



Doctoral Thesis in Planning and Decision Analysis

Democracy and Planning

Contested Meanings in Theory and Practice

SHERIF ZAKHOUR



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ABSTRACT

“Democracy” is a frequently used concept in the Western planning field. Scholars, practitioners, and citizens alike regularly deploy it to both explain and contest the nature and legitimacy of urban governance. And yet, in the planning literature, the concept of democracy itself is rarely explained or debated. The assumption being made is that its root meaning for planning is self-evident or agreed upon: public participation in, or mobilization against urban governance. However, my argument in this thesis proceeds from the opposite assumption: that far from self-explanatory or accepted, the contested meanings ascribed to democracy play a central role in shaping conflicts and experiences in planning—both in the literature and in practice. My overarching aim is to contribute with knowledge on this role by specifically examining what the substantial meaning of democracy is assumed to be according to actors in the field; that is, among planning scholars, practitioners, and citizens.

The thesis is comprised of a cover essay and four empirical papers based on qualitative case study research on local authority planning in Sweden. In the cover essay, I explore the meanings ascribed to democracy among planning actors, first, by conducting a careful reading of key theoretical texts in the field and, second, by analyzing the individual papers’ key findings.

To help elicit these rarely explained, often implicit democratic meanings among planning actors, I develop a theoretical framework based on the work of historian Pierre Rosanvallon. He understands the democratic project as a ceaseless attempt to resolve the fundamental indeterminacy as to what constitutes its substantial meaning. This perpetual project is nourished by a deep-seated incompatibility between three of democracy’s central ideological components: *voluntarism*, *rationalism*, and *liberalism*. Their incompatibility stems from how each of them is regularly mobilized in response to the pathological tendencies ascribed to the other. These responses, in turn, can be empirically charted by how actors implicitly assume the role of “guardianship” over different “democratic temporalities”; manifested as repeated clashes between competing meanings as to what constitutes democracy’s substantial essence.

By applying this framework to planning theory and practice, I highlight a striking range and depth in democratic meanings among actors in the field. Moreover, the many debates in planning theory and conflicts in planning practice come across as being deeply nourished by these competing meanings—often in ways that are only partially explicit and thus have been rather neglected in the literature. But examining planning through the lens of democracy not only provides critical insights

into the nature of its conflicts, it also challenges the established assumption that treats the meaning of democracy as exclusively intrinsic to participation or citizen action.

My intention with the thesis is not to advance the merits of one or another specific understanding of the essence of democracy, nor to promote a questionable relativism around its meaning. On the contrary, the intention is to stress that if our ambition is to challenge the broadly technocratic and neoliberal governance practices currently the norm in the field, we need to understand—and render contestable—those specific circumstances, ideals, and even democratic meanings that inform them.

SAMMANFATTNING

Ett av de mest förekommande begreppen i det västerländska planeringsfältet är ”demokrati”. Bland planeringsforskare, planerare och medborgare används det regelbundet för att både förklara och bestrida samhällsplaneringens roll och legitimitet. Men i planeringslitteraturen brukar själva demokratibegreppet varken förklaras eller diskuteras. Litteraturens antagande vilar på att demokratins betydelse för planering redan är vedertagen och accepterad: medborgardeltagande i, eller medborgaraktivism mot stadsplaneringsprocesser. Mitt argument i denna avhandling vilar dock på det motsatta antagandet: att demokratibegreppets omtvistade betydelse i själva verket spelar en nyckelroll i planeringens många konflikter – både i litteraturen och i praktiken. Mitt övergripande syfte är att bidra med kunskap kring denna roll genom att specifikt undersöka vad demokratins väsentliga betydelse anses vara enligt olika aktörer i fältet, det vill säga bland forskare, planerare och medborgare.

Avhandlingen är organiserad i ett sammanläggningsformat bestående av en kapp och fyra empiriska artiklar baserade på kvalitativ fallstudieforskning om kommunal samhällsplanering i Sverige. I kappan undersöker jag demokratiförståelser bland aktörer i planeringen genom, först, en noggrann läsning av centrala teoretiska texter i fältet och, sedan, genom en analys av de enskilda artiklarnas centrala fynd.

Till hjälp för att skilja ut dessa sällan förklarade, ofta implicita demokratiförståelser bland planeringsaktörer utvecklar jag ett teoretiskt ramverk baserat på historikern Pierre Rosanvillons arbete. Han förstår det demokratiska projektet som ett ständigt försök att komma till rätta med en grundläggande osäkerhet kring vad som utgör demokratins väsentliga betydelse. Detta ständiga projekt underhålls samtidigt av en inneboende konflikt mellan tre av demokratins centrala ideologiska komponenter: *volontarism*, *rationalism* och *liberalism*. Deras konfliktförhållande härrör från hur var och en av dem mobiliseras i reaktion mot de bristfälligheter som upplevs vara inneboende i de andra. Dessa reaktioner kan i sin tur empiriskt kartläggas genom hur aktörer implicit antar rollen som ”beskyddare” över olika ”demokratiska temporaliteter”, vilket ges uttryck genom upprepade konflikter mellan konkurrerande förståelser om vad som utgör demokratins essens.

Genom tillämpningen av detta ramverk på planeringsteori och praktik visar jag på ett brett spektrum av demokratiförståelser bland planeringsaktörer. Dessutom framställs många av de återkommande debatterna och konflikterna i planeringen som starkt understödda av dessa konkurrerande förståelser – ofta på ett sätt som inte är helt explicit och därmed ofta förbises i litteraturen. Men analysen ger inte bara kritiska

insikter kring vad som ofta utgör kärnan i dessa konflikter, den utmanar också det etablerade antagandet där demokratins betydelse framställs som inneboende kopplat till medborgardeltagande och engagemang.

Min avsikt med avhandlingen är inte att visa på de inneboende fördelarna med en demokratiförståelse över en annan, eller att främja en slags relativistisk debatt kring dess olika förståelser. Tvärtom så är avsikten att poängtera att om vår ambition är att utmana de teknokratiska och neo-liberala praktikerna som för närvarande genomsyrar planeringen, så behöver vi synliggöra de specifika omständigheter, ideal och till och med demokratiförståelser som inspirerar dem.

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APPENDED PAPERS

Paper I: Zakhour, S., & Metzger, J. (2018a). Placing the action in context: Contrasting public-centered and institutional understandings of democratic planning politics. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 19(3), 345–362.

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Sherif Zakhour, June 2020

1

Introduction

An almost ubiquitous concept in Western planning theory and practice is “democracy.” Scholars in the field often use it to intimate the ends of planning, and they speak of planning’s role in “re-enchanting democracy” (Healey, 2012). Other times, democracy is portrayed as a vehicle for “re-enchanting” planning, and they speak of “the realization of a democratic planning process” (Forester, 1989, p. 45) or of “(re)democratizing contemporary planning praxis” (Metzger, 2011). In such cases, planning is often seen as an impediment to democracy, and they use “technocracy” (Raco & Savini, 2019) or “post-democracy” (Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 371) to contest the nature and legitimacy of urban governance. Democracy is also often used adjacent to other prevalent concepts in planning, such as “participation,” “empowerment,” “diversity,” or “justice”—concepts which seem to fit under the label “democracy” (Healey, 1997) but are at the same time distinct from it (Fainstein, 2010). And yet, when planning scholars speak of democracy only rarely do they expand upon it, assuming its meaning for planning is self-explanatory or agreed upon.

In this thesis, my argument is the opposite. Far from constituting a self-evident or accepted concept—with debates merely resting on the details for its fulfillment—I intend to show how the contested meanings ascribed to democracy among planning actors represent one of the most central sources of conflict in planning theory and practice.

Democracy’s central place in the field, and the different meanings ascribed to the concept, is readily observable through a brief reading of the “textbook narrative” (Fainstein & DeFilippis, 2016, p. 4) on the origins and development of Western planning.

The “great men with great ideas” (Fainstein & DeFilippis, 2016, p. 5) of the early 20th century had often justified their planned interventions in space as an act of universal progressive reform, where the combined application of scientific and aesthetic expertise would help alleviate cities from the ails of industrialization (Taylor, 1998). And as

planning was subsequently professionalized as a public service, its democratic legitimacy was increasingly predicated on the “instrumental rationality” of an organized bureaucracy acting on behalf of the welfare state—what Mannheim (1940) famously encapsulated in his conception of, precisely, democratic planning “as the rational mastery of the irrational” (p. 265). This postwar “golden age” of planning (Taylor, 1998, p. 38) was also conditioned by parallel developments in the science of public administration. Here, a more rational planning bureaucracy was promoted as a democratic bulwark against the clientelism and partisan politics characterizing local government (Meyerson & Banfield, 1955).

Some of the subsequent developments in planning theory and practice, such as “incrementalism” (Lindblom, 1959) or “transactive planning” (Friedmann, 1973), were partly advanced on the back of a sobering suspicion towards planning’s modernist Enlightenment ideal centered on “progress.” But such reservations did not preclude the assertion that planning activity was a force for democratic good—as evinced by the opening of Davidoff’s (1965) classic, manifesto-like text on the promises of “advocacy planning”: “The present can become an epoch in which the dreams of the past for an enlightened and just democracy are turned into a reality” (p. 331).

Nevertheless, the ensuing “paradigm breakdown” (Yiftachel, 1989) in planning thought in the 1960s and 1970s has partly been read as a crisis of faith in the democratic nature of planning (Galloway & Mahayni, 1977). Here, a sustained attack from materialist (Scott & Roweis, 1977), liberal (Rittel & Webber, 1973), and later on, postmodern directions (Sandercock, 1998) challenged some of the most basic assumptions at the heart of planning. What was subsequently at question for its theorists was not only the debatable existence of a “public interest” for planners to objectively try to ascertain, but also, fundamentally, whether such attempts were even desirable in the context of deeply fragmented and pluralized societies.

As a result, the many attempts to reinvent planning up to the present have generally grappled with its glaring technocratic traits. This has resulted in conceptualizations of planners as “communicators,” “facilitators,” or “critical friends” (Forester, 1999, p. 196; see also Healey, 1997, Innes, 1995;), as well as what seemed to emerge—for a time at least—as the panacea for planning’s democratic deficits: public participation. But in recent years, debates about the (un)democratic nature of planning has seen a strong resurgence, often by way of the concept “the political” and its apparent subversion (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2011).

Accordingly, even if we were to ignore the many counter-narratives to the established canon as to the origins and development of Western planning¹ it is clear that planning has since long been conditioned by conflicting ideas about democracy. Only from this short review, it seems that the substantial meaning ascribed to the concept has enabled, or at the very least legitimized, at times diametrically opposing views on what planning substantially is and should be. And yet, in the planning literature, democracy as a concept has not been given nearly as much analytical treatments relative to its normative use, and few systematic reviews about its variegated meanings exist.

The overarching aim of this thesis, then, is to contribute with analytical knowledge on the relationship between democracy and planning. This is done by examining the contested meanings ascribed to democracy in planning theory and planning practice. This exploration will not be directed towards presenting a complete index of these meanings, nor towards affirming which of them might best express the “true” or “best” meaning of democracy. Rather, it will be geared towards establishing the central argument of the thesis: Many of the conflicts and debates in both planning theory and practice are deeply nourished by different and, at times, fundamentally incompatible meanings ascribed to democracy—often in ways that are only partially explicit and thus have been left unexamined in the literature.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I will present the structure of this pursuit more in-depth, including the specific research questions guiding me, the empirical context of the thesis, and the delimitations. But first, I want to bring attention to some of the analytical challenges of examining the meaning of democracy in planning, which can productively be highlighted through a short review of the existing literature on the subject.

1.1 ANALYTICAL TREATMENTS OF DEMOCRACY IN PLANNING

Although the meaning of democracy in planning has largely escaped systematic reviews, there are a few analytical treatments geared towards examining the relationship. In relation to planning theory, Inch (2015) has recently discussed how the democratic ideals and normative assumptions underpinning participatory planning theories often obscure the significant demands placed upon citizens who engage with planning

1. That is, where its colonial roots are largely erased and many of its contributors and victims go unacknowledged (cf. Njoh, 2009; Rabinow, 1989).

activity and, furthermore, the high levels of anxiety, duress, and even disillusionment with democratic institutions such encounters generate.

A somewhat similar argument was raised by Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger (1998) on the back of their philosophical critique of communicative planning theory. According to these scholars, communicative planning was largely developed on a set of reductive values about democracy, “such as participatory democracy ‘good’, representative democracy ‘bad’” (p. 1977), which obscured the fact that many planners “do not hold the view that they should act more openly and democratically” (Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones 2002, p. 17).

Recent investigations have also highlighted how the contested meanings ascribed to the neighboring concepts of “power” (Westin, 2019) and “social justice” (Uitermark & Nicholls, 2017) in participatory planning theory have significant impact upon their translation and reception in practice. Similarly, in the broader literature on participatory governance, researchers have for some time stressed that the democratic merits of such activities are highly ambiguous and directly dependent on which specific elements we choose to fit under the label “democracy” (e.g., Bengtsson & Christensen, 2016; Metzger et al., 2017; Michels & de Graaf, 2010;).

In relation to planning practice, Grant (1994) has evocatively used dramaturgical metaphor to illustrate how the “drama of democracy” is crystalized in public planning controversies in North America. According to Grant, the actors involved in such conflicts—planners, politicians, citizens—each come with their own set of predetermined behaviors, interests, and perspectives on democracy—“as if by script” (p. 4). At times, “the planner acts the ‘pompous technocrat’; at other times the ‘genial civil servant’” (p. 4). But as her drama unfolds these roles become more blurred, the meaning of democracy more ambiguous, and the conflicts more contentious; until it ultimately center-stages dilemmas around major societal themes, “like ‘democracy’ itself” (p. 4).

More recently, Bäcklund and Mäntysalo (2010) have highlighted a similar ambiguity around the meaning of democracy in participatory planning practices in Scandinavia. They trace a temporal sequence of theories that have informed planning debates around participation: from the rational process view of planning on to more contemporary, conflict-oriented “agonistic” approaches. In turn, these “paradigm shifts” in planning are said to be informed by corresponding developments in democratic theory: “from aggregative to deliberative and further to agonistic interpretations” (p. 334). However, their intention with drawing up such a clean, linear picture of theory development is specifically to

contrast it to the “institutional ambiguity” of practice. Here, they argue, planners are seldom informed by any one specific theory or paradigm and different meanings about democracy often compete and coexist with each other (see also, e.g., Allmendinger, 2002).

Similarly, Van Wymeersch et al.’s (2019) recent study of participatory planning processes in Belgium concludes that these arenas not only “sustain and accommodate radically different, even incompatible views on democracy,” but that such views “indeed explain their contentious nature” (p. 359).

What this research highlights, then, is that planning is a field “pregnant” with “democracy ideals, with corresponding potential consequences” (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010, p. 335). And yet, even in much of the analytical treatments above, there is an undercurrent of essentialism regarding the relationship, seeing as how their examinations are all but completely constrained to participation in, or citizen action against urban governance processes. This emphasis is in line with its dominant normative usage today in the planning literature, which tends to equate democracy and planning with public engagement (Forester, 1989; Healey, 1997; Hillier, 2002; Innes, 1995; Innes & Booher, 2010) or citizen activism more broadly (Miraftab, 2009; Purcell, 2009; 2016; Swyngedouw, 2011).

This is an understandable and, not least, welcomed bias given the glaring technocratic traits of contemporary urban governance (Metzger et al., 2015; Raco & Savini, 2019; Swyngedouw, 2011). And the emphasis is arguably reflective of concerns over the broader legitimacy crisis of liberal representative democracy (e.g., Healey, 2012)—or, alternatively, an attempt to challenge the broader practice of treating democracy as synonymous with that regime (e.g., Purcell, 2008). Indeed, broad parts of the critical planning literature have since long emphasized how public mobilizations and citizen protest movements could potentially introduce urban governance processes with a long needed “democratic(izing) makeover” (Metzger, 2011; see also de Souza, 2006; Haughton et al., 2016; Legacy, 2016; Raco & Lin, 2012). But, as evinced from the above discussions, the meaning of democracy in and for planning among theorists, practitioners, and citizens, is far from agreed upon, and there is no essential reason that the term itself should be intrinsically rooted in political participation.

The term “democracy” is derived from the Greek roots *dēmos* (common people) and *kratos* (rule or strength). It is contrasted with tyranny, monarchy, aristocracy, and other forms of heteronomous rule not explicitly designated by the subject that is to be ruled; that is, “the people.”

But beyond that contrast, the term itself does not specify much at all. And in the broader debates in political science and political philosophy, its meaning is deeply riven with qualifiers, conceptions, interpretations, and positions (Agamben et al., 2011; Bobbio, 2005; Gagnon, 2014; Held 2006; Isakhan & Stockwell, 2011, 2012; Mouffe, 2000).

In this sense, if democracy is that which is to be *explained* in planning not “only” achieved, relying on excessively strong normative assumptions regarding its meaning necessarily becomes an obstacle (Metzger et al., 2017; Silver et al., 2010; Van Wymeersch et al., 2019). At the same time, as evident from the research above, planning actors and theorists may well harbor meanings, pursue activities, or assume roles that center-stage democracy, but they do not always pay explicit tribute to it—or if they do, they rarely explain it. This means that attempts to elicit the multiple meanings that people may ascribe to democracy—including and especially among those who do not directly participate in its debates—would still require some preconceived assumptions and theoretical boundaries as to its precise meaning. In the remainder of this chapter, I present how this task is pursued in the thesis and its empirical context.

1.2 RESEARCH AIM, QUESTIONS, AND OUTLINE

The thesis is organized in two parts: this cover essay and four papers. As stated above, the overarching aim of the *thesis*—which substantially consists of all these five parts together—is to contribute with analytical knowledge on the relationship between democracy and planning. To that end, the specific aim of this *cover essay* is to examine the conflicting meanings ascribed to this relationship among planning theorists, planners, and citizens. With that aim in mind, the research question guiding me is twofold: *What are the substantial meanings ascribed to democracy in planning theory* and, furthermore, *in planning practice?*

In the cover essay, I develop a theoretical framework for exploring these two questions based on the work of French historian Pierre Rosanvallon (2006, 2008, 2011). He understands the democratic experience as variegated attempts to resolve the fundamental indeterminacy as to what constitutes its meaning and “essence.” This ongoing, ceaseless project is perpetuated by a deep-rooted incompatibility between three of democracy’s central ideological components: *rationalism*, *liberalism*, and *voluntarism*. According to Rosanvallon, the constitutive tension between these components stems from how each of them regularly comes to be mobilized in response to the perceived pathologies endemic of the other. These responses, in turn, have nourished and deepened a set of relatively

constant questions and dilemmas throughout the history of democracy, which manifests in a kind of conjunction of “democratic temporalities” where competing approaches for solving democracy’s foundational problems repeatedly clash and conflict with one another. But crucially, the responses deployed by actors are not necessarily directed towards realizing some explicitly defined democratic ideal. Rather, for Rosanvallon, they can more productively be understood as implicitly assumed “guardianship” roles over different temporalities of democracy.

As we saw before, even if planning actors harbor meanings, assume roles, or pursue activities that center-stage democracy in various ways, they do not always evoke the term explicitly. And when they do, only rarely do they expand on its root meaning. But Rosanvallon’s thinking proceeds from the assumption that there is a certain degree of permanence and recurrence to its expressions, thereby allowing to elicit its ascribed meanings even among those actors who do not explicitly use the word *per se* or fully explain it. More specifically, and in relation to planning, this can be achieved by examining which *ideological components* they mobilize; which *perceived pathologies* of modern society that they presume planning to be a response against; and furthermore, how those responses translate to different types of *planning guardianships* over the temporalities of democracy.

Using this framework, I first examine the meanings ascribed to democracy in the planning literature. This is conducted through an “empathic” reading (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 105) of the normative works of some of the prominent scholars in field. These works are catalogued under three labels that correspond to democracy’s three ideological components as outlined by Rosanvallon (2006). The labels and their respective works are *rationalist* treatments of planning (Chadwick, 1978; Faludi, 1987); *liberal* treatments (Pennington, 2002; Rittel & Webber, 1973); and *voluntarist* treatments (Fainstein, 2010; Healey, 1997; Purcell, 2016).

As I will argue, the understood relationship between democracy and planning is far from straightforward across these thinkers’ texts. In some, democracy connects to the field of planning as a means to *democratize planning*; in others planning itself is seen as a vehicle for the *democratization of society* or, alternatively, an impediment towards such pursuits; and in others still, democracy is treated as both a *means* and an *ends* of planning. Indeed, as I will show, even among those theorists that seem to promote insular, technocratic, or neoliberal planning approaches, there is still a manifest concern for democracy to be evinced. But the more important argument here is the following: A central source of

conflict in the planning debates essentially concern competing views on the nature of democracy and how it connects to planning, even if only implicitly so.

The different meanings ascribed to democracy in these planning texts are then used a resource for the second research question: to examine its meanings in planning *practice*. Here, I draw on the findings of the four individual papers that also comprise the thesis.

The empirical context of these papers concerned three qualitative cases studies related to Swedish local authority planning. Together, they make up three distinct settings: a *public planning controversy* in the City of Stockholm (Paper I); the *administrative routines and practices* in the City's planning administrations (Paper II and III); and the *experiences of the public* who have engaged in participatory planning arrangements in Stockholm County (Paper IV). While they are far from representative of either Western or Swedish planning practice as a whole, these cases and their settings do manifest certain conflicts, experiences, and dilemmas that are emblematic of planning activity. Accordingly, they serve as valuable empirical context to the central argument of the thesis: that many of the recurring conflicts, debates, and experiences in both planning theory and practices are deeply nourished by competing understandings of what democracy in planning is and should be, even if not always stated in those terms by the actors themselves.

In making this argument, I employ a “reflexive” qualitative research methodology as outlined by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018). Broadly conceived, reflexive research treats empirical material not as a way to validate truth claims but “as a way to work ‘against’ dominant thinking” (2018, p. 388). Such research thus proceeds from an ambition to be “rich in points” by making “an epistemological break with everyday knowledge” (2009, p. 305). In line with this, my “point” of establishing the above argument is twofold: first, to stress how examining planning through the lens of democracy can reveal critical insights into the nature of its conflicts; and second, to challenge the dominant thinking in planning that treats democracy as exclusively intrinsic to citizen participation or activism more broadly.

My intent with the thesis is not to argue for another intrinsic or exclusive meaning of democracy nor to encourage a kind of debatable relativism around the subject. On the contrary, my foremost intent is to highlight that if the point is to transform urban governance practices towards more inclusive and “democratic” trajectories, we need to have a fundamental grasp of the circumstances, assumptions, and even democratic meanings that inform those actors who oppose them.

1.3 DELIMITATIONS AND CONTEXTS OF THE CASE STUDIES

Beyond “Western” as its qualifier, I have until now left the concept “planning” deliberately ambiguous. This is because, like “democracy,” I will be treating its meaning as an open question to be explored. What unites the theorists I will be discussing is that they all in some way have “planning” as one of their referents. But in each case, they load this concept with partially or radically different meanings—meanings that, as I intend to show, are at least partly informed by the meanings they ascribe to democracy.²

At the same time, and as I will further explain later on, the selection of the specific planning works to be analyzed is partly based on how well they are readily observable in Swedish planning practices in general and the empirical material of the thesis in particular. This means that there are many planning theories that I will completely overlook but which still place ideas and meanings about democracy at the center of their concern, including and perhaps especially “agonistic” planning theories (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010; Hillier, 2002). I will also not explore the explicitly *spatial* dimensions of democracy, a relationship that is quite well theorized in the political geography literature (e.g., Barnett & Bridge, 2013; Massey, 1995). Furthermore, a below discussed “disciplining” dimension of planning—aimed at creating a supposedly “democratic” consciousness—will only briefly be intimated in the analysis of planning theories. But even then, it will be in relation to a post-modern critique of planning which sees at as a tool for oppression and social control (i.e., “the dark side of planning,” see Yiftachel, 1998). But again, my aim is to explore and stress the *contested* meanings ascribed to democracy in the planning field, not to present a complete index of the relationship.

In relation to empirical material, the research is delimited by its specific context: Swedish local authority land use planning. Below, I present the material’s context relative to Western planning and democratic governance more broadly, along with some key background details regarding the three case studies of the thesis.

Swedish local authority planning

Newman and Thornley (1996) locate the Swedish planning system under the legal and administrative system of the “Scandinavian family”

2. This also means that I will generally treat the constitutive elements in the relationship between “democracy and planning” as an empirical question to be explored, including whether democracy constitutes the subject or object in the relationship and the relative prepositions between the two (e.g., planning *for* democracy, planning *in* democracy, democracy *for* planning, etc.).

(p. 63). It is distinguished from other European systems (e.g., British, Napoleonic, Germanic, etc.) by how far it has decentralized its planning functions, with national planning reduced to a minimum and regional planning often limited to transport infrastructure. Accordingly, in Sweden, land use planning is firmly placed within the ambit of the municipality. This sovereignty is broadly expressed through the so-called “municipal planning monopoly” where, under the legally binding “detailed development plan” (*detaljplan*, i.e., zoning) and non-binding, visionary “comprehensive plan” (*översiktsplan*), municipalities are granted the right to specify all land use within their borders, regardless of landownership (Blücher 2006; Strömgren, 2007).

In Strömgren’s (2007) study of the Swedish political planning debates from the 1940s and onwards, he highlights how the Swedish planning system is strongly informed by the *rational process view* of planning (e.g., Faludi, 1973, 1987). This means that while the system is underpinned by a strong expectation that plans, plan-making, and planners can productively steer urban development towards a broadly defined “public interest,” planning itself is fundamentally treated as a political process. Accordingly, virtually all decision-making (or “taking”, see Faludi, 1987) around land use and urban development ultimately falls within the ambit of elected representatives—either through the Municipal Council, or by delegation through planning councils, or both.

Indeed, the norm around parliamentary, representative democracy is understood to be exceptionally strong in Sweden (Karlsson, 2012; Strömgren, 2007), and international comparisons show that it enjoys relatively high levels of public trust towards established democratic institutions (e.g., Andersson et al., 2018; SOU, 2016). But once “the prototype of the Social Democratic Corporatist State” (Lewin, 1994, p. 59), Sweden’s distinctive mixture of pluralism and consensus culture is generally perceived to be in sharp decline (Lindvall & Sebring, 2005; Newman & Thornley, 1996). And, like many other Western nation-states, it has also been the target of a crisis of legitimacy in representative institutions (SOU, 2000, 2016).

Interestingly, planning has since long been treated by public authorities as a key instrument in strengthening and promoting Swedish democracy. In some readings, planning in Sweden (and in the West more broadly) emerged at the turn of the 20th century in the face of strong organizations of the working-class poor, and it was deployed as an instrument to, in a sense, “discipline” them into liberal democratic subjects (Deland, 2001, p. 117). And while planning also served as a key instrument in the postwar expansion of the Swedish welfare state, even

then it was simultaneously treated as a means to shape a more desirable and “democratic” Swedish consciousness (see Segerstedt, 1944). The assumption was that suburban neighborhood housing which emphasized community would promote a collective group identity over a totalitarian mass identity (Franzén & Sandstedt, 1993).

Alongside the regulatory planning framework, public landownership constitutes another important instrument used by Swedish municipal authorities to steer urban development. This is particularly the case for the City of Stockholm, which served as the empirical context for one of the three case studies of the thesis.

Municipal landownership and urban development

A major source of interest in Paper II (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018b) and III (Metzger & Zakhour, 2019) centered on the changing roles and functions between the *regulatory planning framework*, stipulated by national legislation under public law, and the management of *municipally owned land*, which instead largely comes under the sphere of private law and freedom of contract (see further Olsson, 2018). Compared to many other Western states, Sweden enjoys relatively high levels of municipal landownership, enabling them as private legal subjects to more readily compel development (Caesar, 2016; Olsson, 2018).

Indeed, municipal landownership in Sweden was also one of the key instruments used in the expansion of the Swedish welfare state (Blücher 2006; Bodström, 1994). Via land sales and leasing rights, public administrations granted developers an option to develop on public land, encapsulated through the so called “land allocation agreement” (*markansvinning*). At the same time, this municipal instrument was often *subordinate* to the regulatory planning process; until the 1990s, the land allocation was more or less a formality that, similar to a building permit, would often be granted to a developer *after* a detailed development plan was already in place (Bodström, 1994; Caesar, 2016). Furthermore, neither the municipalities’ purchase price of land nor its exchange value on the market would have much formal influence on its management (Bodström, 1994). On the contrary, during the postwar period, a central impetus behind the municipal land banks was to curtail land speculations and market fluctuations so as to pave the way for widespread production of affordable housing (Blücher, 2006; Bodström, 1994).

Both the agency ascribed to the Swedish planning framework and the privileging of the “use value” of public land changed quite radically from the 1990s and onwards. Where the land allocation had previously functioned as a means to distribute developments rights after the estab-

ishment of the regulatory plan, now it typically serves as the first instrument deployed by public administrations when negotiating development (Caesar, 2016). Additionally, the privileging of the exchange value of public land has now become deeply embedded in the finance structure of municipal planning (Caesar, 2016; Cars & Thune-Hedström, 2006).

There are many causes for this transformation. These include a widespread reorientation of the planning impetus away from the provision of housing for workers and towards urban entrepreneurial growth strategies aimed at attracting business and capital (Forsell, 2008; Loit, 2014; Olsson, 2018; Ramberg, 2016). But in the City of Stockholm, the sale of public land and the privileging of its exchange value was also motivated by the State's withdrawal from the housing sector, making the City increasingly reliant on the revenue generated from leases and land sales to finance municipal commitments associated with urban development (e.g., water and sewage lines, streets, parks, schools, etc.). One effect of this transformation is a consequent "projectification" of the City's urban development process, whereby much of the regulatory planning process has become byproduct of the private law contracts drawn up between developers and the City.

In the cover essay, I return to the case and the conflicts generated within the City of Stockholm's planning administrations due to these changes. In particular, I will be examining the meanings ascribed to democracy among the two actor-groupings who are, on the one hand, in charge of the regulatory planning framework and, on the other, the City-owned land. Next, I provide some context to participatory planning arrangements in Sweden, which constituted another of the case studies of the thesis.

Participatory planning arrangements

As stressed earlier, the norm around representative democracy is strong in Sweden. But it has not gone unchallenged and calls for more public influence in urban governance has largely remained a permanent item in planning and policy debates since the 1960s. As Strömngren (2007) has shown, many of the government inquiries into new planning legislation from that point on strongly resonate with participatory democratic ideals, with the early ones explicitly coming out in favor of subjecting planning decisions to more public debate and even concrete citizen influence. These suggestions, however, were met with substantial skepticism over the years, as they were understood to be in direct conflict with the representative model (Henecke & Khan, 2002; Strömngren, 2007).

With the Planning and Building act of 1987, public participation was eventually introduced in the planning legislation through the legally mandated “stakeholder consultation” (*samråd*). But they were ultimately conceived as advisory in nature: aimed at improving rather than overriding the decisions of elected representatives; expediting rather than procrastinating the planning process; and foregrounding private (often property) interests rather than more collective concerns (Strömngren, 2007; see also, e.g., de Carvalho, 2015; Listerborn, 2015).

Today the majority of municipalities also practice so called “citizen dialogues” where the public is invited to participate in the development processes of plans, locations, vision programs, and steering documents (SOU, 2016). However, case studies in Sweden tend to suggest that concrete influence in urban governance is rarely at stake in these activities (e.g., Monno & Khakee, 2012; Wiberg, 2018)—partly due to the strong norms around representative forms of decision-making (Henecke & Khan, 2002; Tahvilzadeh, 2015).

The case study in the thesis, which resulted in Paper IV (Zakhour, 2020), concerned the experiences and expectations of citizens who had participated in such arrangements in three municipalities in Stockholm County: *Norrtälje*, *Täby*, and *Järfälla*. In the cover essay, I return to the case to elicit the specific democratic meanings produced through these experiences which, as will be shown, were shaped by expectations and demands that went well beyond having concrete influence in urban governance.

Public planning controversies

Finally, a third context of the empirical material, which corresponds to Paper I (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a), concerned a public planning controversy in the City of Stockholm. Sweden, and perhaps Stockholm particularly, has a long tradition of neighborhood mobilizations and citizen protest movements against urban redevelopment. Indeed, many trace the eventual introduction of stakeholder consultations in planning legislation directly back the radical politics of the 1960s and the urban movements that emerged out of a manifest discontent with Sweden’s expert-led modernist planning (Lindholm et al., 2015; Strömngren, 2007; Tahvilzadeh, 2015).

Today neighborhood mobilizations and protest movements are a ubiquitous part of Stockholm’s urban governance landscape; as is the urge among policy-makers (and researchers, see Brunet et al., 2020) to label such movements as self-serving or ill informed “NIMBY-groups” who favor their own interests over the needs of the citizenry at large.

There might well be a grain of truth to such claims. But planning scholars have aptly highlighted how such “labeling practices” (Inch, 2015, p. 412) often obfuscate legitimate critique towards both the substance and process of contemporary urban development—and the multiple business, professional, and political interests enmeshed in development (Inch, 2015; McClymont & O’Hare, 2008). From this perspective, in Stockholm, the upswing in public planning controversies could more productively be understood in relation the lack of concrete citizen influence afforded by the prescribed forms of participation and, furthermore, the above discussed “projectification” of planning and re-orientation towards an entrepreneurial growth strategy. It can also gainfully be understood against the backdrop of a state-sponsored “super-gentrification” (Hedin et al., 2012) of the City and its suburbs, with subsequent widespread rent spikes and fundamentally transformed local environments and communities (Baeten et al., 2017; Wåg, 2015).

In the cover essay, I foreground the contested meanings of democracy between two actor-groupings involved in one such planning controversy in Stockholm: a group of locals who mobilized against the redevelopment plan of old industrial district and the planners in charge of the plan. In a similar way to that of Grant’s (1994) “drama of democracy” above, these meanings eventually became an explicit source of conflict between the two actor-groupings—effectively turning democracy into an issue at stake in the controversy.

I will be providing further context and background to these three cases and their resulting papers. But here, it is sufficient to note that this broader empirical backdrop serves a suitable “critical case” (Flyvbjerg, 2006) for establishing the contested nature around the meaning of democracy in planning. Because even in Sweden where local authority planning is strongly informed by norms around the rational process view and representative democracy, it will still be possible to highlight the multiple democratic meanings harbored by its various actors.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE COVER ESSAY

As stated earlier, the thesis comprises four papers and this cover essay. The cover essay is essentially self-contained and can be read by itself; it covers the above research aim and questions. While the four papers serve as the “empirical material” for the second research question, most of the relevant information regarding their own empirical context is presented in the cover essay. If read collectively, however, the thesis aims to con-

tribute with knowledge on the meanings of democracy and planning more broadly.

In this Introduction chapter, I have established the broader research problem of the thesis and presented how I will address it in the cover essay. First, I highlighted how the meaning of democracy has only been scantily theorized in the planning field and the analytical challenges involved in such pursuits. Second, I presented the research aim and questions—to explore the contested meanings of democracy in planning theory and practice—along with how I will go about these tasks. Finally, I presented some key contextual details of the thesis’ empirical backdrop: Swedish local authority planning. The remainder of the cover essay is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 is dedicated to developing a theoretical framework for analyzing the meanings of democracy in planning. The first part explores the current controversies and disagreements about the meaning of democracy in the broader field of political science and political philosophy. Here, my ambition is to highlight the fundamentally contested nature of the meaning of democracy and to stress how the implications of these debates can be interpreted as “spilling into” planning—even if planning actors do not directly participate in them. In the second part of the chapter, I explore Pierre Rosanvallon’s work on democracy, which I then use to construct the theoretical framework in the third part. In Chapter 3 of the cover essay, this framework is deployed for the first research question: exploring the democratic meanings in the selected planning texts.

In Chapter 4, Methodology, I first present the overall research design of the thesis along with the philosophical and methodological considerations that have guided both the cover essay and the individual papers. In the second part, I present the concrete methods used and choices made in the production of the thesis’ empirical material.

Chapter 5 is a short summary of the papers where I stress some of their key findings and my individual contribution to them. In Chapter 6, I turn to the second research question: eliciting the meanings of democracy among the various actor-groupings studied in the papers. The cover essay is rounded off in Chapter 7 with a concluding discussion, which includes a summary and some key reflections for possible future research endeavors.

Theoretical Framework

As noted in earlier, “democracy” as a term is deeply riven with an indeterminacy about its meaning and referent. In David Held’s (2006) in-depth guide to democratic theory, he traces a spectrum from stringent semantic interpretations of the term where “*all* should govern, in the sense that all should be involved in legislating, in deciding on general policy, in applying laws and in governmental administration,” toward more loosely based interpretations where “rulers should act in the *interests* of the ruled” (p. 2, emphasis added). But even between such extremes, there is still indeterminacy regarding the constitution of “the people”: who they are, how they rule or are ruled, how their interests are determined, and so on.

