Agonism, decision, power – The art of working unfinished

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Abstract

The current debate on agonism has become fixed in an institutional approach: How can an agonistic design institutionally become a tool against forms of domination? An agonistic space needs decisions that do not silence dissensual voices with a finite decision. This paper suggests that this agonistic approach needs de-cisions or simply put, temporary decisions drawn from seeing a decision as a solution for now. A de-cision is not a no-decision, but a decision recognised as temporary. The paper proposes 'the sketch' as an appropriate mode for working de-cisionally and unfinished. By having a sketch and working de-cisionally, planners are able to invite agonistic positions to ongoing talks and to act progressively, adaptably, or rationally in the face of emerging circumstances and uncertainty. To work unfinished from a sketch transforms the planning process from being a matter of reaching a finite decision to a strife about how to understand the present and which temporary contours and directions to move on from. The paper as such thus deals with difficult praxis questions, for instance: How is it possible to allow dissent to inform planning praxis in praxis? How can quarrelling and working unfinished empower planning democracy?

Agonismus, Entscheidung, Macht – Die Kunst, ergebnisoffen zu arbeiten

Zusammenfassung

Die aktuelle Debatte über Agonismus hat zu einer fest verankerten institutionellen Verfahrensweise geführt: Wie kann ein agonistisches Design institutionell als ein Werkzeug zum Schutz vor (Verwaltungs)herrschaft eingesetzt werden? Ein agonistischer Raum braucht Entscheidungen, die kontroverse Stimmen nicht zum Schweigen bringen durch eine finale Entscheidung. Der Beitrag suggeriert, dieser agonistische Ansatz brauche De-Entscheidungen, oder einfacher ausgedrückt Vor-Entscheidungen, um eine Entscheidung als vorläufige Lösung zu erkennen. Eine De-Entscheidung ist keine Nicht-Entscheidung, sondern eine als temporär verstandene Entscheidung. Der Beitrag schlägt „die Skizze" bzw. einen Entwurf als Modus vor, um vorentscheidend und ergebnisoffen (‚unfertig') zu arbeiten. Eine Skizze zu haben und ergebnisoffen zu arbeiten, gibt Planerinnen und Planern die Möglichkeit, Vertreter und Vertreterinnen agonistischer Positionen zu laufenden Gesprächen einzuladen und progressiv, anpassungsfähig oder rational auf neue Umstände und Ungewissheiten zu reagieren. Ergebnisoffen von einem Entwurf aus zu arbeiten, verwandelt den Planungsprozess von einer Frage der finalen Entscheidung in eine Auseinandersetzung darüber, wie die Gegenwart zu verstehen ist und von welchen temporären Konturen und Richtungen ausgegangen werden soll. Der Beitrag als solcher befasst sich daher mit schwierigen Praxisfragen wie zum Beispiel: Wie ist es möglich zuzulassen, dass abweichende Meinungen die Planungspraxis in der Praxis beeinflussen? Wie können Streit und ‚unfertige' Arbeit die Planungsdemokratie stärken?

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1 Introduction

Participation and conflict are important issues for many planning studies and such studies often use Chantal Mouffe's political philosophy on agonism. Mouffe (2005: 20) understands agonism as a space of adversaries and "not enemies". She also says that "the agonistic tension" in politics has disappeared because of the blurring of left and right principles and that politics only aims at "managing the established order" (Mouffe 2018: 17). It is hard to find a space where differences can confront each other in an "agonistic struggle" (Mouffe 2018: 17).

It is not straightforward to transfer political philosophy to planning studies, including questions like: How can agonism as the permanent strife between differences be transferred to planning? How is it possible to allow dissent to inform planning praxis?

The agonistic form is a "conflictual consensus" (Mouffe 2013: xii). If the intention is not to silence dissensual voices by hegemony or a final decision, it is necessary to address how to re-open the consensus-suppressed conflict. This is possible by seeing decisions as de-cisions, a term that involves viewing a decision as "a decision to decide" (Lampert 2018: 11). A de-cision is not a no-decision, but a decision that can only be temporary and unfinished.

This paper proposes 'the sketch' as the appropriate mode for working de-cisionally, temporarily, and unfinished. A sketch is a plan of points and themes. It may be just a drawing of circles, but is an informed mode of planning including a mapping of the forces, visions, and values at play at any time. Having a sketch and working de-cisionally allows planners to invite agonistic positions for ongoing talks and to act progressively, adaptably, or rationally in response to emerging circumstances and uncertainties. To work unfinished from a sketch transforms the planning process from being a matter of reaching a final decision to a strife about how to understand the present and the contours and directions to move on from.

Section 2 introduces some current positions on the institutionalisation of agonism, followed by Section 3 discussing how agonism as disputes – contestation, rivalry, and quarrelling – means consensus confronts the challenge of non-consensuality (Michel Foucault). This discussion of planning as disputes is extended in Section 4 by looking at the institutionalisation of conflict. Section 5 introduces the case study paying particular attention to participation. Building on this, Sections 6 and 7 discuss a participatory planning process in the city of Oslo, Norway (a pre-public process of co-creation meetings in 2019-2022) with a focus on how participation is practised. In Section 8, this analysis is followed by a discussion of how participation meets a 'cognitive closure' of knowledge applied by the planning office 'sorting out' information and knowledge. Acknowledging that both the democratic deficit and the cognitive closure point at the problematic fashion in which decisions are made, Section 9 introduces de-cision as a possible way to work productively with irreducible agonistic conflicts, and Section 10 discusses 'the sketch' as a mechanism with which to work de-cisionally. The final Section 11 summarises the line of arguments by suggesting how an 'unfinished sketch' can be used to work de-cisionally.

