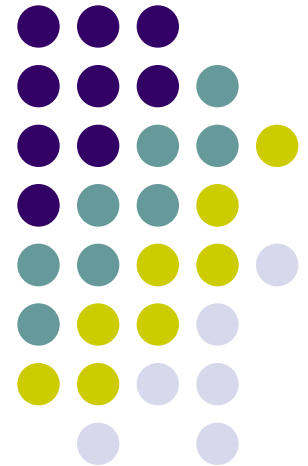# Planning Theory

Why do we do what we do?

Presented by: Gary A. Cornell, AICP

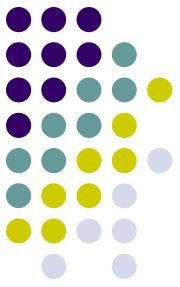Source: Dr. Michael Elliott, Georgia Tech

What is planning?

- a universal human activity involving the consideration of outcomes before choosing amongst alternatives

- a deliberate, self-conscious activity

- activity based on linkage between knowledge and organized action in the public interest

One of the distinct features of planning is the reciprocal feedback between theory and practice.
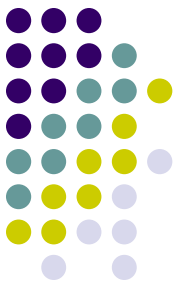
Primary functions of planning

- improve efficiency of outcomes
  - optimization
- counterbalance market failures
  - balance public and private interests
- widen the range of choice
  - enhance the consciousness of decision making
- civic engagement
  - expand opportunity and understanding in community

What is the role of theory in understanding planning?

- planning is rooted in applied disciplines
  - primary interest in practical problem solving
- early planning theories emerged out of practice
  - a way of codifying planning as a professional activity
- efforts to develop a coherent theory emerged in 1960s
  - need to rationalize the interests and activities of planning under conditions of social foment
    - the nature of planning?
    - how is it practiced?
    - whose interests does it serve?
    - what is its role in society?
  - the social sciences as a more broadly based interpretive lens
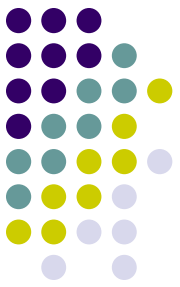   - challenges and insights

Types of theories

- theories of system operations
  - How do cities, regions, communities, etc. work?
    - disciplinary knowledge such as economics and environmental science

- theories of system change
  - How might planners act?
    - disciplinary knowledge such as decision theory, political science, and negotiation theory
    - applied disciplines such as public administration and engineering

Why do we not have a unifying theory of planning? (Rittel and Webber)

- goals and objectives, as well as means to achieve them, are often uncertain
  - "wicked problems"
  - concerned primarily with public issues
    - broadly defined groups/clients
    - diverse interests
- planners rarely make decisions but rather advise those who do
- results of most planning activity is discernable only 5 to 20 years after the decision
  - feedback and corrective actions are difficult

What are "wicked" problems?

- A problem for which each attempt to create a solution changes the understanding of the problem.

- Wicked problems cannot be solved in linear fashion, because the problem definition evolves as new possible solutions are considered and/or implemented

- Not the same as an intractable problem

  "One cannot build a freeway to see how it works"

Characteristics of "wicked" problems

- No definitive formulation of a wicked problem.
- No stopping rule.
- Solutions are not true-or-false, but good-or-bad.
- No immediate and no ultimate test of a solution.
- Every wicked problem is essentially unique.
  - no opportunity to learn by trial-and-error
  - all attempts are significant
- Every problem can be considered a symptom of another problem
- Can be explained in numerous ways. The choice of explanation determines the nature of the problem's resolution.
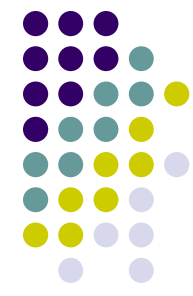- The planner has no right to be wrong.

Hard-to-Formalize, Contextualized, Multidisciplinary, Organizational Knowledge

Rittel, H. J., and M. M. Webber (1984). "Planning problems are wicked problems", In N. Cross (Ed.), *Developments in Design Methodology*, Wiley, pp. 135-144

For every complex problem
there is a simple solution,
and it is wrong.

H.L. Menken

1870

Era of Urban
Industrialization

- Need for more systematic and forward-thinking action
  - Concepts linking planning, research, action
    - Imbedded in architecture, engineering, social work

1915

Roaring '20s &
Progressive Era

- Planning as a profession and public institution
  - Physical determinism: City Beautiful & City Efficient
    - Focus on land use & comprehensive analysis

1928

The Depression Era
& Urban Stagnation

- Regionalizing/nationalizing of planning
  - Social science as a tool of planning
    - Focus on econ development & social policy

1945

Post-WWII Modernism
Suburbanization & Central City Decline

- Trust in governmental authority
- Modernism, comprehensiveness & rationality

1960

Social Activism, Federal Policy
& Regional Cities

- Social science strengthened & challenged
- Planning optimism
- Rise of community voice & social protest
- Political action for reform and transformation

1980

Retreat from Policy
Privatization

- Post-modern critique of rationality
- Segmentation of voices of communities into communities with voice
- Focus on interaction, communication, process

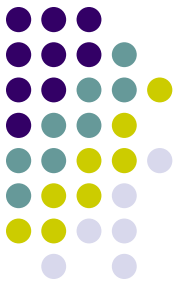**2003**

The diversity of theories
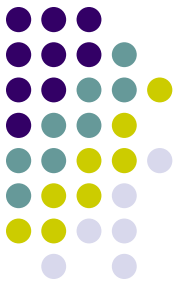
Desired Outcome