A second indeterminacy results from the confusion about its referent. It can at once refer to a mode of government and political regime (Bobbio, 2005; Held, 2006); a normative ideal meant to be contrasted with a specific set of institutional arrangements (Dahl, 1998); a political and public activity (Marres, 2007; Rancière, 2014), and a discursive tradition (Laclau, 1990; Mouffe, 2000).

These ambiguities are further compounded by its contemporary paradoxical connotations. For some commentators, democracy today acts as something of an “empty signifier”; ambiguous and open enough to have reached the status of a mantra across the globe and the political spectrum (Brown, 2011, p. 44; see also Badiou, 2011). At the same time, and according to others, the term also carries an almost ubiquitous connotation with a tradition and political history that is distinctly Western and liberal in its narrative (Isakhan & Stockwell, 2011, 2012; Gagnon, 2014).

In the field of political science and political philosophy, there are thus fundamental ontological disagreements over the meaning of democracy. The purpose of this chapter is to develop a theoretical framework that can partly do justice to these disagreements but that

does not lose sight of the particularities of what democracy means in and for planning. Doing so will not only require moving partly beyond much of the established democratic theory. As will be shown, it will also entail moving beyond the term itself, its various qualifiers, and many of its associated institutions, since the struggles over and about democracy are not always clothed in such vocabulary.

In the first part, I explore the current controversies over the meaning of democracy in political science and political philosophy: from its “standard narrative” in a distinctly liberal and Eurocentric tradition to the ongoing attempts to challenge this narrative through an opening up of the term and its usage. These debates highlight how its meaning is part of an ongoing, contentious political struggle that ultimately plays out as part of its own nature. However, the normative-theoretical models these debates have produced leave much to be desired for analytically exploring its meanings in planning, especially since, as we saw, not all actors in the field explicitly engage with democratic theory as such.

Accordingly, in the second part, I explore some of the key points of Pierre Rosanvallon’s analytical-historical work on democracy. His thinking proves especially helpful in analytically eliciting democracy’s implicitly ascribed meanings owing to his emphasis on those democratic experiences and expressions that are not always explicitly rooted in the term itself or its established normative ideals.

Finally, in the third part I translate his thinking into a concrete theoretical framework. Here, my ambition is not to construct a theory of democracy as such, but rather to develop a framework that can explore and map out how *other* actors construct *their* democratic “theories”—and hence what they implicitly or explicitly ascribe the substantial meaning of democracy to be.

2.1 THE CONTESTED MEANINGS OF DEMOCRACY

In political science and political philosophy, the history of democracy as an ideal and political regime has a widely reproduced standard narrative. While this narrative concedes that “some form of democracy probably existed for tribal governments long before recorded history,” it firmly holds that democracy’s “most crucial developments occurred in Europe” (Dahl, 1998, pp. 10–11).

According to this narrative, the story of democracy is told to substantially begin in the assemblies of ancient Athens and the senate of the Roman Republic. Here, citizens began to share in collective decision making through complex mixtures of direct participation and political

representation by systems of lottery and vote. Then, following the decline of these regimes, “the course of democratic history would look like the path of a traveler crossing a flat and almost endless desert broken by only a few hills, until the path finally begins the long climb to its present heights” (Dahl, 1998, pp. 9–11).

These “hills” included some brief democratic experiments with local assemblies and proto-constitutions in, for instance, the Italian city-states and medieval England. But not until the American and the French revolutions did the specific conditions arise which would truly propel the idea of popular sovereignty to its current status. To accommodate the scale and conditions of the liberal nation-state, democracy’s foundational ideal in direct participation was abandoned in favor of an arithmetically designed representative system of rule. Democracy became synonymous with “liberal representative democracy,” a mode of government in which citizen preferences are arbitrated and mediated through electoral politics within the limits and frameworks set out by constitutions and the separation of powers.

Nevertheless, according to this narrative, Europe’s entanglements with fascism, Nazism, and Leninism during the early the 20th century came close to eradicating democracy all together. But the defeat of the Axis powers in World War II, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent global spread and diffusion of liberal democratic ideals and institutions eventually made “that century far and away the most flourishing period for democracy in human history” (Dahl, 1998, p. 145).

This textbook narrative, summarized here from Robert Dahl’s (1998) *On Democracy* (see also, e.g., Dunn, 2005; Held, 2006), has over the years come under pressure by “a whole ‘secret’ history, too big, too complex and insufficiently Western in character to be included in the standard narrative” (Isakhan & Stockwell, 2011, p. 1).

According to this broader, more complex narrative, the global reach and embrace of democracy over the past half-century was not necessarily premised on the advantages of the electoral-representative system emblematic of liberal democracy, but on the proliferation of extra-parliamentary institutions and other power-monitoring bodies that endeavored to make that system more accountable to public scrutiny and control (e.g., Keane, 2009). Conversely, according to some scholars, many of the liberal dimensions associated with democracy today (suffrage rights, universal education, political equality) were not always advanced *within* the liberal representative system but *against* it—through hard-fought battles won by the working class, the marginalized, and the poor (e.g., Piven, 2006). In such alternative readings, the existential

threats posed by totalitarian ideologies during the early 20th century were not so much a resurgence of tyranny or dictatorship, as they were a natural extension and pathological conclusion of democratic modernity (e.g., Lefort, 1986).

It is also increasingly evident that the course of democratic history after the fall of Rome and before the democratic revolutions was anything but “a flat endless desert,” as many of the ancient Greek democratic ideals and practices were during this time kept alive and well, including by the medieval Islamic empires (e.g., Sadiki, 2012). Growing evidence also suggest that the pivotal origins of democracy found its way to ancient Athens not by primordial invention but through trade routes by way of the Phoenicians (Stockwell, 2011)—which in turn were precluded by various forms of self-governance practices and ideals across the city-states and empires of Mesopotamia (Isakhan, 2011). Indeed, many of the basic features we today identify with democracy more broadly, including equality, pluralism, free speech, and rule of law, have seemingly been independently practiced by a diverse range of cultures, civilizations, and tribal communities across the globe (e.g., Muhlberger & Paine, 1993).

From this perspective, a crucial source of conflict in these debates can productively be understood as a fundamental difference in where they locate the “essence” and supportive mechanism of democracy. Broadly conceived, much of the mainstream liberal narrative portrays democracy as a historically and spatially contingent phenomenon, making it dependent on a particular set of favorable (and often liberal) institutional conditions and arrangements. By contrast, in much of the counter-narrative, democracy is more akin to a proclivity or “universal value” (Sen, 1999) emblematic of human history, stretching back to pre-agrarian “campfire democracies” (Glassman, 1986) on to the many and recurring attempts by people to empower themselves and others against oppressive rule (Ranci ere, 2014). Here, then, democracy is understood to be more essentially rooted in the experiences and activities of a democratic populous, which emerges *despite* and *against* seemingly inhospitable conditions and institutions.

Indeed, scholars in the field often catalogue the normative theories and “models” of democracy into two broader camps that broadly mirror these two narratives (see Coppedge et al., 2011; Held, 2006; Isakhan & Stockwell, 2011). Most of the mainstream models fall under the earlier recounted liberal representative narrative. These include, for instance, the *minimalist* model in which the perceived irrationalities and totalitarian proclivities of a “mass society” compels the circumscription of

citizen influence to periodic elections (e.g., Schumpeter, 1943/1976); the *pluralist* model that instead stresses how the oppressive potential of executive power compels a restriction and decentralization of government institutions, often through strengthened civic institutions and constitutional laws (e.g., Dahl, 1961); and the *majoritarian* model where the perceived biases in decentralized democracies towards elites and special interests demand more centralized systems of rule (e.g., Schattschneider, 1942/2004).

Democratic models in the second, more radical camp draw more on the counter-narrative. Here, the *participatory* model tends to be catalogued, where the perceived deficiencies of mediating forms of representation informs a demand for greater citizen involvement and popular control (e.g., Pateman 1970); but also the *deliberative* model where the perceived crudeness in which citizen interests are aggregated via electoral politics require them to be complemented with decision-making processes that emphasize reason and cooperation over narrow self-interests (e.g., Gutmann & Thompson, 1996).³

What's in a name?

It is crucial here to note that these growing controversies over the defining features of democracy are not simply semantic debates over philosophical abstractions. Beyond facilitating productive debates regarding the nature of democracy—its limits and potentials, its history and its prospects—the normative models discussed above also serve as a critical basis for measuring the performance of existing democratic regimes, so as “to mark progress or regress on this vital matter, to explain it, to reveal its consequences, or to affect its future course” (Coppedge et al., 2011, p. 247). Indeed, every year billions of dollars in foreign aid aimed towards “advancing democracy” in the developing world are dependent on which features deserve its label (Coppedge et al., 2011).

Furthermore, when such features are delimited by the discourses established by the standard narrative recounted above, then those whose experiences and histories fall outside of it often come to be regarded as underserving of democracy. As Isakhan and Stockwell (2011) have aptly observed, this pattern is evident in how the global uptake of the Western liberal democracy has long been treated “as a sign of the merits of this model and as a vindication of European hegemony” whereas resistance or failure to embrace it is portrayed as “the inability of non-Europeans

3. However, some scholars firmly locate deliberative democratic theory under the mainstream liberal representative tradition (e.g., Pateman, 2012), and others suggest that deliberative theory seeks to “break the mould” between the two camps (Held, 2006, p. 4).

to grasp the complexity of democracy and of their preference for violence, disorder and autocracy” (p. 9).

The controversies over its meaning can thus be taken as indicative of its *anti-essentialist* nature, where competing definitions are deployed by actors as part of broader political struggles with corresponding implications. This is a line of reasoning that has been picked up by parallel developments in post-foundational thought, where disagreements about the meaning of democracy are situated along a deeper struggle that ultimately plays out as part of its own nature. It is along these ontological grounds that post-foundational theorists insist that that “there is democracy as long as there exists the possibility of an unlimited questioning” (Laclau, 1990, p. 187); that the “very moment of its realization would coincide with its disintegration” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 32); and that “the only thing that grounds or founds democracy is an absence” (Nancy, 2011, p. 66). And why they speak of “democracy to come” (Derrida, 2004); and why it must always transgress its defined forms and be “scandalous” to survive (Rancière, 2014).

What these theorists highlight is that the contested meaning of democracy has deep implications for the broader experimentation with and development of democracy; making such struggles a critical object of study even in fields not directly involved in these conceptual debates. To relate this more directly to the aim of this study, it highlights a need for a theoretical framework that can partly capture these broader fundamental disagreements around the meaning of democracy while simultaneously doing justice to its meaning among actors in planning.

From that perspective, the various normative-theoretical models of democracy discussed above leave much to be desired for a number of reasons. First, there are obvious epistemological difficulties with using models that broadly refer to *regime types* for an analysis of the substantial meanings ascribed to the democracy in planning, an activity or field that could be said to operate under such regimes. Second, since my ambition is not to contrast and compare normative democratic ideals against planning activity, but to examine planning actors’ normative ideals—or meanings—it also calls for more normatively “agnostic” understandings of democracy than those facilitated by the models (see e.g., Metzger et al., 2017). And finally, since not all actors in planning engage with democratic theory as such, the models themselves likely fail to do justice to those democratic meanings not preceded by the signifier itself, its established qualifiers, or many of its given institutions—but which nonetheless may have significant impact on democracy’s broader

experimentation in its attempt to understand itself. Simply put, not everything about democracy is in its name.

In the next part, I discuss Pierre Rosanvallon's analytical-historical understanding of democracy. His work is also rooted in the post-foundational tradition. But, as will be shown, he largely eschews assumptions about deep ontological structures riven by "absence" in favor of tracing historically manifest experiences of democratic meanings and conflicts—including among those actors who do not directly engage with the term itself. Accordingly, I will be using his work not to construct a normative theory of democracy but, rather, as a starting point to construct an analytical framework in which to analyze planning actors' normative and partially implicit meanings ascribed to democracy.

2.2 AN ANALYTICAL-HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF DEMOCRACY

Rosanvallon's political thought owes much to that of his teacher, renowned post-foundational theorist Claude Lefort. Lefort (1986) saw the disappearance of the monarch, the personified exterior symbol of power that had previously organized society, as the moment in which the central place of power became—in his famous expression—"empty" (p. 279), thus marking the founding moment of modern democracy. Without power attached to any particular body or person, democracy became a regime constituted by its own uncertainty. From this uncertainty, a "symbolic divide" emerged between, on the one hand, democracy's ideal *self-representation* of a unified society made up of free and equal individuals and, on the other, *actually existing* democracy—a society constituted by conflict and heterogeneity.

But for Lefort, the paradox at the heart of modern democracy was that the same *voluntarist* pursuit for a more democratic society—the drive to finally close its symbolic divide so as to effectively achieve "real" democracy—was also what birthed its pathological twin regime. Totalitarianism, the moment in which the idea of "the people" become one with government, state, and society, emanated from the traumatic experience of a fractured social body and vacuous place of power within democracy. Thus, for Lefort (2006), the birth democracy also gave rise to a permanent temptation "to deny social division in all its forms, and to give society a *body* once more" (p. 167, emphasis in original).

Much of Rosanvallon's (2006, 2008, 2011) work has largely been aimed at empirically charting the conflicts and tensions resulting from this constitutive uncertainty at the heart of modern democracy. But in doing so, he expands upon and nuances the understanding of the core

ideological components of democratic thought throughout history. Beyond what Lefort identified as the *voluntarist*, and sometimes totalitarian temptation to achieve democracy by denying its own foundational premise, Rosanvallon's work identifies how elements of *rationalism* and *liberalism* also acts as paradoxical expressions of democracy; both supporting it and denying its constitutive indeterminacy (see Moyn, 2006).

According to Rosanvallon, these three ideological components—voluntarism, rationalism, and liberalism—are regularly mobilized by actors to pre-empt the political conflict, uncertainty, and plurality constitutive of democracy's figurative empty place. But crucially, as noted in the Introduction, these responses are not always explicitly rooted in their corresponding ideologies or, for that matter, deployed towards realizing predefined democratic ideals. As Rosanvallon explains it, "living democracy never measures itself against an ideal model; rather, it seeks to solve problems" (2008, p. 25). Accordingly, the responses can more productively be understood as implicitly deployed "fixes" to democracy's inner void and, moreover, against the perceived pathologies of the other ideological components and their corresponding responses. Moreover, according to Rosanvallon, these democratic responses can be empirically charted by how their relational antagonism fosters and deepen a set of relatively constant questions, dilemmas, and contradictions across the history of democracy, where competing meanings ascribed to democracy and how to solve its foundational problems repeatedly clash with one another. More specifically, these responses—or democratic meanings—manifest in how actors regularly come to assume the roles of "guardians of the temporalities of the political" (2006, p. 208), even if they do not state their roles in those terms themselves. In other words, Rosanvallon's thinking will prove especially helpful in teasing out democratic meanings among actors who are not directly or explicitly engaged with democratic theory and its debates.

In this second part of the chapter, I first discuss how he conceptualizes the three central ideological components of democracy and how he enlists the above temporal dimension of democracy to better understand their conflicting expressions. I then move on to situate his methodological approaches to the study of democracy in relation to the broader literature discussed previously. In the third part of the chapter, his thinking is then mobilized to construct a theoretical framework for exploring democratic meanings or "guardianships" in planning.

Voluntarism, rationalism, liberalism

The democratic responses categorized under *voluntarism* concern the iterative attempts to reconcile what Lefort saw as the “symbolic division” between formal and actually existing democracy in order to effectively achieve “real” democracy. It finds its practical manifestations, according to Rosanvallon (2006), in the protest movements, public mobilizations, collective struggles, and revolutionary moments across the history of democracy by which the democratic idea of “the people” is made tangible through the “unmediated expression of a directly palpable will” (p. 93).

It is against this voluntarist temptation to *close* the divide between democracy and its self-representation that Rosanvallon (2006) positions the ideology of *rationalism* and the accompanying compulsion to *enlarge* the divide through mediating forms of representation. These opposite responses result from the perception that (as Lefort suggested) the voluntarist temptation, while often democratic in its aspirations, comes with a pathological tendency to slip democracy into negative populism and even totalitarian trajectories by denying the uncertainty, conflict, and plurality that is also constitutive of democracy.

Such iterative responses towards affective “will” with programmatic “reason” is an undercurrent of democracy that has dogged its history since ancient times.⁴ But rationalism as an ideology is largely a product of the Enlightenment and, according to Rosanvallon, deeply intertwined with the modern history of democracy. In this modern rationalism, he catalogues certain underlying tenets partly central to the liberal tradition, for instance, rule of law, representative procedures, the establishment of opposing checks and balances, and which are thus premised on *negating* the power of popular sovereignty. But Rosanvallon (2006) also identifies a type of *positive* rationalism premised on “the erection of a ‘good’ power, a rational power, one grounded in science” (p. 128) and which regularly serves as a justification and expansion of government institutions and administrative authorities.

Accordingly, for some, rationalism comes attached to an even stronger compulsive tendency to extinguish plurality and political conflict than that of voluntarism, but this time on the basis of scientific utopianism and through the empowerment of a supposedly capable technocratic elite. Thus, for Rosanvallon (2006), much of the history of modern democracy can productively be understood as a kind of constitutive and manifest tension between “the search for *rational politics*

4. Rancière (2014), for instance, refers to these responses more directly as “the hatred of democracy.”

on the one hand, and the exaltation of *cultures of voluntarism* on the other” (p. 55, emphasis in original).

But across these two central ideological components of democracy, Rosanvallon (2006) traces a third: *liberalism*. Under this expansive and variegated ideology, he catalogues a number of central tenets of modern democracy, including the protection of individual liberties and minority rights—as well as a forceful, almost deterministic obligation to plurality and political conflict. Accordingly, these political dimensions of liberalism are strongly conducive to modern democracy’s founding ideal: power as an empty place “which *no* group can claim to be the owner” (2008, p. 113).

Nevertheless, in liberalism Rosanvallon (2006) also identifies a kind of capitalist utopian fantasy aimed at a “global refusal of the political” (p. 149), which also emerges as a response to the perceived pathological tendencies in the two democratic expressions above. Its most prominent theoretical author is, of course, Friedrich Hayek who Rosanvallon writes, “thought he saw no intermediate position between the spontaneous order of the market and totalitarian dictatorship.” (p. 197). But Rosanvallon traces the genealogical history of this utopian thinking across a range of other liberal thinkers as well, dating back to Adam Smith. In these more economic interpretations of liberalism, the market acts as an automatic social harmonizer of society and “allows for transfer and redistribution to occur without needing the will of individuals in general and of elites in particular to play any role” (p. 150)—thus eliminating the prerequisite for a political authority and place of power altogether.

According to Rosanvallon, then, democracy’s constitutive gap between itself and its self-representation nourishes a set of incommensurable and competing responses aimed towards closing the divide, enlarging it, or circumventing it altogether. But he is clear to point out that in practice, the same force may produce a parallel expression of two or more moods: “In twentieth-century communism, for example, the praise of supposedly authoritative experts in management went together with the most exacerbated voluntarism” (Rosanvallon, 2006, p. 55).

To further highlight their complex and sometimes interrelated expressions he enlists an often-neglected temporal dimension to the study of democracy.

Guardianships over the democratic temporalities

According to Rosanvallon (2006), many of democracy’s recurring conflicts and dilemmas can be understood as a kind of “conjunction of its

different temporalities” (p. 208) in how different democratic responses and positions are awarded different forms of democratic legitimacy according to the time horizons which they seek to safeguard.

On the one end, there is the *instantaneous* expression of democracy, often embodied in the voluntarist pursuits to progress democracy as a societal project through episodic public actions and revolutionary events. At the same time, this attraction for the *short-term* is only made possible by a utopian commitment to invent and establish a *long-term* democratic future on to the present. As Rosanvallon (2006) reasons, emphasis on “the people as event” (p. 92) is inherently attractive to many who pursue “real” democracy since it symbolizes a moment in which the constitutive tension between democracy and its self-representation is fully resolved, if only temporarily: “In action, as indissociably lived and narrated, the people is given tangibility by what it makes happen; sociological doubts are silenced by the evidence of behaviors and activities on the move” (p. 92).

Against this, and at the other end of the temporal spectrum, Rosanvallon (2006) positions the *protracted* expression of democracy. This democratic temporality is broadly embodied through the more rationalist responses highlighted earlier. It is expressed through, for instance, rule of law, constitutions, rational government bureaucracy, and other institutions directed towards safeguarding the past and existing democratic arrangements. But conversely, this attraction for the *long-term* comes rooted with an opposite tendency to chain the future with the *immediate* commitments of the present, acting as a kind of “radical deep freeze of the political” (p. 55).

Thus, democracy is susceptible to at least two kinds of temporal challenges according to Rosanvallon: “excessive immediacy for the concerns of the long term and excessive duration for the urgencies of the moment” (p. 49).

Broadly conceived, then, the temporal spectrum of democracy charts a relative difference between a kind of fast, transformative democracy geared towards progressing it as a societal project; and a slow, incremental democracy directed towards maintaining its established institutions and arrangements.⁵ But the differences can also productively be

5. Bruno Latour (2007) has discussed political enactments against a similar temporal perspective. However, he conceptualizes it as a kind of “trajectory” or “moment” in the life of political issues. These political moments range from discoveries and innovations in the scientific realm that redefine our societal relations; to the moment in which they are rendered controversial through the attention of an unsettled public; on to the point where political issues have been so thoroughly “naturalized” in the daily routines of “vast and silent bureaucracies” that they “rarely make the headlines” (p. 817).

understood in relation to the fundamental disagreement between the two camps discussed earlier. The counter-narrative could be said to draw on a more voluntarist understanding of democracy to express a more immediate temporal perspective centered on the activities and demands of a democratic populous; whereas the established narrative draws more on a rationalist and partly liberal understanding that center-stage more protracted and institutional expressions of democracy.

But importantly, as discussed earlier, Rosanvallon does not conceptualize these conflicts around the meaning of democracy as always explicitly rooted in their corresponding ideologies. Rather, more often they come to be deployed as responses against the perceived pathologies of the others, which broadly translate into implicitly assumed guardianship roles over democracy's different temporalities. As Rosanvallon (2006) explains it, this perspective "allows one a framework for understanding the meaning of conflicts among militants, journalists, representatives, executives, intellectuals, or judges [and we could add, planners]" since "each of these figures of the political scene implicitly inhabits the role of guardian of one among other democratic temporalities, thanks to the very fact of the particularity of function of each" (p. 208).

Rosanvallon himself does not provide much in the way of a specific framework or a formal methodology for analyzing such conflicts around democratic meanings and temporalities.⁶ But he does offer some suggestions. These are presented next, before I move on to the actual framework used in the cover essay.

A controlled empathy with democracy

Given Rosanvallon's (2006) quite sober reading of democracy, one that "takes as its privileged object the lack of fulfillment—the fractures, the tensions, the limits, and the oppositions—that have been emblematic of democracy" (p. 46), it might be tempting to position him along the more skeptical and "minimalist" understandings of democracy discussed earlier. But for Rosanvallon, "none one of these contradictions can be ignored for anyone who wants to understand human emancipation, for each utopia is permanently destined to criticism from its opposite" (p. 158).

He thus resolutely rejects much of the methodological approaches upon which the standard narrative of democracy has been built, where one stands on top of "its present heights" (Dahl, 1998, p. 11) to look

6. In Michael Dormal's (2019) attempt to pin down the core elements of Rosanvallon's method of conceptual history, he writes that Rosanvallon has deliberately refrained from formalizing his approach—preferring instead its practical demonstration so as to presumably counter excessively dogmatic approaches to the study of democracy and history.

down upon its progressive story of successes—“as if the democratic idea already existed from the outset, prevented from full realization only by the ambient circumstance” (Rosanvallon, 2006, p. 69). Such fixed viewpoints, where “the past is judged from the standpoint of a present that is not itself historicized” (p. 70), inevitably inscribes it with a kind of destined narrative while eschewing democratic meanings and histories that fall outside of it.

Accordingly, he is deeply critical of many of the democratic models emblematic of the standard narrative—which often either begin from idealized theory or settle on negative conceptions. In Rosanvallon’s (2008) reading of democracy history, voluntarist pursuits for emancipation never truly rest content, nor are its concluding resolutions, however fleeting they may be, typically arrived at theoretically. But he is also skeptical towards the explanatory merits of the democratic theories emblematic of the counter-narrative and where many of the meanings people may ascribe to traditional liberal-representative democratic institutions are taken for granted or all-out ignored (Rosanvallon, 2011).

From this perspective, Rosanvallon (2006) advocates for a kind of “controlled empathy” towards the study of democracy (p. 66). As he explains it, this entails “reconstructing the way actors made sense of their situations, rediscovering the affinities and the oppositions from which they planned their actions, drawing the genealogies of possibility and impossibility that implicitly structured their horizon,” while still remaining distanced enough “to understand the blind spots and the contradictions of actors and authors” (p. 66). For Rosanvallon (2011), such an approach to the analysis of democracy is “the only way to overcome the clash between arrogant Eurocentrism and suspect ‘differentialist’ rhetoric” since it “points toward a social organization that is still a work in progress, which cannot claim to have been fully achieved anywhere” (p. 226).

But relating this more directly back to the study’s aim, this type of controlled yet open reading of people’s understanding of democracy was also the kind of normatively agnostic approach that was needed.⁷ Furthermore, his thinking around democracy also helps in exploring its more *implicitly* ascribed meanings among actors, as it proceeds from the

7. Of course, *all* theory is more or less normative, especially so when it relates to highly controversial topics such as “democracy.” And it should be noted that great parts of Rosanvallon’s expansive work on democracy has a decidedly normative ring to it as well. However, for the purpose of the cover essay, I draw more on the analytic-historical dimensions of his work, which is on the “lesser” side in terms of normative and prescriptive measures (but see the Methodology chapter where I discuss other ways his thinking has been applied in the papers of this thesis).

reasoning that democratic experiences are far from always clothed in such a vocabulary.⁸ By making such implicit meanings and experiences explicit to democracy, Rosanvallon (2006) likens the researcher's task to that of a poet or novelist in that each of them must in their own way "remain open to the contradictions of the world and never allow concepts to exhaust the density of the real" (p. 66).

Along these lines, Rosanvallon (2006) also reasons that the study of democracy cannot be limited to its "great texts" (p. 155). While they can be considered as "poles around which the questions raised in a period of history as well as the answers that it sought to offer crystallized," he reasons that "it is also necessary to analyze the way society at large addressed the same question, looking at pamphlets, iconography and songs" (p. 63).

In the Methodology chapter, I will return to how this perspective relates more directly to the second research question: to examine the meanings of democracy in planning practice. But it can here be noted that it points to the possibility—and importance—of connecting the "great texts" in planning theory with experiences in practice in order to engender a deeper understanding of the relationship. Now, however, I move on to discuss the actual framework for exploring the meanings of democracy in planning.

2.3 A FRAMEWORK FOR EXAMINING THE MEANINGS OF DEMOCRACY

Having presented some of the core concepts and ideas in Rosanvallon's approach to the study of democracy, I now use them to construct framework for exploring the different meanings ascribed to it planning. As stated earlier, the idea is not to construct a substantive theory or model of democracy—either in its ideal or in its actually existing form. Rather the framework will help map out how other actors construct their understandings of democracy within a conceptual and relational space—and hence, what they implicitly or explicitly ascribe the substantial meaning of democracy to be.

A visual heuristic of the constructed framework is shown in Figure 1 below. Democracy's figurative inner void, or "empty place," is circumscribed by democracy's three central ideological components. Together they form a triangle, inside of which it is possible to locate various

8. As a historical example of this, for the greater part of the Enlightenment period, the term "democracy" largely had pejorative connotations and was associated with an archaic and disorderly stage of political history. Accordingly, in France and America, the term did not fully enter political and popular discourse until around half a century after their respective "democratic" revolutions (Rosanvallon, 2009).

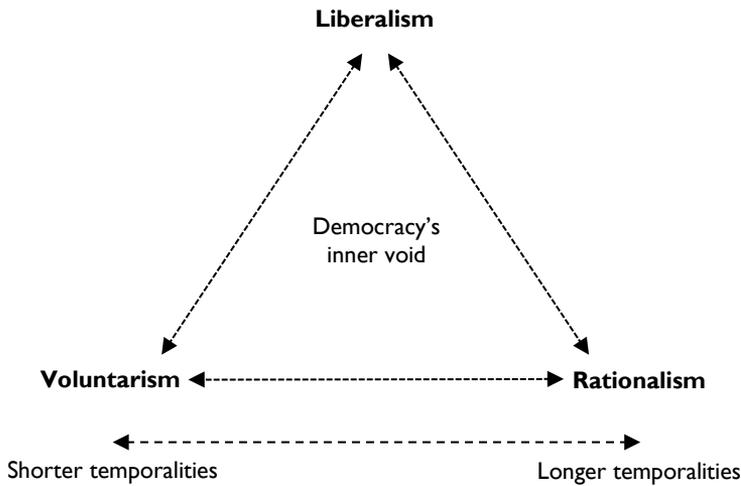


Figure 1: The field of tensions between democracy’s ideological components and the democratic temporalities they express

implicit and explicit meanings ascribed to democracy. Each of the three ideological components are mobilized by actors in response to the structural gap between democracy and its self-representation, and each of them are deployed in the attempt to fill, replace, or circumvent its empty place—only to be resisted by the others. Accordingly, together they form a kind of politically charged “field of tensions” where competing meanings about democracy and how to solve its foundational problems repeatedly clash and conflict with one another.

Cutting across the triangle, between *voluntarism* and *rationalism*, is the temporal dimension to democracy, which emphasizes the structural tensions further. As discussed earlier, voluntarist pursuits for emancipation and popular sovereignty tend to be expressed through shorter, instantaneous “guardianship” of democracy—where the past is perceived as an impediment to the establishment of a democratic tomorrow. Conversely, understandings of democracy that emphasize the role of rationalism are often committed to more protracted guardianships as expressed in rule of law, constitutions, and so on. In the figure, *liberalism* is located along an intermediate position to emphasize its variable and ambivalent temporal guardianship. Liberal understandings of democracy can thus be expressed through an excessive immediacy emblematic of the short-term horizons of market logics, but also through longer temporalities and via the institutional settings and state protections that set those logics in place.

Along these lines, it could be possible to envision a position which espouses ideas regarding individual liberty and autonomy typical of *liberalism*, combined with a strong emphasis on the public-centered and, at times, collectivist ideas emblematic of *voluntarism* to form, for instance, a kind of “anarcho-syndicalist” understanding of democracy—and thus locate it along the upper-left part of the triangle. Or to imagine a distinctly liberal position that strongly rejects the collectivist dimension of voluntarism in favor of espousing the merits of individual *rationality* conducive to a free market, and which thus perhaps harbors an “anarcho-capitalist” understanding of democracy instead—located somewhere in the upper-right parts of the triangle. But it would be more difficult to imagine a coherent theory or understanding of democracy in which all three, or even two of the ideological components in their most extreme forms are held simultaneously. This is because the merits of each of them, as we saw, are often advanced against the perceived pathologies of the others.⁹

Drawing on Rosanvallon’s contention that each “democratic utopia” is destined to criticism from its opposite, the framework thus proceeds from the assumption that certain incommensurable dimensions exist between many of the possible meanings ascribed to democracy—an irreconcilability that in turn shapes the meanings themselves. Accordingly, by tracing which perceived pathologies actors presume to be responding against, it is also possible to locate meanings of democracy not explicitly rooted in the term itself, its ideological components, or its established normative ideals. But this assumption can already be “tested” though the more explicitly ascribed meanings to democracy among the earlier discussed normative models.

For instance, if voluntarist pursuits for “real” democracy is perceived to slip society into totalitarian temptations, then individual liberty and programmatic reason serves, according to some, as a critical buffer against such trajectories (as stressed by e.g., the *minimalist* model of democracy). And if the exaltation of the cultures of rationalism forms the basis for authoritarianism and technocratic elitism, then strong civic

9. As might be observed, the figure itself bears some resemblance to the liberal “trichotomy” between the State, the Market, and Civil society. This trichotomy goes by many names (e.g., the “Tittmusian triad”) and can broadly be traced back to the writings of Tocqueville who drew a distinction between civic and political associations for theorizing the supportive mechanisms of democracy (see also, e.g., Lipset, 1959). But in relation to the framework developed here, the construction of such triads could productively be understood as specific *normative* theories of democracy located somewhere *within* the figure. Perhaps closer to the liberal-rational axis since they often advance the merits of democracy based on the relative possibility for various liberal and governmental institutions to maintain this trichotomy.

organizations emblematic of liberalism is by others advanced as a potential solution (the *pluralist* model). And if an extreme competitive individualism emblematic of exacerbated tributes to liberalism threatens to extinguish social relations and depoliticize public needs not translatable into market demands, then empowering citizens against the structures of capitalism is by others promoted as its solution—either by more voluntarist forms of engagement (the *participatory* model); by stronger and more rational government machineries (the *majoritarian* model); or by both (the *deliberative* model).

Seen from this perspective, the framework not only helps with excavating and locating recurring positions and competing meanings ascribed to democracy. It also helps to better understand *why* they are competing by emplacing them in relation to the tensions, oppositions, and disappointments that have been endemic of the democratic project. It thus eschews normative ideals and destined narratives about democracy to better try to grasp why people come to harbor at times diametrically opposing views on what is ostensibly the same project.

At the same time, the framework should not be regarded as a kind of democratic “meta-theory,” able to apprehend and distinguish between *all* potential meanings ascribed to the concept. Instead, it simply approaches the subject from a different and more agnostic perspective than much of the established theories of democracy. From this perspective, the ascribed meanings produced through the framework are as contingent to the framework itself as they are to their corresponding authors.

Accordingly, it is important not to overstate the framework’s explanatory potential. As an example of this, arguments could be made for locating democratic meanings espoused in both 20th century communism (per Rosanvallon’s suggestion) and fascism somewhere close to the voluntarism-rationalism axis in the figure—despite their diametrically opposing ideological foundations. But where the framework fails in capturing such differences, it partly succeeds in explaining why, for instance, *liberal* treatments of democracy often crudely conflate these two ideological regimes as well: In such treatments the perceived pathologies of both regimes are often traced to a dangerous merger between exacerbated populism and rational bureaucratic machineries (e.g., Arendt, 1963/2006).

It should also be stressed, then, that the framework does not proceed from the assumption that the pathological dimensions of each of these three ideological components are necessarily true. Instead, I mobilize these pathologies to highlight how understandings of democracy are

often advanced *relationally* and *antagonistically*; against the perceived faults and deficiencies of other democratic meanings and expressions.¹⁰

Furthermore, the irreconcilable tension between these three ideological poles and the corresponding democratic meanings they produce should all be regarded as “ideal types.” For not only does a two-dimensional space significantly underappreciate the complexity in actors’ meanings, it also fails to capture the multiplicity in their positions. As will be discussed later on, people rarely harbor any definite, unambiguous conceptions about a given subject, and they can often slide between different ontological positions—or even hold multiple, conflicting positions simultaneously (see further Mol, 1999).

In sum then, there are many dimensions surrounding democracy that this framework is far too crude to sensibly do justice. It does not specify much about actually existing democracy—either as a mode of government, political regime, or discursive tradition, and so on. Nor does it say much about many of democracy’s “given” institutions (universal suffrage, constitutions, equality, public participation, etc.). Instead, the framework stresses the antagonistic tensions between three of modern democracy’s central ideological components and how those come to be expressed through competing “guardianships” over the temporalities of democracy. But as will be shown, it is partly this crudeness that allows one to elicit meanings about democracy not necessarily premised upon the term itself, its qualifiers, or the various institutions that what we generally associate with the concept. In the next chapter, I do so for planning thought.

10. It should also be clarified that Rosanvallón himself proceeds from the position that many of these pathologies are in fact an inherent part of their corresponding ideologies. He distinguishes these pathologies by how “they have always derived from a claim to realize democracy’s truth” and yet they have always served as “a reduction, polarization, or simplification of the structuring tensions and forms of indeterminacy that underpin the question of democracy” (2019, p. 35). But as stated earlier, in the cover essay I try to eschew Rosanvallón’s more normative contentions around what separates democracy from its “deceptions” (p. 35) in order to better grasp how other actors arrive at such distinctions.

Democratic Meanings in Planning Theory

This chapter is dedicated to the first research question of the study: exploring the meanings ascribed to democracy in planning theory. As noted in the Introduction, the aim of doing so is not directed towards presenting a complete index of this relationship. Rather, it is underpinned by the central argument of the thesis: that many of the conflicts and debates in planning have been nourished by competing views on the nature of democracy and how it connects to planning—often in ways that have been taken for granted or unexamined in the literature.