2 The current debate – some positions

Planning is expected to be an analytical mode of working. It starts from a diagnosis of the present, and if a problem is found then seeks solutions to change this condition. Planning is not a meeting on the *agora* and a dialogical *parrèsia* (truth-telling) is not an issue (Grange 2017). Planning is politicised, because before taking action, planning institutions must wait for political signals or decisions on the issues raised. Politics expects decisions to create a path dependency, as is achieved by aggregating decisions supported by a juridically binding land-use plan to guide the management of place development.

Public participation is a tool for such management and acts as a mechanism to create consensus or consent. Recent research, however, points to several common and often permanent limits to public participation. "A coalitional political culture", as in Germany, and a deliberate planning culture, as in Scandinavia, "form parts of the political-administrative system" and then depend on policies made and what this means for the "scope for action" (Kühn 2021: 145). Decisions on planning issues take place within a diversity of arenas (e.g. city council, informal alliances, neighbourhood councils) and contexts (e.g. deliberation, closed meetings). This diversity constitutes asymmetrical power relations between politics, powerful interests, and participants (Wolff 2020). Planning represents a political need to tame antagonism, but it is simultaneously expected to react to the contingency of forces involved. Because there is no foundation for a final justification among participants, the participatory process ends in a forced consensus or consent (Landau 2021). The role played by "horizontal experimentation" in "democratic resistance" has received political attention, primarily on how to avoid a stalemate, while there has been less attention paid to how to understand "resistance" as "an openness-inciting practice of conflict provocation" (Süß 2022: 1124).

Ideology is a force contingent to politics and planning, mobilising protests and forms of resistance (Metzger/Allmendinger/Kornberger 2021). So, as Trapenberg Frick (2021: 64) remarks, there is a vast repertoire of perspectives

on agonism within "a continuum from agonistic encounters of negotiation, bargaining, conflict negotiation, and mediation to consensus building". Planning is a governing power that meets or makes tactical coalitions with mutual interests on single issues. Such single-issue coalitions may develop into more long-standing alliances evolving over time and may end as part of "network governance" and thus part of "governance through policy network" (Trapenberg Frick 2021: 67–68). Situated within formal institutional linkages, any coalition and its stakeholders are placed within a politically initiated "consensus-oriented deliberation" (Mattila/Purkarthofer/Humer 2020: 6).

A policy and planning design based on "divergent political or ideological values" faces the lack of common ground for a final justification and thus remains open to conflicts and agonistic provocations (Landau 2021: 2535). The void may stand out as a "*meta* conflict or consensus (i.e. value-related, normative, or ideological assumptions about political meaning and power)" or as "*operational* conflicts or consensus (i.e. procedural, technocratic and everyday concerns of political decision-making)" (Landau 2021: 2536).

If we look at the role of planners, they are politically expected to be loyal to political signals and policies (Grange 2017). Studies on "how citizen input is managed, judged and put to use" in Sweden show (Eriksson/Fredriksson/Syssner 2022: 1008) that citizen suggestions that conflict with legislation or politics are "likely to be rejected" (Eriksson/Fredriksson/Syssner 2022: 1008), for instance, by referring to "common interests".

Planning has no place for non-consensuality against politics. If we follow Grange (2017) or the power-rationality study of Flyvbjerg (1998), there is neither a space for planners to problematise politics on planning issues nor to engage themselves in problematising politics in public disputes. One challenge to conflict management in planning is that planners need to be able to make decisions without assuming political hegemonic preferences if such preferences are not deemed useful in a professional analysis of the conflict. Planners are subjugated to what is "proper" to implement according to dominant politics (Eriksson/Fredriksson/Syssner 2022: 1007).

Studies on active citizenship in planning issues are very often undertaken using Mouffe's (2005; 2013) political philosophy on agonism, while studies on planning as a technology and mechanism of governing may be conducted in accordance with Foucault (2007; 2008). The governance mechanisms of participatory planning are "the mechanisms through which community representation, responsibilities and influence are mediated are defined from above" (Raco/Imrie 2000: 2196). Here it is difficult to see an empowerment of citizens or "a devolution of power to residents" within planning (Raco/Imrie 2000: 2196). As

Watson (2021: 482) says, we must notice "how participatory governance obscures the lack of choice afforded", and how dissent is neutralised through mechanisms of "soft power" (Watson 2021: 487), such as compromises, consent, or by reference to legislation.

In Scandinavia, conflicts in planning are a matter of political decisions. If dissenting voices emerge during the process, the response may take the form of informal meetings between powerful political, economic, and local interests making decisions out of the sight of the public.

A pluralist society has no final justifications from which to meet differences and disagreements. What then are the possible ways in which public participation "designed to accommodate contestation and disagreements" (Mattila/Purkarthofer/Humer 2020: 8) can be advanced?

