcending particular conditions. By declaring as "absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others" (Deleuze, in Foucault and Deleuze interview: 1977: 209), the possibility of expressing solidarity for people with different backgrounds or in different conditions seems foreclosed (Alcott, 1991–1992). Another tradeoff stems from the assumption that subaltern groups are a sovereign subject, undecieved and undivided, foreclosing "the necessity of the difficult task of counterhegemonic ideological production" (Spivak, 1988: 69). Rather than engaging full on with the issue that intellectuals play a role in selecting, mediating, and connecting—in a word, silencing and amplifying—different voices, Foucault and his colleagues deny that intellectuals play such a role.

Toward a typology of justice strategies and their tradeoffs

This discussion of the roles of intellectuals shows there are different ways to handle the power of representation dilemma. Some feel that it is the task of intellectuals to articulate a clear sense of what social justice is and how it could be achieved. The knowledge and theory of intellectuals provide them with a strong substantive understanding of justice, which allows them to steer the masses to a more just society. Others feel that marginalized communities, not intellectuals, have the capacities to understand the meaning of their own grievances and desires. Rather than assume there is a universal "social justice" that is detectable by intellectuals, they believe that marginalized groups have their own ideas of the good and just society and do not need intellectuals to serve as their guides and conscience. By embracing a weak understanding of justice, they seek to open up a space for multiple notions of justice to bubble up from the everyday and specific struggles of marginalized communities.

A related but distinct issue is the relationship of the intellectual to marginalized communities; some feel that intellectuals should be independent from particular communities—they need to retain a certain distance in order to keep an eye on the bigger picture and avoid being caught up in the particularistic and short-term squabbles that make up the everyday struggles of marginalized communities. Others feel, in contrast, that

Table 1. Strategies and tradeoffs for intellectuals in pursuit of social justice.

		<i>Substantive conception of justice</i>	
		Weak	Strong
<i>Engagement with community</i>	Strong	<p>Positive: Recognition of marginalized communities as fully equal and capable of engaging as full citizens; encourages grassroots diversity and the voice of multiple others</p> <p>Negative: Prone to short termism, cooptation, and fragmentation across different marginalized communities—no common concept of justice to bridge differences across communities</p>	<p>Positive: Recognition of marginalized communities as potentially able to recognize their true interests; use of substantive knowledge to steer movements toward more just societies and avoid state cooptation; broad framework to retain a common movement made up of different communities</p> <p>Negative: Continue to value one knowledge over others; requires silencing alternative ideas of justice</p>
	Weak		<p>Positive: Strong leadership and vision of justice provides goals for achieving longer term goals of equality and justice</p> <p>Negative: Devalues the particularistic knowledge of communities and their qualities as fully equal members of the polity</p>

intellectuals should engage with, or be an integral part of, communities. Rather than avoid the squabbles of everyday life, intellectuals (especially organic and specific intellectuals) should lend their knowledge and skills to advance and accelerate micro-resistances. The typology in Table 1 maps these different strategies of intellectuals to deal with the power of representation dilemma.²

Planners and marginalized communities: dilemmas of planning the just city

Although few planners root their practice in theorizing on intellectuals, the general discussion above is relevant for reflecting on the positions planners can take and understanding the tradeoffs involved. All intellectuals (from traditional to specific) in pursuit of social justice confront the power of representation dilemma, including planners. When planners represent certain communities or conceptions of justice, they evoke and acknowledge some instead of other people, interests, and values. The discourse and practice of progressive (or any other form of) planning thus entails strategic silencing and it is important to acknowledge these silences to chart what different strategies sacrifice in their quest for social justice. Table 2 provides a typology of planning strategies.

Table 2. Typology of planning strategies.

