

Foreword
to
Wassenhoven, Louis,
'Compromise Planning: A Theoretical Approach from a Distant Corner of Europe',
Springer, Berlin, Germany (2022)

A shift in planning theory for the post-Covid era of sustainable climate change mitigation and social justice

Planning theory has traditionally originated mainly in the countries of North and West and its relevance for those of South and East has been repeatedly doubted and disputed. It is this plain truth, admitted by the author, that is the starting point of this book by Louis Wassenhoven. The book is divided into three parts of which the first is a thorough review of existing theories classified in four dominant currents. The first and second, i.e., the rational/comprehensive and the communicative/collaborative currents, constitute the main and well-established stream in the theoretical literature. The third, which the author labels radical current, emanates mainly from the Global South and from a transformative/insurgent approach upholding the views of disadvantaged groups in society. A fourth current, according to Louis Wassenhoven, is rapidly emerging in response to the threat of climate change and environmental deterioration. To these currents Louis proposes the addition of a fifth one, namely compromise theory, already touched upon by theoreticians of the pragmatist tradition. In the second part of his book, he presents the example of Greece, a country sitting at the interface between North-West and South-East. The “empirical reality” of Greece is what compromise theory is meant to explain; a reality created out of specific historical, social, geopolitical and geographic conditions, in which the role of the state has been of paramount importance. The final part of the book is where the author develops compromise theory and links it to a Southern perspective and a pragmatist approach. Compromise is found to exist in the elaborate nexus of clientelist and patronage bonds between state and civil society, particularly evident in land use and spatial planning. In neoliberal times, intimately associated with the recent economic crisis, this nexus is extended to new forms of high-profile planning. The radical perspective, to which the author incorporates past efforts for development planning and the realities of informal settlement, is now faced with the additional challenge of climate change, which he links with the growing interest in resilience planning. However, political compromise between the state and the electoral clientele of small landowners over the use of land in areas outside the official planning system, perpetuates unstable conditions which are inimical to environmental protection and climate change adaptation, let alone their reversal.

The conjunction of the existential threat of global climate change, the continuing Covid pandemic and a new awareness of social injustice, largely stimulated by the international success of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, particularly in the global North and West, has occasioned a significant disruption and reappraisal in prevailing planning theory. As is extensively recounted and analysed in Louis Wassenhoven’s scholarly book, planning theory is itself an ongoing dynamic process of debate and change, currently broadly embraced by the Collaborative/ Communicative and Rational theories of planning, more especially falling under Louis’ classification category of Climate Current, particularly

notable in coastal locations, threatened by rising sea levels and inland demographic changes, occasioned by farmers (with few, if any, urban skills) escaping the loss of livelihoods caused by extremes of heatwave causing aridity or excessive precipitation and flooding). The significance of the Covid-19 pandemic has shown the extent to which it rests on the transfer of viral pathogens, particularly within and between urban residential neighbourhoods and places of public gathering, including transport systems and recreation facilities – issues central to spatial planning and environmental management. In large measure, social justice stimulated by the alienation of ethnic or racial groups, particularly of socially marginalised youths and other ‘minority’ groups, has been shown to be ameliorated by engaging their participation in planning and physical development processes.

Operational partnerships of stakeholders, notably local government and national line ministries and service agencies, planning authorities and user groups present an effective antidote to the frequently, and often erroneously, perceived, inefficiencies of participatory spatial planning. For instance, ‘City Development Strategies’ (CDS) (Freire and Stren 2001), promulgated by the Word Bank and Cities Alliance, with some emphasis on urban economic development and by United Nations agencies¹ and some bilateral aid donors that are principally concerned with social development and poverty alleviation and reduction (Wakely 2020). Also, examples of successful national development partnerships exist, such as the ‘Arms-length Management Organisations’ (ALMO) programme for the planning and management of local government housing, established by the UK (Labour) government in 2000 (Broughton 2018) and the Government of Kenya Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP) partnership programme, launched in 2012 (Riley and Wakely 2005, 66).

Such partnerships between local government and community organisations provide opportunities for the engagement of young people and social minority group members² with their residential or workplace communities and in wider governance and planning activities with formal agencies of government, thereby enhancing assimilation in the majority community and appraising the latter of their cultural assets, social norms and aspirations. Environmental planning and management partnerships dispel the customary divide between the producers³ and users of spatial plans that frequently are antagonistic; on occasions conflictive. They are central to addressing the new and urgent demands of planning in the twenty-first century, such as minimising dependencies on non-renewable energy (e.g., for motorised transport) and planning open spaces to minimise the transfer of viral pathogens and vegetation to enhance the absorption of carbon dioxide.

1. E.g., UN-Habitat, UNICEF, etc.

2. Including political and economic refugees and other migrant groups.

.3 Public sector planning authorities.

Operational risk- and benefit-sharing partnerships, embracing (local) government agencies and civil society organisations, fit comfortably in Louis Wassenhoven's 'Theory of Compromise Planning'.

Patrick Wakely

London

November 2021

References

- Boughton J (2018) '*Municipal dreams: The rise and fall of council housing*' Verso, London UK
Freire M, Stren R (eds) (2001) '*The challenge of urban government: Policies and practices*',
Riley E, Wakely P. (2005) '*Communities and communication: Building Urban Partnerships*', ITDG Publishing, Rugby, UK
Wakely P (2020) '*Partnership: a strategic paradigm for the production and management of affordable housing and sustainable urban development*', International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development, 12(1), Taylor & Francis, Abingdon, UK