3 Planning and disputes

Agonism is contestation, rivalry, and quarrelling. The space of the *agōn* is the place for the "fearless speech" of "the truth". This was discussed as *parrèsia* in ancient Greek philosophy (Foucault 2001; Foucault 2013). *Parrèsia* is the constitutive force of the *agōn* game of truth enacted within a non-hostile, non-aggressive, but agonistic meeting (Foucault 2007). *Parrèsia* is a dispute or strife concerning the relation between reality and truth, and this point contests a process ending in a final political decision. As long as a planning decision is a law-ingrained decision undertaken through an institutionalised procedure, it is not made in the *agōn* game. The meeting is not a *parrèsian* strife about truth and reality, but a dispute subjugated to or tamed by a dominant political and planning discourse (see Grange 2017 on planning).

If public participation is to be a space of agonistic pluralism (Mouffe 2013), it needs a participatory and decisional process that makes "room for dissent" (Mouffe 2000: 105). Any consensus can only be seen as "a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power" (Mouffe 2000: 104), meaning that a decision can only be a solution for now (Mouffe 2005). Dissensus is what will "keep the democratic contestation alive" (Mouffe 1997: 9).

It is claimed that agonistic studies are conceptually weak and of little help to praxis, for instance, by providing "no statements about the conditions under which conflict" can be a productive force, or how planning "can contribute to a productive solution of conflicts" (Kühn 2021: 147–148), for instance by indicating how conflict and dissensus is possible and necessary in planning. We can take an easy way out of a non-consensual dilemma by saying that there will be winners and losers (Mouffe 2013), but the agonistic challenge, 'What is a solution for now?' as a decision, remains.

Is the solution to have a process that follows James Tully's "agonistic realism" (Tully 2014), which is a realism sensitive to "the lived experience of historically located political actors, the denial of the usefulness of the abstract universal, the alertness to the politics of power and exclusion" (Honig/Stears 2014: 149) to empower localities? Tully acknowledges that the agonistic realism of a conflictual consensus is to have a solution for now at one's disposal. Seen in this way, is the answer to have a "temporary resting place" (Rorty 1982: xli)? Or to find a space for doing "aporetic" decisions (Hillier 2002: 291)?

Foucault (1984: 379) once said, "one must be against nonconsensuality" and instead ask, "what proportion of nonconsensuality is *implied* in a power relation" and what is "*the degree* of nonconsensuality or not" needed. He suggested that we need to consider an ethic of non-consensuality from reflecting on decisions in terms of both "decisional distance" and a "cloud of decisions" (Foucault 1988: 168–175). Decisional distance is the distance between "a decision and the individual it concerns", and thus a matter of finding the "optimal distance" so the person it concerns has "a say", and that how the decision is "geared to his [or her] situation" is "intelligible" to this person (Foucault 1988: 168–169). The cloud of decisions is "the norm decided upon" (Foucault 1988: 174) from (dis)agreements, representativeness, and consent. A consensus should be an ethical consensus that allows the participants to recognise themselves in a decision and its values, rather than being left with a distance to their experiences and an institutional power over people's everyday life and needs.

Reading this as a possible entrance point to discuss how the theory of agonism may help practitioners, Foucault challenges how we understand decisions in planning: Are they a way to govern antagonistic positions? Are planning decisions based on a political consensus hegemony, a routine praxis, a certain logic, the law, or a direct democracy? A critical threshold to these questions is that *if* planning is an applied "set of relations, or rather, the set of procedures" (Foucault 2007: 2) that work as mechanisms of power and "in a circular way [these mechanisms] are both [...] effect and cause" (Foucault 2007: 2), *then* how is it possible to work consensually in a space of diverse forces of politics as well as mentalities, passion, affect, interests, hopes, utopias and desires? Are these forces to be tamed by a forced consensus or to be made predictable by making "a shared symbolic space" (Mouffe 2005: 120–121) of norms among actors as a location for dialogue? Or does planning need a non-consensual ethical mode of working like the one Foucault describes?

Another challenge is the agonistic point that we cannot *decide* 'what is real' because 'the real' is a meaning *effect* of experiences, knowledge, reflections, desire, hope, tactics,

and strategies. The agonistic quarrel is how the *relative-real reality* of the many voices participating plays out. But there is no place for this quarrel within planning, only a ladder of decision.

A major challenge to a decision and participation is "a lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments" (Lyotard 1988: xi). A single rule of judgement will always be "a wrong" to one side (Lyotard 1988: xi). Planning is thus an endeavour facing the "impossibility of avoiding conflicts (the impossibility of indifference)" (Lyotard 1988: xii), and the question is how such a system can be expected to make a *not* partial but equalising decision? Is this problem not a call to look at how to make the system realise there are only aporetic and unfinished decisions at its disposal?

4 Planning conflicts and institutionalism

Several studies have focused on how the agonistic strife can be institutionalised (e.g. Mäntysalo/Balducci/Kangasoja 2011), that is, to change the "art of government" and "the way in which the conduct of a set of individuals" (Foucault 2007: 364) can keep agonistic positions alive. Mouffe (2013: 9) is right in saying a conflict "can never be reconciled rationally" or "for good", but at the same time she says "the crucial role of hegemonic articulations" of "what exists" is a condition to move on from (Mouffe 2013: 11). In this way she implies the dissensual *Streit*[1] is to be rejected, because consensus politics is a mode of action from "a proper rationality" (Rancière 2010: 13) bound to a discourse hegemony on 'what exists'. Consensus rests on the power to make the "distribution of the sensible", where the sensible is the shared common defined by hegemony. In contrast, dissensus is the "gap in the sensible itself", in the proper. A dissensus critique of politics will "reveal a society in its difference to itself", because dissensus represents an irreducible contradiction or paradox to the politics and the issue in question (Rancière 2010: 42).