		<i>Substantive conception of justice</i>	
		Weak	Strong
<i>Engagement with communities</i>	Strong	<i>Collaborative planning</i> Patsy Healey	<i>Insurgent planning</i> Faranak Miraftab Advocacy planning Edward Soja Paul Davidoff
	Weak	Rationalist-instrumental planning	Planning for universal justice Susan Fainstein

Specific types of planning strategies can be placed throughout this table, depending on the particular ways in which they conceive social justice and community participation. In the bottom-left corner, we find planners who do not seek to engage communities or espouse social justice. With an appeal to values like efficiency or rationality, they plan for the “optimal” use of space, with “optimal” being defined according to dominant norms and values. Planners in the other three quadrants do seek progressive change. In the top-left quadrant, we find collaborative planning. Collaborative planners seek to strengthen community power over planning ideas and practices. Such planning is not devoid of conceptions of justice but they are procedural rather than substantive as for collaborative planners the inclusion of various stakeholders is more important than the outcome of planning. The work of Patsy Healey exemplifies this type of approach as she explores ways to foster “collaborative, consensus-building practices” (Healey, 2006: 5). Recent examples of this collaborative mode of planning include “urban labs” that aim to bring together a range of stakeholders with experts in a joint effort to develop projects and places. In the top-right corner, we find scholars with a strong conception of justice who also seek to involve communities. In contrast to collaborative planners, their goal is not to establish consensus or involve all stakeholders but to tip the balance of power so that their substantive ideas of what justice entails are realized. One example is Jay Arena (2012) who provides a sharp criticism of non-governmental organizations and academics ignoring, co-opting, or stifling resistance against displacement and the destruction of public housing. Finally, in the bottom-right corner, we find approaches emphasizing universal principles of social justice. One example—discussed more fully below—is Susan Fainstein. Needless to say, categorizing planning intellectuals within a two-dimensional space does not do full justice to the complexity of their positions. For instance, Fainstein includes democracy (largely operationalized as community engagement) among her criteria for a just city. Similarly, Healey’s discussion of proper procedures implies that such procedures lead to substantive conceptions of justice. Moreover, there are intellectuals who adapt their position to the situation at hand or develop intermediate positions. However, the goal of the typology is not to comprehensively discuss the work of these intellectuals but to provide a rough guide into the tradeoffs associated with different strategies for creating just and democratic cities.

Planning for the “Just City”: Susan Fainstein as universal planning intellectual

Fainstein's *The Just City* falls in the tradition of the universalist intellectual who decides, independently and on theoretical grounds, what course should be steered. She believes that developing a definition of justice is the first step to producing more just cities and discusses different notions of justice to come up with her own universal and transcendent idea of what justice is. Drawing on Rawls, among others, Fainstein states that the “emphasis on justice can be defended in terms of a communicative consensus at the highest level of articulation; it then becomes a universal principle rather than one negotiated in each interaction” (Fainstein, 2010: 10). This is both a synthetic and definitive exercise in the sense that she expertly decides how to assemble different ideas of justice into a coherent working definition and program. For Fainstein, the just city is a city that is diverse, democratic and, above all, equitable. By comparing Amsterdam, New York, and London, she shows that within the capitalist system meaningful differences exist between different cities; Amsterdam scores best on her indicators of justice, New York is the worst, and London falls somewhere in between. By identifying the decisions and institutions that guarantee more equitable outcomes in Amsterdam, Fainstein provides guidance to practitioners and administrators seeking to promote social justice in the city. Toward the end of the book she provides a set of guidelines that could help politicians and practitioners to realize what she calls, after Fraser (2003), “nonreformist reforms,” which would operate within existing social frameworks but open up possibilities of more radical reforms over time (Fainstein, 2010: 18–19). Knowing what “justice” means provides the planner with the reference, the categorical imperative, to wade through noise and distractions of everyday life, identify and combat specific expressions of injustice, and strive to achieve the just city.

Rather than proposing certain planning procedures, Fainstein deliberately privileges a *substantive* conception of justice and derives recommendations of policy measures from this conception (Fainstein, 2010: 9). Her reason for this stance is that she feels that ideals and practices of communicative or deliberative planning processes are easily perverted. She criticizes collaborative planning for failing to account for inequalities. The theory of deliberative democracy undergirding these planning philosophies “does not adequately confront the constraints on democracy in a society where resources are privately owned and controlled” (Fainstein, 2010: 28). Planners seeking to include all stakeholders into democratic decisions may recognize rather than question these parties and their interests. When Fainstein speaks of “the community,” she uses inverted commas to emphasize that communities do embody different ideas, ideals, and interests (e.g. Fainstein, 2010: 128). Fainstein's criticism of collaborative planning highlights the important point that there is a tradeoff between planning for justice and planning for (or with) communities. While collaborative planners assume that just outcomes will be generated under conditions of maximum democratic representation, Fainstein suggests that in practice, communities may often end up serving their narrow self-interest and elect to pursue policies incompatible with the values of equity, diversity, and democracy. “In an unequal society,” Fainstein argues, “democracy and justice are frequently at odds” (Fainstein, 2010: 30).

