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Commentaries

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Elizabeth L. Sweet Antonio Raciti

Assessments of what constitutes planning theory (Klosterman, 2011) and a recent study on typical areas of planning (Fang & Ewing, 2020) triggered Ann Forsyth's editorial on the use and meaning of planning theories (Forsyth, 2021). Fang and Ewing asserted journal editors' decisions to favor topical planning areas are responsible for their findings of a shift away from planning theory in generalist planning journals. Forsyth's concern is vital to the discipline and pointed to a "conundrum" regarding a decline of interest in planning theory. Her editorial invites scholars to reflect on planning theories, how they produce and use theories, and which theories are more relevant to planning practice. Reviewing *JAPA's* publications, Forsyth (2021) showed that if Fang and Ewing used a broader net, their assertion of the decline of planning theory would be negated.

Alexander's response goes back to an old question about the definition of planning (Alexander, 2016; Sweet, 2011), an issue he suggests we need to address before engaging in any discussion on what theories might be. After decades of defining what planning is (or should be), however, it seems futile to focus on this effort. We should highlight how different theories spring from different epistemologies and how they are then relevant for planning practices. Alexander's viewpoint strongly suggests that only theories *in* planning are helpful for practitioners because these clearly define epistemic objects and are knowledge based, contrary to theories *of* planning that "are not very helpful in planners' real-life practices" (Alexander, this issue). This view has been questioned at least since Faludi's *Reader in Planning Theory* (Faludi, 1973) opened a new scholarly agenda focused on the *messy* relationship between planners and decision-making bodies.

The controversial nature of this relationship has shown the impossibility of using modernist epistemologies to produce knowledge to inform planning practice. From this perspective, theories *of* planning have created revolutionary normative horizons of work that have impacted planning practice in various ways. *JAPA's* publication of Davidoff's "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning" (1965) represents the foundation for practitioners questioning rational facts as the basis for plan-

making and, instead, shaping ideas of the future by reflecting on a system of values anchored by broad diversity. Although it was unsettling for rational technical planners—usually White heterosexual males—this moment was long overdue for women, people of color, and others, who were historically excluded from the profession and political processes. Their approaches to planning practice have been exemplary implementations of advocacy and pluralism and showed the potential to change the profession and the lives of many living in the communities where they worked. Among many other community intellectuals, it is relevant to remember Linda Davidoff challenging Trump's developments in Manhattan's Upper West Side (NY), Yolanda Garcia with her ¡Nos Quedamos! EJ Movement in the Bronx (NY), and Mauricio Gaston directly challenging the former Boston Redevelopment Agency in Boston (MA).

Furthermore, discounting theories *of* planning to privilege "useful" theory *in* planning is problematic. For us, these domains are overlapping and shifting so significantly that their separation does little to address issues raised in Forsyth's conundrum. Rather, it creates a hierarchy that demotes nonnormative or alternative planning theory and practice in a way that is detrimental to equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice. In this context, it is essential to notice how decades of feminist thought have brought us to reflect on what Angela Davis defined as "intersectionality of struggles" (Davis, 2016, p. 25), the intertwined systems of values and power underpinning different struggles. Going back to the production of theories strictly focused on producing procedures and plans, as Alexander suggested, is insufficient at best, backward at worst. The ongoing challenge is to figure out how to conduct research related to the intersection of those struggles and draw multiple normative horizons of work (theories *of* planning), helping to imagine innovative planning practices. We believe that this concern should be at the core of the debate addressing Forsyth's conundrum. The question is, how?

Campbell (2012) represented planning research agendas along 1) descriptive-prescriptive and 2) exploratory-normative axes. In the context of this commentary, her article illuminated how current challenges for planning theory linked to the type of theoretical work and the interests of planning scholars. Campbell inferred that planning theories' descriptive and exploratory nature has been overshadowing the discipline's primary mandate, which is informing innovative approaches to action. Searching for immediate answers

to inform practice, we might be lured into producing theories that prescribe *what to do* instead of generating open horizons of work on *what ought to be done* (italics borrowed from Campbell).

From this perspective, the feminist, antiracist, and decolonial turn in planning must drive theories; they should be informed by new epistemologies and focus on the relations planners need to build with gendered, colonized, and racialized bodies (possibly including their own bodies) to produce innovative decision making. This imperative, we believe, is one of the biggest challenges Forsyth's conundrum poses to planning theorists today. We have been trying to work along these lines; for example, engaging self-reflection through cultural humility (Sweet, 2018), envisioning new spaces for planning in the anti-immigrant city (Sweet, 2018), or collectively challenging prescriptive theories of spatial design (Raciti, 2020) and national public housing policies (Raciti et al., 2016).

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