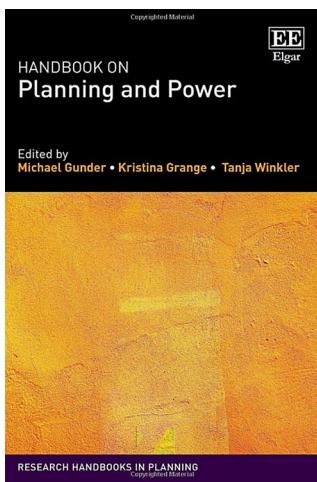


Gunder, Michael; Grange, Kristina; Winkler, Tanja (eds.) (2023): Handbook on Planning and Power.

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“Power is what remains to be explained”. Many planning-related studies end with the statement that power is a crucial factor in planning processes that remains underexposed in research. The exercise of power has many faces in practice. According to Max Weber, power is amorphous, which is why it is so elusive. There is some agreement in the social sciences that it is a social relationship that is asymmetrical and manifests itself only in action. But how can acts of power and unequal power relations be captured? There are many theories of power in political science, philosophy and sociology that planning research can draw upon. In planning

research itself, there are much-cited contributions by John Forester and Bent Flyvbjerg, among others. Nevertheless, to date there is no common understanding of what power is in planning; rather, there is a great plurality of competing approaches. This makes it difficult to theoretically conceptualise the role of power in planning processes and to make it accessible for empirical studies. Planners are either ascribed very powerful roles as “masters”, “strategists”, “managers” or “communicators” in theory, or criticised as entirely powerless vis-à-vis policymakers and investors. For this reason, the new “Handbook on Planning and Power” is sure to arouse lively interest in the community of international planning theorists.

The three book editors are former editors of the journal “Planning Theory”. Michael Gunder passed away while working on the volume in 2021, so the book is dedicated to him. The 432-page handbook includes a total of 26 contributions by 36 authors. Their origins are worldwide, with most contributions coming from the USA, UK, continental Europe and Australia. The handbook’s own claim is “to identify the current state of knowledge about planning and power, as well as this scholarship’s new emerging trajectories” (p. 1). As democracy is currently on the defensive in many countries, the editors associate the handbook with the need “to nurture a critical ethos in order for planners to create democratic spaces, where the political can play out in new and alternative ways [...] and where greater awareness of how power plays out in the field of planning might lead to socio-economic and spatial justice” (p. 5). The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 with 12 contributions is dedicated to “theorising power in planning” and part 2 with 14 contributions to “situating power in planning”. Due to this large number of contributions, only selected essays can be discussed in this review.

Theorising power in planning: the theoretical contributions here cover a wide range of different political,

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philosophical and sociological approaches to power with Marxist, post-Marxist, post-structuralist and institutionalist to social constructivist approaches standing side by side. Accordingly, the authors refer to thinkers such as Karl Marx (*Enda Murphy/Linda Fox-Rogers*), Henri Lefebvre (*Lina Olsson/Elena Besussi*), Michel Foucault (*John Pløger*), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*Jean Hillier*) Jacques Lacan (*Chuan Wang*), Jacques Rancière (*Camillo Boano*), Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (*Nikolai Roskamm*). The understandings of planning are critical throughout, but differ greatly. They range from seeing planning as the handmaiden of the state for the enforcement of capitalist class interests to viewing it as the antagonist of capital and state in approaches of “insurgent planning” (*Bjørn Sletto*). These contrasts can be attributed to the fact that there are not only completely different definitions of who the actors of planning are, but also completely different geographical contexts. The majority of the contributions refer to state or municipal planning in the capitalist democracies of the Western world, while individual contributions from the “Global South” show a much broader understanding of planning that reaches far into civil society. This leads to a distinction between “invited” and “invented” spaces of participation. Opposing positions also refer to the model of “communicative planning”, which on the one hand is defended and further developed with the argument of the transformative power of participation (*Crystal Legacy*), while on the other hand it is criticised as power-blind and depoliticising (*Enda Murphy/Linda Fox-Rogers*).

The authors also have very different understandings of power. The basic distinction is between “power over” and “power to”. In the classical understanding of Max Weber and in the early community power debate in political research, power is understood as command and control or domination. In contrast to this understanding, which usually has a negative connotation, “power to” refers to an enabling capacity to act and is used by urban regime theory and in governance research, among others. Some authors refer to a narrower political science understanding of “power over” in the community power debate, according to which in the “three faces of power” at least the first two faces – the power to decide and the power to control the agenda (non-decisions) – can be empirically studied. *Raine Mäntysalo’s* contribution, which is profitable to read, deals explicitly with Steffen Lukes’ “three faces of power” and its critiques. *John Pløger’s* contribution draws on the philosophical understanding of Michel Foucault, whose approach to governmentality locates power in the diffuse fabric of all social relations. *Nikolai Roskamm* in turn deals with the “hegemony” approach of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, which certainly offers some points of contact for planning-related power analyses.

Situating power in planning: the second part contains contributions that deal with very different questions of planning and power and the topics covered include the public good (*Andy Inch*), informality (*Mona Fawaz*), neoliberalism (*Marlyana Azyyati Marzukhi*) and media (*Jaime Lopez/Lisa Schweitzer*). *Andy Inch* addresses the “promissory power” of planning and the extent to which planning represents the common good. *Yvonne Rydin* questions the legitimising power of planning with Michel Foucault’s approach to governmentality. Other contributions take decidedly queer, feminist and “Southern” perspectives. A more systematic approach is taken by *Kristof Van Assche, Raoul Beunen* and *Martijn Duineveld*, who distinguish between “power of planning”, “power on planning” and “power in planning”.

As might be expected from the large number of authors, the handbook contains very diverse contributions, the majority of which are likely to be more relevant to those interested in planning theory rather than in planning practice. This is because many of the theoretical contributions contain long explanations of the philosophies of power and only few references to planning. In this way, the authors often offer fundamental critiques of capitalism, neoliberalism and colonialism without taking a closer look at the political processes in which planning is embedded. Unfortunately, the handbook also contains only a few contributions that deal with the issues of democracy and participation. Therefore, the editors’ own goal is not really fulfilled. The conceptual link between power *and* planning also remains weak in many contributions. The most promising contributions seem to me to understand planning as a political process and part of governance. As the persuasive power of communicative planning theories and governance approaches is currently weakening and planning conflicts are increasing in many fields of practice, the narrower understanding of “power over” versus “power to” is apparently regaining relevance. One indication of this is that several authors in the anthology revisit the theories of Steffen Lukes in the community power debate. There is certainly much undiscovered potential for planning research in the old question of who uses what means of power to prevail in cases of conflict. Even after reading the handbook, conceptual approaches that convincingly combine planning and power and also provide insights relevant to practice, remain a desideratum. Wolf Reuter and John Pløger present new attempts to do just this, not least in this special issue (Reuter 2023; Pløger 2023).

Full reference of reviewed title:

Gunder, Michael; Grange, Kristina; Winkler, Tanja (eds.) (2023): Handbook on Planning and Power. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 432 pp.

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