There is, however, also a tradeoff to Fainstein's approach to social justice. It provides little space for people within cities to employ their own concepts of justice. One reason for this is that Fainstein accepts capitalism as the framework in which decisions have to be made. Another reason, more pertinent to the present discussion, is that she also has rather strict ideas about which decisions would have to be made and who should make them. The role of the planner is to keep out stakeholders holding views different to Fainstein's. In *The Just City*, "political masters" and "clients" appear not as (elected) representatives or possible partners, but as detractors. In their role as bureaucrats, Fainstein suggests, planners can "use their control over information to bend their political superiors to their will" (p. 180). She acknowledges that planners "require some support from a political base" (p. 181) but this support is only a tool in the pursuit of justice as defined by Fainstein, something that should be pursued even in the absence of support from politicians or political bases—"regardless of authorization or not, justice is a goal to continually press for" (p. 181). Fainstein thus provides planners with a strong mandate to pursue social justice based on their role as professionals and experts. If performed according to her plans, this would result in a more equitable city but the tradeoff is that it would also create a city where planners maximize their power by strategically exploiting their superior command over the bureaucracy to push aside alternative agendas, interests, and conceptions. Although Fainstein lists "democracy" among the three values for a just city, it appears that planners have to stick to their own substantive conception of justice, even if citizens, their associations, or their elected representatives would have different ideas.

Spatial justice from below: Edward Soja as the democratic socialist planner

Like Fainstein, Soja develops a strong substantive idea of social justice. Drawing largely from the works of Iris Marion Young and Henri Lefebvre, he dedicates the first part of his book to developing his idea of "spatial justice" and discussing the ways in which this would help create more equitable and democratic city-regions. Unlike Fainstein, he also strongly embraces the ideal of community engagement and outlines the ways in which planners can work with marginalized communities to bring about just cities. The urban planning department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) promoted discourses and practices that made community engagement a central component of achieving more social justice in the city. The model the department pursued

revolved not around paid consultancy with governments and large funding agencies but [was based] on voluntary assistance to and educational emphasis on constituencies usually given little attention by university researchers and professors, such as labor unions, community-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other groups aiming to empower social movements among the poor and disadvantaged populations. (Soja, 2010: 157)

Urban planners at UCLA developed strong connections to various activist clusters, combining the provision of technical assistance to targeted communities with the promotion of grassroots activism (Soja, 2010: 160). The department functioned as a networking hub

in the sense that it fostered ties among various activist groups and thus enabled activists to look beyond their own specific sectors, interests, and mindsets (Nicholls, 2003). It developed a spatially sensitive discourse of social justice, provided valuable technical expertise to resource-poor communities, and cultivated ties to activists mobilizing with workers, women, immigrants, and tenants (Nicholls, 2003). The battles for social justice obviously brought about incremental improvements rather than a revolution but it is important to note that seemingly small struggles within specific domains were informed by general understandings of the development of capitalism as well as “utopian socialist and social anarchist ideas” (Soja, 2010: 161).

Soja’s prescriptions differ from Fainstein’s in several ways. While in Fainstein’s work planners form a corpus of professionals independent from both communities and administrations, the planner in Soja’s text is firmly embedded in the trenches of urban social movements, working to bring together different currents to move the city toward social and spatial justice. The role of the urban planners in these processes of politicization is to provide a crystallization point where general discourses can be translated into specific applications and where groups operating in various sectors can be connected. Soja stresses the idea that spatial justice is not only about the equitable distribution of goods and rights between social groups, but also ensuring an active role of all urban users (*citadins*) in appropriating and producing urban space on the basis of use instead of exchange value. In this context, the planners must take sides in the struggle for justice and throw their lot directly on the side of those being marginalized by state and economic power. Planners are conceived as organic intellectuals very much in the Gramscian tradition, working through the trenches of civil society to build a counter-public and counter-hegemony in cooperation with other activists and organizations.