The immanent "contingency" in planning processes (Lowndes/Paxton 2018: 701) means that planning institutions must act in an "indeterminate and open-ended" manner within their "games of power" and "games of truth" (Lowndes/Paxton 2018: 703). This contingency opens the opportunity to see participatory planning as offering a place for "a 'permanent provocation'" (Foucault 1986: 222).

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[1] Mouffe (2013: 11) very briefly refers to Hannah Arendt's concept of "Streiten", "where agreement is produced through persuasion, not irrefutable proofs". Is politics not about persuasion but the power to decide?

A focus on *the games of truth* – the "gaps" and "soft spots" between "rules and interpretation" (Lowndes/Paxton 2018: 704) – is to see public participation as a processual (discussion as a process), collective (interdependence), contextual (representing a bricolage of interests) and contestable (open to challenge) field of interaction (Lowndes/Paxton 2018: 705–708). *Games of power* are "a set of arrangements that influence, but do not determine, how citizens act and interact" (Lowndes/Paxton 2018: 703). If we wish then to look at how planning can enable "contingency and contestation" (Lowndes/Paxton 2018: 708), there is a need to ask what power in planning is (Metzger/Soneryd/Tamm Hallström 2017).

Power is, for instance, that participation is "stage-managed" by the "apparatus of government […] offered by the state" in a juridical form (Legacy/Metzger/Steele et al. 2019: 276). The planning law ensures that whatever kind of participatory or institutional process is established, decisions are always made through a political process and its formal, legal procedures. The public encounters a plan representing a configuration of politics (the power to decide), law (securing political power is embodied in a formal decision), professional knowledge (hegemonies, traditions), informal meetings (tactics), and participation undertaken by following codes of conduct. This apparatus of "procedures and means employed to ensure the government" of society, place, and process (Foucault 2007: 363) addresses contestation by taming it around certain issues rather than embedding planning in a local strife about development. Public participation is part of "a perpetual process of strategic elaboration" of a controlled development of society used as a mechanism to reach beneficial ends to politics and power relations (Foucault 2007: 121).

Agonistic actions or "political insurgencies" rarely, if ever, enable "planning to plan" in new ways, if that, as suggested by Legacy, Metzger, Steele et al. (2019: 277), means being able to let planning be open to the contingency of people's choices, critique, and suggestions. A disruptive event is met by demobilising its legitimacy (e.g. not possible by law, wrong knowledge) or by consent that what is argued is common sense (Rydin 2020).

An examination of planning's role as management, a process of ordering and keeping in order, needs a gaze on how the institutionalisation of public participation includes micro-mechanisms like discipline (e.g. procedure, agenda), normation (e.g. moralism, givens, dominant values), guidelines, the (in)formal power of policy documents, forms of communication, and the production of discourse hegemonies.

5 The Karlsrud process

In Norway, planning law secures citizens' right to participation in planning issues that affect them, and public deliberations unfold within a procedural setting established by the planning law. It is said to be a process inspired by Arnstein's "ladder of participation" (KMD 2014; Røed 2018). There are four designated phases in a public planning process (in part following Falleth/Hanssen 2012): a pre-public hearing phase in which the planning office meets with the interested parties proposing a plan and has a series of meetings with selected members of the local public to create a planning programme to guide the planning process. This is followed by a formal phase with the legally stipulated public hearings, including the public's right to complain in writing about the plans and suggestions announced. There is a third political decision phase in which spatial and land-use plans are decided by the council. And finally, there is an post-decisional phase in which it is possible to complain about decisions to the State Governor[2] or by going to court.

The case[3] studied is an area development in a neighbourhood south-east of Oslo. It is one of the earliest suburban areas in Oslo built around 1950 to 1960 with single-family housing, co-operatives, some minor businesses, public life centred around sport and fitness, a shopping mall, and voluntary activities. The pre-public planning process analysed here involved a series of meetings leading to a 'plan programme' which was then politically decided. A plan programme is designated to secure an area development plan (timetable, tasks, responsible authorities, etc.) and refers to the Planning and Building Act's detailed regulation of building and land use (POLK 2021).

Participants for the pre-public meetings are selected by the planning office, which decides "who should be involved in the planning work and how", and who can help to work out a "shared field of knowledge" regarding the place concerned. The aim is to enable the city to have a common

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[2] The State Governor is a regional authority responsible for following up how decisions, goals and regulations from Parliament and the Government are implemented locally.

[3] The case is exemplary, a strategic choice to produce a 'critical case' (a) illuminating some crucial thresholds to contemporary planning praxis, (b) as a paradigmatic case showing a new mode of planning is possible, and (c) serving as a critique of the all-dominant mode of planning in Norway (see Flyvbjerg 1998:145–153). The theoretical-empirical relation is thus that the cases are used as exemplary cases to discuss specific issues about participation in planning and about how to make decisions from participation. However, the cases also represent a well-known issue in Norway (see Schmidt/Guttu/Knudtzon 2011, Falleth/Hanssen 2012, KMD 2014, Røed 2018).

agreed plan programme that is based on existing regulations (POLK 2021: 52).