As I also stated in the Introduction, by bringing attention to this my point is twofold: to help clarify some of the fundamental conflicts in the debates; and furthermore, to challenge the dominant thinking in the literature that treats democracy as exclusively intrinsic to public involvement in, or action against urban governance—which is, as will be shown, a broadly *voluntarist* treatment of democracy. As I will also stress, even those thinkers who formulate planning approaches that undermine such pursuits can still sometimes be understood to do so on the bases of democratic concerns. Nevertheless, my intent is not to necessarily argue for the inherent democratic merits of such approaches, but rather to stress that even if our ambition is to challenge them, we need to understand what informs them.

The chapter begins with a short discussion on the rationale behind the selection of the specific planning theory texts that are analyzed. After examining their democratic meanings, the chapter is rounded off with some concluding reflections.

3.1 THE PLANNING THEORY TEXTS

As a basis for analysis, I have selected somewhat contemporary planning theories that have had strong resonance or can be readily observable in Swedish planning practices in general and the empirical material of the

thesis in particular. In relation to the former, Strömngren's (2007) study has aptly identified three broader schools of thought or "paradigms" that have informed Swedish planning debates. These include the rational process view of planning, a communicative or participatory planning paradigm, and a libertarian-inspired school of thought. But as discussed earlier, Strömngren highlights that the Swedish regulatory planning framework is characterized by a stability and continuity that is overwhelmingly underpinned by the first paradigm. However, as will be shown, if "Swedish planning practice" is expanded beyond its regulatory framework and its chief managers (i.e., the "urban planners") to also include practices and activities of other actor-groupings in charge of, or who come be involved in the broader urban development process, then both libertarian and more participatory ideas about planning are at least as prominent as the rational process view.

The specific planning *authors* within these three broader schools have been selected in relation to their relative influence according to some of the classic textbooks on planning theory (e.g., Allmendinger, 2017; Fainstein & DeFilippis, 2016; Taylor, 1998). Finally, the selection of the specific planning *texts* is based on how well they express some of the core ideas in these paradigms and how well they highlight the relative similarities and differences between each other in relation to the meanings they ascribe to democracy.

I also choose to catalogue these works under three other labels than Strömngren's identified schools in order to emplace them better in the theoretical framework developed earlier. To repeat, these labels and their respective works are *rationalist* treatments of planning (Chadwick, 1978; Faludi, 1987); *liberal* treatments (Pennington, 2002; Rittel & Webber, 1973); and *voluntarist* treatments (Fainstein, 2010; Healey, 1997; Purcell, 2016).

The analysis of the respective works emphasize what these authors identify as some of the fundamental democratic problems and contradictions of society at large or planning in particular; the role of planning in either exacerbating or resolving such problems; and how that translates into different types of "guardianships" over the temporalities of democracy.

These works are then located in Figure 2 below to visualize how they conceptualize the relationship between democracy and planning, and to highlight some of the core differences and similarities between them. In this sense, the analysis is guided by the theoretical assumptions developed previously: Normative models, theories, and meanings about

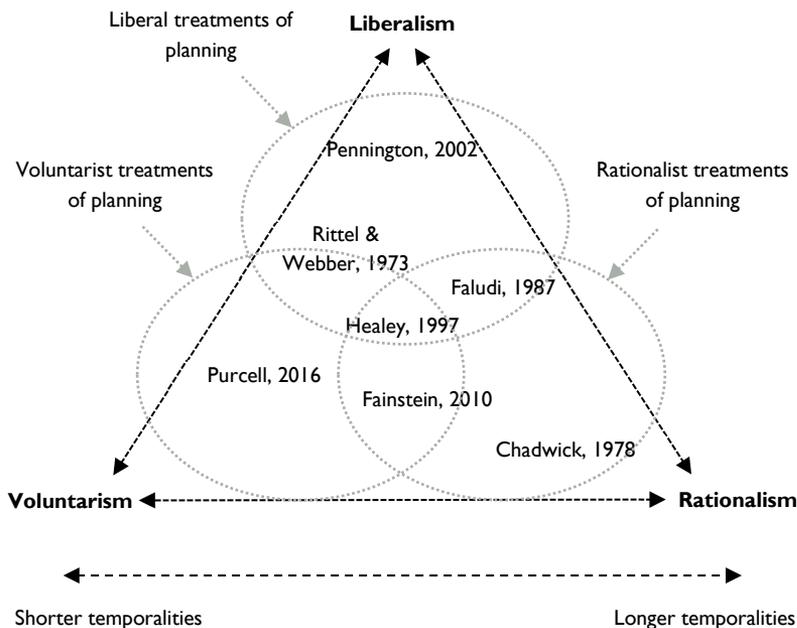


Figure 2: Democracy’s field of tensions and the positions of selected planning works within this space

democracy are often constructed in response to, and as a way to resolve some perceived pathology and deficiency in actually existing democracy.

In my reading of their work, I employ the kind of “controlled empathy” that Rosanvallon (2006) promoted for the study of democracy. More specifically, I employ a hermeneutically inspired “empathic” approach as outlined by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009). It eschews excessively critical and normatively grounded “overproblematizations” in favor of a better understanding of text “in terms of itself, of its own immanent standards and criteria, and more particularly of the original intentions behind it” (p. 105). At the same time, the approach recognizes that any ascribed meaning to the text is the result of interpretation and appropriation on part of the researcher. Thus, the idea is not to elicit the “true” meaning or intention behind these scholars’ works, nor to contrast and compare their understandings against established democratic theory, but rather to simply try and better understand their “democratic theories” of planning, and hence what they implicitly or explicitly ascribe the substantial meaning of democracy to be. It should also be duly noted that my emphasis is on the democratic meanings advanced in these specific planning *texts*, not on the meanings held by

their authors, which are at times so varied across their different works that I see little possibility to them justice.

As noted earlier, the relationship between democracy and planning is far from straightforward across these scholar's texts. For some theorists, democracy connects to the field of planning as a means to *democratize* it; for others planning is conceived as a means to progress or safeguard *democracy*, while others conceive of planning as an obstacle towards such pursuits; and for others still, democracy is conceived as both a *means* and an *end* of planning. It is these conflicting meanings of democracy in planning thought that I will later mobilize to explore and better understand the contested meanings in planning practice.

Below, however, I begin with exploring democratic meanings in rationalist treatments of planning, which is followed by liberal, and then voluntarist treatments. Each part begins with some introductory remarks on these broader theoretical treatments of planning before the selected works are analyzed. And each part is rounded off with a concluding summary.

3.2 RATIONALIST TREATMENTS OF PLANNING

Western planning thought is deeply premised upon ideas and assumptions around rationalism; on the belief that through knowledge and reason, the object of planning can be manipulated in a desired and premeditated direction (Allmendinger, 2017; Strömngren, 2007; Taylor, 1998). Nevertheless, across the broad range of critiques leveled at planning on account of “democracy” throughout the years, planning's claims to rationalism has undoubtedly been one of the prime targets (Allmendinger, 2017; Mukhtar-Landgren, 2012; Taylor, 1998). But, as will be shown, some of the more prominent scholars who have championed rationalist approaches to planning actually do so on the basis of a deep-seated concern for safeguarding established democratic arrangements.

The object of much of the criticism of rationalist approaches and treatments of planning has long been centered on its preoccupation with “instrumental rationality”—something of a “bogeyman” in the planning debates (Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998, p. 1979). In planning, the concept is often attributed to Karl Mannheim (1940) whose work on state-led economic planning advanced the Weberian distinction between a substantive and formal, or instrumental, rationality. Substantive rationality concerned the goals and ends of planning and was thus intrinsic to the sphere of politics, whereas instrumental rationality

concerned the means in which such ends are achieved and thus more emblematic of the bureaucratic sphere. Writing against the backdrop of early 20th century Europe and what he saw as “the irrational elements in mass society forc[ing] their way more and more into the sphere of politics” (1940, p. 63), Mannheim envisioned how the former sphere could sensibly be “mastered” through the instrumental rationality possessed by planners in their more neutral capacity as a kind of free-floating “intelligentsia” (1940, p. 101).

In other words, already in its early formulations, the perceived instrumental rationality possessed by planners ascribed them with an exceedingly strong mandate to override representative democratic arrangements and in some sense to “safeguard” democracy from itself—an understanding that has continued to inform much of the subsequent work in rationalist treatments of planning. It is observable, for instance, in the work of Meyerson and Banfield (1955), whose landmark study on housing policy in Chicago has been credited with introducing the rational process view into the planning literature (see Faludi, 1987, p. 28). Countering sustained liberal critique towards planning, they argued that rational planning “machines” served to “insulate traditional democratic values and institutions from the forces which unscrupulous demagogues using mass communications media can so easily unloose in a society deeply divided by ethnic, economic and other conflicts” (Meyerson & Banfield, 1955, p. 292). It is also prevalent in the “Chicago school” of urban planning which instilled in its prominent education program “a vision of people of science contributing to guide societal choices and to curb the irrational decisions of politicians” (Sarbib, 1983, p. 79).

But as a basis for analyzing democratic meanings in rationalist treatments of planning, I begin with George Chadwick’s (1978) work *A Systems View of Planning*, as it is slightly more contemporary yet still quite radical in its treatment; which is then followed by Andreas Faludi’s (1987) rational process view of planning.

Chadwick’s systems view

Chadwick popularized the systems approaches to planning in Britain in the early 1970s. These approaches were developed on the back of a broader critique of the earlier “physical design” view of planning, and drew on theories from emerging technical fields to stress the complex and dynamic interdependencies between human activity and physical environments (see Allmendinger, 2017; Taylor, 1998).

Chadwick (1978) also builds his systems view of planning on a critique of traditional planning, which he perceives to lack proper scientific

methods for understanding and manipulating the complex relationships between environmental, social, and economic processes. Against this, he contends that “planning can be seen, and *must* be seen, as dependent upon the application of scientific method to the problems of the real world” (p. 81, emphasis in original).

Chadwick (1978) defines systems as “parts that are connected to each other in some way” (p. 31), which in turn make up a whole, or a “set”. Importantly, in the real world, systems are “open,” in the sense that they are constantly “undergoing irreversible external (exogenous) changes in time, i.e. becoming” (p. 46). But despite their dynamism and complexity, Chadwick ascribes real world systems with some measure of probabilistic predictability, owing to how “man appears as an optimizing animal ... consciously seeking to modify nature as well as adjusting himself to nature’s phenomena” (p. 3). The task of planning, then, is to approximate the ideal connections of open systems through closed systems modelling, or as Chadwick puts it, “to concern ourselves with the optimisation of a real world system by seeking optimisation of the conceptual system” (p. 63).

The instrumental rationality Chadwick ascribes to planners thus proceeds from a *technical* expertise to model and intervene in complex fluid situations, as opposed to an earlier aesthetic expertise dedicated to the design of somewhat fixed urban environments. For Chadwick (1978), this also suggests a more strategic and flexible approach to plan-making than conventional “blueprint” planning (p. 319), one that can adapt to the feedback loops of open urban systems.

Interestingly, Chadwick (1978) ascribes so much scientific weight to this form of planning that he extends its purview to also encompass “goal formulation” of planning (p. 114). As he observes, “If the matter is approached firstly from the client end it seems very likely that, even with considerable difficulty, goals formulated will be exceptionally narrowly chosen, rigidly framed, and run the danger of being only politically, rather than socially, acceptable” (p. 123). This situation, he candidly explains, “throws a considerable responsibility upon the planner: he largely has to *determine the goals* of planning ... to *replace*, or to add to, the normal processes of social choice in a democracy” (p. 120, emphasis added).

Admittedly, Chadwick goes on to argue that there should be some kind of “goal-formulation dialogue” (p. 125) between planners and their clients, so as to avoid a somewhat “technocratic situation” (p. 152). But it is difficult not to interpret the above statement as anything other than that of planners’ supposed possession of instrumental rationality all but

overriding, or as Chadwick discloses, “replacing” established democratic politics.¹¹

Relating Chadwick’s work more directly to the framework, his arguments locates his work close to the *bottom-right* corner in Figure 2, being emblematic of a quite radical rationalist treatment of planning; one that could be seen as largely advanced against some of the perceived pathologies inherent in both the voluntarist and liberal dimensions of democracy. As Chadwick (1978) explains, “the political view is short, conditioned by the next election, by appeasing the electorate so far as possible—or appearing to do so” (p. 122). Thus, the goals of elected representatives may simply be “to stay in power”; and that of developers and property market actors “to maximise profit”; whereas the “public at large”—according to Chadwick—“do not consciously arrive at goals at all, but rather concern themselves with day-to-day norms and criteria” (pp. 122–123).

Consistent with his placement along the right-hand side of the figure, the temporal commitments role Chadwick ascribes to planners can thus be seen as a *protracted* guardianship of democracy. That is, one that stresses a slow, incremental, and flexible planning approach against what is perceived as the shortsighted goals and activities of other actor-groupings, including those of the traditional master-designer.

Faludi’s rational process view

A slightly more recent and, in the case of Swedish planning practice, more relevant theory that can be sorted under the category of rationalist treatments of planning has been developed by Andreas Faludi, one of the leading thinkers on the rational process view of planning (Allmendinger, 2017; Taylor, 1998). Much of the debates around Faludi’s brand of rationalism has been centered on his early work, particularly the equally celebrated and lambasted book *Planning Theory* (1973). But here, I use his subsequent book *A Decision-Centred View of Environmental Planning* (1987) as a basis for analysis. This is because its arguments are slightly more refined following Faludi’s attempts to counter the many charges of positivism and technocracy leveled at his previous work (see, e.g., Taylor, 1980; Thomas, 1979; Scott & Roweis, 1977).

Like Chadwick before him, Faludi (1987) develops his approach on the basis of a critique of earlier modes of planning, particularly what he perceives as their disregard for “the conditional nature of knowledge and

11. In Taylor’s (1998) reading of some of these passages, he likens them to writings “by a state planner in the former USSR” (p. 78).

the need to render explicit such value judgements as are implied even in the simplest survey” (p. 8). According to Faludi, by lacking a more explicit scientific method for translating knowledge into action, planning is made reliant on an intuitive “creative leap” (p. 18) of self-proclaimed experts. Interestingly, he even extends this diagnosis to Chadwick’s systems view of planning, which Faludi contends merely “replaces unidirectional causality with the idea of mutual interdependence between phenomena” (p. 44). Not mincing his words, Faludi argues that many of the earlier, ostensibly rationalist planning approaches “committed the double sin of positivism and technocracy” (p. 18).

Faludi’s (1987) criticism is founded upon his—at the time—some-what proprietary conceptualization of what rationality entails for planning. He essentially rejects “the idea of rationality as a behavioural rule” (p. 134), and he readily admits that “planning can never be rational” (p. 33), even in a limited “bounded” sense as purported by Chadwick. Rather, and in a passage remarkably similar to how Flyvbjerg (1998) would later advance the concept of “rationality” in planning thought, Faludi (1987) contends that “it is the arguments advanced to *justify* the decisions, rather than the *real* motives for taking them, to which rationality in planning relates” (p. 118, emphasis added). But rather than seeing this post-hoc conception of rationality as an indictment of ostensibly rational processes, Faludi still holds it to be a worthwhile ideal since, according to him, the legitimacy of established democratic institutions are also founded upon this very fiction: “A Council, an advocate, a judge, they all test decisions for their legitimacy in terms of whether they can be shown to be justified, irrespective of how they have been arrived at” (p. 134).

Accordingly, Faludi does not abandon instrumental rationality as an instructive principle of planning. But he firmly believes that, ideally, it should be kept separate from a more value-laden sphere of politics and “goal formulations,” hence his maintenance of the much-maligned process-substance dichotomy in planning thought (see Allmendinger, 2002). For Faludi (1987) planners are in the business of decision-*making*, as opposed to political representatives who occupy the field of decision-*taking*. The choices and decisions taken in the latter field flow from the debates, arguments, and proposals put forth by the planners in the former field. But crucially, according to Faludi, planners should have no part in actually taking decisions since, “for better or for worse, representative democracy relies on elected politicians” (p. 58).

His position is thus a far cry from earlier rational approaches, including Chadwick's, which we saw envisioned planning as a vehicle for constraining some of the perceived deficiencies of established democratic institutions. For Faludi, it is the irrationalities emblematic of the planning fraternity, as opposed to the public, politicians, or the market that need to be constrained. In contrast to earlier approaches, then, Faludi does not ascribe planners with much legitimacy to speak or act on behalf of public, nor to progress democracy more broadly.¹² As an example of this, Faludi (1987) reasons that public participation in planning's decision-making arena often helps in raising awareness of some of the deep-seated conflicts in society, but he nonetheless insists that "whether democracy is able to resolve conflicts which, thanks to participation, become apparent, is not an issue of planning theory" (p. 59).

In recent years, the sustained charges of technocracy and positivism leveled at the rational process view espoused by Faludi have rightfully been described as something of a "straw man" (Strömngren 2007, p. 41; see also Allmendinger, 2017) given that these were precisely the problems of planning he was trying to resolve. But there have been comparably little discussions around how these attempts broadly locate his work in a more *liberal* tradition regarding the role of planning. The highly circumscribed professional planning role advocated by Faludi, his maintenance of planning's substance-process dichotomy, as well as his explicit emphasis on the latter could be understood as searching pursuits for more impartial and democratic procedures by which to temper many of planning's authoritarian traits.¹³ It is thus a position which is remarkably resonant of what Rosanvallon (2008) described as the liberal dimension of democracy's founding ideal: power as empty space which "no group can claim to be the owner" (p. 113)—least of all the planning fraternity.

In relation to Figure 2, Faludi's position on these issues locates his work at the intersection of the *rationalist* and the *liberal* treatments of

12. Even his heavily maligned teleological contention that planning is conducive to "human growth" can be read as an argument against such ambitions. Compared to Faludi's (1973) previous work, it is largely downplayed in this book and, in fact, here he argues that the contention was mainly aimed at stressing planning's societal responsibilities over professional norms and commitments, meaning that it was "also about constraints on self-fulfillment" (1987, p. 53). And while such a normative and "substantive" claims about the impetus of planning might not fully align with the scientific and "procedural" view he otherwise promotes, Faludi contends that this was precisely the point: "By clearly outlining my commitments I hoped to escape the charge of "positivism" (p. 53).

13. Indeed, writing in the backdrop of wider anti-planning sentiments of the 1980s, his work is showered with subdued endorsements of various neoliberal policy reforms. As Faludi (1987) writes, "Decentralisation, devolution of power, privatisation and deregulation ... must be taken seriously" or, he notes, at the very least be given a more "dispassionate analyses" than the one afforded by the political discourse of the left (p. 221).

planning—that is, far closer to liberalism than Chadwick’s work. Faludi (1987) harbors “little patience” towards planners who “dream up desirable future environments to which their professional self-image attaches much importance” (p. 176). Similar to Chadwick’s critique of the early physical design view of planning, for Faludi the rigidity of such utopian ambitions often transgresses on the flexibility required for “achieving as much certainty as is possible in a world in flux” (p. 206). It is thus a temporal position that also stresses the protracted, slow, and tempered movements of democracy. But in contrast to Chadwick, Faludi sees planning as *subservient* to these movements and it has no business slowing it down further or altering its course, as is also highlighted by his “temporal” position slightly to the *left* of Chadwick.

Conclusions

To sum up these two treatments of planning: Both seem to conceptualize planning as a means to *safeguard* existing democratic institutions and arrangements—but in quite different ways. Both Chadwick and Faludi develop their planning approaches based on a critique of earlier ostensibly rationalist planning models. In Chadwick’s (1978) case, the problem is not their deep-seated roots in enlightenment ideals around rationalism, but that they were in some sense not “rational enough” and thus failed to address what he perceives as some of the other chief pathologies of democracy, such as the shortsighted views of the elected representatives, market actors, and the wider public. Accordingly, Chadwick’s systems view of planning still espouse similar ambitions as that of some of the earlier rationalist approaches, where planning was conceived as a means to “insulate” existing democratic institutions and arrangements from itself.

Faludi’s (1987) planning approach is also geared towards safeguarding established democratic institutions, but since he also identifies rationalism as problem of democracy—if deployed in an all too literal sense at least—his approach instead paints planning as something of a threat to those institutions. Thus, Faludi conceptualizes the relationship between democracy and planning the other way around to that of Chadwick: By placing planning under the rationality audits of representative democracy, as well as other institutions that puts it under more public scrutiny, the ambition for Faludi is to safeguard democracy by *democratizing* planning.

3.3 LIBERAL TREATMENTS OF PLANNING

As was hinted at through the work of Faludi, some of the basic precepts of liberalism significantly challenge the normative and epistemological grounds for collective planning action. Land-use planning, for instance, can be seen as operating in direct conflict with liberalism's deep-seated idea of private property rights as an absolute since planning's "*raison d'être* is precisely to control how landowners use their land in the interest of the public (or at least not against it)" (Gerber et al., 2017, p. 1687). But liberalism's underlying acknowledgment of political conflict and individual autonomy can also be said to partly inform the more post-modern identification of the "dark side of planning" and where it is regarded as a tool for oppression and social control (Yiftachel 1998; see also, e.g., Sandercock, 1998).

In this part, I draw upon two particularly sophisticated formulations of such critiques to stress how they might translate more directly into democratic meanings around the role and function of planning. I begin with Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber's article "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning" from 1973, which symbolizes the latter post-modern critique of planning. This is followed by a more recent text by Mark Pennington (2002) that espouses a Hayekian and broadly neo-liberal treatment of planning, and which is thus more emblematic of the liberal critique based on property rights.

Rittel and Webber's wicked problems

The first half of Rittel and Webber's landmark (1973) article is dedicated to the differentiation between scientific problems of the *benign* kind—where "the mission is clear [and] it is clear, in turn, whether or not the problems have been solved" (p. 160)—and the social problems that planning and public policy deal with; those of the *wicked* kind. In unequivocal terms, firmly directed to those who are the subject of their criticism, the authors argue that planning's basis in scientific rationalism is fundamentally inadequate in a world where the latter, wicked problems proliferate.

As they plainly explain it, this is a world where "every wicked problem is essentially unique" (p. 164) and, furthermore, might always be framed as merely a symptom of other underlying problems. Accordingly, there are no essentially right or wrong solutions to such problems, "only 'better or worse' or 'satisfying' or 'good enough'" (p. 163). And yet "the planner has no right to be wrong" (p. 166). This is because "any solution, after being implemented, will generate waves of consequences over an extended—virtually an unbounded—period of time" (p. 163),

effectively posing “another set of wicked problems, which are in turn subject to the same dilemmas” (p. 163).

It is this half of their article that brilliantly encapsulates the emerging dissent against planning’s reliance on instrumental rationality, and which will also propel the concept of “wicked problems” to a broad range of fields and disciplines where the intractable, political, and fundamentally unsolvable nature of social problems are now treated as the norm (see Law, 2014; Skaburskis, 2008). The second half, however, is not any less relevant today, and it is in this part the more liberal undercurrent to their critique of planning is brought to the fore.

According to Rittel and Webber (1973), the above dilemmas are further compounded by a breakdown of the cultural and political hegemony following the transition into post-industrial society. Western societies, they contend, “are becoming increasingly differentiated, comprising thousands of minority groups, each joined around common interests, common value systems, and shared stylistic preferences that differ from those of other groups” (p. 167). In such a fragmented setting of diverse political pursuits, they ask, “How is the larger society to deal with its wicked problems in a planful way? How are goals to be set, when the valuative bases are so diverse? Surely a unitary conception of a unitary ‘public welfare’ is an anachronistic one” (p. 168). This is a diagnosis that broadly tangents the, at the time, emerging sentiment by which planning’s modernist aspirations are seen to be in a “mismatch” with the needs and demands of postmodern times (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 172).¹⁴

True to their convictions regarding the intractability of wicked problems, the authors leave planners with little in terms of solutions to this incongruity. But through their dismissal of some of their contemporaries’ planning approaches, they do display a subdued endorsement for others’.

For instance, the bulk of the systems view of planning is dismissed from the outset as completely unappreciative of the above dilemmas. Against a more “argumentative” understanding of rationalism as espoused by Faludi they argue that reason alone is an insufficient ideal in political decision-making since such processes are now “judged against an array of different and contradicting scales” (Rittel & Webber 1973, p. 167). The authors do appreciate how the incremental planning approach (which was popular at the time, see Lindblom, 1959) might

14. At the same time, the authors do not directly deploy “postmodern social theory” (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 172) to argue for ways in which planning should respond to this discrepancy (cf. Sandercock, 1998).

entail marginal improvements. But since some wicked problems, as they concluded, are often merely symptoms of others, incrementalism may also “result in making things worse, because it may become more difficult to deal with the higher problems” (Rittel & Webber 1973, p. 165). This leaves the authors with reserved support for a kind of “public choice” approach to planning where “one would promote widened differentiation of goods, services, environments, and opportunities, such that individuals might more closely satisfy their individual preferences” (p. 169).

Accordingly, while the meanings ascribed to democracy in relation to planning are not made explicit by the authors, their positions on the above issues makes it possible to locate their work under the liberal treatment of planning in Figure 2; that is, even closer to the liberal pole than where we found Faludi’s work. Furthermore, their all but complete rejection of rationalism as a guiding principle of planning and their emphasis on the values and judgments of the public also locates them on the *left-hand* side of the liberal pole and towards the voluntarist understanding of democracy—although they ultimately frame such demands in the differentiated and individualist terms that are more consistent with liberalism. Broadly conceived, theirs is a position that harbors a deep-seated acknowledgment of political conflict, diversity, and difference; one where a scientifically-grounded planning approach that purports to somehow “supersede” such conflicts is not only presumed to fail, but is directly viewed as “morally objectionable” (Rittel & Webber 1973, p. 161).

In relation to temporalities of democracy, this location is also consistent with a planning approach that seeks to safeguard more *intermediate* temporalities than the earlier positions. For instance, their critique of incrementalism for its failure to potentially address the source of wicked problems could be read as an indictment of the longer temporalities (and thus slower) such incrementalist approaches seeks to safeguard, and as a defense of slightly more transformative planning actions aimed at more immediate (and faster) structural change.

Pennington’s Hayekian view

Rittel and Webber’s article can thus be seen as emblematic of a liberal critique of the role and function of rationalist treatments of planning. Now, I examine some of the potential meanings ascribed to democracy when liberalism is more readily treated as the point of return for planning as well, as is the case in libertarian or “neoliberal” models of planning. But before doing so, it is important to make a distinction here

between *neoliberalism* as a broader political ideology and *neoliberal planning theory*.

Neoliberalism as ideology has had profound influence on planning practices for almost four decades now (see Allmendinger, 2016; Fainstein, 2010; Purcell 2009; Healey, 1997). Allmendinger (2017) describes this influence in two ways. As a *subject* of neoliberalism, planning has been the target of market-based reforms aimed at reducing its regulatory function and developing “a more proactive and market facilitative approach emphasizing partnerships, skills and knowledge, etc.” (p. 121). As an *object* of neoliberalism, planning has also served as a tool to “create the right conditions for growth in cities and regions through facilitating and coordinating infrastructure, transport, schools, etc.” (p. 120).

Despite this pervasive influence there are relatively few normative planning works that, in the same vein as the systems view or rational process view, explicitly advocate neoliberal planning *theories*—perhaps owing to how the “collectivist mindset of planners does not easily fit with a view that is hostile to many aspects of the state an intervention in markets” (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 112). But here, I draw on one such text: Mark Pennington’s (2002) conceptualization of a Hayekian approach to planning (see also, e.g., Poulton, 1991; Sorensen & Day, 1981).¹⁵

In Pennington’s (2002) reading of the earlier discussed rationalist planning models he places them in a neoclassical economic framework to highlight the traditional assumptions around the impetus of planning. In such a reading, due the existence of “externalities” brought on by various instances of “market failures,” planners trained in appropriate scientific methodologies are required to step in and “objectively identify and measure individual preferences for the relevant environmental goods” (p. 188). The established criticism against the rationalist model

15. Two clarifications should be made here. The first is that in this text, Pennington conceptualizes a Hayekian understanding of planning to mobilize a theoretical critique of the rationalist planning model, as well as collaborative planning theory’s response to it. Pennington himself only vaguely endorses this particular conceptualization and elsewhere he advocates a public choice approach to planning that gives slightly more credence to individuals’ abilities to calculate and pursue their self-interests (e.g., Pennington, 2000). But again, my emphasis is not on the democratic understandings held by various planning scholars, but on the meanings advanced in specific planning works. This particular text is chosen for its sophisticated and concise arguments that distinctly articulate what a neoliberal planning approach entails. Second, few (if any) authors label their own approaches as “neoliberal” (more often they refer to it as “Hayekian,” “libertarian” or “public choice-based”). However, I label it as such due how these approaches can be merged under the shared assumption that (in line with the description of neoliberalism earlier) market institutions are better equipped to coordinate the majority of activities currently organized by and ascribed to planning institutions.

is by now well-rehearsed: Technocratic forms of planning are seen as incapable of objectively identifying and pursuing the public interest in irreducibly complex societies. But for Pennington, the problems are even more serious than that.

As Pennington (2002) observes, much of the criticism of rationalist planning—including, and especially, liberal and neoclassical formulations—does not necessarily reject the instrumental conception of rationality; it merely transfers it from planners on to market actors. The problem with this view, according to Pennington, is not only that it underappreciates the complex social processes in which human behavior takes form, it also runs directly counter to liberalism’s axiomatic concern for individual autonomy and liberty. Drawing directly from Hayek’s critique of neoclassical economics, Pennington explains that if it truly was the case that individuals were “rational actors” then “people would, in fact, have no option than to respond to the objective stimuli before them and to speak of ‘choice’ in such a context would be meaningless” (pp. 189–190).

Thus, from a Hayekian perspective, individuals are *not* perceived as rational or self-interested utility optimizers, since that would assume the existence and possible identification of some optimal course action. Instead, Pennington (2002) describes them as “purposeful actors who base their plans and decisions on *subjective perceptions* of the opportunities before them” (p. 190, emphasis added). The difference might seem trivial, but in relation to the role and function of planning, it is crucial. In the Hayekian conception, the market economy cannot be consciously coordinated into some equilibrium end state. Instead, the market is seen as a “spontaneous order” (p. 195) of intersubjective learning where people rediscover their own and other’s preferences through a constant process of trial and error. This order is tremendously flawed, yet it is these flaws that serve as critical feedback mechanisms for market actors to discover their optimal production and investment decisions.

According to Pennington (2002), one crucial feedback mechanism is the price system that, in turn, is underpinned by the existence and protection of private property rights. Since planning is perceived to lack the equivalent price mechanisms for gauging profits and losses, Pennington explains that “planners (democratically elected or otherwise) can never perceive and respond to as many instances of dis-co-ordination as can individuals who have the freedom to exchange property titles in the market” (p. 191).

For the same reasons, this diagnosis also holds true for public participation, stakeholder rights, and other institutional measures that put the

exercise of property rights under the purview of public litigation and scrutiny. As Pennington (2002) argues “the greater the extension of social democratic controls over property rights, the more difficult it becomes for people to judge which particular bits of knowledge are most appropriate to the tasks in hand” (p. 198). Furthermore, when externalities do occur, the price mechanisms of the property market, if properly facilitated, helps “internalize” them in a superior way than state-led interventions.

In this conception of planning, then, “no attempt should be made to co-ordinate land uses according to some holistic plan” (Pennington, 2002, p. 203). At most, planning should be geared towards experimentation with “innovative property rights solutions to facilitate coordination via the spontaneous forces of markets” (p. 203).

Relating this back to the framework, Pennington’s ideas regarding the role and function of planning firmly locates his work close to the liberal pole in Figure 2; that is, almost as far away from the rationalist and voluntarist treatments as possible. The tribute to individual freedom is the most explicit yet among the examined works; as is the rejection of planning’s claims to rationality and, moreover, the entitlement of the (unpropertied) public to voice their demands. Here, almost any attempt at coordination by planners, elected representatives, or a wider public audience is considered a gross infringement on individual choice and, furthermore, an inefficient liability on the market mechanisms such choices promote. Broadly conceived, it is an understanding of democracy that aligns with what Rosanvallon (2006) described as the radical and utopian dimension of liberalism, where the market economy is understood to eliminate the need of “the will of individuals in general and of elites in particular” (p. 150).

An interesting parallel can also be made to Chadwick’s (1978) work, which was located in an equally extreme position but, instead, in relation to the pole of rationalism. Both works purport to in some sense supersede the need for established democratic institutions and arrangements. But instead of the instrumental rationality of planners replacing the need for market actors and politicians to formulate the goals of planning (as was the case with Chadwick’s systems view), in Pennington’s radical (neo)liberal approach it is instead the price system of the property market that substitutes the need for planners.

In relation to planning’s “guardianship” role, Pennington’s conceptualization champions a similarly *intermediate* temporal commitment to democracy as that of Rittel and Webber’s (1973). For Pennington (2002), the inefficiency that comes from planners’ intervention in the

property market is often expressed as “conservatism and preservation of the status quo” (p. 199), which he contrasts to how a more facilitative and experimental planning function would “provide people with the space to try out eccentric and innovative ideas” (p. 198).

Conclusions

In sum: Both these liberal treatments of planning could be seen as emblematic of slightly more dynamic and transformative agendas and thus slightly shorter temporal democratic commitments than those of the rationalist treatments. Pennington’s (2002) work, however, is still broadly about *safeguarding* existing democratic institutions; or at least those institutions centered on individual liberty and freedom of choice. For Pennington, this depends on negating planning’s influence in property markets since the latter is seen as the only sphere such freedoms can be protected.

Rittel and Webber’s (1973) work can also be broadly read as geared towards safeguarding existing liberal democratic institutions, but their emphasis is more on cultural and norm-based dimensions of liberalism, such as individual self-expression, cultural diversity, and an emancipatory politics of minority groups. Here, the problem with planning is not necessarily its interference in property markets, but how its modernist roots translate into totalizing managements of heterogeneous social and cultural urban environments. Their work could thus be read as in support for a planning approach that contributes to *progressing* democracy as societal project—if it manages to be more enabling towards minority groups and interests.

3.4 VOLUNTARIST TREATMENTS OF PLANNING

The voluntarist ideology informed those understandings of democracy where the activities, demands, and “will” of the public was center-staged (Rosanvallon, 2006, 2008). Roughly speaking, such understandings are often advanced on the back of a suspicion towards mediating forms of representation (i.e., rationalism), and/or attempts to “atomize” the public will into an aggregation of individual preferences (i.e., liberalism). Accordingly, the current dominant thinking around democracy in the planning literature—where it is often linked to participation and citizen activism more broadly—is arguably informed by the voluntarist understanding of democracy.

Given the central place of this treatment of democracy in the field, here I examine three planning theories that draw on such tendencies,

beginning with Patsy Healey's (1997) book *Collaborative Planning*; followed by Susan Fainstein's (2010) *The Just City*; and concluding with a paper by Mark Purcell (2016), espousing a quite radical public-centered approach.

But interestingly, as will be shown, Healey's work could arguably be located at the intersection between the three ideological treatments of planning I examine. While it is clearly advanced against the perceived pathologies of rationalism and liberalism—and should therefore be understood as a *voluntarist* treatment—it also acknowledges many of the core tenants of all three ideological components that constitute the historical field of tensions regarding the meaning and definition of democracy. Accordingly, her work will serve as an illuminating example of a planning theory that attempts to “strike a balance” between them, so that—as Rosanvallon (2006) himself has put it—“no one of them comes to eclipse the others” (p. 207).

Healey's collaborative planning

Healey's collaborative planning approach is one of the more influential European iterations of a group of theories that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as part of the “communicative turn” in planning thought (Healey, 1992; see also Innes, 1995; Forester, 1989). These theories broadly drew on deliberative and participatory democratic theory to emphasize how language, discourse, and deliberation structure the relationship between government institutions and civil society. They also significantly diverged from positivist treatments of science and knowledge in how their advocates were much more explicit and unapologetic in their affirmation of planning as a generally political, and specifically democratic enterprise. This is perhaps most clearly evident in Healey's (1997) work, which often seamlessly moves between the analytical-critical and the normative-theoretical in pursuits towards “realising the practical meaning of participatory democracy in pluralist societies” (p. 5).