However, while Soja provides a “bottom-up” view of the planner, he still assumes (like Fainstein) that there is some ideal-typical form of socio-spatial justice. Performing a synthetic exercise similar to Fainstein’s, he draws on the work of several theorists to develop a working definition of “spatial justice.” While they engage with many others in this struggle, planners also bear the substantive knowledge of what “spatial justice” is and should reveal this knowledge to the others. He argues that a “critical spatial awareness” originated in the university and its “spread” occurred through ongoing engagement between academics (at UCLA in particular) and urban activists throughout the Los Angeles region. For example, he draws special focus to the important role of Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy. He notes that

While not evident in all LAANE’s projects, a critical spatial awareness informed many of its practices and was promoted and sustained by an extraordinary flow of hired student researchers and activists from Urban Planning at UCLA, at least 30 over the past 15 years, with several entering into executive and managerial roles. (Soja, 2010: 158)

By suggesting that university-trained planners have a unique insight into this “critical spatial awareness,” those in possession of it must assume a leading role in struggles to produce a more just city.³ The tradeoff with Soja’s approach is that communities are engaged but under the planners’ terms. Planners partake in active struggle and become part of community activism but they are still in the last instance intellectuals who hold substantive and theoretical knowledge that enables them to see what others cannot.

Collaborative planning: just processes

Acknowledging the risks of imposing predefined and substantive ideas of what cities ought to look like, a large number of scholars and activists have argued for collaborative and participatory methods that allow a wide range of actors to arrive at joint understandings and goals through continued dialogue. Proponents of communicative or collaborative planning have argued that the planners' task is to help create a communicative space where different stakeholders can reconcile their differences and work together (cf. Healey, 2006). In this understanding, a substantive definition of social justice is not a prerequisite for the promotion of social justice and may even be a hindrance as it implies—as we also argued above—that alternative views are marginalized or ignored. Instead of deciding what is *substantively* just, the main concern of scholars and activists committed to collaboration is to decide what is *procedurally* just. Intellectuals play specific roles in this process as they set up the platforms and means of communication through which dialogue and collaboration can proceed.

Patsy Healey is one prominent proponent of this collaborative approach to planning. Acknowledging that places are subject to competing claims, Healey (1997) feels that there is a need for “a capacity to interrelate issues to do with economic development, environmental quality, and social quality of life within a framework which acknowledges the different and diverse stakeholders in the dynamics of urban region change” (p. 82). The task of planning is to provide such a framework by working toward “the collective management of shared concerns about spatial and environmental qualities, expressed in explicit policies which emphasize a strategic orientation to co-ordination between diverse actions and a relation between policy and action” (Healey, 1997). Healey is very explicit in acknowledging that planning involves power. She draws on Foucault, Davidoff, and Lukes to suggest that formal planning procedures as well as informal planning cultures privilege some interests and stakeholders over others (Healey, 1997: 84–85). Moreover, in *Collaborative Planning* itself, and especially in a reflection on the book (Healey, 2003), Healey indicates that her approach to planning was meant to redeem local and collective agency in the face of challenges posed from neoliberalism in general and Thatcher's neoliberal government in particular. While she acknowledges the formidable power of neoliberalism at the global and national levels, her concern is not to challenge neoliberalism head-on but to develop an approach that allows local actors to be acknowledged as legitimate stakeholders and enables them to transcend their cultural differences and material interests. Although Healey is thus sensitive to power, in her view, the planner's role is not to promote a vision of what is substantively just or to identify wrongs but to assist in reconciling different interests through a process of mediation. One recent example of such a collaborative effort is the URBAN, established in 2012. This network is one among many networks, labs, and platforms aiming to bring together communities, activists, and scholars but it is particularly ambitious and has raised debates among urban and planning scholars. The initial development of URBAN was concentrated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) but currently offshoots are established across the United States and plans are being made to set up affiliates internationally. The rationale for the network is stated as follows: “An emerging set of collaborations between scholars and activists is creating living laboratories for hands-on, community-based research that grapples with

critical issues emerging in cities and proposes innovative policy solutions to advance social equity” (URBAN, 2012: 1). URBAN intends to pioneer such collaboration by creating online and offline learning environments. The challenge is to design these environments in such a way that they can deal with “competing logics, incompatible styles of discourse and attitudes towards authority, or inaccessibility of methods and results, all of which can undermine collaboration” (URBAN, 2012: 3). While scholars like Fainstein and Soja depart from a substantive understanding of social justice, URBAN explicitly recognizes “the equivalence of non-technical expertise” and emphasizes the involvement of “multiple stakeholders and disciplines” (URBAN, n.d.: 2).