The planning office faces hard work. It is not easy to manoeuvre between existing regulations (in this case 32 regulations and four building permissions), landowner interests, co-operative housing boards, and local single-issue groups. A way to try to balance interests is to make 'a co-creation group' where actors meet with their different knowledge and resources.

The object of the meetings is to secure "openness, predictability and participation for all affected and authorities" (Falleth/Hanssen 2012: 191). Different participatory methods are available, such as public meetings, workshops, charettes, questionnaires, participation of children and school classes, study tours, and urban walks. The content of the plan is, as said, often pre-negotiated between developers and the planning administration before a public announcement and the work of a co-creation group (Falleth/Hanssen 2012: 199). The city council underlines that it is a matter of having the "right participation at the right time" (BYB 2018: 5), indicating that public participation is not necessary on all issues all of the time. Although an agenda and a plan exist before public participation is initiated, the city claims citizens are part of "planning their own future" (BYB 2018: 5). The city admits that it only follows "the minimum demands" of planning law, which require the public inspection of plans and public hearings (BYB 2018: 5). In terms of decisions, the public has the "right to express their views/opinions and to make recommendations to draft the plan before it is made ready for political reading and discussion" (BYB 2018: 5).

As said, a plan programme defines the aims and responsibilities for the long-term planning process, including actions and time schedules defined within different phases of implementation, and which part is done by whom and when. If considered necessary, the plan programme can define demands for new research concerning the consequences of certain actions (BYB 2018: 5). When deciding a plan programme, "some leads" are made before the public meets the plan (BYB 2018: 6), and the first meeting introducing the plan aims to "raise citizens' consciousness" about the process, the aim of plan, the complexity of the plan, and the planning law. This meeting is expected to "increase the understanding of the content" of the plan (BYB 2018: 6). In other words, the participants are to come to terms with and converge with the plan. In the case discussed, the city council demanded a particular focus on "innovation in the participation process" (BYB 2018: 1), indicating there was a space for experiments with the participatory process itself.

6 How is public participation done?

Planning initiatives in Norway very often start from a private developer proposal or when political concern is triggered by public "statements on consequences" of, for instance, traffic congestion, population growth, climate impact, lack of social and technical infrastructure or a plan's effect on youth and children. At Karlsrud, the initiative came from the city wanting an area regulation in a neighbourhood that lacked housing, service facilities, and urban qualities (a shopping street). As indicated, the city says, they always aim to define what is "sufficient" or "enough" participation (PBE 2019c: 4) to know "population needs and interests" (PBE 2019c: 6). They see a good participatory process as one where (PBE 2019c: 9): "the outcome, within certain frames, is not decided on beforehand, [with] early involvement, where the premises and space of action are made plain, that everyone's opinion has equal value, [and] sufficient information is put forward, so it is possible to have all parts of the plan made legible".

The planning office is available for informal talks and at Karlsrud, they had project meetings with local citizens (invited citizens attended a workshop that is not open to the public) to gain insight into "how different groups experience and use the area" (PBE 2019c: 11). The city also, as said, needs a forum to communicate the premises of the plan, content and consequences, but also to communicate what can be affected by interests and citizens (BYB 2018: 8).

The city explains that they decide what kind of participation process they need by asking themselves the following: What do we want information on? Who will participate? What methods should be used? How will participation affect the plan and the planning process (PBEMV 2012: 28)?

At Karlsrud, the municipality decided to start by making a co-creation group (CCG) with landlords, housing co-operatives, local businesses, organised volunteer groups, and local politicians to prepare the plan programme starting in 2018. As early as 2016, the planning office invited landlords to a "charette", a co-learning and dialogical workshop. The purpose was "together to suggest a planning grip for the area" and to make an "adjustment" to the city-initiated plan (PBEOP 2018: 2). Landlords, in other words, were 'insiders' long before the co-creation group started its work. It is important to the city that the co-creation group has "legitimacy" by being representative, but also that the dialogue partners know their role and mandate to represent defined local "target groups" (BYB 2018: 9).[4] The main goal of

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[4] One of the important target groups defined, which nevertheless remained outside the series of meetings, is children and youth. They had their own one-day meeting on what they see as their fu-

public dialogues is to achieve consent, air local interests, and for citizens to "recognise their common responsibility" (PBEMV 2012: 4) for the plan.

Although the city wants to have the "highest possible publicness and real participation" (PBEMV 2012: 6), it is admitted that citizens "having a say in decisions in the planning process is rare". They can, however, make their own draft plan and see if it is accepted (PBEMV 2012: 7). Public influence is limited to hearings and written complaints, and the planning authorities openly admit that the public's influence decreases from the announcement of the draft plan to the final political decision (Røed 2018; PBE 2019a).

7 Communication is all about spatiality

It is of course impossible for the planning office to meet all arguments and demands. In Oslo, the planning office informs the public on why the city and its planning office decide as they do (PBEV2 2019). In addition, they aim to answer all complaints they receive. One example is provided by a situation when the planning office was criticised for not being visionary, for preferring owner interests, and for not making a strategic plan. They responded as follows (PBEV5 2020: 51): "The Planning & Building Department disagree with the claim that the CCG only represents owner interests and that the group has not discussed or has no interest in long-term urban district development. There is a mix of representatives from the community (including inhabitants, the local council, children, voluntary organisations, and landlords). At the workshop about the planning grip and future visions, one of the tasks was 'What should Lambertseter-Karlsrud look like at 2050?' The PBD points out that also other participative activities have given/will give input on development".