Healey (1997) proceeds from the same type of postmodernist diagnosis of society as that of Rittel and Webber, one where evolving socio-political identities, diffused decision-making processes, and more pronounced inequalities pose significant challenges for the planning enterprise. As she explains it, planning is an activity that is fundamentally geared towards “managing co-existence in shared spaces” (p. 73). This means that in contemporary pluralist societies, planning will necessarily have to grapple with democratic dilemmas arising from the conjunction of “multiple lifeworlds and multiple cultural communities” that

lay their claim to such spaces (p. 63). For her, in such situations of compounding conflicts, it is not enough that planners simply step back from their technocratic role in order to make room for parliamentary democracy (as Faludi prescribed), individual expression (as championed by Rittel & Webber), or intersubjective learning processes of the property market (as Pennington argued).

Thus, as much as Healey's (1997) work is guided by a critique against instrumental rationality, the polemic target in her book is more often neoliberal ideology and policy reform, as well as the complacency among planners in perpetuating state-led commitments to capital accumulation. Writing in the wake of when Thatcher-era policy reforms had reduced British planning to something of a shell of its former self, Healey draws on first-hand experience to highlight how the circumscription of planning had far-to-often left "any necessary co-ordination to voluntaristic action, through the dynamics of market processes and community selfhelp" (p. 28), so that conflicts surrounding shared spaces were likely to be resolved, not through parliamentary democracy or individual choice but "by the power of money and landownership" (p. 201). She is far from shy in her rejection of the "not-so-benevolent paternalism" (p. 235) among the "master-designers" of old. But she also quite clearly bemoans the loss of the radical utopianism characteristic of many of these same planners who, she argues, "in the 1940s and 1950s saw themselves as being at the forefront of a transforming effort, building the welfare states which would deliver a reasonable quality of life to the majority of citizens" (p. 8)—as opposed to their successors who in contrast "often feel themselves operating within a complex and often uncomfortable, political and economic context, within which room for transformative manoeuvre seems slight" (p. 8).

Beneath this qualified but quite genuine lament over the transformative planning aspirations of yesteryear is a strong dedication towards reclaiming planning as a normative enterprise. Drawing primarily on Giddens (1984) and his theory of structuration, Healey (1997) argues that planning activity must be understood from a relational perspective: between the larger *structural*—and often capitalist—dynamics that act upon on individual lives and the on-the-ground social relations constitutive of *daily life*. From this perspective, she argues that planners are not only directly complicit in reproducing the structures for capital accumulation through their day-to-day choices, but that they also have possibility "to change them, to transform the structure" (p. 47).

For Healey, such transformative actions are possible through a collaborative planning approach. At its core, the approach entails, first, a

recognition of the differences and conflicts across the multiple lifeworlds that lay claim to shared spaces; and second, an ambition to forge new, *shared* meanings across these differences—or, as Healey puts it, to “make sense together whilst living differently” (p. 266).

In Healey’s (1997) approach, public participation exercises are conceptualized as critical instruments in forging such relational meanings, as are various forms of “consensus-building practices” (p. 195)—an emphasis that has invited powerful criticism against the collaborative planning approach (e.g., Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998). But, according to Healey (1997), such instruments are still only partial dimensions and part of what she deems the “soft infrastructures” (p. 243) of planning efforts. Equally crucial are the “hard infrastructures” (p. 286) of planning systems, which broadly include the material resource allocation procedures that either foster or undermine the pursuit for collaborative planning efforts. For Healey, without such infrastructures, “strategic planning exercises are likely to fade into empty rituals or the re-affirmation of the status quo” (p. 247).

Relating back again to the theoretical framework, the arguments advanced by Healey could locate her work in the middle of Figure 2: in-between the rationalist, liberal, and voluntarist treatments of planning. This location is illustrative of how her work proceeds from a recognition of some of the fundamental tensions inherent in the democratic project, but how it also conceptualizes planning as a means to reconcile them.

While Healey (1997) acknowledges some of the core tenets of liberalism, such as acceptance of diversity and difference, she also elaborates on ways in which shared meanings could be forged across such differences—while at the same time categorically rejecting what she perceives as liberalism’s pathological conclusion: a kind of neoliberal governmentality that has “boxed us into unequal, unrespectful, economically problematic and environmentally unsustainable practices” (p. 314). And while the approach relies on public participation and involvement in urban governance, as would be emblematic of voluntarist understandings of democracy, such activities are not necessarily valued for their own sake, but rather for their capacity to “change governance practices such that people would trust their governance machinery sufficiently that challenges were the exception rather than the norm” (p. 239). Accordingly, the idea is to transform governance institution to the extent that citizens are not constantly given reason or need to participate in planning. And, finally, while planning’s reliance on a narrow instrumental understanding of rationality is seen as deeply problematic, her approach

is nonetheless also predicated on planners having an enlarged and more transformative role in urban governance and policy.

Interestingly then, while the slippage towards technocratic governance is typically characterized as a pathology of *rationalism*, this is a tendency that is perhaps slightly more pronounced in Healey's work than in Faludi's—despite the charges of positivism and technocracy levelled at the latter scholar. In contrast to Faludi's (1987) procedural planner, who is supposed to be circumscribed from the public via elected representatives, Healey's (1997) collaborative planner is actively encouraged to directly speak and act on behalf of the people (see further Uitermark & Nicholls, 2017). This apparent incongruity is explained by how Faludi's work was located more deeply in the liberal tradition where, as we saw, the acknowledgment of individual liberty is treated as the primary bulwark against the perceived authoritarianism of rationalism.¹⁶

Healey's in-between location is also consistent with an *intermediate* temporal guardianship ascribed to planning, similar to the earlier liberal treatments. To be sure, her approach is predicated on the need for transforming the overarching structural dynamics that shape urban governance processes—more so perhaps than in the communicative approaches of her contemporaries. At the same time, she clearly does not advocate an all-out counter-hegemonic planning practice, instead setting a boundary for such transformations to existing institutions. It is thus a position that is grounded in a measured search for “ways of overturning one form of discrimination without producing another” (Healey, 1997, p. 118).

Fainstein's social justice view

Next, I turn to Susan Fainstein's (2010) book *The Just City*. She is one of many scholars who have sought to advance social justice perspectives in planning (see Marcuse et al., 2009). The broader discourse around justice in planning places an overriding emphasis on equity dimensions, redistributive policies, and emancipatory politics for marginalized

16. Of course, we could make the opposite argument if we were to eschew Faludi's *intentions* in favor of a more critical reading of his work. Even if we accept Faludi's position that rationalism should only be deployed in a *post-hoc* manner to legitimize decision-making, it is still possible to question why planning would not be subject to technocratic slippage, but instead of the “transcendental reasoning” of the master-architect, planners now have the guise of “scientific method” to hide behind—perhaps obfuscating the lines of responsibility and accountability in the planning process even further. In other words, by having planners *not* speak on behalf society, Faludi's approach might only help them tighten their grip, albeit in a perhaps more sinister fashion (for further discussions on this “post-political” critique of planning see, e.g., Metzger, 2018).

groups—ambitions which are often assumed to be achieved through the mobilization of social movements and more direct forms of citizen participation (Dikeç, 2001; Marcuse, 2009; Miraftab, 2009). Accordingly, it can productively be understood in relation to the voluntarist dimension where the nature of democracy is—as we saw—pinned on the proclivities of an active citizenry that presses for strong demands against state-led institutions. As will be shown, such dimensions are partly stressed in Fainstein’s work as well. But interestingly, when read through the democratic framework developed in this study, her work also harks back to the more rationalist treatment of Chadwick’s systems approach, where planners were granted an exceptionally strong mandate to “determine the goals” of planning over other actor-groupings in urban governance.

Like Healey, the polemic target in Fainstein’s (2010) book is also a capitalist “neoliberal hegemony” (p. 19) that is perceived to generate massive and systemic inequalities in urban contexts. And perhaps even more so than Healey, Fainstein is also fundamentally guided by normative ambitions. Her definition of justice proceeds from fairly abstract discussions and ideas around the subject, which are then contrasted with empirical findings in three major Western cities and subsequently assembled into a “counterideology” (p. ix) to neoliberalism. This ideology is defined by three core principles that together should form a concrete “moral basis” (p. 63) for planners to evaluate and develop policies towards social justice—they include *democracy*, *diversity*, and *equity*.

But interestingly, throughout the book Fainstein (2010) consistently reasons that planners should “give less priority to democracy than to equity” (p. 175). In doing so, she partly distances herself from “democracy” based on the reasoning that “in an unequal society democracy and justice are frequently at odds” (p. 30). However, she also takes great care to point out that her “intention is to counter the proceduralist conception of democracy ... thereby allowing process and structural situation to be considered separately” (p. 35). In this “normally accepted meaning” (p. 35) of democracy, she includes deliberative and prescribed forms of participation—as is advanced by communicative planning scholars—but also more radical forms of participation—as is championed in the broader social justice discourse. The problem with both such understandings of democracy, Fainstein candidly argues, is that they “disregard the possibility that paternalism and bureaucratic modes of decision making may produce desirable outcomes” (p. 32).

Similar arguments are raised against overzealous pursuits for diversity in urban contexts. Such aspirations were, as we saw, originally advanced as a postmodern critique against planning's homogenizing treatment of marginalized groups and minorities, whereas now, according to Fainstein (2010), diversity has become something of a mantra among public officials who aspire to attract "creative-class cosmopolitans" (p. 70) that can contribute to the growth economy. As Fainstein argues, this contemporary iteration of diversity has not only "failed to end racial and gender divisions, but it has seemingly exacerbated income inequality" (p. 71).

Accordingly, while Fainstein (2010) does not dismiss the merits of participation and diversity, she stresses that they should not be pursued merely for their own sake since they far too often come to be captured by economic interests that run directly counter to pursuits for equity.

To oppose such interest, she ascribes planners with a remarkably strong mandate to impose her definition of what is substantially just in urban contexts, even in cases when elected representatives or a wider public have not granted them such authority. Alluding to the Weberian distinction between a political and bureaucratic sphere discussed earlier, Fainstein (2010) argues that "bureaucrats can use their control over information to bend their political superiors to their will [and] shift the debate toward a concern with equity" (p. 180). Here, participation and citizen activism may play a crucial role in generating "support from some political base"—that is, not because the public necessarily agree with such concerns, but "rather because they have an interest in knowing who is getting what" (p. 181). From this perspective, she argues rather controversially that "regardless of authorization or not, justice is a goal to continually press for and to deploy when evaluating decisions" (p. 180).

In relation to the framework, Fainstein's (2010) reasoning could locate her work in the intersection between voluntarist and rationalist treatments of planning in Figure 2, and perhaps with a slight favor towards the latter.¹⁷ As we saw, she is quite critical towards the voluntarist treatments of planning where the immediate demands of the public come to be center-staged since, in her view, citizens are not always "good judges of their own interests or the public good" (p. 30).

17. Despite her placement slightly further in the rationalist treatment of planning than the voluntarist one, I have still chosen to treat her work as emblematic of the latter. This is because I read her work as more geared towards addressing the perceived pathologies of liberalism and rationalism compared to voluntarism. Nevertheless, this placement highlights the obvious problems with positioning planning theories along two-dimensional spaces.

And while her work proceeds from a strong critique of earlier positivist forms of planning, which are perceived to “incorporate disguised normative biases” (p. 20), it also proceeds from a remarkably similar reasoning to that of Chadwick’s (1978) systems view approach. As we saw, Fainstein ascribes planners with an instrumental rationality to in some sense “replace” the established democratic politics in urban governance, only instead of deriving this rationality from a technical expertise regarding the functioning of urban systems, she grounds it in a “moral basis” (p. 63) around justice. Along with her critique of pursuits for diversity and neoliberalism more broadly, this also locates her work quite far from liberalism; below Healey’s work.

At the same time, this location still positions Fainstein’s work along a similar *intermediate* temporal guardianship as that of Healey’s. Indeed, this is also consistent with Fainstein’s (2010) aspirations for planning, which is geared towards the implementation of “nonreformist reforms” that can lead to “incremental changes in the system that place it on a path toward justice” (p. 170).

Purcell’s publics without the State

The final work for analysis could be said to be an almost diametrically opposing voluntarist treatment of planning compared to Fainstein’s: a succinct and to-the-point article by Mark Purcell (2016) entitled “For Democracy: Planning and Publics without the State.” Purcell’s broader work could be said to fall under the same category as some of the “justice” approaches to planning that emphasize the empowerment of marginalized groups through various forms of social movements and public mobilizations (e.g., Purcell, 2008, 2009, 2013). But as will be shown, he is also remarkably radical in what this emphasis entails for democracy and planning.

In the article, Purcell (2016) sets out to uncouple the notion of “the public” from “the State,” the conflation of which reproduces the assumption that the State is equivalent to “the people” and, by definition, therefore must be “democratic.” But the “deep truth of the State” (p. 387) according to Purcell—which he wants to convey without “overstating the case in order to provoke reactions or incite debate” (p. 387)—is that “the State is a necessarily oligarchical arrangement that prevents us from achieving real democracy” (p. 386). To be clear, his reasoning is not based on the Marxist interpretation of the State, where its impediment to “real” democracy proceeds from the State’s embeddedness in a “distinctively capitalistic social order” (Harvey, 1985, p. 177). For Purcell, the problem is the State itself, not its historical order.

There are thus obvious parallels with anarchist thought in Purcell's conception of the State. But he arrives at this conclusion mainly by way of Hobbes, Locke, and other liberal thinkers who saw "the State" as a qualitatively separate entity to that of "the People." Such thinking is not necessarily an indictment of the State as it largely echoes the rationalist understandings of democracy that, as we have seen, depend on *mediating* forms of representation; as well as the liberal understandings which aspire to keep Lefort's (1986) place of power "empty." But as Purcell (2016) describes it, "what the State does—and it is designed expressly for this purpose—is to alienate people from their power and vest it in an entity outside themselves" (p. 387). For him, this separation is vital to the question of the democracy, because "at its core, democracy means that people retain their power and use it to manage their own affairs" (p. 391). In this reading of the State, virtually all of early modern political thought "is really just an extended (and fevered) attempt to make legitimate the State's founding alienation" (p. 390), which includes the temptations to conflate it with the public as though they were not in fact separate, according to Purcell.

This contradiction between democracy and the State has obvious implications for planning. Given how deeply intertwined planning is with the latter, Purcell (2016) stresses that "there is a very real danger that some large percentage of planning activity stands, structurally and necessarily, as an impediment to democracy" (p. 388). Indeed, as if he is speaking directly to Fainstein (2010) and her reasoning around insulated planning bureaucracies and democratic outcomes, Purcell (2016) categorically argues that "whatever real improvements the State might make in our material experience, therefore—whatever good it produces or evil it prevents—are achieved, necessarily, at the cost of diminishing democracy" (p. 387). Nevertheless, he does not dismiss planning activity out of hand as contradictory to democracy, so long as it in some sense operates towards a state-less society.

Purcell (2016) does not offer much details regarding such activities since not doing so is precisely the point he is trying to get across: "Democracy obviously requires that people in each public work out for themselves what those specifics are" (p. 394). But he does offer some "habits of thought" (p. 388). This includes theorizing about the many dilemmas of planning—such as conflicts of interests, community concerns, or various expressions of environmental injustices—without recourse to the State. Naturally, this means that the deployment of prescribed forms of public participation should be met with deep suspicion since "whatever participation processes exist should be created

by people themselves” (p. 396). Furthermore, he also urges planning scholars and practitioners to learn from and engage with the real and actually transpiring “publics without the State,” such as temporary housing squats, self-managed guerilla gardens, shared transportation networks, and other events where publics “reclaim popular control of important aspects of urban life” (p. 396).

Purcell’s conceptualization of democracy is thus remarkably similar to what Rosanvallon (2006) described as the voluntarist pursuit to “close” the divide between actual democracy and its formal self-representation in order to effectively achieve “real” democracy, a pursuit which is only achieved through the “unmediated expression of a directly palpable will” (p. 93). At the same time, Purcell does not paint this expression of the public will in a fully unitary conception, as is sometimes the case in such pursuits. Instead he conceptualizes it along a more anarchist tradition, thus acknowledging certain tenants of liberalism, including individual freedom and autonomy. His work can thus be located in-between Healey’s and Fainstein’s in Figure 2’s vertical axis; but much further *left* along its horizontal axis, being emblematic of the most voluntarist treatments of planning yet.

This location also coincides with the shortest temporal guardianship ascribed to planning among the examined works. Purcell (2016) harbors an extremely instantaneous and episodic interpretation of democracy that places emphasis on the “spectacular eruptions of people using their power to manage their affairs for themselves” (p. 396). For Purcell, democracy is not found in established institutions and norms constructed in the past. Rather, “democracy is better understood as perpetually inchoate, as a necessarily ongoing project that we carry out together into an uncertain future” (p. 393). But paradoxically such an open view of democracy, also engenders perhaps one of the narrowest conceptions regarding its relationship to planning among the various works (or at a close second to Pennington), since nothing else but counter-hegemonic planning activity against, or at a safe distance from the State would, in Purcell’s view, deserve the label “democratic.”

Conclusions

To sum up this part: Voluntarist treatments of planning could be said to ascribe planning with shorter and more transformative temporal democratic guardianships than earlier approaches, including the liberal ones which were slightly ambivalent in their temporal commitments. Here, planning is seen as more directly geared towards *progressing* democracy

as a project—as opposed to safeguarding democracy’s established institutions.

This is most clearly expressed in Purcell’s (2016) work where such institutions are seen as a direct impairment on the road towards “real” democracy. But it is also somewhat evident in Fainstein’s (2010) work where the democratic impetus of planning was traced to its potential in realizing just outcomes, regardless of whether they are achieved within, or at the expense of existing democratic institutions and procedures. Healey’s (1997) work, however, could be said to advance a middle ground between planning’s role in safeguarding and progressing democracy, which is broadly reflected by her centrist location in the framework. While Healey acknowledged the need for planning to produce more just and equitable outcomes, it seems that, for her, this is not achievable without also restoring public trust towards established democratic institutions and arrangements.¹⁸ In this sense, her work could be seen as geared towards *democratizing* society through a *democratization* of planning.

3.5 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: DEMOCRACY AND PLANNING THEORY

Having examined the meanings ascribed to democracy across a few key theoretical sources in contemporary planning thought, I now move on to discuss some key reflections, which can broadly be divided in three main points.

First, it seems that despite, or in part because of broader conflicts around the meaning of democracy, the concept has been central in the development of these thinkers’ planning theories. The theories were not developed as a means towards realizing some consensual ideal around what democracy in planning is and should be. Rather, they were at least partly advanced as a response to what their authors saw as the core pathologies of actually existing democratic arrangements and, furthermore, the perception of how other theories had failed to respond, or even further exacerbated such pathologies. Accordingly, it seems that the conflicts and debates in the literature around what planning substantially is and is meant to achieve have been deeply nourished by conflicting meanings about democracy—even if such meanings are not always explicitly evoked.

18. This middle ground position is also partly expressed in Healey’s (1997) work by how it seems to view the process-substance duality in planning as somewhat misleading: “Process innovations are as significant an outcome of planning activity as are substantive outcomes” (p. 85).

The second reflection is that despite the lack of consensus around the meaning of democracy, a broader pattern was still observable regarding its perceived relationship to planning. Very broadly conceived, *longer* temporal commitments and *rationalist* treatments tended to conceptualize approaches that envisioned planning as a means to *safeguard* democracy against excessive and sudden popular demands, which was expressed through concerns for the slow, incremental movement of existing democratic institutions. By contrast, *shorter* temporalities and *voluntarist* treatments conceived planning as a means to *progress* democracy, as expressed through concerns for its development and transformation as a societal project. The *liberal* treatments and more *intermediate* temporalities fell somewhere in-between as they were partly concerned with planning's role in safeguarding democratic norms around individual liberty and diversity, but also to in some sense to progress democracy by allowing the latter to be more readily expressed. And yet, despite this broader pattern, it varied quite considerably between and within the three different ideological treatments of planning. For Faludi (1987), democracy connected to the field of planning as a means to *democratize* planning. For Chadwick (1978), planning itself was seen as a means to *safeguard* democracy; for Purcell (2016) and Fainstein (2010): to *progress* democracy; for Pennington (2002) and for Rittel and Webber (1973): as an *obstacle* towards such pursuits. And finally, for Healey (1997), democracy was conceived as both the *means* and the *ends* of planning.

Third, then, given the multiple ways these theories express concerns for democracy, no convincing argument could be made for the existence of a default or intrinsic relationship between planning and democracy. Similar to the broader political philosophy debates around the concept, the meaning of democracy can more readily be understood as part of an ongoing political struggle where different understandings are mobilized to construct, or serve to inform and/or legitimize different planning agendas. In other words, while it is possible and encouraged to debate the democratic merits of each of these theories, none of them could be said express its "true" or "real" meaning or, for that matter, how democracy should be pursued in planning. The fundamentally contestable nature of this relationship is observable through a closer inspection of some of the different positions in the framework.

Healey's (1997) work was located in the center of the Figure 2 to illustrate how she envisioned planning as a means to resolve some of the core tensions between democracy's constitutive ideological components. This might lead us to conclude that her position is the most "nuanced," or "suitable," or even the most "democratic" one among the examined

works. This conclusion seems particularly tempting given how more “extreme” positions are often seen as more predisposed to the pathologies of democracy. But this is to misunderstand the framework, which did not proceed from the assumption that these pathologies were necessarily true, but rather from the assumption that each conception of democracy in planning is susceptible to critique from its relative opposite. This is the case regardless of its position in the framework.

Accordingly, this perspective could instead lead us to the opposite conclusion: that by attempting to resolve the tensions between democracy’s constitutive components, Healey’s “centrist” position concedes to neither of them, thus making her planning approach susceptible to powerful criticism from all three directions (see, e.g., Purcell, 2009; Pennington, 2002; Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998). This can at least partly help explain how *Collaborative Planning* has had the dubious legacy of being not only one of the most cited, but also one of the most criticized books in planning thought (see further Hillier & Metzger, 2015).¹⁹

Of course, there might well be inherent democratic merits in theoretical models that in some way try to attend to all the constitutive pathologies of democracy; making sure that “no one of them comes to eclipse the others” (Rosanvallon, 2006, p. 207). But even if we concede to such merits, there is no essential reason why that attention would translate to Healey’s centrist position in the “democratic subfield” of planning and the specific democratic guardianship that it presumes to embody. Rather, the short-term horizons of the electoral-representative system might well compel us to argue that administrative bureaucracies such as planning should act as an important democratic “counter-balance” by being committed to longer temporalities (du Gay, 2000, Lindblad, 2020).

Thus, even in such an extreme position as that of Chadwick’s (1978), there is still democratic meaning to be found if we appreciate what he saw as the dangers of *not* giving planners the authority to supersede elected representatives, market actors, or a wider public audience. This is also the case for the equally extreme position of Pennington (2002), where planners are by contrast meant to all but completely pull back from their conventionally ascribed roles and duties. Understandably, Pennington’s neoliberal treatment is a controversial position in the planning field. But it still harbors democratic meaning if we take seriously the authoritarian traits of planning and its many infringements on

19. Of course, its remarkable influence upon European planning practice has also made it an obvious (and fair) target for critical scrutiny.

individual choice. Accordingly, at least some of those thinkers who seem to champion extremely technocratic and neoliberal planning approaches can be identified as harboring deep-seated concerns for democracy, even if the dominant thinking around democracy and planning often leads us to the opposite conclusion.

To conclude this chapter: It seems that democracy's meaning in planning theory can gainfully be understood as part of an ongoing political struggle, where different understandings inform different normative conceptions of what planning substantially is and should be—often in ways that are not completely explicit, and thus have been partly neglected in the theoretical debates. My ambition has not been to argue for one position over another among these democratic meanings. Rather—to repeat—the point was twofold: to highlight that excavating these meanings helps clarify some of the fundamental conflicts in the planning debates; and furthermore, to destabilize—as Fainstein called it—the “normal meaning” of democracy in planning that treats it as exclusively intrinsic to the realm of participation or citizen activism.

The remaining part of the cover essay proceeds from Rosanvallon's (2006) suggestion to connect the “great texts” to how society at large has sought to address the dilemmas of democracy, so as to nourish a deeper understanding of its multiple meanings. But instead of “pamphlets, iconography and songs” (p. 64), I turn to experiences in planning practice. The rationale for doing so is to provide empirical context to the central argument of the thesis: that many of the conflicts, debates, and experiences pertaining to planning often concern competing meanings about what democracy in and for planning means. Accordingly, the exploration proceeds from the same two points as before: to highlight how examining planning through the lens of democracy can reveal critical insights into the nature of its conflicts and to challenge the prevailing practice where we equate democracy as an exclusive experience to voluntarist expressions.

Again, my intent is not to argue for the inherent democratic merits of insular, technocratic, or neoliberal planning approaches but, on the contrary, to argue that if our ambition is to challenge them it is crucial to understand the democratic meanings that inform them. This research ambition has been informed by a *reflexive* research approach to empirical material, which is presented in the next chapter.

Methodology

Broadly conceived, the thesis engages with *explorative case study research* (Czarniawska, 2014; Groat & Wang, 2002) through a mixture of qualitative methods, particularly in-depth interviews.

A qualitative case study methodology has been particularly useful for the cover essay's second research question directed towards exploring the substantial meanings ascribed to democracy among actors involved in planning practice. This is because case study research generally aims at an "understanding of how people in real-world situations 'make sense' of their environment and themselves" (Groat & Wang, 2002, p. 179; see also Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018; Czarniawska, 2014).

More specifically, the thesis also engages with a *reflexive* theoretical and methodological research approach as promoted by organizational theorists Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldbberg (2018). This approach relies on a hermeneutically inspired research process where interpretations are subjected to reinterpretations by a variety of theoretical lenses. As stated earlier, in such research, the ambition is not necessarily to "work 'neutrally' (inductively) or apply a framework, but to see empirical material as a way to work 'against' dominant thinking" (p. 388).

In this chapter, I outline this research process more in-depth. The first part describes the overall research design of the thesis. It begins with a discussion on the merits of pursuing reflexivity in research, which is followed by a presentation of how I have implemented such considerations throughout the research process. This includes a presentation of the philosophical points of departures for the papers and the cover essay, as well as a discussion on the thesis' methodological treatment of empirical material, including questions regarding the "validity" and "generalizability" of the research. The second part gives a more detailed description of the choices made and methods used pertaining to the three case studies of the thesis, as well as how the individual papers are utilized for the cover essay.

4.1 REFLEXIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

A widely accepted belief in the philosophy of science is that the researcher's philosophical point of departure unavoidably shapes their research design—including the research questions posed, the methods used to produce the empirical material, the theories mobilized, and the conclusions finally drawn from the inquiry. This strong influence has particular implications for the social sciences where a variety of ontological and epistemological positions exist (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). Accordingly, most textbooks on social science research will insist that the researcher reflects on their own assumptions and positionality so as to understand how it might frame their interpretations (e.g., Groat & Wang, 2002; Hollis, 2002).

However, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) argue that researchers not merely reflect on their positionality, but that they also adopt *reflexivity* in their research design. For them, all qualitative research is to some extent reflective. But it is so in a focused and limited manner in that it is often tied to a particular philosophy that researchers, in effort to be consistent, try to maintain throughout the research design (see also Law, 2004). But for Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009), being reflexive is “to break away from consistency and a narrow focus on a particular aspect; to question weaknesses inherent in the mode of thought one embraces (and is easily imprisoned within), to break up and change a particular language game rather than expanding it” (p. 270).

The authors do not dogmatize about ways in which qualitative research can be conducted more reflexively, which is fair since the idea is not to get stuck in any single way of thinking about research. However, they do stress that an important aspect involves the pursuit of depth and variety in the research's *metatheory*—the philosophical and theoretical point of departures on which the interpretation of empirical material rest. The idea is that such variety enables a researcher to question and challenge established narratives and interpretations—including one's own—in a hermeneutic-like process of reinterpretation from other directions. This, in turn, generates reflections beyond that which the empirical material would offer if it were approached separately from any single direction.

At the same time, this process does not necessarily entail “mixing” different philosophical positions or theoretical orientations for the sake of variation. As the authors caution, too liberally employing different positions might subject the research to “selective interpretation” where we, for instance, “deconstruct” one statement because we do not agree with it and take another account at face value because we do (Alvesson

& Sköldberg, 2009, p. 231). In other words, by utilizing too many different positions, and by not differentiating between them, none of them can be used to their full potential. An ambition with reflexivity, then, is to be conscious of what any given frame of reference brings to the table and, more crucially, what it fails to.

Having discussed the merits of pursuing reflexivity in qualitative research, I now move on to present how I have implemented such considerations in the research design of the thesis.

The research design of the thesis

It seems to me that the core suggestion for achieving reflexivity in research—to pursue depth and variety in the research’s metatheory—works particularly well for the compilation thesis format. By design, a compilation thesis enables the utilization of a wide range of positions, theories, and methodologies across its different papers, the results of which can then be discussed more in-depth in the cover essay. Additionally, the cover essay offers an opportunity to extend the reflexive ambitions slightly further than what can be achieved within the scope of a single paper.

The overarching research design of this compilation thesis is shown in Table 1 below. As can be seen, the empirical material has been produced through three different case studies. These have resulted in four papers, all of which have individual research aims and utilize somewhat different theoretical approaches and philosophical orientations (designated as “constructionist orientation” in Table 1). This makes any attempt to form a single coherent argument or overarching narrative about their collective meaning somewhat counterproductive to the thesis’ reflexive ambitions. Indeed, as will shortly be discussed, the papers themselves have constructed rather specific meanings about democracy and planning, which thus conflicts somewhat with the aim of the cover essay to more openly investigate the relationship. Thus, in line with the thesis’ reflexive ambitions, this cover essay employs the theoretical framework and the democratic meanings produced earlier to *reinterpret* the empirical papers in a way that “acts back” on their own meanings and, hopefully, dominant ways of thinking about democracy in planning (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 271). In other words, rather than glossing over the papers’ potential disparities through a systematic “meta-analysis” (Timulak, 2014) the cover essay aims to add another layer of interpretation to them.

Next, where I discuss the thesis’ theoretical and philosophical orientations (i.e., the “metatheory”), I explain these steps further. This is

followed by a more systematic discussion of the thesis’s methodological treatment of the empirical material. Finally, in part 4.2, the specific research aims of the papers and the concrete methods used to produce their empirical material is presented.

Table 1: Research design of the thesis

	Case 1: Paper I	Case 2: Paper II, III	Case 3: Paper IV	Cover essay
Sites and settings	Public planning controversy in the City of Stockholm	The City of Stockholm’s planning administrations	Participatory planning activities in Stockholm County	Western planning thought and Swedish land use planning
Primary empirical material	Interviews with 6 citizen activists and 9 public servants	Interviews with 18 public servants	Interviews with 37 citizen participants; participatory observations.	Paper I-IV
Research aim	To explore democratic enactments in planning controversies	To explore effects of planning institutions’ organizational routines upon urban development processes and outcomes	To explore the engenderment of democratic legitimacy from the perspective of citizen participants	To explore the meanings ascribed to democracy in planning theory and practice
Theoretical approach	Pragmatist and institutional understandings of democracy	Political economy and structuration approaches to urban governance	Anti-essentialist understanding of democratic legitimacy	Analytical-historical understanding of democracy
Constructivist orientation	Critical-Social	Critical-Social	Epistemological	Critical-Epistemological

The metatheory

The metatheory of the thesis—which here includes the philosophical orientations and theoretical approaches—is underpinned by a *constructionist* approach to research. Most social scientists assume that phenomena are at least partly constituted by social relations rather than by a pre-given, independent, external reality (Law, 2004). But there is considerable breadth within this seemingly trivial position, and Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) tease out at least “four degrees of radicality” within it: a *critical*, a *social*, an *epistemological*, and an *ontological* (p. 35).

The critical position, the mildest form of constructionism, often aim at uncovering the conditions in which specific phenomena came to be considered “natural” through processes of social relations. Accordingly, while critical approaches tend to ascribe social phenomena with a constructed dimension, it is mainly limited to the *past* when the phenomena

were young and malleable and could have gradually been constructed into something else, whereas *now* they are treated relatively stable and ready-made (see further, e.g., Mol, 1999). The social variant treats phenomena as constructed in the present as well since, here, phenomena are understood to be dependent on a continuous reproduction of shared meanings, practices, and conventions. The epistemological position, in turn, takes an interest in exploring how the construction of knowledge serves to reproduce such relations. From there it is only a small step to the ontological position and, as Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) note, “to start considering whether or not the object of knowledge, reality itself, is a social construction” (p. 35).

As was shown in Table 1, the degrees of constructionism differ somewhat between the individual papers that make up this thesis. Much of the research does not try to make any fundamental ontological statements about the nature of reality. Rather, the objects of study have broadly been planning and democracy, which are generally treated as constructs. Nevertheless, these disparities have still contributed in constructing somewhat different, at times, even conflicting meanings about democracy and planning. Here I discuss how, as well as the role of the cover essay in relation to such conflicts.

In Paper I (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a), my colleague and I conducted a twofold analysis of a public planning controversy in the City of Stockholm. In the first instance, we drew on Noortje Marre’s (2005) pragmatist and empirically driven approach to democratic politics, which is underpinned by the belief that democracy is dependent upon a “public” that forcefully makes itself involved in political affairs. This belief roughly corresponds both to a *voluntarist* and a *social* constructionist understanding since, here, democracy is not to be found within the confines of a set of predetermined institutions constructed in the *past*, but in the citizen protest movements and public mobilizations that enact democracy in the *present*. In the paper, however, we brought attention to how such public-centered understandings still tend to produce rather myopic pictures of democratic politics since they often discount the institutional conditions in which public mobilizations occur as well as the wider implications of these events. To highlight this, we drew from some of the more normative parts of Rosanvallon’s (2008) work where he underscores how the *rationalist* and *longer* temporal dimensions of democracy may sometimes serve critical functions in enabling voluntarist public action and in “safeguarding” democracy from some of the more pathological dimensions of such events. It is a position which thus accepts the *critical* constructionist variant but one that,

before it slips further into the level of the social and epistemological, it pulls back to stress the merits of relatively stable democratic norms and institutions. Accordingly, in the paper, we argued that public-centered approaches could productively be complemented with a broader analysis of the institutional histories in which such enactments are made possible. Here, then, we alternated between a *social* and a *critical* perspective on the constructed nature of democracy to discuss the merits of each.

In the second case study, the phenomena of study were the routines and practices of the City of Stockholm's planning administrations, as opposed to democracy specifically. But here again, we alternated between a *social* and a *critical* perspective to our objects of study. In Paper II (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018b), we examined the circumstances in which regulatory land-use planning may actually affect specific patterns of change in the broader governance landscape of urban development. Here we acknowledged structural explanations regarding the role of planning in perpetuating state-led commitments to capital accumulation, as is underscored by the typically *critical* constructionist position in urban political economy literature (e.g., Harvey, 1985). But we also drew on Healey's (e.g., 1991) relational and more *social* constructionist perspective to underscore how the seemingly mundane daily organizational routines of planning administrations serve to reproduce, challenge, and even alter such structures.

Similarly, in Paper III (Metzger & Zakhour, 2019) we complemented a Marxist and broadly *critical* perspective on power relations (Lukes, 2005) with our own more inductive and *social* perspective to analyze how some of the planning actors come to inhabit the role of technocratic "gatekeepers" for what is considered political and not in Stockholm's urban development.

In Paper IV (Zakhour, 2020), which corresponds to the third case study, Rosanvallon's (2008) more post-structuralist treatment of democracy was mobilized to explore public demands of participatory planning arrangements. One of the main ambitions with the paper was to foreground an anti-essentialist understanding of democracy, and to show how the bases for its legitimacy changes over time as of part of the shifting social perceptions and expectations of public institutions. The degree of constructionism was thus slightly more radical here, moving to level of the *epistemological* where the question of what democracy substantially *is* and what democracy is *perceived* to be is treated as somewhat co-constituted.

In this cover essay, I have attempted something of synthesis of Rosanvallon's broad work on democracy, which in turn has functioned as a theoretical framework for exploring the potential meanings of democracy in planning. Here, the point of departure is also an anti-essentialist understanding of democracy. But it is precisely democracy's lack of essence that is presumed to generate a set of structural tensions and relatively constant problems and responses across the history of democracy—constants which in turn make up *actually existing* democracy. It is thus a constructivist position that straddle the *epistemological* and the *critical*. The anti-essentialist starting point allows for a fairly inductive exploration of democratic meanings in planning. But the structural tensions also ascribe the framework with theoretical boundaries and a certain degree of essentialism with regards to the understanding of exactly what constitutes the different core components of this deep structural tension. This in turn allows me to theorize its meaning in a more abductive way, where I can locate it in places where it is not perhaps used explicitly in the material.