Collaborative planners evade some of the problems faced by Fainstein and Soja in the sense that there is no substantive definition of social justice imposed on the collaborative process. Moreover, whereas both Fainstein and Soja believe that intellectuals in the end should have a greater say in how justice is articulated and put into practice, collaborative planners make no such assumption and have as an explicit starting point that “non-technical expertise” should be valued. In this sense, Healey, URBAN, and other collaborative planners resemble a contemporary variant of Foucault’s specific intellectual. Collaborative planners may be in possession of valuable skills but they wish to employ these skills to enable “multiple stakeholders” to express themselves and collaborate. Collaborative planners practice what Foucault preached: intellectuals are a mere tool for the realization of others’ desires.

However, the lack of substantive definitions of social justice or privileging of intellectuals does come at a cost. Power differences between different stakeholders are left implicit or covered in such clinical terms as “competing logics.” It seems as if “communities” are homogeneous in terms of composition and interest as no differentiations are made in how different people or interests are involved. Collaborative planners typically want to bring together actors with different interests and perspectives but do not attend to the inequalities among these actors. For that reason, collaborative planners’ commitment to recognizing the interests and perspectives of different stakeholders risks naturalizing inequalities among them. As Purcell (2009) argues, collaborative planning may help neoliberal policies to overcome legitimacy problems by maintaining “hegemony while ensuring political stability” (p. 140). Soja’s and Fainstein’s substantive conceptions of justice enable them to say how and where they would want to intervene. As long as they lack such a rationale, collaborative planners run the risk of adjusting their practices to accommodate rather than overcome inequalities. A number of scholars have suggested that the participatory policies often end up co-opting and constraining activists with more radical demands (Arena, 2012; Miraftab, 2009; Purcell, 2009). This then raises the question of whether it is possible to have a radical conception of justice *and* a radical commitment to community engagement. The tradeoffs associated with the prioritization of community engagement are that broader structures of inequality and exploitation remain uncontested and that planners will be inclined to accommodate rather than confront power disparities within communities.

Justice on the margins: insurgent planners

While the ideas discussed in the previous sections have been developed to make sense of the cities in the Global North, there is a strand of theorizing that looks for what

just planning may entail at the globe's urban peripheries. This strand of theorizing uses concepts like "insurgent citizenship" (Holston, 2008) to rethink objects and subjects of planning. Many cities in the Global South are not subject to planning in the usual sense of the term as they largely defy state efforts at regulation and organization (Simone, 2010). Where the grasp of state bureaucracies and formal markets is incomplete, urban space is produced through informal modes of development. In such conditions, "planning" is not the provenance of accredited experts operating within agencies or universities but an emergent or insurgent collective endeavor. Faranak Miraftab (2009) defines insurgent planning as "those radical planning practices that respond to neoliberal specifics of dominance through inclusion" (p. 32). This concept is meant to transcend the division between planners and their subjects, thus radicalizing critical perspectives (cf. Friedmann, 1987): "critical perspectives remained within the bounds of conventional wisdom that conceptualized planners as professionals who stand outside the society, though reaching out to citizens for inclusion, perhaps through redistribution but at least communication" (Miraftab, 2009: 42). To the extent that professional planners have a role to play in insurgent planning, they immerse themselves in the communities they work with and for. Katherine Rankin provides one example of such a practice as she joined the Board of Management of her local Business Improvement Area as a resident representative and volunteered to develop a "Community Safety Plan." Rejecting narrow understandings of safety based in law and order, she explores the concept of "safety" in relation to gentrification and exclusion (Rankin, 2010: 194). Jay Arena's work on New Orleans also falls in this area as he worked with community groups to resist the displacement of public housing residents before and after Hurricane Katharina.