The answer indicates how the office looks at planning democracy and the task of public meetings: representative legitimacy and a debate on spatial issues. The 'Lambertseter-Karlsrud 2050' workshop was on physical planning and not visions drawn from asking, 'Who is going to live at Karlsrud in 2050, and why should they live there?' Such questions were not raised because the planning office took a moral argument insisting that "we need to take hold of the problems and needs of *today*" (PBEV5 2020: 51).

There has been criticism of how the planning office

ture needs and wants for the physical development of the neighbourhood (playgrounds, etc). The local high school was engaged in a workshop on the same issue, guided by city-selected youth representatives who were 'trained' on doing workshops and debate (BYB 2018: 5).

listens to suggestions and critique. The Karlsrud plan is about new housing, mixed-use functionality, informal meeting places, green areas, and walking and biking facilities (PBE2 2019: 2). On green planning, the city's Council of City Environment complained about the ignorance of environmental planning concerning walking, biking, roads, sport, and urban space (BYM 2019). They saw the plan's conclusion as a project on physical planning rather than living. The planning office responded that they wanted a comprehensive plan as the first step for the area development to preserve the existing qualities of the neighbourhood (PBE2 2019). They also claimed that a detailed spatial plan improves the possibility of generating concrete feedback and input both from the public and capital interests (PBEV5 2020: 5), and that interests are "safeguarded at a suitable level" in the plan programme (PBEV5 2020: 51).

For the planning office and the city, the aim of communication is to reduce the debate to a few core fields addressing the city's main interests: governing, control, and steering. This is ensured by adhering to spatial planning. Following this, the planning office says a place's *urbanity* is secured by "a fine-grained street and urban space structure, density, variated land-use and architecture that show consideration for the place" (PBEV3 2019: 35). The planning office suggests that "the intensity of urban life and the use of the city space" (PBE 2019b: 7) are constitutive to urban life, because "the intensity of urban life and the use of the city space [is] an effect of density and multi-use functionality" (PBE 2019b: 7). "A certain variety" will emerge from "how the physical frame can facilitate human activity and interaction" (PBE 2019b: 8) from "population density, functions, economic and cultural activities" (PBE 2019b: 7).

Within this spatial dispositive thinking (Foucault 2007), the need for informal spaces at Karlsrud is catered for by suggesting ground-floor activities along the main street to create an attractive and lively urban street. The plan does not touch on Karlsrud's cultural and ethnic diversity or that urbanity is about informal socio-cultural amenities such as music, galleries, restaurants, cafés, and the backstreets of entrepreneurial small businesses. The preferred ground-floor shopping street urbanity will likely be reserved for everyday consumption in chain stores (grocery, chain fashion, fast food, hairdressers, cafeterias, etc). The plan is a plan on how to spatialise social life.

8 'Sorting out' – the power of making cognitive closures

A crucial way of governing is by knowledge. Governing talk about what and how is a mechanism to manage communication. A limited agenda is accompanied by limiting the know-

ledge needed. The planning office has the power to 'sort out' knowledge and information as a basis for discussion (Eriksson/Fredriksson/Syssner 2022). Such a 'cognitive closure' not only involves sorting out statements and knowledge but also letting, for instance, a summary text adhere to political signals and suggestions, allowing hegemonic discourse(s), or prioritising planners' own evaluations, judgements, and suggestions concerning the plan.

It is assumed that a 'cognitive closure' of this sort is prevalent at Karlsrud when the planning office says participants are expected to "follow up the main principles of the plan" (PBE 2019a: 9), and that there is only a "real possibility to impact the plan within certain frames" (PBE 2019a: 11). In this case, interested citizens are informed on the project website and they also have an opportunity to post their comments on the site. The planning office publishes the minutes from the co-creation group's meetings on the site, and in a summary they have responded to 43 comments, incoming suggestions, and complaints from the co-creation group members, commented on more than 40 statements from citizens who are not part of the co-creation group process (PBEV5 2020), and held two public information meetings between 2018 and 2019 (PBEV3 2019).

A public website is not suitable for dialogical negotiations. It is a form of communication "that reports participants' different views on the case", but it is not, as wished, a way "to find out the possibility for a common solution, and to agree on further possibilities" (KMD 2014: 43). The website and public hearings are ways to obtain 'relevant knowledge' on spatial aspects of the plan, on which the office needs input (how the neighbourhood views density, mixed-use, green areas). The web-communication is basically undertaken to secure the "democratic anchoring and legitimacy" of the plan (PBE 2019c: 4).

An evaluation of participation in Oslo defines participatory 'impact' to mean that a proposed plan cannot be politically considered without being evaluated by citizens (Schmidt/Guttu/Knudtzon 2011). If such a public evaluation is limited by the sorting out of what information citizens need and an agenda of objectives, it seems reasonable that the study shows that citizens do not see their complaints or suggestions in the final plan (Schmidt/Guttu/Knudtzon 2011: 14). However, the city government and planning law view participation as the sharing of knowledge needed to arrive at a common end-result acceptable for all involved parties. It thus follows that the planning office can say that they do not see complaints as part of such knowledge exchange or of the deliberative participatory process itself (PBE 2019c: 6). From this perspective, complaints are made 'after' a decision or come from 'the outside' (e.g. from those not affected) and have another decision-making forum in which

they should be solved. Antagonistic or dissensual disagreements are not to be discussed among participants.