In sum, then, the different philosophical orientations that underpin the thesis have constructed different, at times conflicting understandings about the relationship between democracy and planning. But the idea is not to obfuscate these conflicts by having the cover essay act as a corrective to the earlier analyses. Rather, in line with the reflexive approach, the idea is to add another layer of interpretation to the papers. Indeed, since one of the points with the cover essay is to challenge taken for granted assumptions about the relationship, as will be shown in Chapter 6, this will also entail challenging some of the assumptions made in the papers themselves. But next, I discuss how pursuits for reflexivity has guided the treatment of empirical material in the thesis.

Methodological considerations

What does democracy mean in planning? It might seem a straightforward interview question to ask people engaged in, or who come to be involved with public planning institutions and events. But it is often not exhaustive enough and, from a constructionist perspective, the answers it might garner could be directly misleading.

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) discuss how social science conventionally draws a distinction between two levels of interpretations for analyzing empirical material: the *ideational* level where the researcher interprets statements as conceptions, values, meanings, and beliefs; and the level of *action* where the statements are understood as being related to actual events, situation, and external phenomena (pp. 235–236).

However, this “realist” distinction has been subject to powerful constructionist critique, especially from the *epistemological* and *ontological* variants discussed above. Beyond the obvious ways in which dishonesty, self-deception, misunderstandings, and “interviewer effects” make it difficult to ascertain from interview statements what people “really” think or what “actually” happened, there is also a more fundamental and ontological issue regarding peoples’ subjectivity. People rarely harbor any definite, singular, unambiguous conceptions, either about themselves or about external phenomena (Mol, 1999). And even when they do, it would be naïve to assume that these conceptions could always be properly expressed through language (see further Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000).

Many researchers therefore treat interviews as *discursive*; they represent an interaction that is recorded and transcribed and the degree to which they can be trusted as a reference to actions and events outside of the interview must remain an open question (Czarniawska, 2014). Here, what is said in interviews is not so much a representation of the interviewee’s own subjectivity as it is a product of the particular circumstances that inform the interview. Asking, for instance, what democracy means in planning could thus generate widely different answers from the same person even at different points in the same interview. Thus, a third level interpretation, often employed by discourse analysts, is to see the statements themselves as the object of research interest; to stress the plurality among people’s statements and highlight the ambiguity of language (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000).

However, in the spirit of reflexivity, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) offer an approach to language and statements somewhere between the earlier realist and the latter more radically constructionist perspective. While they acknowledge that language can never be a one-to-one mirror of subjectivity or external phenomena, they still stress “the partial and incomplete ability of language to convey something beyond itself, and the variation in the relative consistency and value of different utterances as clues to phenomena other than their own language usage” (p. 235).

This is a methodological approach that I have applied throughout much of the thesis. The production and treatment of the empirical material in the different papers heavily relied on Barbara Czarniawska’s (2014) textbook *Social Science Research: From Field to Desk*. Czarniawska broadly advocates a similarly reflexive approach as the one encouraged by Alvesson and Sköldbberg, especially in relation to interview techniques. In her view, eliciting *narratives* from interviewees is of great value to qualitative research since such statements often contain more

meanings about the phenomenon in question than, for example, abstract descriptions or binary answers.

In line with this ambition, I employed a semi-structured approach to interviews. This meant that I often had a list of questions that I asked the interviewees but which I did not follow dogmatically—sometimes by changing their order, by omitting some in favor of others, and by phrasing them more openly or with specific examples. The idea was to give interviewees room to speak and build narratives about their perceptions and experiences. This helped to generate enough relative variation and consistency across the different statements as to offer clues about phenomena beyond language itself (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2018; Czarniawska, 2014).

In relation to the distinction between ideational and action statements, the interviewee's accounts have mainly served the former level of interpretation; that is, as statements about subjective beliefs, interpretations of events, and ascriptions of meaning. But when they have served as witness accounts to external events, the statements have been verified through other means when possible (such as through official documentation or observations, see part 4.2). At times, however, the point has been to contrast different witness accounts to specifically highlight the conflicting meanings ascribed to the same phenomenon or event, such as in the case of the public planning controversy and in the participatory planning activities. But such shifts in levels of interpretation have generally been attempted explicitly so as to reduce the degree of “selective interpretation” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 231).

In line with this treatment, all quotes in the thesis have been translated from Swedish to English with the ambition to represent their meaning rather than literal form. Accordingly, long pauses have often been left out, and the order of words and idioms have been translated in a manner that has tried to capture to the original intention of the statements.

Nevertheless, acknowledging that language can never directly mirror reality also implies conceding to the fact that any ascribed meaning to accounts are partly the result of appropriation on part of the researcher.²⁰ At the same time, the ambition with the thesis' empirical material has not been to “validate” truth claims nor to necessarily achieve “reliability” in the results—the two conventional research standards

20. This type of appropriation is particularly evident in the cover essay where I analyze what the actors who figure in the individual papers ascribe to democracy in planning—actors who have thus not always been explicitly asked this question. But as we saw above, even fairly straightforward questions to interviewees are still marred with methodological problems.

demanded by more realist philosophical traditions. In line with the thesis's reflexive research ambitions, the empirical material should instead be seen "as an argument in efforts to make a case for a particular way of understanding social reality, in the context of a never-ending debate" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 304).

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) thus champion quite different standards than conventionally demanded of social science. As stated in the Introduction, the most prominent of these different standards is what the authors dub "richness in points" (p. 305). Here, the research's "novelty value" is brought to the fore, as is its potential in "achieving an epistemological break with everyday knowledge" (p. 305). But these different standards do not necessarily mean that validity as an abstract ideal is completely abandoned. As the authors explain, the empirical material also "anchors the process of theorization in specific claims about the object under study, thus prohibiting arbitrary ideas from being brought into play" (2018, p. 388).

Seen in this light, generalizing the points made in reflexive research is not necessarily seen as an obstacle. Rather, the overarching ambition is "to transcend the empirically specific and to produce something of broader relevance" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018, p. 390). In relation to the cover essay, I do acknowledge how the particular empirical contexts have nourished arguments for particular points and limited or completely excluded others. And in Chapter 6, I will discuss, for instance, how some potential meanings ascribed to democracy among agents involved with planning are partly marginalized due to limitations in the material. But again, the cover essay's aim to explore the meanings of democracy in planning is not directed towards presenting a complete index of this relationship, nor towards validating their truth claims against "empirical reality." Rather, it is directed towards establishing the central argument the thesis: that many debates in planning theory and conflicts and experiences in planning practice are deeply nourished by these multiple, at times conflicting meanings—often in ways that have been neglected or unexamined in the theoretical debates.

4.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Having discussed the reflexive considerations that have guided the research design of the thesis, in this part I present a more detailed account of the methods used and choices made during the case studies. I conclude this part by also briefly presenting how the individual papers

are utilized for the cover essay's aim of exploring the meanings of democracy in planning practice.

Case 1: Democratic enactments in planning controversies

The first case study served as empirical backdrop for Paper I (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a) and it concerned the activities and experiences of some of the actors involved in a public planning controversy in the City of Stockholm.

The controversy erupted in 2013 as part of the redevelopment plan for The Slaughterhouse District (*Slakthusområdet*), a century-old food-processing hub located just south of Stockholm's inner city. Due to the district's history and ongoing activities, and due to the nature of the plan itself (a large-scale commerce complex with an Ikea retail store), the redevelopment quickly became a stage for a broad spectrum of competing claims regarding the district's future (see further Metzger & Wiberg, 2018). However, in the case study, and in the thesis as well, the emphasis was on the conflicts between, on the one hand, the City planning administrations and, on the other, a dozen locals who had mobilized against the redevelopment due to the increase in traffic and pollution a new commerce complex would entail for their neighborhood.

The study was conducted on two separate occasions, between 2014 and 2015. In 2014, and when I was still pursuing my master's degree, I was asked by my current colleague (and co-author of the paper) to produce working material for a research project on "stakeholder enactment" in urban governance.²¹ My colleague directed me to the controversy due to its deeply contested nature and the wide range of actors who made claims to have "stakes" in the affair. Given all the material I had developed—and the research interest it sparked upon me—I returned to the controversy in 2015 to have it serve as a case study for my master's thesis. Here, the ambition was to explore how democracy is understood and enacted among actors involved in planning controversies. During my PhD studies, I returned to the controversy yet again during the production of Paper I—although most of the empirical material had already been generated.

The empirical material was produced through a mixture of qualitative research methods as outlined by Czarniawska (2014). To understand the context and background to the redevelopment plan, and to get an overview of the competing political claims about the district, I conducted media searches on the subject through a news article database

21. The research project was supported by FORMAS under grant 2013-1282, and it would later also constitute part of the funding for my PhD studies.

spanning a ten-year period. This material was complemented with studies of the City's official documentation regarding the redevelopment.

But the study overwhelmingly relied on in-depth interviews with City representatives and the local activists. They were broadly selected through a form of snowball sampling. This meant that the interviewees would often advise me on who to interview next, and that the study ceased when multiple referrals would be to the same person and/or when the material itself had become somewhat repetitive (Czarniawska, 2014).

From the time the local activists first organized, they consisted of an active core of about ten people. In 2014, and in relation to the research project, interviews were conducted with five of them. For my master's thesis, four more interviews were carried out with them in 2015, three of whom were the same people as before. In other words, nine interviews in total were conducted with six of the locals. Most of them were women and they shared a similar socio-economic status: above average in income and careers in the advanced service sector. Although the interviews were conducted in relation to separate projects, the aims of these projects broadly intersected. Furthermore, the earlier material significantly helped in bringing attention to the activists' exacerbating disillusionment with the planning authorities and citizen activism as the controversy had unfolded, which is, as will be shown, an important yet often overlooked dimension of citizen engagement (see also Inch, 2015).

The interviews with the City representatives were also conducted in 2015, three of which were with project team for the redevelopment plan. They included an urban planner (*stadsplanerare*) from the City Planning Office (*Stadsbyggnadskontoret*, in charge of the regulatory planning process); a development engineer (*exploateringsingenjör*) from the Development Office (*Exploateringskontoret*, in charge of municipally owned land and urban development); and a project communicator responsible for coordinating information on the project to the media and public. Four politicians who were responsible for, or implicated in the redevelopment plan were also interviewed: one from the City Planning Board (*Stadsbyggnadsnämnden*); two from the Development Board (*Exploateringsnämnden*); and one from the local City District Council (*Stadsdelsnämnden*), which oversees the area where the area where the industrial district is located. Additionally, I interviewed two representatives of the business association operating in the district, and I attended a number of citizen-organized local public engagement events—although this material has not been utilized significantly for the thesis (but see Metzger & Wiberg, 2018).

The interviews were conducted in the interviewee's workplaces, their homes, in coffee shops; and they ranged between 40 minutes to over an hour in length. All of the interviews were fully recorded and later transcribed. The questions asked were, as noted above, directed towards eliciting narratives, with an emphasis on how the actors understood the controversy over the redevelopment; the sequence of events that had occurred; the experiences and meanings it had produced; and how they justified their own stake in the controversy and their own activities—both on behalf of the local activist and the City representatives. Accordingly, the interviews were broadly geared towards explicating meanings around what constitutes democratic ways of acting in relation to planning.

Case 2: The organizational routines of planning administrations

The second case study concerned the organizational routines and practices of planning administrations in the City of Stockholm, and it served as backdrop for Paper II (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018b) and Paper III (Metzger & Zakhour, 2019).

My colleague and co-author, again, directed me to the case when I started my PhD studies in 2015 and under the same research project as before. The selection emerged due to how both of us had a few lingering questions about some of the events in the controversy over The Slaughterhouse District. Particularly why the planning administrations had seemed so adamant about continuing the project in the face of widespread public and, later on, even political opposition. Against this backdrop, my ambition was to somewhat inductively and openly explore not just how Stockholm's *regulatory planning* process functioned in practice, but also the overarching *urban development* process and the different, perhaps conflicting interests it produced within the City administrations.

This research interest quickly led me into questions concerning Stockholm's vast public landholdings—upon which the majority of the city's urban development takes place. A particular interest was directed towards examining how the profit motives and contractual arrangements around the use and sale of the City's land aligned with the participatory ideals that underpin Sweden's regulatory planning process. But as discussed later, these profit motives and contractual arrangements also turned out to have deep repercussions on other issues pertaining to "democracy" and urban development, including issues around segregation, distribution of public investments, and the environmental qualities and designs of the built environment. Accordingly, much of the research

interest was subsequently directed towards the administration in charge of managing Stockholm's public land: The Development Office.

In this study, the empirical material was also generated through a mixture of qualitative research methods. This included extensive studies of the City's official documentation regarding urban development, such as annual budget reports and investment strategies; policy documents regarding the land allocation process; and official statements and decisions on various urban development projects.

However, as before, the material was largely produced through interviews, which were also conducted through a form of snowball method. Between 2015 and 2016, interviews were conducted with 14 City officials with varying degrees of responsibility over Stockholm's development process. These included five officials from the Development Office, but also three urban planners from the City Planning Office—one of whom was a project manager in the redevelopment of The Slaughterhouse District and who was thus reinterviewed for this case study. The interviewees also included two officials from the City Executive Office (*Stadsledningskontoret*) and four politicians from the City's planning and development boards, two of whom were conducted together with my colleague.

The questions asked were again geared towards evoking narratives as outlined by Czarniawska (2014). However, since the case study was focused on the actors' practices and routines rather than a specific project, the questions were slightly more open and exploratory than before; geared towards understanding what their specific administrative role ascribed them with doing, how, and why. Accordingly, the questions were not directly addressing democratic ways of acting or thinking in planning. But, as shown later on, it is still possible to productively elicit such meanings from the interviewees through their own identifications of some of the core planning problems that they in their specific role seek to rectify.

Additionally, in 2017 my colleague and I conducted a group interview with three urban planners and an operations manager who were tasked with the introducing a new organizational routine in Stockholm's planning administrations. Group interviews as a research technique (sometimes called or conflated with "focus groups") is not all that talked about in the literature on qualitative field research. This is perhaps due to its many disadvantages compared to one-on-one interviews, particularly how a group setting impedes on probing sensitive topics, and how it might generate a pressure to conformity rather than diversity. But it also has its advantages. As Frey and Fontana (1991) note, beyond its

obvious efficiency benefits, the group interview can provide another dimension for understanding social relations within in the research setting. For instance, the group dynamic can also serve as a stimulus to elaborate on meanings and experiences; help interviewees recall past events and experiences; and function as another form of validation of events and relations already studied (1991).

In relation to this case study, the group interview was particularly helpful in these regards. It was broadly directed towards confirming our existing research on the City's management of its landholdings and, furthermore, towards understanding how the urban planners in their collective professional role handled many of the generated conflicts within the City administrations due to this management.

All interviews, including the group interview, were conducted in the context of their workplace. Their lengths varied greatly, between one and several hours. As before, all of the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Beyond the two papers in this thesis, the case study also resulted in a popular scientific publication (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018c).

Case 3: Citizen experiences of participatory planning

The third case study resulted in Paper IV (Zakhour, 2020), and it concerned the citizen experiences of participatory planning arrangements in three municipalities in Stockholm County: *Norrtälje*, *Täby* and *Järfälla*.

This research interest emerged as a response to some of the findings of the previous case studies. In line with much of the literature on the subject (e.g., Monno & Khakee, 2012), the cases seemed to confirm that citizen influence or even input in urban governance was significantly hampered by the many other vested interests in these processes, including and perhaps especially municipalities' own profit motives. In light of these obstructions for concrete citizen influence, I wanted to explore what other functions participatory arrangements might serve according to citizens themselves—particularly in relation to the widespread assumptions that such arrangements can help in neutralizing the legitimacy crisis of representative democracy (see further, e.g., Tahvilzadeh, 2015).

The phenomenon itself was selected by me, but the setting of the case was chosen in consultation with the project manager of *Decode*²², a collaborative research project with a focus on social sustainability and process management in local environmental governance. The project funded the second portion of my PhD studies, and the setting was based

22. The research project *Decode* (Community Design for Conflicting Desires) was supported by Vinnova under Grant 2016-03724.

on the partnered municipalities' stated needs for methods and governance processes in communication, citizen dialogues, and social sustainability.

The material was generated through a combination of observations of municipally led participation activities and interviews with citizens who had partaken in these same activities. The first stage of the study took place in the autumn of 2017 when I attended and observed twenty participation activities in the three municipalities. The activities were selected partly based on which participation activities were planned by the municipalities at the time, and partly on an ambition to attend a diversity of activities. They ranged from information meetings about development projects, through stakeholder consultations regarding regulatory plans, to public workshops concerning policy documents.

The observations were "nonparticipant," meaning that I did not participate actively in the meetings as one of the participants or, for that matter, as a municipal representative, but as a spectator (Czarniawska, 2014, p. 44). The purpose of the observations was twofold: obtain an understanding of the activities firsthand and secure contact details from participants for the subsequent interviews. In the beginning of the activities, everyone present was informed about the purpose of my research, that I would be taking notes about the activity, and that they had the possibility to opt out of the study.²³ The notes I took included statements made by municipal representatives and citizen participants, but also personal impressions and interpretations of situations and events. The majority of the notes were transcribed on a computer the same or the following day to be used as part of the study. Contact details were secured either by passing around sheets during the activities or by asking participants directly. Only a few among those asked (about two or three per meeting) denied the request. Of the twenty activities observed, seven were in Täby, five in Järfälla, and eight in Norrtälje.

The interviews with the citizen participants were conducted in the spring and autumn of 2018. I had secured contact details from around 200 participants and I interviewed 37 for the study: 23 of them were men and 14 women; 21 were in working age and 16 were seniors. The selection was to some extent directed towards a diversity in age and gender. But since the majority of participants I had secured details from were men, this was not fully accomplished. Furthermore, the selection was also aimed at obtaining a more diverse material in relation to

23. This was done in all meetings to the extent it was possible; that is, in information meetings and workshops but not in "open-house" formats where participants would repeatedly come and go.

different activities I had attended. Some people were also prioritized based on something they had said or done in relation to the activities and that had felt relevant for the ambitions of the study.

The majority of interviews, 23, were conducted by telephone. Telephone interviews have several shortcomings compared to conventional research interviews since the absence of visual cues potentially restricts the development of rapport and could result in a loss of important contextual information (Irvine et al., 2013). But in relation to the ambitions of the study, which aspired to generate a diversity in experiences, the advantage of being able to conduct more interviews—even if by telephone—outweighed some of its shortcomings.

The remainder of participants, 14, were interviewed face-to-face: in their homes, in their workplace, in restaurants, and in an association house. Two of these interviews were group interviews: one with 3 participants and one with 6. All of these people had participated in workshops for a rural vision program in Norrtälje and they were somewhat overrepresented in the material since these interviews also aimed to produce material for another study in the same research project. Accordingly, some of these interviews were conducted together with two other researchers in the project—although these studies largely intersected. As before, the group dynamics proved helpful in stimulating the interviewees to recall, elaborate, and contrast their experiences and understandings of past phenomena.

The interviews were conducted between 5 and 10 months after the participation activities took place in an effort place less emphasis on the participants' immediate satisfaction with the events and more on their long-term experiences, especially in relation to the activities' perceived outcomes (or lack thereof)—a fairly under-researched topic in the participation literature (Bickerstaff & Walker, 2005).

My ambition with the interviews was again to elicit narratives from the interviewees. The questions were aimed towards exploring which dimensions of the activities had made strong impressions on them, why, and in what way. Examples of questions included why they had chosen to attend the activities; whether their purposes had been fulfilled; whether they had felt involved; how they felt they had been treated, and so on. But they were also asked questions more directly geared towards their understanding of democracy in relation to the activity in particular and planning more broadly. My notes from the earlier observations were particularly supportive in these regards since they could provide context to some of the questions, help the interviewees recall their experiences, and help to explore and compare different interpretations of the same

events—including my own ones. The length of the interviews varied greatly, between 30 minutes to two hours, and as before they were all recorded and transcribed.

Beyond Paper IV, the case study also resulted in a report for the research project and two popular scientific publications (Degerhammar et al., 2019; Zakhour, 2019).

The cover essay

Having already explored the substantial meanings ascribed to democracy in planning theory, the aim of the remainder of this cover essay is to do the same for planning practice. In line with Rosanvallón's (2006) suggestion to connect the "great texts" on democracy to how society at large responds to its dilemmas, the earlier democratic meanings elicited from the planning texts will be used for this latter exploration.

The rationale for using the meanings elicited from planning theory (rather than deploying Rosanvallón's thinking directly) is twofold. First, the planning scholars' particular conceptions around democracy and *planning* can provide much needed depth to the empirical material—which was, as was noted, not always produced with the purpose of excavating such meanings. Second, and in line with the reflexive approach of the thesis, the idea is to use empirical context as a way to work against "dominant thinking" (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2018, p. 398), which also includes the democratic meanings elicited from planning theory.

At the same time, my ambition is not to test these specific democratic meanings against "empirical reality," nor to necessarily argue for one over the other. The exploration will provide some much-needed context in which to productively debate the democratic merits of some of them. But one of the main "points" is still to destabilize some of the taken for granted assumptions around democracy and planning; particularly the contemporary thinking that treats it as exclusively linked to citizen participation or activism. For even if our ambition is to challenge the technocratic and/or neoliberal planning practices currently permeating urban governance, it is useful to grasp the democratic meanings that inform and legitimize them; that is, to understand the particular circumstances, experiences, and ideals that pressure certain planning actors into assuming (or claiming to assume) specific "guardianships" of democracy, even if we do not necessarily agree with those roles ourselves.

As indicated above, the empirical context used for this exploration concerns three different settings related to Swedish local authority planning: a *public planning controversy* in the City of Stockholm; the *administrative routines and practices* in the City's planning administrations; and

the *experiences of the public* who have engaged in participatory planning arrangements in Stockholm County. While these three settings are far from representative of either Western or Swedish planning as whole, as shown above, they do display certain recurring conflicts, dilemmas, expectations, and experiences that are prevalent in planning practice. Thus, the material also serves as a useful empirical backdrop to further the central argument of the thesis: that some of the recurrent conflicts in planning can productively be understood through the lens of democracy.

Furthermore, as noted in the Introduction of the essay, the broader Swedish context also lends itself well to that of a “critical case” as outlined by Flyvbjerg (2006). For even in Sweden, where local authority planning is heavily informed by ideals around representative democracy in general and the rational process view of planning in particular (Strömberg, 2007), it is still possible to elicit deeply conflicting meanings about democracy across the various actors engaged with, or who come to be caught up in planning activity.

In approaching this task, I employ the same kind of “controlled empathy” towards the material as when I analyzed the planning texts. The analysis also emphasizes what the actors treat as some of the core democratic issues and problems pertaining to the studied phenomena; the role of planning in either exacerbating or resolving these issues; and how such treatments can be understood in relation the temporalities and guardianships of democracy. Although not all these actors have been explicitly asked about their understanding of democracy, as discussed above, it will still be possible to elicit such meanings—particularly when attention is paid to many of the conflicts and disputes generated by planning activity.

It should also be noted that in the cover essay it is the *papers* that serve as empirical material—that is, not the complete material produced from the case studies. The latter has undeniably informed the interpretations in the cover essay but, unless specifically stated, nothing “new” will be presented. Before moving on to the analysis, then, I first present some of the key findings of the papers and my individual contribution to them.

Summary of Papers

PAPER I

Zakhour, S., & Metzger, J. (2018a). Placing the action in context: Contrasting public-centered and institutional understandings of democratic planning politics. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 19(3), 345–362.

As stressed throughout this cover essay, there is a tendency among planning researchers to equate the meaning of democracy with a broadly voluntarist understanding centered on the role of the public in directly influencing or (if that fails) destabilizing urban governance processes and outcomes. The aim of this paper was to caution against the exclusive deployment of such public-centered perspectives to the analysis of planning controversies. The concern proceeded from the argument that a myopic emphasis on the “heat of the action” of such events risks obscuring many of its crucial dimensions. These aspects include the material and symbolic prerequisites for direct citizen action; the institutional factors in which such controversies unfold; and the long-term patterned outcomes on democracy they engender.

As empirical backdrop for this argument, we used material produced from the first case study of the thesis; that is, the planning controversy around the redevelopment of The Slaughterhouse District in the City of Stockholm. Drawing primarily on the in-depth interviews with both citizen activist and City officials implicated in the affair, we illustrated how a public-centered perspective left a number of crucial aspects in the controversy all but completely unexamined. These included, for instance, how the citizen activists’ eventual “democratic victory” in derauling the redevelopment project was for the citizens themselves overshadowed by a profound sense of disillusionment with both established democratic institutions and citizen activism more broadly.

In the paper, we rounded off our argument by suggesting that research attention on the role of public mobilizations in “democratizing”

planning can be productively complemented with strands of more institutionally inclined democratic theory, so as to situate citizen action in its broader political and institutional landscape.

In the cover essay, I revisit the paper by paying particular attention to expressed meanings around democracy among the activists and the planners in charge of the redevelopment. As will be shown, those meanings eventually became an explicit source of conflict between the two actor-groupings as the controversy unfolded—effectively turning the meaning of democracy into an issue at stake in the affair.

My individual contribution to the paper consisted of producing the empirical material and writing the majority of the theoretical discussion, results, and analysis—although both my co-author and I contributed in writing to all sections of the paper.

PAPER II

Zakhour, S., & Metzger, J. (2018b). From a “planning-led regime” to a “development-led regime” (and back again?): The role of municipal planning in the urban governance of Stockholm. *disP - The Planning Review*, 54(4), 46–58.

As also discussed in the cover essay, much has been written on the reorientation of the planning impetus towards a neoliberal urban governance regime centered on competitiveness and growth. In the critical planning literature, this reorientation is often traced to broader structural dynamics in the global economy. The aim of the paper, however, was to bring attention to how such external pressures are translated through the daily routines of planning administrations and, hence, to identify some of the concrete organizational components that hold urban governance regimes in place.

Here, the second case study of the thesis served as empirical material: the organizational practices of the City of Stockholm’s planning administrations. Through our case study, we highlighted how the City’s broadly neoliberal planning regime was indeed set in motion as a result of overarching economic structural dynamics, such as the deep recession that hit the Swedish financial and housing sector in the early 1990s. However, we also argued that the ongoing stabilization of this regime was not exclusively contingent on purposeful neoliberal strategies geared towards competitiveness and growth. Rather, the reproduction and maintenance of this regime seemed equally dependent on a set of deeply cemented administrative routines based around short-term priorities and

cost estimates regarding land and property values. Indeed, these latter practices seemed so obstinate that even when new administrative routines were rolled out across the City's planning administrations to specifically address the problems with the prevailing governance regime, they barely seemed to leave a mark the urban development process—largely due their failure to explicitly target the ingrained short-term priorities of the City.

In a somewhat similar fashion to the earlier paper, we concluded by suggesting that structuralist understandings of neoliberal planning regimes can productively be complemented with more sociological-institutional perspectives that seek to identify—and hence render contestable—the concrete organizational components that sustain such regimes.

In the cover essay, I primarily draw on this paper to analyze the democratic meanings espoused by the urban planners in Stockholm's planning administrations. While these meanings are only partially explicit, they are made somewhat tangible by what the urban planners identified as some of the core planning problems with the ongoing organizational routines and priorities of the City.

As stated in the Methodology chapter, I produced the empirical material for this case study—although a few of the interviews were also conducted with my co-author. As before, I wrote the majority of the theoretical section, results, and analysis, but with both of us contributing to all sections.

PAPER III

Metzger, J., & Zakhour, S. (2019). The politics of new urban professions: The case of urban development engineers. In M. Raco, & F. Savini (Eds.), *Planning and knowledge: How new forms of technocracy are shaping contemporary cities* (pp. 181–195). Policy Press.

This paper drew from the same empirical material as paper II. But, here, we focused our attention on those planning actors who contributed to reproducing the broadly neoliberal planning regime in the City of Stockholm: the development engineers.

The paper was developed for an edited volume that critically reflected on the possible emergence of new forms of “technocracies” in urban governance. One aim of the paper, then, was to investigate the specific values and knowledge claims espoused by the development engineers and, furthermore, what might constitute as “new” in such emergent

technocracies. Our findings suggested that the development engineers' professional roles indeed served to render political and potentially contentious issues more benign through their specific claims to expert knowledge. But in contrast to the traditional master-designer—and for that matter Chadwick's (1978) system planner—we also showed how this expertise pertained to the optimal performance of land and property market, as opposed to the design or functioning of urban environments. In line with much of the research on the subject, then, we concluded that the knowledge claims among the “technocrats” in our case study could be said to have emerged as part of broader neoliberal economic relations and trends.

In the cover essay, I partly contrast the paper's highly critical portrayal of the development engineers' self-ascribed responsibilities with Pennington's (2002) liberal treatment of planning to stress how these planning actors could still be said to express a manifest concern for democracy.

Beyond generating the empirical material, my contribution constituted of producing an early draft and writing the majority of the background and results sections of the final paper. But as before, my co-author and I contributed to all sections of the paper.

PAPER IV

Zakhour, S. (2020). The democratic legitimacy of public participation in planning: Contrasting optimistic, critical, and agnostic understandings. *Planning Theory*. Advanced online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095219897404>

This paper asked how democratic legitimacy is potentially engendered in participatory planning if examined from the perspective of the public. This is a fairly neglected perspective in the literature, despite planning scholars' overwhelming emphasis on political participation when theorizing the democratic merits and nature of planning.

In the paper, I divided this participation literature into two broader perspectives. The optimistic and broadly Healeyan perspective has primarily stressed the procedural and more intangible democratic merits of involving citizens in urban governance. By contrast, the more critical and, to some extent, Purcellian perspective base the democratic legitimacy of participation on its relative possibility for citizens to have concrete influence over a political system that serves them. Both these perspectives offer critical insights on the challenges and potentials of

participatory planning. But in the paper, I argued that by lacking an explicit empirical grounding in citizen participants' own experiences and demands, these theoretical perspectives also produce strongly normative and essentialist understandings of democratic legitimacy, which treat it as intrinsic to either process or substance of political participation.

Drawing on the material from the third case study of the thesis—that is, citizens' own experiences of prescribed forms of participation—I brought attention to the complexity and multiplicity of citizens' understandings and demands of participation, which went well beyond having concrete influence or say in urban governance. An especially overlooked factor in both research strands seemed to be the substantial weight placed by participants on the *behaviors* of those in charge of these events, such as whether or not civil servants seemed considerate or knowledgeable about the participants' local environments. Accordingly, I concluded the paper by suggesting that more normatively agnostic and empirically grounded research on participation could reveal critical insights into its potential for realizing democratic planning outcomes.

In the cover essay, I return to this paper to provide some further insights into the citizens' experiences of both participation and planning. As will be shown, when read through the democratic meanings elicited from planning theory, the behavioral emphasis among some of the citizens could be said to broadly fall under the liberal and, to some extent, post-modern treatment of planning as was stressed by Rittel and Webber (1973).

6

Democratic Meanings in Planning Practice

This chapter is dedicated to the second research question: examining the conflicting meanings ascribed to democracy in planning practice—which here concerns three different settings in the context of Swedish local authority planning. The investigation will be geared towards stressing the central argument of the thesis: that many of the conflicts in planning are at least to some extent premised upon competing meanings ascribed to democracy and how it connects to planning, even if not always stated in those terms by the actors themselves.

Accordingly, similar to the preceding analysis of debates in planning thought, the point is to highlight that the substantive meaning ascribed to democracy in planning practice also has bearing on how such conflicts play out and thus constitute an important dimension for understanding planning practice itself.

Additionally, the point is again to challenge the conventional and broadly unexamined treatment of the meanings of democracy in planning, which often intrinsically or uncritically links its meaning to the realm of public participation or citizen activism in urban governance. As will be shown, even citizen participants and activists ascribe planning with certain dimensions akin to a *longer* and even *rationalist* “temporal guardianship.” Moreover, these different meanings around democracy also challenge the prevailing tendency in the literature to label those who oppose or seem unconcerned with public participation as also opposing or unconcerned with democracy. Indeed, democracy could even be seen to serve as an issue at stake among planning actors who assume technocratic and even neoliberal roles in urban development.

The structure of the chapter differs from the chronological order of the papers and, hence, the order in which the case studies were conducted. The first part examines the disputes and conflicts within the planning administrations in the City of Stockholm (i.e., the 2nd case study). Here, the meanings around democracy and its relation to

planning are manifested somewhat implicitly; through the ongoing conflicts regarding the process and substance of Stockholm's urban development. In the second part, I examine the experiences of citizen participants who engaged in participatory planning arrangements and whose meanings around democracy are voiced slightly more explicitly (the 3rd case study). Finally, in the third part I return to the City of Stockholm to foreground the contested meanings of democracy among the actor-groupings of the planning controversy (the 1st case study). Here, these meanings can be understood as actively constructed by the actors, and also deployed as part of the political struggle—turning the meaning of democracy into an ongoing source of conflict as the controversy unfolded.

Each part is introduced with some relevant context and background to the case. This is followed by the analysis proper of the democratic meanings ascribed by the actors; facilitated with the help of the framework developed earlier and the contested democratic meanings elicited from planning thought. Each part is then rounded off with a concluding summary where I locate these meanings in the heuristic figure of the “field of tensions” regarding the meaning and definition of democracy.

6.1 DEMOCRATIC MEANINGS IN PLANNING ADMINISTRATIONS

As stated in the Methodology chapter, the material used for analyzing democratic meanings in planning administrations comes from Paper II (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018b) and Paper III (Metzger & Zakhour, 2019). These papers essentially investigated how the overarching structural shifts in the global economy has influenced the administrative roles, routines, and sequence of events that characterize the urban development process in the City of Stockholm. Broadly conceived, these shifts entailed a transfer of power away from the “urban planners”—housed in the City Planning Office and who are thus in charge of the regulatory planning process—to the colloquially titled “development engineers”—located in the Development Office and who are tasked with managing the lease, sale, and development of Stockholm's vast public landholdings.

Here, I analyze the meanings both these actor-groupings ascribe to democracy in planning, made manifest through their repeated disputes regarding the urban development process and its outcomes. But before doing so, I present a brief background to Stockholm's urban development process.

Background

As I discussed in the Introduction chapter, a main source of interest in Paper II and III centered on the shifting roles and functions between the *regulatory planning framework*, stipulated under public law, and the management of *municipal landownership*, which broadly falls under private law (Olsson, 2018). While municipally owned land has since long been a crucial instrument for Swedish municipalities to actively compel urban development, it is only recently—since the early 1990s—that its management has begun to override and set the framing of the regulatory planning process as well. From that point on, the procedure for allocating public land to developers shifted from something of a formality (typically deployed after a detailed development plan was in place) to functioning as one of the first and most central instruments used by public authorities to negotiate urban development (Caesar, 2016). Moreover, the exchange value and sale of this land is now deeply embedded in the finance structure of municipal authorities (Tonell, 2016).

As shown in Paper II, in the City of Stockholm these changes were motivated by a broader withdrawal of the State from the housing sector, making the City increasingly reliant on the resources of the developer sector to finance and initiate development. Accordingly, the development engineers—in charge of the use and sale of this land—now have clear stipulations that they assess the profitability of each project on public land from early on in the development process. The prevailing praxis is that close to all projects on public land should either be profitable or, at the very least, break even for the City.

Furthermore, during Sweden's recession in the 1990s, the granting of land allocations in Stockholm was also reframed as an incentive to developers to find innovative solutions for land considered difficult to develop. This, in effect, shifted the initiative of urban development away from the City and the City Planning Office on to the market, leaving much of the regulatory planning process a byproduct of the private law contracts drawn up between developers and the Development Office.

It has recently been observed that the double role that municipalities assume as rent-seeking landowners and planning authorities represents a transgression of the Western liberal legal tradition and its public-private law divide (Gerber et al., 2017; Olsson, 2018). In this tradition, the State is expected merely to provide institutional frameworks for the market rather than actively engage in it. Nevertheless, from a political economy perspective, this dual role has been observed to be fully compatible with the diffusion of “regulatory capitalism” where the

State—through a “roll-out” rather than “roll-back” of regulations (Allmendinger, 2017)—assumes an actively coordinating role in steering urban development for capital accumulation (Raco, 2014). In this sense, the transgression itself ultimately reveals “the inescapable contradiction, or tension, between the purpose of the state according to liberal-democratic ideals and its regulatory function within capitalism” (Olsson, 2018, p. 647; see also Christophers, 2016; 2017).

But as will be shown, in the public administration of Stockholm this dual role also reveals a tension between competing meanings of democracy itself, meanings that are made manifest through the repeated conflicts between the urban planners and the development engineers regarding the role and function of urban development.

Democratic meanings among the urban planners

For the interviewed urban planners in the City Planning Office, the above identified organizational shifts have produced deep discrepancies between the concrete administrative instruments at their disposal and what they see as their core responsibilities, which are instilled both through the explicit planning policies designated by the political majorities and by what they perceive as the wider obligations that underpin planning as a vocation. In Paper II, we showed how such discrepancies were particularly evident through three core problems and concerns the urban planners identified as currently prevailing in the urban development process.