Linkage Between Knowledge and Action		System Improving	System Transforming
	Cognitive Rationality	• Synoptic rationality	• Radical planning
	Procedural Rationality	• Incrementalism • Comprehensive planning	• Advocacy planning
	Communicative Rationality	• Traditional participatory planning	• Transactive/ collaborative planning • Mediation
	Self-Reflective Political Action	• Social learning • Phenomenology • Contingency theory	• Critical theory • Social mobilization
	Moral Philosophy		• Utopianism

Cognitive Rationality, Conceptual Basis

- A rational decision is one that
  - the DM knows what ends the DM seeks
    - the public interest
  - the DM considers all the alternatives
  - the DM identifies and evaluates all the consequences of each alternative
  - the DM selects that alternative with consequences that most probably maximizes the desired ends
- Rationality focuses on
  - the quality of decision
  - the subordination of knowledge to values and of action to knowledge

Cognitive Rationality, Schools of Thought

System Improving
Synoptic Rationality

- Meyerson and Banfield
  - *Politics, Planning and the Public Interest*
- *Paul Davidoff and Thomas Reiner*
  - *A Choice Theory of Planning*
- Andreas Faludi
  - *A Reader in Planning Theory*

System Transforming
Radical Planning

- Robert Krashaar
  - Outside the Whale: Progressive Planning and the Dilemmas of Radical Reform

Procedural Rationality, Conceptual Basis

- Synoptic rationality is essentially impossible
  - cognitive limits
  - resource limits
  - an infinite regression
- Procedural rationality seeks to approximate rational decision making within these limits

Procedural Rationality, Schools of Thought

System Improving

Incrementalism

Comprehensive Planning

- Charles E. Lindblom
  - The Science of Muddling Through
- Martin Meyerson
  - Building the Middle-Range Bridge for Comprehensive Planning
- Amitai Etzioni
  - Mixed Scanning: A Third Approach to Decision-Making

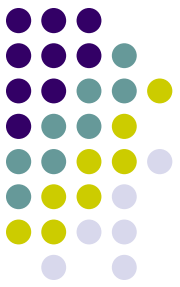## System Transforming

Advocacy Planning

- Paul Davidoff
  - Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning
- David F. Mazziotti
  - The Underlying Assumptions of Advocacy Planning
- Norman Krumholz
  - A Retrospective View of Equity Planning in Cleveland, 1969-1979

Communicative Rationality, Conceptual Basis

- Planning is fundamentally linked to clarification of interests (desired ends)

- The selection of means cannot be isolated from the identification of valued ends

- Both are linked to community, and to the communicative acts that bind community together

- Emphasis on
  - transparency
  - inclusiveness
  - truth-seeking

Communicative Rationality, Schools of Thought

System Improving
Traditional Participatory Planning

- Sherry Arnstein
  - A Ladder of Citizen Participation
- Lawrence Susskind and Michael Elliott
  - Paternalism, Conflict and Coproduction
- Stuart Langton
  - Citizen Participation in America

Collaborative Planning, Mediation

- Susskind, L. and J. Cruikshank
  - Breaking the Impasse: Consensual Approaches to Resolving Public Disputes
- Amy, Douglas
  - Mediation and Inequalities of Power
- Judith Innes
  - Group Processes and the Social Construction of Growth Management: Florida, Vermont and New Jersey
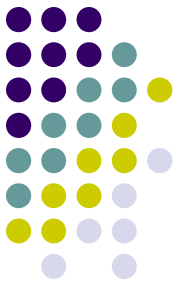
System Transforming
Transactive Planning
Critical Theory

- John Friedmann
  - Transactive Planning
- John Forester
  - Critical Theory, Public Policy and Planning Practice
  - Planning in the Face of Power
- George C. Hemmens and Bruce Stiftel
  - Sources for the Renewal of Planning Theory
- Patsy Healey
  - Planning Through Debate: The Communicative Turn in Planning Theory

Self-Reflective Political Action, Conceptual Basis

- Planning is a professional act that occurs within a political community

- Political and social interaction are central activities

- Truth is not fixed, but emerges from continuing search

Ladder of Citizen Participation

Citizen Control

Delegated Power

Partnership

Placation

Consultation

Informing

Therapy

Manipulation

Degrees of Citizen Power

Degrees of Tokenism

Nonparticipation

Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation"

Self-Reflective Political Action, Schools of Thought

System Improving
Social Learning, Phenomenology, Contingency Theory

- Donald Schon
  - The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action
- Richard S. Bolan
  - The Practitioner as Theorist: The Phenomenology of the Professional Episode
- John Bryson and Andre Delbecq
  - A Contingent Approach to Strategy and Tactics in Project Planning
- Charles Hoch
  - *What Planners Do*

System Transforming
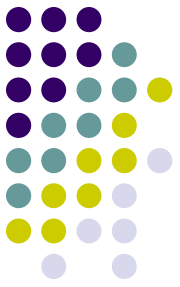### Social Mobilization
Postmodern Critiques

- Saul Alinsky
  - Reveille for Radicals
- Robert A. Beauregard
  - Between Modernity and Postmodernity: The Ambiguous Position of U.S. Planning.
- Susan S. Fainstein
  - Planning in a Different Voice

Moral Philosophy, Conceptual Basis

- Ends, without means
- An essential focus on values
  - clarification of values
  - clarification of the implication of values
  - clarification of desired ends

Moral Philosophy, Schools of Thought

"How does one translate the complexity of the world into the simplicity of a theory without falling into the trap of mistaking the model for reality itself?"

- Barclay Hudson

System Transforming

Utopianism

- John Friedmann
  - Moral Philosophy
- Utopian literature

All of the following are known for their involvement in organizational approaches to citizen participation, **<u>except:</u>**

(A) Saul Alinsky
(B) Homer Hoyt
(C) Sherry Arnstein
(D) Paul Davidoff