The research report concludes that the planning process shows no sign of "citizen power" in terms of impact or decision (Schmidt/Guttu/Knudtzon 2011: 155). The report suggests that this is partly due to participants meeting and encountering only three pre-defined hegemonic discourses: a growth discourse, one on density and urbanisation, and one on environment and sustainability (Schmidt/Guttu/Knudtzon 2011: 157). If local suggestions cannot fit one of these discourses, they have no impact on the plan.

The city may argue that they use cognitive closure as a mechanism to balance conflicting interests, but a cognitive closure is a governing mechanism to deal with the fact that there is no final decision to be reached between conflicting parties (Mouffe's argument). The cognitive closure is thus used to force through a decision from what is said to be a common symbolic space of consensus.

9 A decision to decide

However, politics, planning, and the public probably all agree that they always face a common dilemma: "We know in the present that we will be revising the present in the future" (Lampert 2018: 2).

There are also other crucial problems pertinent to a decision. First, although a decision is expected to represent aggregated knowledge, and a new decision is seen as adding new relevant knowledge to previous decisions, the decision starts from and is grounded in 'where we are' at present. Second, decisions are just as unavoidable in people's daily lives as they are in politics and planning. However, Heidegger (2007) claims, it is the decision that "binds us to time and space" (Lampert 2018: 97), to a present and a context. It is not per se future directed. Third, a decision in politics and planning does not imply a coming back to issues that have been left out, and arguments and knowledge that are excluded are not kept in mind for later use. Fourth, to decide is not the same as to act. After a decision is made, those who made the decision or benefit from it (or not), can choose whether to act or not. Fifth, if a decision leads to action, this action is taken by adding an interpretation of a current 'reality' to the knowledge behind the decision. Sixth, it is not possible for planners to have a will to act in a way that will contest a legally binding decision or decided-upon policies.

A decision is a choice of knowledge, strategies, and tactics, but the past is "a disconnected beginning" to a decision (Lampert 2018: 93). This is so because present actors do not know the context of decision(s) made in the past, including what forces led to the issue or influenced the outcome.

For present decisions, the past is mainly "fluctuating and disconnected starts unknown to one another" (Heidegger) (Lampert 2018: 93).

This reality, as Heidegger (Lampert 2018: 11) said, is "the ontological condition" of a decision. He says a decision is seen as future directed, but may be unfaithful to the original decision. Decisions are *de*-cisions: "a decision to decide" (Lampert 2018: 11). A *de*-cision is not an indecision or no-decision, but an "original beginning" that "sets the stage" for coming "crossings" (Lampert 2018: 88). A present decision not only has a beginning "very far back", a past unknown to the present decision, but it is also a decision that wants to prepare for "the ones to come" (Heidegger) (Lampert 2018: 94).

A decision as a decision to decide is not only a value against indifference in the present, but a decision for another, new beginning. For planning and politics, a decision is an attempt to reduce the complexity and multiplicity of the current context motivated by a hope to tame the future by taking what is thought to be a path-making decision. Choices are made, choices must be made, but the ideal that a decision is making a path into a future must, alluding to Heidegger, be replaced by a *de*-cision: a decision that is made not in order to stay indifferent to the present but one that is expected to be revised in the future.

The ontology of a decision is that "we have to decide to decide before we can decide" (Lampert 2018: 91), but also that every decision is unfinished just because "there is time" (Lampert 2018: 101). As the future is unknown, a decision can only be a "value against indifference" in the present (Lampert 2018: 98).

10 The sketch – acting de-cisionally

For politics, a final decision is a tool to enable efficient, rational, and legally secured path-making governing. A planning office is, among other duties, a mechanism to conduct the task of having a public dialogue to secure common agreed choices and decisions on plans announced. A conflict on path and choices can only be a 'conflictual consensus' from the best guess or best fit for now.

A decision may be needed to prevent a stalemate in the present or to have a legally binding plan to move on from. Despite saying, as Mouffe does, that an agonistic decision builds on a consensus about the interpretation of common values, when a decision represents a 'conflictual consensus' it cannot be other than a temporary and unfinished decision made for 'now'. Seen agonistically, decisions can only be de-cisions, because a decision does not create a secure path forward and because, as Lyotard says, a decision is wrong for (at least) one party. A decision can only represent a need

to move on, and it is thus a decision in need of finding a temporary resting place between antagonistic and/or dissensual disagreements.

It is elementary that any decision has "an unlimited range of 'not yet' before it" (Lampert 2018: 101), but also that "the moment of decision is a temporal floater" (Lampert 2018: 2). Not only will the future revise the present, but when a constitutive condition for a decision is antagonistic or agonistic, the question is how can planning work with 'the moment' and 'the temporal floater'? How can planning move from being a governing apparatus using public participation to legitimate a forced consensus to fit political aims and intentions, to being an ongoing floating and agonistic democracy?