First, the reconfiguration of the development process has resulted in a “projectification” of Stockholm’s urban development where long-term strategic planning has been replaced by a small-project based planning model. As one urban planner observed, between the comprehensive plan’s vagueness and the detailed development plan’s technical specificity “there was no level where you could enlist these more general questions to be able to get an overall picture of qualities, needs, challenges and what [a project] could mean in a broader context” (urban planner, in Zakhour & Metzger, 2018b, p. 52). According to the urban planners, this projectification has been rather detrimental for the city’s built environment, with environmental qualities threatened or built away and potential long-term linkages and synergies between new developments canceled out by short-term priorities.

Accordingly, the urban planners seem to identify some of the same deficiencies in planning as those highlighted in the works of Chadwick (1978) and Faludi (1987), where the shortsighted nature of other actor-groupings and interests involved in planning compelled planners to

pursue more long-term commitments. But given how the urban planners here identify problems related to the substantive content of urban development—as opposed to its “process”—their sentiments seem to align more with the comparably longer commitments of Chadwick’s systems view approach, which envisioned how the long-term functioning of complex urban environments could potentially be redressed through strategic, flexible, and holistic planning efforts.

A second issue that has increasingly become a source of frustration among the urban planners stems from the Development Office’s practice of utilizing the exchange value of land as a basis for public investment decisions in urban development. The unequivocal consequence of this finance structure is a deepened segregation across the city, with richer areas effectively being subsidized with public investments at the expense of poorer and already marginalized areas. As shown in both Paper II and III, areas in Stockholm where the market value on the land is high enjoy considerably more public investments in crucial infrastructures and amenities by the Development Office than socio-economically weaker parts of the city which are considered less attractive to developers. As one urban planner noted, if projects on such land are even initiated, its lower selling price inevitably leads to less income for the City, which means that “you must try to forgo something else, so to say; you don’t invest in developing the park, or you can save on something else so that you can still walk on both sides of the street” (urban planner, in Metzger & Zakhour, 2019, p. 187).

Many of the loudly voiced ambitions by the City authorities pertaining to equity and segregation are in various policy documents often explicitly shouldered on the urban planners in City Planning Office. At the same time, virtually all the interviewed urban planners lamented the lack of institutional infrastructures to follow through on such ambitions, as was tellingly by captured in one of their statements:

If you draw that which you can control in spatial planning (*fysisk planering*) to its conclusion, it’s “Where do you put the streets?”, “How do you design public spaces?” or “How do you design the settlements?” That’s basically what we can control. [...] So these are, of course, things that are linked to social sustainability, but for a lot of things, which are more of land politics and economic politics, we don’t have these... We may have knowledge of them and commitment to them, but we have no way to control them with the tools that we have at our disposal, which are, sort of, planning documents and planning regulations. (Urban planner, in Zakhour & Metzger, 2018b, p. 55)

Through their loudly voiced critique of the current “deeply unfair” finance structure (urban planner, in Zakhour & Metzger, 2018b, p. 53) and their desire for tools by which to promote a more equitable urban development, the urban planners thus voice some of the same ambitions for planning as was evident in the work of Fainstein (2010). Similar to the previously voiced ambitions that echoed Chadwick’s (1978) work, these also seem founded on the belief that planners harbor a specific “instrumental” capacity to better accommodate the public interest than many other actor-groupings involved in urban development. Here however, and as in Fainstein’s work, this capacity is not necessarily derived from their technical expertise around urban environments, but from their normative commitments towards implementing a more equitable urban development—even in cases, it seems, where neither their elected employers nor the regulatory planning framework has given them the infrastructures to follow through on such ideals.

A third contentious issue concerned how well the subordinated role of the regulatory planning framework resonates with the participatory ideals that underpin it, as well as the City’s own loudly voiced aspirations to promote an inclusive and participatory urban development process. Indeed, as shown in Paper III, the Development Office’s narrow focus on quantitative targets and profit maximization has produced an explicit interest in promoting high levels of development density for each project instigated on public land. Coupled with how this interest is generated from early on in the development process, it is questionable if the emergent interests of those actors who are not present for the negotiations or the signing of the agreements have any likely chance to alter the trajectory set out during the land allocation process. While such issues were only briefly discussed in the papers, some of the interviewed urban planners did express concerns about how the City’s participatory activities potentially lose their worth due to these administrative practices and interests.

Through such concerns, the urban planners thus also espouse dimensions of Healey’s (1997) democratic ambitions for planning; where planners were not simply seen as catalysts for a predefined public interest, identified through a technical expertise regarding urban systems or a normative ideal around justice. Rather, the public interest was understood as actively constructed through processes of collaboration with the public. But interestingly, as will be shown in part 6.3, at least one of interviewed urban planners had a quite different opinion on the matter of participation when they were faced with an ongoing public planning controversy.

As a result of these issues, the urban planners regularly came into conflicts with the development engineers regarding both the substance and process of the City's urban development. Indeed, as shown in Paper II, even after the City Executive Office had rolled out a new set of administrative routines for the various planning administrations to specifically address many of these exact issues, the urban planners were still frustrated by the Development Office's insular practices, which they described as "still completely organised based on what type of pressure there is from the market, and on when [development] applications arrive" (urban planner, in Zakhour & Metzger, 2018b, p. 53). Nevertheless, as will be shown, the development engineers ascribe themselves with responsibilities that could also very well be interpreted as relating to democratic concerns.

Democratic meanings among the development engineers

The Development Office's project managers, the development engineers, are the ones vested with the responsibility of managing the above-described land allocation process. They thus serve as something akin to "gatekeepers" of the Stockholm's urban development (and regulatory planning) process through having early influence over which projects are picked up by the City and by further setting the premises and conditions for the content and expenditures of these projects.

Paper III's critical reading of their practices and professional commitments—which were likened to that of "post-political techno-managerialism" (Metzger & Zakhour, 2019, p. 182)—painted these actors as if they were forcefully working against any potentially democratic meanings and ideals emblematic of planning. However, a rereading of how they express their responsibilities also highlights a manifest concern for democracy, albeit with a more liberal emphasis compared to the urban planners.

As noted in Paper III, the role of development engineer in Sweden does not designate an "expert profession" or broader "vocation" in the same sense of an urban planner or planner-architect. Rather, it could more readily be understood as a technically oriented professional *role*. The actors who occupy this role are thus not ascribed with any broader professional commitments or specific "codes of conduct" beyond those designated by their employer. In this sense, they could be said to already embody parts of what Faludi (1987) envisioned for planning, one where its chief actors are ultimately beholden to parliamentary politics rather than predefined normative ideals inherent in the planning profession. At the same, as also stressed in the paper, the development engineers did

not seem overly concerned about the majority of the various public planning goals ratified by their elected employers. Rather, their responsibilities mainly seemed to entail, as one of them noted, “representing the land owner, that is, the tax payers” (development engineer, in Metzger & Zakhour, 2019, p. 186).

From this perspective, the development engineers’ commitments partly overlap with Chadwick’s (1978) ambitions for planning, which was almost geared towards “replacing” parliamentary politics. Indeed, as shown in Paper III the technocratic elements expressed through their professional role does have the effect of rendering potentially contentious issues into technical questions of “right and wrong.” At the same time, this capacity is not vested in a body of knowledge pertaining to the optimal performance of urban systems or environments, as the planning technocrats of old (and the urban planners above) made claims to represent. It instead relates to a technical expertise concerning the functioning of land and property markets. The development engineers’ role thus runs partly counter to the broader rationalist treatments of planning, including Faludi’s who at least acknowledged that planners ultimately deal with substantive questions about the built environment (even if he was more concerned about the procedures in which such questions unfold).

Accordingly, the self-described role of the development engineers more closely aligns with the liberal treatment of planning that was stressed by Pennington (2002); that is, where the price system of the property market is seen as a superior mechanism for coordinating decisions in urban development. While the development engineers do seem to acknowledge certain housing provision responsibilities, as shown in Paper III, those are mostly limited to quantitative targets. Indeed, many of the City’s stated equity aspirations, including actively staving off segregation and the provision of more affordable housing were, in their view, simply not part of their core responsibilities and better accommodated by the market economy. As one of them noted, “If we can handle the quantitative target, then it should of course be a better balance in the market; that is what one can hope, in a sense” (development engineer, in Metzger & Zakhour, 2019, p. 188). But in contrast to the more explicitly normative aspects of Pennington’s arguments, the development engineers’ do not seem to ascribe market processes with the capacity to handle such issues based on a substantive liberal tribute to individual freedom and choice. Rather, and as was still stressed by Pennington, it seems that the sheer complexity they ascribe to such issues for them

cludes any prospects for planning intervention beyond that of a facilitative capacity.

As an example of this, In Paper III, the development engineers stressed that subsidizing land sales or stipulating rent levels would do little for the City's ambitions to provide more equal access to housing since such market interferences would only benefit the first renter/buyer. As one of them explained, under such circumstances, "it is simply better that the taxpayers get their share of the market price, so to speak, than that the developer gets an even higher profit, right?" (Development engineer, in Metzger & Zakhour, 2019, p. 186). Thus, while their activity might not be founded on ideals around individual freedom, they do adopt a form of "liberal guardianship" towards the property owners they serve.

In sum, then, while the nature of their role as landowners on behalf of the public may well transgress the liberal market-state dichotomy discussed earlier, the development engineers nonetheless come to see their role as a merely facilitative one. Indeed, in many ways they view themselves as just another profit-seeking agent on the property market who are simply beholden to their shareholders, which in this case happens to be the tax-paying citizens of Stockholm.

Conclusions

In this part, I have highlighted how the conflicts and disputes between Stockholm's urban planners and development engineers are at least partly informed by competing views around the meaning of democracy for planning. In Figure 3 below, these meanings are visualized in relation to the contested meanings of democracy obtained from planning theory.

For the interviewed urban planners, the reorganization of the City's development process has led to confusion and resignation due to their roles largely being reduced to a facilitating capacity geared towards the property interests of the City and developers. But as shown in the figure, in contrast to these actual roles, the democratic meanings evoked by the urban planners partly reflected the rationalist treatments of planning as espoused by Chadwick (1978). For the urban planners, the short-term profit motives characteristic of the developer market, and crucially, their own colleagues, demanded from them a longer temporal guardianship aimed at comprehensive strategies and long-term holistic planning.

Additionally, by bemoaning a perceived loss of planning instruments geared towards more socially and economically inclusive outcomes, the urban planners espoused democratic meanings in line with Fainstein's

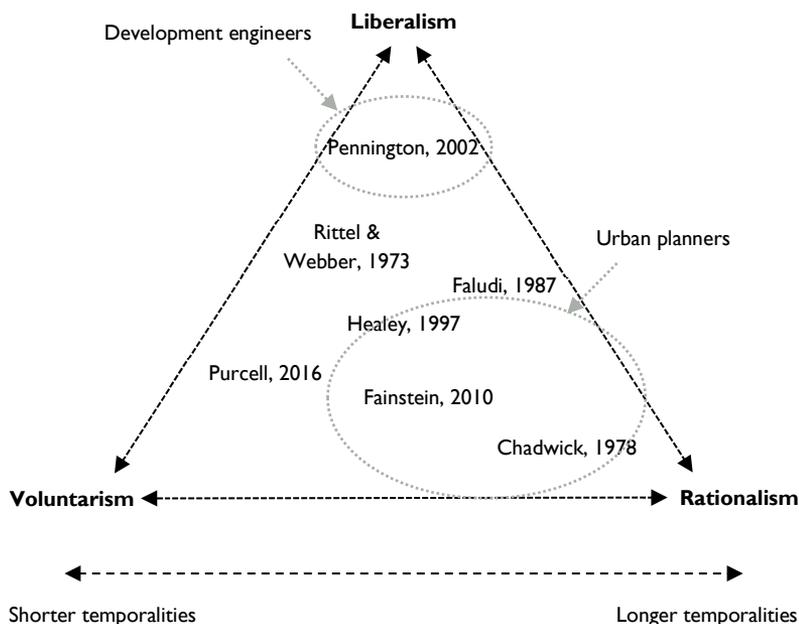


Figure 3: Democratic meanings among urban planners and development engineers in the planning administrations of the City of Stockholm

(2010) slightly shorter and slightly more voluntarist approach—and which was broadly geared towards progressing democracy as opposed to safeguarding its existing institutions. Indeed, their commitments to such meanings seemed so principled that they expressed them—and perhaps even pursued them—without recourse to the formulated goals of their democratically elected employers.

The urban planners' also voiced sentiments echoing Healey's (1997) emphasis on collaborative and participatory planning processes, albeit in quite subdued forms. But as shown (or not shown) in the figure, democratic meanings reflecting Rittel and Webber's (1973) more postmodern emphasis on diversity and emancipatory politics was not expressed among the urban planners. At the same time, the lack of such emphasis might be less of a representation of the Swedish urban planner per se and more of a reflection of this empirical material in particular, including the questions that were asked to the planners, the particular geographical areas of Stockholm that they work in, and so on (cf. Westin, 2019; Wiberg, 2018).

But interestingly, despite the strong norm around representative democracy in Sweden—a norm which has engendered a dominating influence of the broadly Faludian rational process view on planning

legislation (Strömngren, 2007)—it seems that there are many more democratic meanings ascribed to planning among some of the urban planners themselves; who in some ways see themselves superseding parliamentary democracy.

A similar understanding was expressed by the objects of much of the urban planners' woes: the development engineers. Although, in this case, the professional commitments that superseded the ambitions of their elected employers was instead aimed at the interests of the taxpayers. The development engineers thus harbored a more intermediate and liberal temporal guardianship where planning intervention in the property market is to some extent viewed as an impediment to democracy. Accordingly, as shown in Figure 3, despite their profit-driven and broadly neoliberal practices, the development engineers' self-described responsibilities and tasks can still be located within the historical field of tensions regarding the meanings of democracy that has been identified by Rosanvallon (2006).

It should be noted that my ambition is not defend the development engineers' practices through a relativization around the meaning of democracy. Quite obviously, their practices produce what can be argued to be a deeply problematic and, in many understandings of the concept, a deeply *undemocratic* urban development. Rather, my intent is to bring attention to the fact that if the point is to challenge such practices, it helps to understand the ideals and sentiments that inform the actors who promote them, and even what they perhaps see as the opposite dangers and "pathologies" of democracy in not assuming such roles.

Indeed, when we return to some of these same actors in part 6.3, and are introduced to the repeated attempts of an affected public to have of any kind of voice in an extremely insular planning process, we do well to keep in mind that these same practices also seem to have pressured the *urban planners* into assuming their longer temporal and broadly technocratic guardianship roles. But first, I move on to explore democratic meanings among the public in participatory governance practices.

6.2 DEMOCRATIC MEANINGS IN PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

In this part, I draw on Paper IV (Zakhour, 2020) to analyze democratic meanings among citizens who have engaged in prescribed forms participation in planning. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, the empirical context of the paper was the planning related participation activities of three municipalities in Stockholm County: *Norrhälje*, *Täby*, and *Järfälla*. In the paper, I investigated the expectations and experiences

among participants of such activities in order to explore how, and in what form democratic legitimacy is engendered through participation if viewed from the perspective of the public—a surprisingly neglected perspective in the broader debates around the merits of participation.

Here, I discuss these expectations and experiences in relation to the theoretical framework to more clearly highlight the multiple democratic meanings these citizens ascribe to participation in particular and plan more broadly. My ambition is to foreground how understandings about democracy and planning inform the expectations and, consequently, shape the subsequent experiences of people who engage with planning, whether they turn out to be broadly positive, negative, or both. Accordingly, the point is again to stress that understanding the meaning of democracy among actors in planning helps in understanding the meaning of conflicts in the field as well. Additionally, the point is again to challenge the established yet unexamined assumption that treats democracy as intrinsic to “more participation” in planning. As will be shown, even citizen participants seem to ascribe planning with what could be considered longer and even rationalist democratic guardianships.

Background

Stakeholder consultations have been a staple of municipal planning processes since they became a legally mandated requirement via the Planning and Building Act of 1987. But as discussed in the Introduction, municipalities are also increasingly employing so called “citizen dialogues.” There is no given framework for how they are implemented, and it instead serves as a wide framing device for prescribed forms of participation activities where public authorities involve citizens in, usually, urban governance processes. Accordingly, it encompasses the above statutory planning consultations but also information meetings, public forums, and workshops around plans, vision programs, and steering documents. But despite the widespread interests and deployment of participatory governance activities, it seems that much of the prospects for substantial public influence have been severely challenged by Sweden’s strong norms around representative forms of decision-making (Tahvilzadeh, 2015)—and, as was garnered from the previous part, perhaps also by the move towards a more development-led planning regime (see also Olsson, 2018).

The three municipalities studied in relation to the case constitute a somewhat diverse context. Their population sizes are similar, ranging between 60,000 and 80,000 people. But there are substantial differences

between them in relation to, for instance, income and education levels, demographics, and experience with participation activities.

Norrälje has relatively low average income levels compared to both Täby and Järfälla and—relative to the Swedish average—a low educational level. It also has a much larger rural population than any other municipality in Stockholm County, with half of the population living outside the urban centers. By contrast, Järfälla broadly mirrors the County in terms of income, education, and demographics. Täby, in turn, is one of the richest municipalities in Sweden, and has traditionally been quite antagonistic towards urban development and population growth more broadly.

At the time of study, several new urban development projects were underway in all three municipalities, which had provoked strong discord among many of its residents. And in line with much the literature on the topic, the participation activities I studied rarely seemed to provide the possibility for citizens to disrupt, alter, or concretely influence the trajectory of these projects. But as will be shown, the meanings citizens' ascribed to participation arrangements were not only shaped by the relative possibility for influence.

Democratic meanings among citizen participants

Unsurprisingly, many of the expectations and demands placed on the participatory activities among the interviewed citizen participants did, in fact, reflect ideals along the voluntarist understanding of democracy. In other words, participatory activities were not expected only to be advisory in nature but should actually force planning institutions to conform to the will of the people. As one participant put it, “We don’t want a *feeling* of participation, we *want* participation” (woman, thirties, in Zakhour, 2020, p. 12). Indeed, as highlighted in Paper IV, this expectation was so consequential for many participants that even in cases where planning decisions eventually ended up being favorable to them (e.g., a project was canceled), the participants were still left with a feeling of ambiguity about the participation activity in question since they were not quite sure if such decisions were the result of their own input or due to other political and economic forces far beyond their purview and control. This ambiguity was often expressed through conditional assessments about the activities, such as, “if [the participation meeting] has any effect, it was very democratic [but] it remains to be seen” (man, fifties, in Zakhour, 2020, p. 20).

This broadly voluntarist sentiment that participation should entail concrete citizen influence was observable almost across all interviewed

participants, in all activities, and in all three municipalities. But, as shown in Paper IV, it was often accompanied by a parallel expectation, or suspicion, that the participation activity in question was, in fact, only advisory—or worse, an attempt to legitimize preconceived plans and decisions.

Such expectations were particularly evident among the rural populations in Norrtälje, the municipality located in the northern rim of the County. Here, a number of workshops around a new rural vision program were essentially hijacked by rural residents due to their discontent with the municipality's decision to decommission several public schools in their local communities. But as noted in Paper IV, their discontent should also be understood in relation to a deep-rooted schism between the wider rural population and the municipal administration in Norrtälje, which had seemingly developed following decades of austerity policies, reduced public services, and distribution policies favoring the urban centers over the rural outskirts. According to these rural citizens, without such issues first being addressed, prescribed forms of participation were seen as hollow attempts to placate an angered citizenry.

From this perspective, it seems that some citizen participants place demands on planning institutions that are partly in line with Fainstein's (2010) justice view of planning and where participatory governance is broadly seen as subordinate to issues around equity. But interestingly, in lieu of such redistributive policies, some of the rural citizens in Norrtälje adopted a more radical voluntarist (and slightly anarchist) understanding of planning similar to that promoted by Purcell (2016). Although this was only hinted at in Paper IV, some of these communities began to envision themselves as fully autonomous districts in the municipality and they regularly took it upon themselves to finance and run public services; and even organizing participatory activities for their own rural vision programs (see further Degerhammar et al., 2019).²⁴

Nevertheless, some citizens were also pleasantly surprised by the municipalities' participation activities—even in Norrtälje where the workshops allowed the angered citizenry to collectively voice their discontent towards the municipal administration and demand accountability. Indeed, some of these citizen participants expressed a clear satisfaction with how the planning authorities adapted to their complaints and substantially changed the highly prescribed workshop-design to a more open and facilitative format in the ensuing activities. Although

24. In the interviews, a recurring joke among some of these rural citizens was their ambition to blow up the only bridge leading to their island community.

these changes did not have much bearing on the school issue, it still lead some citizens to liken the participation activities to that of “democracy seeping all the way out in its limbs” (man, fifties, Zakhour, 2020, p. 12). Such sentiments thus partly align with Healey’s (1997) collaborative understanding of planning, one where “process innovations are as significant an outcome of planning activity as are substantive outcomes” (p. 85).

There were also those who seemed to harbor sentiments more in line with Pennington’s (2002) radical and liberal treatment of planning, where it is seen as direct infringement on private property rights. This was particularly observable among homeowners in Täby. Here, the planning authorities were in the process of developing a new comprehensive plan that targeted large areas for densification, including affluent residential districts. In Paper IV, I highlighted that some of these homeowners were ultimately satisfied with the consultation meetings around the plan—indeed, some were even eager to translate it into reality due to how it would likely entail a lucrative increase in their property values. But here, it must also be noted that not all homeowners shared this sentiment. The comprehensive plan itself would not be legally binding (in contrast to a “detailed development plan”), and in areas where the municipality did not directly own the land it would be impossible to implement it without the consent of the actual property owners. But some participants still felt deeply resentful towards the fact that the municipality had even expressed interest in targeting their property for densification.

At the same time, as was emphasized in Paper IV, other participants had arrived at these same consultation meetings with an ambition to better understand what the densification proposals meant for Täby as whole. But they were also left with feelings of frustration due the consultation format’s perceived institutional bias towards those with clearly defined property interests. As one participant explained, the format made it difficult “to mix high and low since you’re standing next to a local resident who’s very upset about what will happen on his or her property in relation to their neighbor who’ll be getting something better” (woman, forties, in Zakhour, 2020, p. 14). From this perspective, some citizens ascribed participation with the same democratic deficiencies as did Fainstein (2010), who stressed that such activities often favor narrow sectoral interests over more collective concerns. Although, the same participants would perhaps not see this institutional bias as an argument for ascribing planners with even more authority relative to the wider public.

Other liberal meanings around democracy and planning can also be observed in the material, but which are more along the cultural and norm-based dimensions that was emphasized by Rittel and Webber (1973).

In Paper IV, I tried to bring particular focus to the fact citizen participants often seemed as conscious of the *behavior* of decision-makers as they were of the exact *content* of the decisions that were at stake in the activities. This was particularly observable from the recalled experiences of a participation meeting in Järfälla that concerned a densification plan for a green space near a local community. While the participants were extremely antagonistic towards the plan itself, the planner in charge of the meeting had seemed so appreciative of their grievances and knowledgeable about their local environment that some of them still felt genuinely satisfied with the meeting. One participant had even called up the planner the following day to offer praise, reasoning that “you have to distinguish between the issue and the person, so to speak” (man, sixties, in Zakhour, 2020, p. 16).

In other activities, participants had been attentive of depreciative behaviors among municipal representatives. For instance, in the very first of the workshop-meetings in Norrtälje, many participants decided to leave due to what they perceived as an exaggerated “spritely attitude” (man, forties, Zakhour, 2020, p. 16) among the hired consultants and the deployment of “kindergarten methods” (woman, forties, Zakhour, 2020, p. 16) in the face of their grievances. Interestingly, the interviewed participants often recalled behavioral impressions such as these more vividly than they did the exact nature of the plans that the activities concerned.

Thus, on the one hand, such experiences centered on the behavior of decision-makers are partly consistent with some of the dimensions of planning that Healey (1997) had stressed; its role in acknowledging and appreciating the different “lifeworlds” that lay claim to shared spaces. But on the other, it is difficult to interpret even the above positive sentiments as the result of a collaborative process where new “shared meanings” are forged across cultural differences. Rather, the participants treated these experiences as distinct from, or held them simultaneously with their particular grievances—which often were still in need of redress. Indeed, for some, the generated satisfaction around the participation meeting only seemed to have entrenched their position on the issue at stake even further; “It made me even more excited and I felt that of course we need to keep this space” (woman, sixties, Zakhour, 2020, p. 16). Accordingly, many of these behavioral impressions seem to align

more with the liberal and “postmodern” treatment of planning that Rittel and Webber (1973) emphasized, where the recognition of cultural diversity was valued for its own sake rather than for its relevance to various process innovations and outcomes.

Interestingly, more rationalist demands of planning can also be observed in the material—or at least the brand of rationalism that Faludi (1987) espoused.

As I stressed in paper IV, an aspect that seemed crucial in shaping citizens’ experiences concerned their perception of how urban governance was marred with deeply ingrained biases and vested interests. Many of the interviewed participants challenged the notion that stakeholder consultations serve as a site for negotiation between the “private interests” of locals and the “public interest” that planners often make claims to represent. Rather, as noted above, participants often found themselves representing more collective concerns not only against what they perceived as the narrow interests of property owners but also, it seems, against the “special interests” advanced by developers, politicians, and planners as well.

At the same time, such struggles were often deemed extremely taxing due to the perceived impenetrable nature of urban governance. As one citizen participant with a long career in planning had explained, “These are processes that take place completely outside the purview of any ordinary citizen” (man, eighties, Zakhour, 2020, p. 14). Thus, some participants seemed resigned to the fact that the fate of their local environments was likely to be determined by vested interests, short-term profit motives, or even fraudulent conduct perpetrated by the local authorities. Accordingly, at least some of the experiences among the citizen participants align with the rationalist treatment of planning by Faludi (1987), whose ambition was to “democratize” planning by placing it under more outside scrutiny and impartial government procedures.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this part has further illustrated how conflicts and experiences among actors in planning are at least partly informed by different understandings of what democracy means in the field. Indeed, among those citizens engaged in participatory governance, meanings around democracy seemed crucial in shaping their expectations of these activities and, hence, their subsequent experiences and perceptions of public authorities—even if “democracy” was not always evoked explicitly by these actors themselves. Furthermore, these experiences revealed a striking range and variation in ascribed meanings to democracy—even

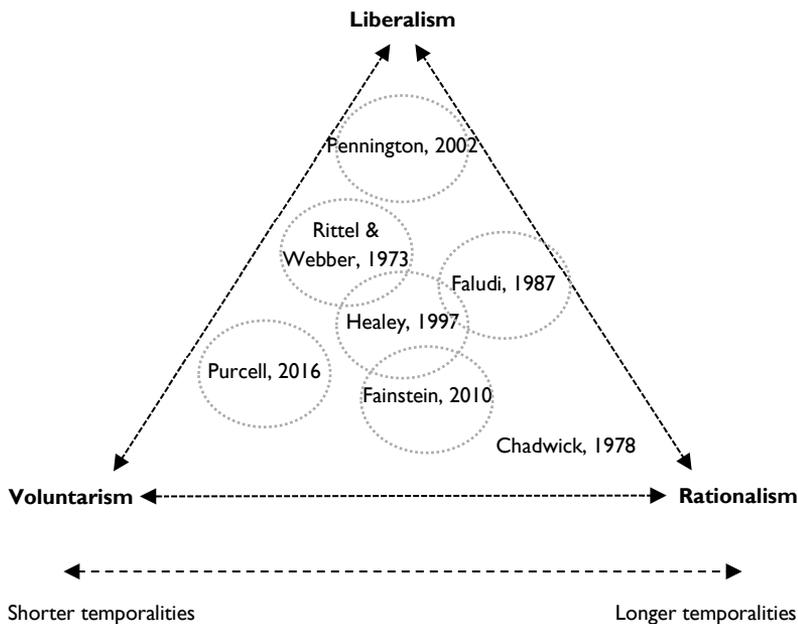


Figure 4: Democratic meanings among citizens engaged in participatory planning

within the individual citizen participant. These multiple meanings are indicated through the circles in Figure 4.

To be sure, many of the participants seemed to harbor convictions along the voluntarist treatments of democracy: that for participation to be considered democratic, it needs to allow for concrete delegation of power away from planners and elected representatives on to the public. Indeed, some also seemed to ascribe democratic meaning to these arrangements based on their relative potential for more collaborate outcomes, as Healey (1997) has emphasized.

But many also stressed democratic meanings that went well beyond planning's participatory aspects. These were expressed in their pursuits for more autonomous and self-organized planning practices, as stressed by Purcell (2016), but also in their demands for more redistribute and equity-focused planning practices, along Fainstein's (2010) justice approach.

Liberal understandings of democracy were also expressed by participants, including meanings similar to those highlighted by Pennington (2002) who treated private property rights as intrinsic to individual liberty and choice. But it was also expressed through participants' attentiveness to the behavior of municipal authorities and in whether they felt

they had been treated with respect, had their grievances recognized, and their local environments appreciated; and thus more along Rittel and Webber's (1973) work.

Many also expressed a salient conviction that urban governance is structured by short-term goals, institutional biases, and possibly even corrupt practices. Through such sentiments, participants also seemed to evoke a demand for, if not more rational planning procedures than at the very least more impartial ones, as is stressed by Faludi (1987).

Thus, as evident from the figure, citizens seemed to demand of planning not only short and voluntarist temporal democratic commitments, but also intermediate and even longer guardianships along the rationalist dimension of democracy. But perhaps unsurprisingly, few citizens seemed content with the idea of accrediting planners with an even stronger mandate to dictate urban development relative to the public—as is proposed by Chadwick (1978) and, to some extent, Fainstein (2010).

But again, what is important here to note is not which of these meanings is inherently more democratic or, for that matter, which of these planning theories fit better with empirical reality. Rather, what can be observed is that the multiple way people understand the relationship between planning and democracy puts significant pressure on the established thinking that treats democracy as exclusively intrinsic to the realm of political participation and/or activism. As shown here, even citizen participants themselves seem to ascribe democratic meanings to planning that go well beyond the notion of having concrete influence over urban governance.

6.3 DEMOCRATIC MEANINGS IN A PUBLIC PLANNING CONTROVERSY

In this part, I draw on Paper I (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a) to foreground the contested meanings of democracy among two actor-groupings involved in a planning controversy in the City of Stockholm: the two project managers tasked with redeveloping the industrial Slaughterhouse District in Stockholm into a commercial district and the locals who opposed the redevelopment.

As I noted in the Methodology chapter, in the paper we analyzed the controversy by contrasting a voluntarist and episodic (or short temporal) understanding of democracy with a more rationalist and institutional (or longer temporal) perspective. Now, I reexamine the controversy through the broader theoretical framework to elicit the concrete democratic meanings espoused by its main actors.

My ambition is again to stress the central argument of the thesis: Conflicting meanings about the relationship between democracy and planning can sometimes be crucial in shaping both the conflicts and the experiences among actor engaged with, or who come to be caught up in planning activity. But where such meanings were previously broadly treated as preexisting or partially implicit, here they can more readily be seen as actively constructed by the actors and, moreover, explicitly deployed as part of the political struggle. Moreover, the analysis will serve as yet another counterpoint to the broadly voluntarist understanding of democracy in planning. As I will show, the local activists engaged in this controversy were thoroughly disillusioned with not just the City authorities but also citizen activism more broadly. Additionally, they even seemed to espouse an understanding of democracy and planning that would require planning institutions to assume longer, or at least intermediate guardianships of democracy.

Background

The public planning controversy studied in Paper I could at least superficially fit the stereotypical picture of a NIMBY-controversy:²⁵ a relatively resourceful and moderately affluent group of locals mobilize against the redevelopment plan of an industrial area into a place for housing and consumption and which would thus presumably be in the interests for everyone in the city.²⁶ But the locals understandably refused this label and explicitly argued that they opposed the specific plan and not a redevelopment of the district per se.

Introduced in 2013, the plan entailed the development of what would be one Sweden's largest commerce complexes, complete with a shopping mall, an Ikea department store, and 4000 parking spaces. According to the City, the plans would boost the status of the surrounding areas, attract capital and employment opportunities, and—through the sale of the municipally owned land—secure Stockholm with finances for other projects around the city. But for the neighboring locals, the commerce complex would entail a marked increase in traffic, pollution, and toxins in their already congested neighborhood.

The plans were introduced through a “Letter of Intent,” an early form of land allocation that granted the Ikea Group an exclusive right to negotiations with the City regarding the redevelopment for a period of

25. Many of the interviewed City representatives also explicitly chose to label it so.

26. It should be noted that, at the time, The Slaughterhouse District was far from a “brownfield” location: Before the plans were initiated it constituted one of Northern Europe's largest meat processing hubs and employed close to 4000 people (see further Metzger & Wiberg, 2018).

two years. However, the project did not proceed much further than the agreement itself: around two years later, after it had expired, Ikea withdrew from the project. As shown in Paper I, this was partly the result of the locals' efforts to generate the controversy into something of a local election issue, whereby the new left-coalition in power subsequently deemed the 4000 parking spaces as unreasonable for the district.

Democratic meanings among the citizen activists

The early activities of the local activists involved what they described as conventional political activism: collecting information about the plans and getting in touch with local politicians and the officials in charge of the redevelopment. But, as noted in Paper I, they quickly abandoned these strategies due to what they described as the defense of reactions of the City to all but stonewall their concerns.

Such reactions on behalf the City included directing all channels of public communication to an officially designated officer; placing extraordinary gag-clauses in the contracts of consultants working on the project; and refusing to release crucial background information for the plans beyond material that the locals refer to as “garbage—documents that haven't been relevant or documents without descriptions of what it was” (local activist, in Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a, p. 353).

Moreover, since the project was—formally at least—nothing more than a land allocation agreement, the City was not obligated to institute any stakeholder consultations or, for that matter, citizen dialogues surrounding the project. As one of the locals summed up their experiences:

I am very disappointed. I was a lot more optimistic in the beginning and really thought they would listen to arguments and welcome an open dialogue. And everything is classified, even a traffic analysis. We can't understand it. (Local activist, in Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a, p. 353)

Accordingly, the locals seemed to enter the planning process with the expectation that it would be, if not collaborative and inclusive then at least transparent and fair. But mounting evidence to the contrary made them deeply frustrated with the process.

Interestingly, their frustration was not so much directed at the elected representatives of the City as it was towards the project managers in charge of the plan. As noted in Paper I, the locals had spent quite a lot of time and resources in trying to explain to the politicians what type of development the agreement committed the City to: “‘How should traffic flow into these parts, for example?’ This was something that the politicians hadn't taken part of. The information they had received from

the [Development] Office was quite limited” (local activist, in Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a, p. 353).

Accordingly, similar to some of the citizen participants in the previous part, the locals seem to ascribe planning with many of the technocratic tendencies that Faludi (1987), Healey (1997), and many of the other theorists also identified in planning.

The perceived impenetrability of the planning process compelled the locals to pursue other recourses that would help generate a public controversy surrounding the plan. This involved contacting media outlets and publishing all their gathered material on social media. But they also reached out to people with less resources and limited access in their local community, and who were likely to be even more detrimentally affected by a commerce complex in the vicinity. And while it is not all that clear which aspects led to the plans eventually being shelved, as shown in Paper I, there is a strong likelihood that these concerted efforts by the locals substantially helped.

In this sense, the public mobilization against the redevelopment at least partly fits the label of one of Purcell’s (2016) “publics without the State,” which described the situation where people successfully “reclaim popular control of important aspects of urban life” (p. 396). But as stressed in the paper, despite the success of their efforts, the whole process had left the activists with a deep sense of eroded faith in established democratic institutions. The feelings of disempowerment and alienation that emerged from dealing with the City administration had been so palpable that few of the locals could bring themselves to get involved in the planning process again once a new plan was devised for the district and the process was finally opened up to public consultations.

Of course, Purcell (2016) would likely be the first to acknowledge such alienating experiences, perhaps even view them as necessary for coming to terms with the undemocratic nature of the State. But what is also noteworthy in the material is that the high levels of stress and anxiety that accompanied the process also provoked feelings of disillusionment towards citizen activism among the locals. This was the case despite, or in part because of how the locals constituted a relatively affluent group of people with privileged access to social and political networks. As one of the locals explained:

The reflection is maybe that what we’re doing is needed. That the public needs to organize itself in this way to be significant. And that’s also a bit scary. Because it takes time and energy and strength and also quite a lot of knowledge. And that’s not something everyone has the same access to. And

then we're touching on the democratic aspects. (Local activist, in Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a, pp. 355–356)

In other words, while the locals conceded to the notion that public mobilizations against the State is the only *effective* means for achieving or enacting democracy, it seems that they would have preferred planning processes and approaches that did not constantly give the public reason or need to mobilize—as was perhaps emphasized more in Healey's (1997), Fainstein's (2010) and, to some extent, Faludi's (1987) work.