These scholars are specific intellectuals in the sense that they promote the devotion of planning skills and resources to communities but they propose to do so in a way very different from collaborative planners. Characteristic of insurgent planning is an acute recognition that collaboration can result in complicity when "inclusion" or "participation" serves to streamline rather than obstruct regressive processes. In contrast to collaborative planners, these scholars have a more substantive notion of justice. Community engagement is only validated and recognized if it results in challenges against neoliberalism. Thus, Miraftab (2009) reserves the concept of "insurgent planning" for "*radical* planning practices" resisting neoliberalism (p. 32, emphasis added). Insurgent planners do not practice what Foucault preached but what he practiced: they engage communities selectively by amplifying voices demanding radical change rather than mere reforms.⁴

Insurgent planners' strong involvement with communities and their substantive understandings of social justice safeguard them to a degree against charges of top-down imposition of ideas or complicity-through-collaboration. However, these strong stances do come at a cost. Some segments of the communities insurgent planners work with may not share their view that complicity with neoliberalism has to be prevented at all costs. In her study on gentrifying communities, Rankin (2010) found that "the challenge of building a constituency for critical action is formidable in the context of commercial gentrification because most stakeholders, even commercial tenants at risk of displacement, imagine they stand to benefit" (p. 193). There is a risk that the conviction that neoliberalism can be fought through the mobilization of affected communities idealizes the "propensity for collective consciousness and a romantic portrayal of subalterns as

essentially good political subjects” (Rankin, 2010: 189). People often are not fully committed to collective action and may be more than ready to “make bargains with hegemony” (Rankin, 2010: 187). Miraftab, for example, documents how about half of the families evicted in a project she studied accepted to be relocated to temporary tents. The other half, “protecting their autonomy from political party manipulation, refused the tents” and set up shacks on the sidewalk in protest of the eviction (Miraftab, 2009: 38). While it could be said that people accepting the concession have been “manipulated,” the example illustrates there is a tradeoff between representing communities and choosing for more radical action. This tradeoff is especially vexatious when considerable costs and risks are associated with radical action, as is usually the case. One thorny question for this type of planning is whether it is legitimate to ask people to sacrifice and take risks in the name of a greater cause (the struggle against neoliberalism or the fight for autonomy), especially considering that the insurgent planners advocating such action are unlikely to face the same sort of consequences as the members of the marginalized communities. The devotion of community engagement and social justice do not resolve the “power of representation” dilemma: their superior control over certain types of legitimacy and expertise provides planners with the opportunity to contribute significantly to struggles for social justice but when they use these resources, they could advocate a course of action that goes against the interests and values of at least some segments of the communities they engage with.

Conclusion

We reviewed different ways in which planners can pursue social justice. Our review is not meant to be exhaustive but to bring out different ways in which planners handle what we refer to as the power of representation dilemma. This dilemma, to repeat, arises because planners’ credentials, knowledge, and skills potentially make them into powerful “agents of social justice” but at the same time their privileged position can place them in a position of power in relation to the very communities they represent and serve. This dilemma comprises at least two major issues. First, planners in pursuit of social justice need to decide whether they espouse a substantive understanding of justice or not. Second, planners need to decide whether they engage with, or even usurp themselves in, marginalized communities or operate from a distance. On the one hand, our discussion of various key contributions to the planning literature highlighted that planners with a strong and substantive understanding of social justice enjoy the benefit of a clear political mission but the tradeoff is that they will tend to sideline or silence those segments of marginalized communities with different ideas, ideals, or priorities. Planners striving for community engagement, on the other hand, may be more open to the multiplicity within communities but run the risk of accepting or even accommodating inequalities within communities and in societies at large. Since we emphasize that each of the positions has tradeoffs, we cannot infer rules for how planners should act. However, we do want to provide some pointers and statements in an attempt to stimulate debate.

First, it is clear that the discussion on what social justice is will not be fully resolved. On the contrary, a proliferation of interest in social justice is bound to stimulate contention over what social justice is and who its rightful spokespeople are. However, in spite

of unavoidable disagreement over what social justice exactly is, usage of the term implies an orientation to alternative futures and away from modes of planning that look for optimal or efficient solutions without asking questions about the modes and conditions of governing in which they emerge (cf. Brenner et al., 2011). Acknowledging social justice as a key concept forces planners to be reflexive and pre-empts a technocratic understanding of planning as the pursuit of efficient or optimal solutions.