The answer for Mouffe (2013: 22) is to secure "the pluralization of hegemonies" and have a conflictual consensus. To her, agonistic praxis is based on the realisation that a decision can only be a conflictual consensus made from the "divergent interpretations of shared ethico-political principles" and values (Mouffe 2013: 23). Contestation and irreducible differences are subjugated and subdued to 'a shared symbolic space'. Such an institutionalisation of decisions will displace contestation and dissensus in favour of a will to govern and stay in power by (final) decisions on what counts.

Rather than, as now, developing and designing places and spaces from a legally binding zoning plan, and rather than believing a land-use planning decision is path-dependent (a rational or logical extension of past decisions) and path-making (a certainty about the future), planning not only needs to work with an always emerging complex of antagonistic-agonistic forces, but at the same time to be able to work unfinished while awaiting a future still to come.

Decisions in the present are unavoidable, but at the same time recognising the reality of agonism requires acknowledging the "indeterminacy and contingency" of the present as well as the future (Hillier 2002: 250). A final decision suppresses agonism (dissensus) and the agonistic form (conflicting adversaries) if it fails to respect that a 'solution for now' means acting temporarily. A de-cisional process cannot work from final decisions or a fixed plan but requires a sketch (Mathiesen 1971). A sketch is a thematic plan made of points and lines able to change on the move (not unlike Dovey 2005: 133). The sketch can, as the word itself indicates, only be a themed plan, with points of visions and interests, and is to be supported by an ongoing mapping of changes, forces at play, and micro-social experiences.

As an unfinished plan, a sketch makes it possible to see planning as 'a work in progress' (see Haggärde/Løkken/Dahl et al. 2008), and a work in progress can act aporetically, indeterminately, and come back to issues left out earlier. To work *de*-cisionally and from a sketch is to know

politics and planning will have to modify or change past decisions, habitual ways of thinking, and givens in the face of new conditions. A sketch is open to new knowledge and insights about the past and present, and thus a praxis to avoid cognitive closures. It moves planning from, as now, working with a (conceived) line of aggregated decisions to being able to work with emerging discontinuities and ruptures, be they economic, political, cultural, social, micro-spatial, or micro-social.

To work from a sketch not only enables planning praxis and decisions to connect to discontinuities and ruptures such as change in street-level businesses, local socio-economic changes, or changing knowledge. It also enables planning to work with changing experiences, dreams, and desires by giving a space for listening to lived experiences and dissensual voices without these voices having to fear that they will be discounted or faded out by a final and finite decision. An agonistic sketch has the capacity to represent how citizens, politics, and business separately and in agreement see an imagined future from present challenges, hopes, desires etc., thanks to its ability to represent both consensus, differences, and dissensus.

To work from and with a sketch to guide politics and planning depends on actors learning to think unfinished: learning to work while always being on the move, curating incoming and new citizens and professional knowledge, learning to support one's praxis by mapping changing constellations and configurations of forces, and learning to decide temporarily to move on. This will from time to time work against hegemonic politics and its alliances on planning issues, capital, and investors. An agonistic sketch can operate as a mechanism and a praxis that enables planning to navigate between positions not always comparable, compatible, or reconcilable with each other.

In most places there are, I surmise, no legal hindrances for an agonistic and *de*-cisional planning praxis. It is, for instance, possible to let planning work *de*-cisionally on a neighbourhood regeneration plan. It is possible to support a plan by instigating a public process on visions and futuribles (Albrechts 2005). It is possible to have planning offices draw up an ongoing mapping of presently articulated forces of importance for an area or a present decision. In other words, it is possible within current conditions to explore the potential of suggestions that emerge from using speculative scenes rather than scenarios.[5] However, it is rare to see a process focused on dialogues on people's desires, hopes, and multiple differences (on desire and planning see Gunder/Hillier 2007).

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[5] Scenarios within planning and applied research are premised on data, the political agenda and planning laws.

11 Any conclusion is an unfinished end

Planning studies embracing agonism should take up a critical position: How can agonistic planning praxis be seen as comparable to or include a forced consensus? How can agonistic planning join or intertwine with a planning system that works from a path dependency based on final decisions? How can consent be seen as an expression of an agonistic democracy, if subsumed under a final decision? How can planning make a space for agonistic contestations?

To suggest working from a sketch and to work unfinished seems to be an uphill effort as long as cities are allowed to practise in such a way that "participation does not mean to have a say" in decisions (PBE 2019a: 9). However, the suggestion from Hillier (2011) to include "strategic navigation", and Healey (2009) on finding temporary resting places as a potential new pragmatic approach to planning, show a *de*-cisional mode of working as a possible praxis. Rather than believing a present decision will govern the future by path-making, even a building permit should be adaptable to an uncertain future and make space for a flexible change of use, form, and function of a building or a place.

Planning's actual mode of decision-making closes what should be open: a space for strife and a praxis that has a ready eye for micro-physical, micro-social, and micro-societal changes and their forces. Subsuming contingency and disagreements under a vertical decision-making process focused on a fixed plan and participatory processes using cognitive closures, prevents dissensual knowledge from being kept in mind. It is a system, an apparatus, and a way of working that prepares "a future of stillness" (Lampert 2018: 93). Ultimately of course, every decision is unfinished just because there is time, but a *de*-cisional mode of working respects the realisation that a decision gets "its rights from 'the ones to come'" (Lampert 2018: 94).

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