Democratic meanings among the project managers

As highlighted in Paper I, a result of the clashes between the locals and the City administration was that ideas and meanings around what constitutes democracy in planning eventually emerged as an issue at stake in its own right during the controversy. As one of the local activists summed up the ensuing conflict: “Transparency isn't there so that's what we're trying to develop” (local activist, in Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a, p. 354). Accordingly, if viewed from the perspective of the locals (and from a voluntarist or even Faludian perspective), the defensive reactions of the project managers readily paints them as actively working against inclusivity and public scrutiny in the planning process, and thus against democracy itself. But as shown in the paper, the two interviewed two project managers in charge of the redevelopment also expressed concerns for democracy, but with a different emphasis regarding its meaning for planning.

According to them, the locals' demands for influence and even transparency in the planning process ran counter to their own responsibility towards the City and a wider public interest. For instance, with regards to the conflict over the background material, the development engineer in charge of the project explained that

if we would make unfinished working material available to the public, then it's not democratic, because what comes out is really nothing and it can be interpreted in a lot of different ways, and above all it can be interpreted differently by different people. And then there is no [coherent] picture. And I would call that undemocratic to some extent. (Development engineer, in Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a, p. 356)

Thus, according to the development engineer, opening up the process for public scrutiny before it had run its “proper course” could have subjected the plan to unfair assessments of what it actually entailed and thus served to undermine the potential merits of the plan. Such concerns

align somewhat with Faludi's (1987) procedural emphasis, which stressed the importance of impartial proceedings. At the same time, it should be noted that it is the project managers themselves, as opposed to their elected employers, who seem to take upon themselves what constitutes "due process." In this sense, the development engineer's democratic understanding of planning could more readily be understood in relation to Chadwick's (1978) work, where the perceived short-sightedness of other actor-groupings ascribed planners with the responsibility to decide what should be subject to outside interference and, hence, what should be treated as political and not.

The urban planner also in charge of the project provides a similar justification for their evasiveness towards the locals, but with an emphasis on the difficulty in accounting for the unequal distribution of resources available to citizens. As the planner explains:

How can we sift through public opinion when, for example, many comments are negative, but on the other hand a lot of people have not been heard? How do we deal with the fact that different neighborhoods have very different socio-economic conditions, different cultural capital, different understandings of how society works, different power networks? How much should we try to interpret that, or manage that? It's very difficult. (Urban planner, in Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a, p. 356)

The planner's reflection evinces of a keen awareness of the unequal distribution of resources available to people in increasingly fragmented societies. But in contrast to, for instance, Healey (1997) who saw this as reason to pursue more collaborative planning efforts, the planner insists that a more pluralized society has made it even more difficult to successfully engineer participation since (as was evident in the previous part) such activities tend to favor narrow, often privileged interests over more collective concerns (see also, e.g., Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 2002). From this perspective, the planner's justification seems to align more with Fainstein's (2010) treatment of planning, which emphasized normative commitments to issues around justice and equity over participation—although one would be at pains to identify how the project itself would entail a more equitable outcome for marginalized groups in the city.

Conclusions

In this part, I have again brought attention to how conflicts and experiences in planning can gainfully be understood as emerging due to conflicting meanings actors ascribe to democracy. In this controversy, such

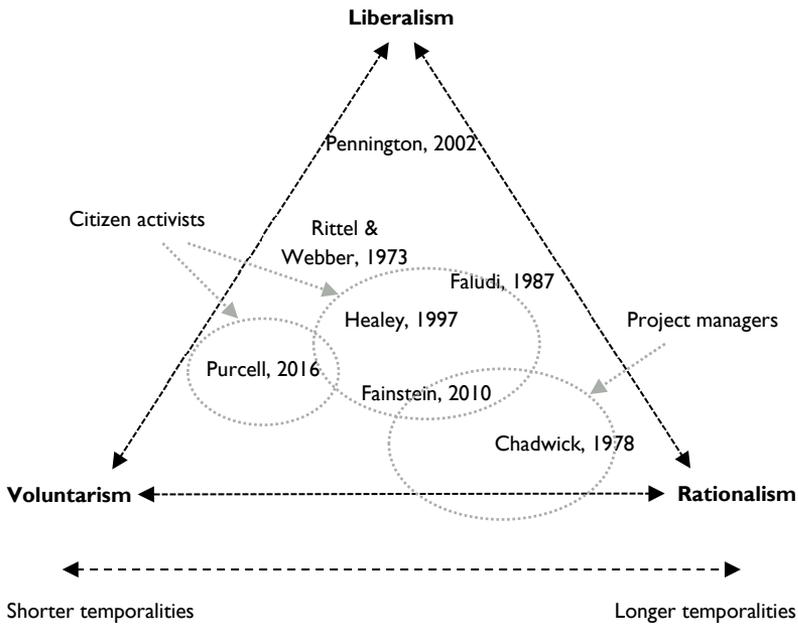


Figure 5: Democratic meanings among citizen activists and project managers in a public planning controversy

meanings seemed crucial in shaping the local activists' expectations of the planning process and, hence, their subsequent experiences of disillusionment with both the planning authorities and, it seems, democracy itself. Additionally, here such meanings were to some extent constructed and were made aware of by the actors as the controversy unfolded—and as the substantial understanding of democracy itself became an ongoing source of conflict. These conflicting meanings are visualized in Figure 5.

At first, the locals seemed to ascribe a somewhat intermediate democratic guardianship to planning, centered on inclusivity and fairness (as indicated via their larger circle in the figure). But when met with the defensive reactions of the City, they were convinced that a more radically voluntarist approach was necessary in order for the public to have any kind of influence or say in the planning process, thus shifting their understanding of democracy towards a more Purcellian (2016) view (as indicated by the smaller one). But interestingly, if such activism constituted the only effective means for achieving or enacting “real” democracy, the locals did not find it all that encouraging, preferring instead a planning practice more akin to what they originally expected. Accordingly, the experiences serve as yet another sobering counterpoint to the dominant thinking around democracy in the literature, where it is

treated as exclusively intrinsic to public participation or citizen activism more broadly.

Against the locals' understanding of democracy and planning, the project managers stressed their commitments to the public interest; hence casting the interests of the locals as narrow or adversarial to those of marginalized groups or supposedly "silent majorities" in the city. As shown in the figure, and similar to the earlier analysis of the City's urban planners, the project managers seemed to ascribe planning with democratic meanings reminiscent of both Chadwick's (1978) and Fainstein's (2010) aspirations for planning, where it serves as a bulwark against the narrow and short-term commitments of other actor-groupings in planning. At the same time, in the earlier analysis, some of the urban planners at least partially espoused ideas that aligned with Healey's (1997) emphasis on inclusivity and collaboration—whereas here, even the urban planner seemed to adopt a more insular guardianship of democracy when faced with an angered citizenry. This underscores not only the variegated democratic meanings held by people—sometimes simultaneously—but also how these meanings are malleable and change as a result of the conflicts that bring them to the fore—and are likely also mobilized and deployed to serve various political agendas.

Again, my intention is not to justify the—in my view—deeply troubling actions committed by the planning authorities, nor to relativize the different versions of democracy that these conflicts produce. Rather, my intent is to further highlight that if the point is to challenge such practices it helps to seriously examine the meanings and experiences that inform and legitimize them. For instance, as we learned in the earlier examination of Stockholm's planning administration, the insular and longer temporal guardianship assumed by the urban planner here could well be seen as a reaction against the competing democratic meanings harbored by their own development engineer colleagues.

Concluding Discussion: Democracy and Planning

The aim of this thesis has been to contribute with analytical knowledge on the relationship between democracy and planning. Considerable scholarly effort has been put into affirming and discrediting the merits of planning by way of “democracy.” As planning scholars, we use the notion of democracy to investigate planning or critique it; to mark the progress of planning or its recurring relapse; to discuss its history, its limits, its tipping points, or to tease out its future potentials. And yet, we rarely examine the root meanings ascribed to democracy itself. The specific aim of this cover essay, then, has been to analytically examine what actors in planning—theorists, planners, citizens—scribe the substantive relationship between democracy and planning to be.

But doing so is fraught with analytical challenges, despite or in part because of how firmly and deeply entrenched “democracy” is in planning discourse. Below, I summarize how I have gone about this task; after which I tease out some key reflections for possible future research endeavors.

7.1 SUMMARY OF COVER ESSAY

In the Introduction, I brought attention to an undercurrent of essentialism in contemporary debates on the democratic nature of planning. In particular, I stressed how these discussions are often constrained to public participation in, or public mobilization against urban governance arrangements. And rightly so given the glaring technocratic and broadly neoliberal traits of contemporary planning practices. But this emphasis has regrettably and myopically left other democratic meanings, activities, and roles among planning actors highly undertheorized. Additionally, it was observed that even if planning actors harbor meanings, assume roles,

or pursue activities that center-stage democracy in various ways, the signifier itself is only rarely explained or evoked explicitly.

Hence, a theoretical understanding of democracy was needed that was, on the one hand, open and agnostic enough so as to not *a priori* assume democracy's intrinsic linkage to contingent experiences and specific practices (e.g., participation). On the other hand, the theory still needed to ascribe democracy with a certain degree of essentialism so as to identify its meanings where it is only made partially explicit by actors.

In approaching this task, in Chapter 2 I drew on an analytical-historical understanding of democracy developed by Pierre Rosanvallon (2006, 2008, 2011). His work on democracy eschews narratives drawn from normative ideals or singular events in favor of charting its historically manifest experiences. Actually existing democracy, Rosanvallon contends, manifests as clashes between competing responses for solving the fundamental uncertainty that marked the founding moment of modernity: the "empty place of power" left behind by the disappearance of the monarch and personified emblem that previously organized society. Although the particular circumstances of these clashes are contingent upon their particular histories and context, according to Rosanvallon, there is still a recurrent pattern in their expressions.

Broadly conceived, these recurring conflicts are informed by a deep-seated incompatibility between three central ideological components of democracy: *voluntarism*, *rationalism*, and *liberalism*. Each of these components are in different ways mobilized by actors in response to the fundamental uncertainty as to what constitutes the meaning and "essence" of democracy, resulting in a set of relatively constant questions, conflicts, and dilemmas throughout the history of modern democracy.

But crucially, as Rosanvallon contends, these responses do not always explicitly rest upon their corresponding ideologies. Rather, more often they come to be deployed against the perceived pathologies of their opposites. From this perspective, actors who do not directly engage in debates about democracy are nonetheless often directly implicated in the project and its ongoing attempt to understand and elaborate itself. These engagements, as we saw, manifests as implicitly assumed "guardianship roles" over different "temporalities" of democracy.

In translating his thinking into a concrete theoretical framework, I conceptualized this ongoing experimentation with democracy as an ideologically charged "field of tensions," where competing approaches for solving democracy's foundational problems repeatedly clash and conflict with one another. *Voluntarist* responses center-stage meanings of democracy that rest upon the public rising up to reclaim the place of power

against oppressive rule so as to effectively achieve “real” democracy. These meanings are often expressed in commitments towards immediate, short, and fleeting temporalities where “the people” and its “will” are incarnated through direct public actions and revolutionary events that press for popular sovereignty. But against this culture of the “will of the people,” an exalting tribute to “reason” establishes itself.

In *rationalist* understandings, then, the meanings ascribed to democracy rest upon the functioning of a set of state-led institutions and domains rather than on the particular actions or proclivities among people. These understandings of democracy are expressed in commitments to the protracted and slower temporalities of the minutiae of government bureaucracy that are made to assume the implicit role of lining democracy’s inner void with institutions that *represent* the people.

Liberalism, in turn, generates democratic meanings that draw upon ideals around individual autonomy, plurality, and political conflict, and that are thus geared towards safeguarding democracy’s empty place from being monopolized by any one political power.

Accordingly, each of these expressions of democracy are often advanced against the pathologies ascribed to the others. Broadly understood, voluntarism is conceived as a seedbed for rampant populism and totalitarian dictatorship; rationalism is presumed to engender technocratic authoritarianism that acts as a direct infringement on individual autonomy and/or denies the people of their rightful claim to popular sovereignty; whereas liberalism is assumed to nurture a kind of market meta-order that overrides popular and governmental power altogether. In short, the framework thus served to chart a difference in relative emphasis between those who seek to *progress* democracy as a societal project against those who seek to *safeguard* its past and present institutions from their disintegration.

In Chapter 3, I employed this framework to elicit the democratic meanings espoused in the works of some of the prominent thinkers in planning theory. While these meanings were often only partially explicit, it was still possible to tease out a resolute concern for democracy across all texts. These concerns were made particularly evident when emphasis was placed on the pathologies of modern society that the authors ascribed planning with resolving—or further exacerbating—and which temporal commitments for democracy such ascriptions resulted in.

In Chadwick’s (1978) rationalist and protracted systems view, planning was conceived as a means to *safeguard* democracy from the perceived short-sightedness of other actors engaged with planning activity, including those of elected representatives, market actors, and moreover,

the public at large. By contrast, in Faludi's (1987) rational process view, democracy connected to the field of planning as a means to *democratize* it against the perceived irrationalities emblematic of the planning fraternity.

In the radically (neo)liberal approach that Pennington (2002) advanced, planning was conceived as an *impediment* to democracy owing to planning's perceived infringement on an individual autonomy emblematic of the private property market. Rittel and Webber's (1973) landmark text on "wicked problems" came to similar conclusions regarding planning's impediment to democracy, but instead traced the pathology of planning to its totalizing managements of heterogeneous social and cultural urban environments.

In Purcell's (2016) voluntarist and almost instantaneous temporal understanding of democracy, planning could well serve as a vehicle for instituting "real" democracy, so long as it operated against or at a safe distance from the "oligarchical State." By contrast, Fainstein's (2010) justice approach rooted the democratic impetus of planning in its relative potential to produce more equitable outcomes, regardless if these were achieved through insulated and technocratic bureaucracies in state-led institutions and domains. In turn, Healey's (1997) collaborative planning approach advanced something of a middle ground among many of the examined texts, as it ultimately aimed towards *progressing* democracy through a *democratization* of planning.

Accordingly, the examination of these thinkers' works underscored the central argument of this thesis: The contested meaning of democracy underpins some of the fundamental conflicts and debates in planning theory—often in ways that have only been partially explicit and thus have been rather neglected in the literature. My point in stressing this argument was twofold: first, to highlight that examining planning through the lens of democracy can reveal critical insights into the nature of the conflicts informing scholarly work on planning; and second, to partly challenge the dominant, broadly *voluntarist* understanding in the literature in which it is assumed that the meaning of democracy is self-evidently linked to participation and citizen action.

To further stress these points, in Chapter 6 the above-identified democratic meanings in the literature were used as a resource for investigating democratic meanings in planning practice. The empirical context for this investigation made up three distinct settings pertaining to Swedish local authority land use planning. These settings included, first, the ongoing disputes between planning actors in the administrations of public planning institutions; second, the experiences of citizen

participants who had engaged in participatory planning arrangements; and third, the conflicts between citizen activists and planning authorities in a public planning controversy.

The examination revealed a striking range and depth in meanings ascribed to the relationship between democracy and planning, where citizen participants and even activists seemed to ascribe planning with certain duties akin to *longer* and *rationalist* democratic guardianships. Moreover, meanings around democracy was observed to inform even those planning actors that assumed technocratic and broadly neoliberal roles in planning processes. From this perspective, the substantive meanings ascribed to the relationship between democracy and planning also seem to have substantial bearing for how planning practices play out—and thus constitutes a critical dimension for understanding planning itself.

Given the multiple and competing understandings of democracy in the field, I have stressed that no compelling argument could be made for the existence of a default or essential relationship between planning and democracy. Instead, democracy reveals itself as something akin to a “wicked problem” for planning, where there is no “stopping rule” for its definition; no “true or false answers” to its solution; and no “ultimate test” by which to reveal its inner meaning (Rittel & Webber, 1973, pp. 162–163). From this perspective, there is no essential reason that democracy in planning necessarily entails participation or citizen activism; and for that matter that those actors who adopt insular, technocratic, or neoliberal planning roles are per default working *against* democracy.

However, by stressing the fundamental indeterminacy in regard to what constitutes the essence of democracy, my intent has not been relativize its meaning nor to discredit its conventional normative usage among researchers. In other words, my wish is not to argue that normative ideals surrounding democracy are unhelpful for academic research; that we ought to leave democracy as an empirical question to only be analyzed as opposed to pursued in planning. Almost paradoxically, once we acknowledge the wider range of competing understandings of what constitutes the essence of democracy, we must also acknowledge the right for actors to label practices as “undemocratic” when they perceive them as such. Accordingly, and as I have stressed throughout the cover essay, my intent has been to highlight that if the ambition is to challenge many of the urban governance processes and outcomes currently the norm in the field—and which we may desire to, even so, label as fundamentally undemocratic—we need to have a grasp of the specific ideals

and meanings that inform them. In the following, then, I propose (to borrow Purcell's words) some "habits of thoughts" for future research endeavors pursued in the name of democracy.

7.2 HABITS OF THOUGHT FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The first habit I would advocate is to approach the subject of democracy without laying claim to its supposedly real or essential meaning. Interestingly, Purcell himself offered similar advice a decade before introducing his quite essentialist treatment of democracy I examined above. In these earlier writings, Purcell (2008) stresses that there are many reasons not to think of democracy in essentialist ways, some of which are strategic. These include challenging the epistemological foundations of the essentialist treatments of democracy in the mainstream liberal narrative and avoiding dogmatic splits within the counter-narrative. But as Purcell also aptly notes, democracy is fundamentally a "malleable concept mobilized to pursue a political agenda" and treating it in essentialist terms wishes away or even obfuscates "a very real political struggle over the meaning of democracy" (p. 36). Accordingly, approaching democracy in planning through less essentialist and more agnostic perspectives could reveal critical insights into the nature of those struggles and agendas, and how they play out as part of democracy's broader development and experimentation.

To relate this more directly to the key findings of thesis—and of the individual papers in particular—I would advocate the habit of keeping close attention to the attrition levels among those citizen activists whom we ascribe with instilling urban governance with "democracy"; so as to grasp the wider repercussions of such mobilizations upon citizens' resultant disposition towards political activity and, hence, upon the "health" of democracy itself (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a). And perhaps even to acknowledge how the conditions and achievements of such mobilizations are often dependent on existing and established democratic institutions arrived at from previous democratization processes, "including the electoral-representative system and the free media" (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a, p. 346).

When critically scrutinizing neoliberal urban governance arrangements, I would advocate the habit of not only examining the broader structural dynamics that enforce such regimes, but also exploring—and hence rendering contestable—the concrete organizational practices that sustain them (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018b). And when doing so, I would stress the habit of also discerning the specific circumstances,

ideals, and even democratic meanings that inform and legitimize certain actors into assuming their neoliberal planning roles (Zakhour & Metzger, 2018a).

Finally, when examining the democratic qualities of participation in planning, I would stress the practice of not only valuing its merits against preconceived normative ideals around, for instance, concrete citizen influence, but also against the public's *own* expectations and perceptions of participation, so as to foster a kind of "democratization of democratic theory-development" (Zakhour, 2020, p. 19).

In line with such open and agnostic treatments of the meaning of democracy, another habit I would promote—but which was not pursued in the thesis—is to explore democracy and planning without recourse to Western understandings and ideals. The framework deployed here, the literature analyzed, and the empirical context of the cases all served to reproduce broadly Western dimensions of what constitutes some of the defining features of democracy in and for planning. An interesting task for future research, then, is to identify which central ideological components, constitutive aporias, and structural tensions that might be endemic of the democratic experience in other contexts and, moreover, what type of temporalities and "guardianships" they might commit actors to through planning activity.

Either way, the findings here suggest that planning is a field in which democracy regularly becomes "enacted": in the ongoing academic debates around what planning substantially is and should be; in the daily routines of local authority planning administrations; in the prescribed forms of citizen engagement activities; and in the on-the-ground citizen protest movements that regularly mobilize against planning activity. All these activities, both small and big, seem to have bearing on the democratic project in its permanent experimentation to understand and elaborate itself. Whether they contribute to reproducing democracy, undermine it, or enhance it remains both an empirical and urgent question planning research to explore.

For while there might not be a "perfect fix" for democracy's structural tensions—no democratic utopia which we can all mobilize around to deliberate on the details for how it should be reached—this constitutive indeterminacy does not mean that democracy is an infinitely malleable and flexible concept, able to withstand its perpetual discursive abuse.

Indeed, despite the global popularity and diffusion of democracy, recent years have also seen an ongoing hollowing out of the concept and its content, where even as an "empty signifier" (Brown, 2011, p. 44) it

seems to have lost some of its performative worth. This disillusionment with democracy is palpable in, for instance, how the “third wave” of right-wing extremism, which has now moved from the fringe to the political mainstream, does not seem all that eager co-opt the term (Bergmann, 2020); in how self-avowed liberals have as a response to this movement resuscitated ancient technocratic ideals and explicitly come out “against democracy” (Brennan, 2017); and in how the existential threat posed by global warming has compelled a growing number of scholars to genuinely consider the merits of “eco-authoritarianism” (Beeson, 2010; Gilley, 2012). But it is also evident in how leftist thinkers are also joining the ranks in seriously challenging or simply abandoning the concept all together given the massive inequalities generated in its name (e.g., Badiou, 2011; Brown, 2011; Dean, 2005). As Rosanvallon (2011) aptly sums up the precarious state of democracy today, “Never has the boundary between progress toward and subversion of the democratic ideal been more tenuous” (p. 202). This situation thus suggests an urgent need for what he prescribed as a sustained yet controlled empathy with democracy and what recent voices have more directly referred to as a “care for democracy itself” (Tronto, 2013, p. x).

Of course, an empathic and “caring” approach to the meanings of democracy also entails a recognition of how its deepening crisis of legitimacy might not be bad thing for democracy. For Purcell (2016), at least, the legitimization of democracy emerges as a result of the State’s founding alienation between the people and their power, whereas democracy itself does not *need* legitimacy—meaning that its “crisis” might simply be a sign that we are on the right track towards it. Indeed, as stressed in this thesis, activities and practices presumably deployed against or at a distance from “democracy” might still engender concrete democratic experiences since—to repeat—not everything about democracy is in its name. But this discrepancy makes it all the more crucial for research to lucidly establish its multiple, conflicting meanings in planning; if only to render more distinguishable those democratic meanings we wish to contest.

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Paper I

Placing the Action in Context: Contrasting Public-centered and Institutional Understandings of Democratic Planning Politics

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ABSTRACT

In recent years public-centered understandings of democracy have become important inspirations for scholarly debates concerning the democratization of planning processes. In this article we caution that an exclusively public-centered understanding of planning democracy risks obscuring how public engagements in planning processes always unfold within the context of longer trajectories and broader landscapes of the evolution of democracy. In the article we counterpoint a particularly sophisticated public-centered conceptualization of democracy developed by philosopher Noortje Marres to the more historical-institutional understanding of Pierre Rosanvallon. By applying both analytical frameworks to an empirical case, we show that although Marres' public-centered approach can productively advance understandings of key dynamics in how public action in planning processes unfolds, its narrow focus on the 'heat of the action' in such episodes produces analytical blind spots with regards to the wider prerequisites and ramifications of these events. Therefore we conclude by suggesting that public-centered analyses of democracy in planning processes are at their most helpful when complemented with a more institutional understanding of the contexts within which public engagements in planning unfold.

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Introduction

It is already well documented that the 'new spatial planning', which is influenced by the governance-paradigm of public management, often produces serious transparency and accountability deficits (see e.g. Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010; Haughton, Allmendinger, Counsell, & Vigar, 2009; Metzger, 2011; Metzger, Allmendinger, & Oosterlync, 2014). In response to such observations, recent discussions in planning literature have suggested that the parallel upsurge in mobilizations of local urban publics could, if properly channeled, instill contemporary urban governance practices with a much needed "democratic(izing) makeover" (Metzger, 2011; see also, Haughton, Gilchrist, & Swyngedouw, 2016; Inch, 2012; Legacy, 2015; Raco & Lin, 2012; De Souza, 2006). Some of these discussions have drawn theoretical inspiration from the Dutch philosopher Noortje Marres (2005a, 2005b, 2007) who, in her seminal work on the nature of publics, brilliantly combines early 20th-century American pragmatism with contemporary Science and Technology Studies to radically rework conventional understandings of democratic politics. Her central argument is that political action is fundamentally

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about a relentless pursuit by actors to displace issues towards sites where it is more likely that the settlement will be in their favor, and that these efforts neither can nor should be measured according to pre-existing definitions of democratic procedures as constituted by established institutional arrangements, but only according to whether they in effect contribute to 'opening up' or 'closing down' the issue for wider public scrutiny. Thus, in contrast to established parliamentary models of democracy, in which democracy is imagined to be guaranteed by certain system designs and institutions, Marres instead posits broad public mobilizations around a specific issue at the center of the practical enactment of democracy.

Marres' issue-focused and public-centered conception of politics and democracy has had a direct impact upon a broad range of subjects/disciplines, including rural sociology (De Krom, Dessein, & Erbout, 2014), political philosophy (Asdal, 2008), political geography (Barnett & Bridge, 2013; Holifield & Schuelke, 2015), participatory design (Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013), and not least, urban and regional planning (Legacy, 2015; Leino & Laine, 2011; Metzger, 2011; Metzger et al., 2014; Paget-Seekins & Tironi, 2016; Tironi, 2015).¹ However, her thinking can also be positioned within a broader political-philosophical trend that builds upon the idea that it is in the fleeting moments of public mobilizations that the true essence of democracy can be found (in relation to planning, see also e.g. Purcell, 2013).

Recently, Willem Salet (2018) has proposed that philosophical pragmatism of the vein that underpins Marres' work can be productively "cross-pollinated" with strands of more institutionally-inclined social theory. The urgency with which planning needs to respond to societal problems, he observes, makes the former philosophy's focus on immediate problem experiences and their solutions inherently attractive to planning. At the same time, it is precisely this privileging of attention to the issues-at-hand that blindsides much pragmatist thinking to all the uncertainties and social complexities of societies that planning also must take into account. Salet's suggestion is a co-evolution of sorts between on the one hand the experimental methodology of pragmatism, which has as its starting point the on-the-ground practices and outcomes to public action, and on the other hand more institutional research approaches, which provide tools for critical reflection on the material and symbolic prerequisites for and effects of action. Along the lines of Salet's argumentation, our central argument in this article is that public-centered understandings of democracy, such as the one provided by Marres, can be of productive help in pinpointing critical and often neglected aspects of planning controversies by providing a concrete analytical framework for how public action in planning processes unfolds. However, this framework has to be applied in a mindful manner and as part of a broader analysis of the institutional histories and landscapes in which such episodes are always situated. By contrasting Marres' public-centered conceptualization of democracy to a more institutional understanding, here exemplified by the works of Pierre Rosanvallon, we are able to tease out the analytical blind spots of a narrowly public-centered understanding of planning democracy. Most important of these is, according to our assessment, how public-centered conceptions of democracy risk focusing too much attention on the 'heat of the action' of public controversies, while letting slip from view the conditions under which such mobilizations occur – as well as the wider ramifications of these events as part of longer trajectories of the development of democracy.

In the light of a more institutional understanding of democracy, which is more sensitive to the situated challenges of sustaining and developing really-existing democratic franchises, narrowly public-centered conceptualizations of democracy come across as myopically episodic and problematically essentialist. We therefore suggest that any public-centered conceptualization of planning democracy should be complemented by a more institutional analysis. This is so as to contribute to

more nuanced discussions and richer analyses of democracy in planning processes than that which the sole reliance on a narrowly public-centered understanding of democracy can contribute. In the article we single out Marres' work for close scrutiny, simply because we find it to be an unusually well-articulated and sophisticated example of a public-centered and action-focused (and in her case, also issue-focused) conceptualization of democracy, which makes it interesting to engage with in some detail. Nonetheless, we suggest that the conclusions that we draw from our analysis has just as much bearing upon other, often less philosophically elaborated, similar approaches.

In the remainder of this article, we develop our argumentation with the help of an examination of a 'critical case' (Flyvbjerg, 2006): the contested redevelopment plans for an inner-city neighborhood in Stockholm, Slakthusområdet (*the Slaughterhouse District*). Here, a concerned public led by local residents took it upon itself to mobilize and make itself involved in the urban development process, due to dissatisfaction with both the process and substance of the City-led planning effort. When viewed through the analytical frames offered by Marres, the mobilization by the local activists appears to be a true democratic success. Even in the face of persistent action by the public authorities to limit transparency and to circumscribe demands for accountability, the activists nonetheless managed to 'open up' and make the redevelopment plans into a public affair in such a way that this eventually led to the plans being shelved. However, when analyzed with the help of Rosanvallon's institutional approach, several underexplored dimensions of the controversy come to light, including how the tactics employed by the public authorities to deal with the public mobilization and their demands left the activists with a profound sense of disillusionment and an eroded sense of faith in the democratic legitimacy of the existing planning system.

Based on the lessons we draw from our case study, we argue that while a public-centered conception of democracy may function as a helpful resource to understand some of the central dynamics of planning controversies, it is nonetheless highly problematic if applied as *the* definition and measure of what constitutes democracy in planning processes. The main reason for this is that a myopic focus on the heat of the action of public controversies is allowed to all but completely crowd out other concerns, for instance pertaining to the *prerequisites to public mobilization*, the *institutional landscapes in which controversies unfold*, and the *long term patterned outcomes* these struggles might generate. Therefore, we caution against too unreservedly embracing a public-centered definition of democracy, and instead conclude by suggesting that an attention to how public mobilizations contribute to the democratization of planning should be supplemented with historical-institutional perspectives that do not have an equally narrow understanding of the concept of democracy, and which can better situate planning controversies within their broader political and institutional landscape.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: In the next section we examine Marres' understanding of democratic politics in more detail and sketch out the public-centered analytical framework that can be derived from her work. In the third section we introduce some of the main points of Pierre Rosanvallon's institutional understanding of democracy. The fourth section presents the background to our case study: the public planning controversy over Slakthusområdet in Stockholm. This episode is then analyzed in the fifth section with the help of Marres' framework, and then in the sixth section with a basis in Rosanvallon's institutional approach. The paper is rounded off with a concluding discussion in which we reflect upon the results of our analysis.

A Public-Centered Understanding of Democracy

There are many political theories that center-stage direct public action as the fundament of democracy, and thus – for us – qualify under the label of public-centered understandings of democracy;

ranging from radical Marxists such as Leon Trotsky, across to liberals such as John Dewey. What unites these very disparate thinkers is their understanding that the essence of democracy is to be found exclusively in the fleeting episodes in which publics rise up and claim the right to partake in the governance of public affairs. Public-centered philosophies of democracy can thus be characterized as narrow, essentialist and episodic in their understanding of the properly democratic moment. In the context of planning theory, e.g. the work of Purcell (2013) constitutes something of an extreme example of such a position, as he characterizes any form of governance lying outside of the pure moment of public mobilization as constituting oppressive oligarchy. For an example of a somewhat more nuanced public-centered understanding of democracy that has recently had an impact on planning debates, we return once again to the political philosophy of Noortje Marres.

Marres' (2005a, 2005b, 2007) work on the nature of democratic politics is essentially grounded in a pragmatist critique against an, in her eyes, all too procedural mainstream definition of democracy which presupposes the emergence of democratic deficits when political issues are 'displaced' outside the parliamentary governance arrangements of established democracies (cf. Beck, 1992; Habermas, 2001; Chapter 4; Held, 1999). According to Marres, an excessive focus on existing, ostensibly democratic governance arrangements fails to fully appreciate the fundamental role that issues – and the publics that they engage – play in democratic politics. To emphasize the role of issues in politics, Marres (2005a, 2007) draws on recent work emerging out of STS (Science and Technology Studies) which has conceived of political activity as particular forms of issue formations that involve the *articulation* and *displacement* of issues as strategies employed by actors to find a better fit for their cause. In such a reading, it is *issues* that are at the center of democratic politics in that they are the causes that mobilize broad segments of the population to become engaged in the governance of public life, rather than the procedures that the issues are confined to or the ideals they elicit.

Thus, according to Marres' definition, for politics to be properly democratic it has to directly engage segments of the general population and – according to her – only specific and concrete issues have the capacity do so (Marres, 2007). Here Marres leans against what she argues is a commonly overlooked point of agreement in the legendary debate between the pragmatist thinkers Walter Lippman and John Dewey regarding the role of the public in democratic politics: namely, that complex issues can be an enabling rather than discouraging condition for public involvement in politics. For Lippmann (1927/1993), established institutions and procedures of instituted democratic government could only be expected to address routine problems, whereas "the public is called in to judge" (p. 121) when complex and contentious issues arise, which prove too difficult for existing arrangements and expertise to settle. And for Dewey (1927/2012), this role was bestowed on the public due to the way in which publics are constituted. As a heterogeneous group of actors become adversely affected by consequences which they under current governance arrangements lack influence over, a public comes into being. And in order to mobilize, intervene, and address the issues which they are caught up in "the public has to break existing political forms" (1927/2012, p. 56).

From the above, Marres arrives at the conclusion that issue politics and their displacements to outside established democratic governance arrangements do not signal the end of democracy, but the beginning. At the same time, Marres does not only update the classical pragmatists' work on the nature of publics and democracy to contemporary settings, she also complements it with contemporary social theory. As she rightly notes, Dewey's "objective" definition of public affairs presupposes not only that its issue at stake is solvable, but also that it is given. The problem for Marres (2005a) is that whether the issue qualifies as a public matter of concern or not, and thus

whether the actors involved in the affair constitute legitimate democratic subjects or not, is actually part of the political struggle itself – effectively making it “unclear whether the public organises itself by virtue of the emergence of an issue, or whether the issue can be articulated because a public has configured itself” (p. 169).

So how is the degree of democracy in the settlement of an issue to be measured according to Marres? What, for her, defines political activity as properly ‘democratic’? Focusing on the eruption of public controversies and the formation of concerned publics, Marres’ conceptualization of democracy in such processes rests upon an analysis of the *articulation* and the *trajectory* of the issues at stake in any given political affair. If issues are ‘closed down’ as public matters of concern, by being displaced from sites of public scrutiny and debate to end up in the hands of secluded elite networks where the issues can be disarticulated in such a way that disentangles them from the concerned voices of those affected, these are anti-democratic moves according to Marres’ (2005a, p. 152) definition. If, however, the issues at stake take a detour through a wider public audience where they are articulated in an approachable manner while retaining the initial conflicts and concerns, ‘opening up’ the affair for public engagement and settlement, they come to constitute “occasions for democracy” (Marres, 2005a, p. 135).

It is easy to see the appeal in Marres’ quite radical reworking of democratic politics, as her pragmatic approach to democracy unapologetically conveys the simple but often overlooked point that not everyone engages in political activity for the sake of participating in democratic life as such; but because they are adversely caught up in issues. Marres (2005a) also tries to be clear that her point is “not to downplay the importance of ideals and procedures, but, instead, to challenge the unfair treatment of issues as excuses for the enactment of these ideals and procedures” (p. 148). While she argues that democratic politics might well require “a healthy dose of disrespect for procedural obligations” in order to compel the creation of new political spaces, she also underscores that “procedural constraints are among the prime instruments available to prevent the disintegration of such spaces, and indeed, the disarticulation of the affair in question” (Marres, 2005a, p. 153). However, fundamentally, her definition of democracy rests on the *momentary* opening up of a public affair by which the issue at stake becomes articulated as matter of public concern and a public subsequently becomes dedicated to its settlement, that is: not for instance on the long-term functioning of the new democratic spaces such affairs might compel.

An Institutional Understanding of Democracy

Pierre Rosanvallon’s (2006, 2008, 2011) sizable inquiry into the institutional history of really-existing democracies strongly resonates with Marres’ mission to decouple democratic activity from procedural arrangements and normative ideals; as Rosanvallon (2008) observes “living democracy never measures itself against an ideal model; rather, it seeks to solve problems” (p. 25). His work is also guided by pragmatist inclinations in which the analysis of democracy “begins with the problems which democracy tries resolve” (Rosanvallon, 2008, p. 26). But where Marres limits such problems to the experience of the public Rosanvallon goes further, envisioning them as core tensions which concern the very basis of democratic legitimacy.