Second, exactly because social justice is an intrinsically contested concept, there is a need to debate what it is in general and particular contexts. This means avoiding two extremes. On the one hand, planners do not have supreme knowledge of what social justice entails. Planners may have credentials and skills to deal with issues of spatial organization but this does not mean they possess the truth of what a just city should be. When they claim to possess this truth, their power to define problems and suggest solutions is only reinforced. The achievement of a truly just city can, in such instances, only come at the expense of depriving marginalized people the opportunity to articulate their own understandings of justice and to partake in bringing about their visions of the just city. On the other hand, planners should not claim to merely represent communities they serve and channel already existing grievances. The idea that the planner merely serves as a tool in service of the struggles of marginalized communities may amount to a “strategy of condescension” (in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 145) in which planners simultaneously hide and exercise their power to shape and steer mobilizations. We argue that urban planners *cannot* merely assist or advocate for groups but *necessarily* acknowledge some rather than other voices. Although these extremes—imposing social justice top-down or claiming it emerges organically from the bottom up—are in different directions, they both run the risk of short-circuiting discussions of what social justice is and negating reflexivity. Claiming truth and justice in the planning process *or* rejecting it leads to a similar outcome: the enhanced power of the planner and the marginalization of already marginalized people.

Third, for urban planners and academics operating within communities and movements, it is essential to assess their own position. Creating equality within communities requires recognition of inequalities and the sociological sources for those structured inequalities. This should be a moment to analyze where privilege comes from, how a community may depend on scarce privileges to advance their interests, and how the concentration of resources in the hands of a few results in hierarchies and inequalities. Planners’ particular conceptions of the just city will bring them closer to some while bringing them into conflict with others. By openly positioning themselves as partisans, they can engage in debate over their visions. When planners are open about their own power and partisanship, the communities and movements they work with can mitigate in-built tendencies for them to become dominant actors.

Fourth, in recognizing that planners and urban scholars have privileged access to scarce resources (knowledge, skills, credentials) that make them powerful, they should also work to make these resources available to more marginalized forces. They must, in other words, diffuse the resources of power away from themselves and toward marginalized groups. The aim is not only to make more effective activists but to also shift the power ratios between the planner-academic and marginalized communities. This is what some planner-academics have called “turning resources out” (Nicholls, 2003). Soja’s

discussion of the Department of Urban Planning provides a number of important illustrations of how this was done. For instance, he shows how university resources were turned out to marginalized communities through such programs as the “Community Scholars Program.” The more community groups acquire critical knowledge and skills, the less they depend on university intellectuals in their struggles for social justice.

In short, planning in the pursuit of justice is a tricky and challenging enterprise. Embracing the concept of justice, no matter how it is defined, makes planners vulnerable to charges that they pervert or betray their ideals. Such vulnerability, however, is the inevitable byproduct of the pursuit for social justice. If planners were not vulnerable, they would be infallible, unreflexive, and unaccountable. Embracing social justice thus sets a high bar and may even give the impression that it is impossible to do the right thing. But at the end of the day, we surmise it is more inspiring to aspire to a contested ideal than to simply optimize whatever system we find ourselves in.

Notes

1. In 1971, Foucault helped organize an anti-prison organization called the Prison Information Group (GIP). The group was made up of a coalition of prisoners, professionals working in the prison complexes, activists, and academics. In its first pamphlet, the GIP laid out its position, “The GIP does not propose to speak in the name of the prisoners in various prisons: it proposes, on the contrary, to provide them with the possibility of speaking for themselves and telling what goes on in prisons” (in Eribon, 1991: 228).
2. Our intention has not been to be exhaustive. Indeed, we can add additional axes or strategies to this typology. What is important is that no strategy is perfect and capable of overcoming tradeoffs.
3. Soja’s view in this sense is close to Davidoff’s. The concept of “advocacy planning” (Davidoff, 1965) may suggest that planners act as councilors to their clients but as Tsubohara (2012) shows, Davidoff has a much stronger conception of the planner’s role as they should “do more than explicating the values underlying his prescriptions for courses of action; he [*sic*] should affirm them; he should be an advocate for what he deems proper” and “a proponent of specific substantive solution” (Davidoff, 1965: 331–333, cited in Tsubohara, 2012: 53). As Tsubohara points out, this makes the planners into arbiters of right and wrong as they decide which communities to support and how to support them while insisting on their substantive ideas of social justice.
4. As we noted above, the GIP stated its ambition was to let prisoners speak for themselves. But clearly the GIP had ideas about what the prisoners should say as the group rejects “reformist goals” and expects prisoners to say “what it is that is intolerable for them in the system of penal repression” (in Eribon, 1991: 228; see also Nicholls and Uitermark, 2015).

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