In his work, Rosanvallon traces out a series of tensions that he argues are relatively constant throughout the modern history of democracy, which to some extent can be considered to constitute the set of continuous “interrelated pathologies” that in various ways have shaped the contemporary institutional forms of democracy (Moyn, 2006, p. 14). These tensions result primarily from the fundamental incompatibility of elements of voluntarism (e.g. popular direct action,

activism), rationalism (generally expressed through bureaucracy) and liberalism (e.g. protection of minority or individual rights) in the development of contemporary democracy. Rosanvallon argues that there is no 'perfect fix' in place for the relation between these conflicting elements of democracy, but that the history of modern democracy evinces a constant relative displacement of emphasis between these elements, where some of them are prioritized at the expense of others at different times and places (Moyn, 2006, pp. 15–17). A cause as well as effect of these dynamics is the reproduction of a fundamental ontological and historical indeterminacy with regards to what actually constitutes the essence of democracy, making it "a type of regime that resists any attempt at unequivocal classification" (Rosanvallon, 2006, pp. 36–37). Rosanvallon's (2006) historical and institutional perspective on democracy leads him to the conclusion that it is not sufficient to claim that democracy *has* a history, "more radically, one must see that democracy *is* a history... irreducibly involving exploration and experimentation, in its attempt to understand and elaborate itself" (p. 38, emphasis added).

Consequently, Rosanvallon argues that to understand the substantial development of really - existing democracy, it is necessary to study concrete situated events, but at the same time to also analyze these with a view to the longer trajectories and broader shifts of historical development. Of particular interest to Rosanvallon's history of the forms of democracy are the various institutions of "counter-democracy" that have been developed at various times and places (Rosanvallon, 2008). In short, mechanisms of counter-democracy institutionalize a "politics of distrust" through which the people in various ways scrutinize and exert pressure on its rulers. The institutions of counter-democracy further serve the purpose of ensuring a balance between the different aspects of democracy, preventing any one of them eclipsing the other at any given point of time. Rosanvallon likens the institutions of counter-democracy to "guardians" of different temporalities of democracy:

The forms of democracy have their own connection to the plurality of temporalities. At some distance from any univocal approach... it is better to emphasize how the perspective of a more complex body of forms of sovereignty (from a simple decision to protest to the memorial institution of the general will in a constitution) works in tandem with the understanding and analysis of the multiplicity of temporalities that constitute the human experience. (Rosanvallon, 2006, p. 49)

These different mechanisms do not necessarily work in concert, but rather tend to counterpoint each other, as evinced by repeated clashes between, for example, public mobilizations and the rule of law, both of which can be considered important institutions of counter-democracy that tend to come into conflict with each other.

According to Rosanvallon's (2008) model, public mobilizations function as an important component of the more immediate temporality of democracy with the purpose of "maintaining pressure on the government to serve the common good" (p. 8). In other words, the democratic nature of public mobilizations is not solely pinned on the articulation and settlement of public affairs. Mobilizations also fulfill a more structural function of ensuring the continuous development and vitality of really-existing democracy. Nonetheless, Rosanvallon (2006) is still troubled by the consequences of an overemphasis or privileging of public mobilizations as some form of essence of democracy, recognizing that "[i]n order to confer tangible power on the general will, democracy is constantly tempted to award legitimacy to 'the caprice of the moment' (in Renan's phrase)", which however is also "an imperative that imposes itself as a destructive master" (p. 48) if allowed to reign unchecked, in that this can easily with time produce a situation of "political atrophy or even paralysis" (Rosanvallon, 2008, p. 251). The reasons for this are structural but also rather simple, having to do with the increasing efficacy of counter-democratic activity. As distrust is

effectively organized, trust in the legitimacy-conferring capacity of electoral-representative institutions becomes undermined, or as Rosanvallon (2008) bluntly puts it: “The citizen-as-watchdog gains what the citizen-as-voter loses” (p. 251). Even and perhaps especially when citizens are successful in properly articulating matters of public concern, they delegitimize the powers of those to which their demands are addressed. Democracy in the short run, Rosanvallon (2008) writes, in effect comes to restrict democracy in the longer run as “elected officials are reined in and lose their room to maneuver owing to pressure from the voters themselves” (p. 253), producing a political culture dominated by rampant primitive populism and crowd-pleasing.

Unlike Marres, Rosanvallon does not provide a ‘package’ for how to understand citizen activism and counter-democratic activity, and the sheer scope of his historical and institutional analysis of democratic regimes makes it rather easy to spot inconsistencies and ambiguities in his work – much like Marres’ more focused work on democracy makes it inevitably easier to criticize it for what it leaves out. But whether one agrees or not with Rosanvallon’s assessment of the inherent tensions in democracy and their implications, his work serves as a sobering corrective for the tendency to limit the analysis of public mobilizations to their momentary enactment of democratic activity. Further, his institutional approach also facilitates an understanding of the contemporary institutions of really-existing democratic systems as the outcomes of iterative attempts at solving some of democracy’s fundamental paradoxes, and to stabilize the grounds upon which it rests. Whether they succeed in serving that function is of course always an open question, and the historical accretion of purportedly democratic infrastructures may or may not be perceived as fulfilling this function in the present by various segments of a population at any given point in time.

To conclude: a broad institutional understanding of democracy, such as the one promoted by Pierre Rosanvallon, does invite an interest in the democratic function of public mobilizations. However, it does not posit such mobilizations as somehow constituting the essence of democracy, but rather demands that any analysis of such events must also take into consideration the prerequisites of such mobilizations, the institutional landscapes within which they unfold, as well as the potentially patterned outcomes of series of such events. In other words: to pay attention to how such mobilizations are both conditioned by and have implications for the evolution of the institutions of really-existing democracy.

Public Mobilization in the Redevelopment of Slakthusområdet

Slakthusområdet (*The Slaughterhouse District*) is a large, century-old industrial district located in close proximity to Stockholm’s southern inner-city limits. The district still serves as a major industrial center for meat processing, but with the City’s successive growth a bipartisan political agreement has for over a decade been in place in City Hall so that it now constitutes one of Stockholm’s key redevelopment areas. One of the latest redevelopment plans for the area was presented at the beginning of 2013, when the City was still ruled by a center-right coalition. The mayor of Stockholm himself held a somewhat ostentatious press conference centered on a “Letter of intent” with the Ikea Group (formally: Ikano Group). The agreement outlined plans for developing one of Sweden’s largest commerce complexes; complete with a shopping mall, an Ikea department store, 550 housing units developed by Ikea’s separate housing branch, as well as 4,000 parking spaces. While the details of these plans were not legally binding per se, the agreement nevertheless granted Ikea exclusive rights to negotiate with the City regarding the development of the area for a period of two years.²

The redevelopment of Slakthusområdet quickly became a scene for a wide range of dissenters to provide competing political claims regarding the district's future – with media outlets, editorials, experts, and interest groups all making their own contributions to the debate in the following years (see further Metzger & Wiberg, 2017). In this article, however, we will be concerned with the conflict between the City planning authorities and the handful of people living in the moderately well-off neighborhoods near Slakthusområdet whom, in the autumn of 2013, mobilized against the project. Between 2014 and 2015 nine semi-structured interviews were carried out with six of the locals. Most of them were women and the majority shared a similar socio-economic status, that is: above-average income with careers in the advanced service sector. Interviews carried out in 2015 with City representatives and officials who were involved or somehow responsible for the redevelopment, also constitute another component of the utilized research materials. These include interviews with the project communicator; two of the planners in charge of the project (one from the City's Development office and one from the Planning office), and four politicians from the City's planning committees. To the extent that this was possible, the accuracy of the detail of their accounts has been verified through official documentation and other sources. To minimize the risk of repercussions on the interviewees all respondents have been anonymized.

For the purpose of this article the research materials were analyzed with a focus on the public mobilization that occurred in relation to the redevelopment plans, with particular attention to the citizens' as well as public officials' understanding of the situation, the sequence of events that occurred in the public mobilization and the aftermath of the mobilization. Further interest has also been directed towards any explicitly expressed ideas about what constitutes a democratic way of acting, both on behalf of citizen-activists and public officials. In the first step of our analysis we apply Marres' conceptual apparatus and frame of analysis to investigate what aspects of our case this approach invites us to consider. In the next stage we approach the case from a more institutional angle, inspired by Rosanvallon, so as to highlight those aspects of the case that appear to be important to take into consideration from such a vantage point – but which nonetheless seem to fall outside the frame of analysis of a more narrowly public-centered approach.

'Democracy in Practice' as the Closing down and Opening up of a Public Concern

Similar to many of the media commentaries, local inhabitants in the vicinity of Slakthusområdet were not convinced of the possibility to successfully integrate housing, culture, and small-scale services with a large-scale commerce complex in the area. Their main concern, however, and what 'sparked the public into being' was how the commerce complex might generate more traffic, pollution, and environmental toxins in their already highly congested neighborhoods. At the end of 2013, approximately a year after the agreement between the City and the company was presented, they therefore started a Facebook group to discuss these concerns. This endeavor significantly expanded their wider supporting networks, but the active core – consisting of around ten people – largely remained the same throughout the controversy.

The local residents' early activities were fairly straightforward, consisting largely of doing meticulous research about the project, followed by attempts at setting up meetings with the politicians and officials in charge of the plans. They also saw the upcoming elections the following year as an important opportunity to steal some of the limelight for their issue, and hoped that they would be able to force politicians to clarify their stance on the plans. However, the locals' early attempts at engaging with the City and its planning apparatus were not at all encouraging.

Even though the initial agreement between the City and Ikea, formally a ‘Letter of Intent’, was a public document which was further publicized through a high-profile press conference, the decision to enter into agreement using this quite specific contractual format has been widely recognized as a technique employed by the City to circumscribe the transparency-demands placed on it by more regulated types of development agreements, such as a formal land allocation contract (‘markanvisning’). Using the format of Letter of Intent instead, “a new form that only served to exclude others and also make the whole planning process very secret” (Politician A), according to a leading City politician, allowed for the City officials to avoid a number of institutional prerequisites, and to jump straight into classified negotiations with Ikea regarding the detailed development of the project. Indeed, the activists explain that the agreement and onward process was so opaque that they had to spend quite a lot of time explaining to politicians in City Hall and in neighborhood councils what the agreement actually entailed and what type of development it committed the City to: “How should traffic flow into these parts, for example? This was something that the politicians hadn’t taken part of. The information they had received from the [Development] Office was quite limited” (Local Activist A).

Thus, the format of the agreement between the City and Ikea can be seen as a first, even preemptive move on the part of the City to close down the issue before it even erupted. The second, more explicit such move on the part of the City authorities, was the decision to all but stonewall the locals’ requests for an open dialogue with the officials directly involved in the development project. According to the local activists, the project members refused to communicate directly with them – instead directing all communication through a designated officer acting as a gatekeeper; and later also putting extraordinary gag clauses into the contracts of any consultants working on issues related to the project.

In the interviews, the officials in turn reiterate that the locals’ demands for influence must be understood in relation to their own greater responsibility towards the City and the political will. As one of them – rightly – notes in referring to the exact geographical boundaries of the area, “no one lives there today” (Project Communicator), hence casting the activists as a special interest group seemingly adversarial to the common good. According to the officials, this fact coupled with the complexity of the project and its uncertain timelines simply eluded any prospects for instituting a more transparent and participatory process.

The insularity of the process was made further evident to the locals’ in an ensuing struggle over background reports for the project. To learn more about the environmental consequences of the planned redevelopment, the locals had requested access to the extensive traffic analysis that was being conducted on behalf of the City administration as part of the new plans. The locals were partially denied, only receiving material they refer to as “garbage – documents that haven’t been relevant or documents without descriptions of what it was” (Local Activist A). And while they subsequently appealed the decision to the Supreme Administrative Court (‘Högsta Förvaltningsdomstolen’), they were denied legal standing. The City’s official stance was that providing all the material to the locals before the full proposal had been made public could “influence stakeholders and have a negative effect on the office’s bargaining position”.³ However, many of the interviewed locals struggle with understanding the City’s reasoning:

I am very disappointed. I was a lot more optimistic in the beginning and really thought they would listen to arguments and welcome an open dialogue. And everything is classified, even a traffic analysis. We can’t understand it. (Local Activist B)

The immediate defensive reactions from the City administration to the locals' requests for an open continuous dialogue convinced the activists that they would be forced to displace their concerns to sites and addressees more hospitable to the expression of their concerns and grievances, and they therefore very soon focused on generating a fully-fledged public controversy surrounding the plans. Their Facebook group served as a crucial platform in this endeavor, but some of the activists also made it their purpose to actively reach out to people with fewer resources and access in their local community. While these efforts were generally motivated by the hope of finding traction in the media for their environmental concerns, many of the interviewees often returned to how their actions hopefully would serve to open up the process to public scrutiny more generally, with e.g. one local activist reflecting that "transparency isn't there so that's what we're trying to develop" (Local Activist C).

As a consequence, the fate of the commerce complex became a local election issue, with the Social Democrats coming out against it somewhat explicitly. But long after the left party-coalition led by the Social Democrats had assumed control of City Hall, in the summer of 2014 and even after the two-year agreement with the Ikea Group had expired, at the beginning of the 2015 the plans still seemed to be continuing ahead. Rather than being directly called off by way of a political decision, the issue over the commerce complex was instead settled in the summer of 2015 when it became part of a fairly tangled affair surrounding the future of a new metro line that would run through the district. Following the power-shift in City Hall the agreed-upon 4 000 parking spaces became less politically feasible, and so for the Ikea group it was important that the new metro station was located as close to the department store as possible. When this failed, and also partly as a response to the strong opposition from locals, the Ikea group withdrew from the project.⁴ After the fact it was suggested that the dissolution of the plans was not only related to the Ikea group's accessibility demands, and in a press announcement from around this time, the new City Planning Commissioner highlighted that the strong public opinion against the plans was also a factor that contributed to the decision.⁵ The leader of the local Social Democrats is also "convinced that all the time and effort that [the locals] invested in discussing with politicians and officials mattered" (Politician A). Of course, more broadly conceived, the question regarding who or what actually tipped the scale in favor of this outcome seems rather unclear given the number of concerned parties and vested interests deeply enmeshed in the contested project. But the locals themselves also take credit for the cancelation of the plans, highlighting both in the interviews and on their Facebook page that the City had finally "listened to the public's opinion".

If viewed through the lens of Marres' work, it appears as if the City in this controversy has constantly acted to displace the issues at stake away from public scrutiny and debate: from the very beginning, in which they circumvented the established administrative practices of land allocation agreements by drawing up a confounding 'Letter of intent' with multinational group of companies – to the very end – in their tooth and nail battle to block access to crucial background information for the plans. By contrast, the locals come across as having managed to displace and settle an issue of concern seemingly too complex for any one institution to address. And by 'opening up' the process via a detour through a wider public audience they have also made the controversy into a moment of enacting 'democracy in practice'.

Placing the Action in Context

According to a Marresian, public-centered definition of democracy, the outcomes of the controversy over Slakthusområdet would appear as not only a substantial victory for the local activists, who ‘got what they wanted’, but also a democratic success story, in which ‘democracy in practice’ productively played out. However, we will now apply a more institutional frame of analysis, inspired by the works of Pierre Rosanvallon, to this controversy so as to situate the episodic, public-centered perspective on the controversy in a broader institutional landscape and flow of events – thus highlighting additional pertinent aspects of the case and its aftermath. In particular we will pay closer attention to *the prerequisites to public mobilization, the institutional landscapes* in which controversies unfold, and the *long term patterned outcomes* that these struggles might generate.

The Prerequisites to Public Mobilization

Marres’ choice of words often makes it seem as if her publics come ready-equipped and on standby to be able to champion their cause as soon as they are ‘sparked’ by an issue. But her work admittedly also shows a degree of appreciation for the difficulties involved in convening a public, as issue affectedness is not a pre-given state but something that entails a process of “learning to be affected” (Marres, 2005a; p. 62; see also Latour, 2004). She is also perfectly aware of the efforts required in addressing the failures of existing institutions, even likening it the “discovery” if not the “re-making” of the state (Marres, 2005a, p 59). The problem is that in her work, as well as in others’ which engage with episodic and essentialist understandings of democracy, there is an unmistakable lack of discussion regarding the historically and socially variegated prerequisites for such mobilizations, including how unevenly distributed resources in society have undeniable bearing on which members of the public have the capacity and resources to make themselves engaged in issues.

Thus, it must be recognized that there is not only a complex attention economy related to engagement in issues (who has the time and training to delve into sometimes opaque documents and protocols, etc.), but also that such inequalities are part of broader landscapes of ubiquitous social and economic inequalities that produce the patterns of differentiated levels of public engagement among, for example, different parts of populations that are generally evident in studies of public participation in planning issues. Thus, the capacity to ‘learn to be affected’ highlighted by Marres cannot be assumed to be evenly distributed in any given population. This will also affect the format and framing in which issues are brought to public discussion, and further – it can be assumed – the influence such different groups may be able to exert with regards to the trajectory these issues will take in their development towards some form of settlement. Further, any publicization of issues at any given point or time will also in various ways draw upon accretions of resources for such actions that have been established as outcomes of previous historical struggles for democratization such as a free media, general elections, etc.⁶

To relate this more directly to the case of Slakthusområdet, it is notable that the mobilization was led by quite affluent and socially well-established local residents. The activists themselves also reflected on this fact and concluded that had their situation been less socially and economically privileged, they would likely not have been able to engage in the issue in the same way:

The reflection is maybe that what we’re doing is needed. That the public needs to organize itself in this way to be significant. And that’s also a bit scary. Because it takes time and energy and strength and

also quite a lot of knowledge. And that's not something everyone has the same access to. And then we're touching on the democratic aspects. (Local Activist D)

As has been recently noted by Inch (2015), the generally unrecognized private "costs of political participation" ⁷ are endemic to public mobilizations and can play "a critical role in people's capacity to sustain engagement" as well as "people's subsequent disposition towards political activity", and yet in the literature tend to be eclipsed by all the 'action' surrounding public controversies (p. 417).

Further, the locals' ostensive success was not only carried on the back of their own resources, experiences and actions, but also came about through the activation of pre-existing institutions arrived at from previous democratization processes and struggles, including the electoral-representative system and the free media. In this sense, while many of their actions were dedicated to finding new addressees for an issue traditionally not pinned on such sites and agents, for instance local and county politicians, social media, and even the court, their issue displacements and articulations also served to re-invigorate and re-legitimize traditional democratic institutions and sites, thus highlighting the complex, occasionally corrective function of democratic/counter-democratic institutions.

The Institutional Landscapes in Which Controversies Unfold

As the above account indicates, we find it deeply problematic how a public-centered understanding of democracy, such as that of Marres, conjures up a rather simple, dichotomous relationship between antagonistically implicated parties involved in controversies, whereby some come to be center-staged as the true champions of democracy, while others – who appear to 'close down' public controversies – per default are ascribed the role of its enemy. In the Marresian analysis of our case study, it is the planners and other public officials who come to populate this latter category. Based on our empirical findings we, in contrast to Marres, find it pertinent to try to understand the institutional landscape which pressures and legitimizes certain actors to assume specific roles and actions, perhaps sometimes even as "guardians" of the different temporalities of democracy that Rosanvallon conceptualizes.

Returning to the conflict over the background data, which the locals refer to as a typical expression of how they were increasingly encountering a democratic deficit in their dealings with the planning offices, it is noteworthy that the project manager explicitly argues that it would have been undemocratic to disclose it due to its unfinished state:

Because if we would make unfinished working material available to the public, then it's not democratic, because what comes out is really nothing and it can be interpreted in a lot of different ways, and above all it can be interpreted differently by different people. And then there is no [coherent] picture. And I would call that undemocratic to some extent. (Planner A)

One of the planners, in turn, justifies their evasiveness towards the locals by emphasizing the difficulties planners face in accounting for the unequal distribution of resources in relation to planning processes:

How can we sift through public opinion when, for example, many comments are negative, but on the other hand a lot of people have not been heard? How do we deal with the fact that different neighborhoods have very different socio-economic conditions, different cultural capital, different understandings of how society works, different power networks? How much should we try to interpret that, or manage that? It's very difficult. (Planner B)

Hence, it appears as if the planners are not completely unconcerned with democracy, albeit with a slightly different understanding of the concept from that which Marres provides – for instance focusing more on ‘due process’ and in ‘equalizing’ access to decision-making procedures. Of course, these justifications might well be post-hoc legitimizations of their questionable actions and a salutary testament to the vacuity of ‘democracy’ as a concept. Such a reading is particularly tempting when taking into account the short-term financial gains the project would deliver to the City. However, here the ‘real’ motivations of the City officials matter less than the fact that they relate to these specific facets of democracy to justify their actions; stressing that there is still value – even if only rhetorical – in construing state bureaucracy as a facilitator of social generality.

Nevertheless, in the interviews the locals shrug off the officials’ concerns for such dimensions of democracy, with one remarking that “it’s a much bigger problem with massive companies with billions in turnover steering the process behind closed doors” than “the 2,000 citizens who fool around in a Facebook group and a bunch of people trying to send signals” (Local Activist C).

The engaged local residents thus also evince a manifest concern for democracy as an issue in itself. However, in the eyes of the activists, the legal and procedural dimensions of democracy – ostensibly championed by the planners – come across as obstacles rather than as resources for the enactment of substantial democracy. Through this they echo what Rosanvallon (2011) posits to be a contemporary demand for ‘proximity’ between people and their governing institutions, whereby legitimacy secured via elective and executive functions alone is not enough compared to what is perceived as properly democratic procedure.

Thus, in contrast to Marres’ approach, our case evinces that the substantial definition of democracy often becomes an issue in itself in public planning controversies. By relating to the theories of Rosanvallon it also becomes possible to situate such disagreements within longer and broader histories of fundamental tensions between various elements of really-existing democracy, such as the tension between – on the one hand public access to decision making, conceptualized by Rosanvallon as the ‘voluntaristic’ side of democracy, and on the other hand institutional norms of proper, impartial bureaucratic conduct – conceptualized as the ‘rationalistic’ side of democracy by Rosanvallon, which historically has been institutionalized to serve as a bulwark against, for example, mob rule.

As a consequence, these types of conflicts over the settlement of singular and specific issues often also tend to play out as moments in trajectories of broader and longer struggles over what fundamentally constitutes a democratic political system, where different positions – emphasizing different components of such a system – time and again clash with each other.

The Patterned Outcomes of Public Planning Controversies

It is rather noteworthy that despite many of the locals enjoying privileged access to important social and political networks before the controversy erupted and despite their ostensive influence over the outcome, the process still left our interviewed activists describing their experiences in negative terms. For all of them, it seems that whatever faith they recall having in the planning system turned to disappointment and alienation coupled with a simmering conviction that not only democratic but perhaps even constitutional procedures had been violated during the process, or as one local put it: “If they’re doing everything by the book, why is everything so secret?” (Local Activist B). Combined, these experiences fostered the belief that it was deep-seated economic interests in the project and its real or assumed potential for profit, rather than proper democratic procedure, that was determining the fate of their living environment. Given this

fatigue and disillusion expressed by the local activists, it is fairly unsurprising that when the plans for the commerce complex were finally shelved and a new area programme was devised and submitted for public consultation in the spring of 2016, few of the local activists that we had followed chose to attend; one of them noting that he did not have the time to engage himself any further, while another simply refused being subjected to the perceived depreciating language and steamrolling approaches of the planning authorities.

Thus, in addition to the individual social and economic ‘costs of participation’ discussed above, perhaps the potential systemic cost of an eroded faith in established democratic procedures and arrangements, resulting from a confrontation with the perceived anti-democratic tactics of public administrations, should also duly be added to the tally of the societal ‘costs’ that need to be taken into account in relation to any specific public controversy (see also Metzger et al., 2014). Although, as we saw, the locals’ actions served to re-legitimize some institutional dimensions, it seems that as a whole the citizen-as-watchdog – or in this case citizen-as-veto-wielder – gained only little at the expense of their role as voters – seeing that their experiences likely alienated them from willfully pursuing any of the above functions for the foreseeable future.

Thus, the experiences of the local activists appear to have left them with anything but a sense of the “deep-down delight of democracy” (cf. Purcell, 2013). Rather, the dominant feeling was one of exhaustion and utter frustration in the face of a public administration whose activities did not at all measure up to the expectations of the residents when it came to issues concerning the transparency and legitimacy of public authority decision-making. Chiming with the previous findings of Haughton et al. (2016), it thus seems as if they were generally left “feeling more alienated than before they got drawn into debates about the detail of policy” (p. 487). Such tendencies towards loss of trust in public institutions and the fundamental fairness of the existing political system can of course be very well motivated in a specific context. Either way, we would argue that staying attentive to such emergent outcomes of public controversies and related struggles is important when trying to understand the political dynamics of planning processes from a democracy perspective. However, a narrowly public-centered framework of analysis would not encourage taking any particular interest in such effects.

This appears to us as a serious lacuna in a public-centered approach such as that of Marres. Her explicit focus on the public and ‘the action’ simply disregards, and therefore also obfuscates, the multidimensional (social, psychological, economic) costs of generating the civic capacity demanded of a public to be able to take action in the first place, as well as the long-term emergent outcomes of such repeated and sustained struggles, for instance in the form of an eroded trust in the fairness of the administrative system.⁸

Concluding Discussion

In this article we have argued that an exclusively public-centered understanding of planning democracy risks obscuring how public engagements in planning processes always unfold within the context of longer trajectories and broader landscapes of the evolution of really-existing democracy. The purpose of our argumentation is neither to denigrate the importance of momentary, episodic forms of democratic expressions – nor Marres’ contribution to their analysis. Indeed, after having applied a public-centered frame of analysis garnered from the work of Marres, we found that Marres’ public-centered approach to democracy provides substantial affordances for analyzing public planning controversies in a manner which illuminates the (counter-)democratic function of public mobilizations in relation to planning issues. From this we conclude that Marres’

public-centered approach provides important theoretical and methodological guidance for grasping some of the key dynamics of such events.

However, the empirical results from our case study also suggest that her public-centered analytical framework overlooks a number of key dimensions to public controversies. These blind spots are largely rooted in Marres' all too narrow definition of 'democracy proper', where public action and issue settlement set the frame for the entire analysis. With the help of a more institutionally-inclined frame of analysis inspired by the works of Pierre Rosanvallon we were able to shed additional light on our case material by demonstrating how the investigated controversy related to fundamental tensions between various components and temporalities of really-existing democracy. By emplacing our case study within such an institutional frame of analysis, it becomes obvious how important it is to always situate any struggle for public traction in decision-making in relation to its contextual prerequisites and institutional landscape, as well as in relation to their specific outcomes as moments in broader struggles to shape and define democracy in practice.

Our overall conclusion based on the above is that an exclusive reliance on public-centered understandings of democracy in the analysis of public involvement in planning processes is potentially problematic in that their myopic, episodic and essentialist definition of democracy risks obscuring many of the crucial prerequisites, contextual factors and patterned outcomes of such events. If not complemented by a more institutional perspective, exclusively public-centered analyses of planning controversies risk missing out on paying attention to critical issues such as uneven distributions of influence and resources, the relevance of due processes and the rule of law and the protection of minority rights and opinions.

Finally, we wish to round off by lauding the definite contributions that Marres and other public-centered theorists of democracy, such as Purcell (2013), have made in inspiring the reinvigoration of scholarly debates on democracy in relation to planning processes. We wholeheartedly support this re-emphasis of democracy as a crucial "matter of care" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) for planning thought and research. We consider our own work presented in this article as but a small contribution towards keeping this discussion going, with an emphasis on the importance of paying careful attention to "what thoughts think thoughts" (Haraway, 2016) – in this case, more specifically: how we substantially understand the concept of 'democracy' and what constitutes the *democratic qualities* of planning processes (see also Metzger & Wiberg, 2017). Our hope is that this intervention can offer some openings for keeping this crucial discussion going.

Notes

1. It can be duly noted that one of the authors of this paper has contributed to introducing Marres' work to the analysis of planning issues, see e.g. Metzger (2011, 2013).
2. See Stockholms Stad. (2013). Intensionsavtal (tidig markreservation) avseende handelsetablering m.m. inom södra delarna av Slakthusområdets programområde. Stockholm: Exploateringskontoret.
3. See Stockholms Stad. (2014). Projekt Slakthusområdet, avslagsbeslut för utlämnande av handlingar. Stockholm: Exploateringskontoret.
4. See Dagens Handel, 10th of June 2015, 'Det blir inget Ikea vid Söderstadion'. Retrieved 15 June 2015, from <http://www.dagenshandel.se/nyheter/det-blir-inget-ikea-vid-soderstadion/>.
5. See SVT, 15th of June, 2015, 'Ikea nobbar Söderstaden – men letar efter ny plats'. Retrieved 15 August 2015, from <http://www.svt.se/nyheter/regionalt/stockholm/det-blir-inget-ikea-i-soderstaden>.
6. However, it is also important to keep in mind that even such resources of democracy which are often assumed to be equally available to the general populace are in practice more or less accessible to certain groups in society, depending e.g. on citizenship status, level of cultural and symbolic capital, etc.

7. It is interesting to note that also Marres discusses this turn of phrase, however in a somewhat different sense, in Marres (2011).
8. It is important to be clear that we by no means suggest that such trust is always unconditionally deserved. Nonetheless, we do believe that the mechanism of erosion of trust itself, whether motivated or not, is an important consequence to take into consideration.

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Paper II

From a “Planning-Led Regime” to a “Development-Led Regime” (and Back Again?): The Role of Municipal Planning in the Urban Governance of Stockholm

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Abstract: Much recent research has pointed out the generally declining influence of planning on urban development, often explaining this trend with major structural shifts in the world economy. In this paper we take a somewhat different tack founded upon a “devil is in the detail” intuition. Tracing the City of Stockholm’s urban governance landscape over the course of a century, we examine how overarching patterns of change are reflected in and reproduced through the organisation of local planning and development administrations. Our point is not to dispute the relevance of broader structural explanations, but rather to suggest that any ambition to change the currently dominant development-led regime must combine more general understandings of broad international trends with a detailed understanding of the concrete institutional mechanisms that come to produce specific patterns of effects at a particular time and place. The paper argues that for urban planning to be promoted as a governance of place, more research on identifying the critical institutional mechanisms which enable or constrain the realisation of particular policy goals is needed.

Introduction

For decades planning scholars have lamented the waning influence of publicly-led planning upon really-existing urban development. The steering power or “agency” of planning is in most parts of the world simply not what it used to be (or, at least, was imagined to be). In this paper we take a manifest interest in the capacity of publicly-led planning to exercise influence over the general development of urban areas, or, put differently, the role and place of publicly-led planning as a “governance of place”. We ask ourselves: under what circumstances do publicly-led urban planning activities have a capacity to actually influence what is built, how and for whom?

Much contemporary research has explained the weakened influence of publicly-led planning with reference to major structural shifts within the global economy (e.g. Harvey 1985, 1989; Swyngedouw 2005). However, in this paper we take a somewhat different tack and instead of zooming out to trace overarching patterns of change, we look closer at how external pressures are translated by the concrete organisational practices of local administrations. These sometimes seemingly mundane practices, we argue, serve to configure a specific “organization of power” (Deleuze in Guattari 2009: 37) which, in turn, produces and upholds distinct urban governance regimes. Thus, our ambition with this paper is not to dispute the relevance of broader structural explanations, but rather to suggest that it is necessary to understand how the practices, logics, roles and agencies that serve to stabilise the current order are concretely organised if we are to be able to identify the organisational keystones upon which any such particular order rests.

To make our point we draw upon our own empirical research on the organisation of Stockholm’s urban development process from 2006 and onwards, as well as historical accounts drawn from the pre-existing research literature, particularly Bodström (1994, 1997). Our own data collection has been performed by way of a qualitative fieldwork methodology as outlined by Czarniawska (2014). The primary method for generating empirical material has been semi-structured qualitative interviews, complemented by document studies and participatory observations in meetings and seminars. The interviews were carried out between 2015 and 2017 with 18 public servants and elected representatives in the City of Stockholm who carry varying degrees of responsibility over Stockholm’s urban development, as summarised in Table 1. These include four politicians from the City’s planning and development boards; five civil servants from the Development Office (*Exploateringskontoret*); two officials from the

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City Executive Office (*Stadsledningskontoret*); one senior advisor in the City Planning Office (*Stadsbyggnadskontoret*); and five planners who have been vested with introducing the new administrative routine “Area Planning”, as well as their operations developer. All interviews were carried out in Swedish but the quotations presented in this paper have been translated into English by the authors. The interviewees’ accounts have, when possible, been verified via official documentation or other sources.¹

The analysis of the empirical material has been performed by way of a phronetic approach as discussed by Flyvbjerg (2001), the purpose of which is to illuminate extant power relations and values that can be discerned to be at play in the given case situation. The extended aim of such a phronetic approach is to contribute to problematising the situation so that the research account can serve as the grounds for a reflection on the current state of affairs in the given situation. As, somewhat more eloquently, expressed by Flyvbjerg (2001: 140): “Phronetic social science explores historic circumstances and current practices to find avenues to praxis. The task of phronetic social science is to clarify and deliberate about the problems and risks we face and to outline how things may be done differently, in full knowledge that we cannot find ultimate answers to these questions or even a single version of what the questions are”. Even if our account thus has the purpose of illu-

minating and problematising the role of publicly-led planning in urban development in Stockholm specifically, it also has a broader methodological ambition of illustrating the necessity of staying alert to also seemingly mundane organisational minutiae in the analysis of just how, to what degree and under which circumstances publicly led-planning may actually be able to influence the governance and development of urban environments.

Throughout our case account we will attempt to trace distinctive and shifting patterns of relations between the broader landscape of urban development and the particular organisational arrangements of the City of Stockholm which come to assign the practices of urban planning variegated roles and functions within this landscape – and how changes in such arrangements have come to affect “what is built, how and for whom” (Healey 1992a: 33). We will stay particularly attentive to the shifting capacity of planners, plan-making and plans to influence land use under various organisational arrangements and look closely at the specific organisational designs that have come to strengthen or weaken this capacity. In other words, we look at the role and place of planning in the broader urban governance landscape, and with this, under what conditions publicly-led planning can influence urban development processes with the purpose of facilitating more socioeconomically inclusive urban development.

Tab. 1: List of interviewees and their positions.

Planner A	Senior advisor in the City Planning Office
Planner B	Strategic planning advisor in the City Planning Office
Planner C	Area planner in the City Planning Office
Planner D	Area planner in the City Planning Office
Planner E	Area planner in the City Planning Office
Planner F	Area planner in the City Planning Office
Planner G	Area planner in the City Planning Office
Development engineer A	Project manager in the Development Office
Development engineer B	Head of a division in the Development Office
Development engineer C	Public land appraiser and negotiator in the Development Office
Environmental planner A	Environmental advisor in the Development Office
Environmental planner B	Environmental advisor in the Development Office
Public servant A	Head of a division in the City Executive Office
Public servant B	Budgetary manager in the City Executive office
Politician A	Chairman of the Development Board for the political majority at the time of the interviews
Politician B	Representative on the Development Board for the political majority at the time of the interviews
Politician C	Representative on the Development Board for the political majority at the time of the interviews
Politician D	Vice-Chairman of the Development Board for the political opposition at the time of the interviews

In the paper we draw upon Patsy Healey's framework for a sociological-institutional analysis of the urban development process to help us sketch two broad types of governance regimes for urban development: "planning-led regime" and "development-led regime". We borrow the concept of "regime" somewhat loosely from urban regime theory (e.g. Elkin 1987; Stone 1989). We use it not to signify the particular form of urban governance by which public and private centres of power, under the pressures of global competitiveness, come to cooperate on urban policies in a mutually beneficial manner – as was originally intended by its founding authors. For us, the usefulness of the term lies in the way it signifies how external pressures, organisational resources and arrangements, and actors and alliances in urban settings come to reproduce and stabilise ways of governing urban life – urban regimes which may well span any number of administrative configurations and exogenous forces beyond those which brought the regime into bear in the first place. We conceptualise this in the paper by using the labels "planning-led regime" and "development-led regime" as placeholders that designate how plans/planners/plan-making is vested with a managing or a following capacity, respectively, in relation to land and property markets. We will show how the shift from a planning-led to a development-led regime in the City of Stockholm in the early 1990s encompassed a handing over of the urban development initiative to market actors, which resulted in a drastic reduction in the capacity of plans, plan-making and planners to actively influence land use in Stockholm. Recent years have, however, seen the voicing of new ambitions to again let more socioeconomically egalitarian policies guide the urban development process in the City, ambitions which have to a large extent been vested in a new administrative organisation emerging out of the City's Planning Office. Dubbed "Area Planning", its goal is to reintroduce a more proactive approach to urban development by developing a comprehensive understanding of the needs and limits of the City's variegated geographic regions. Yet, beyond the somewhat grandiose rhetoric of a new approach to urban development it nonetheless remains doubtful whether the administrative-organisational reforms introduced so far are anywhere near enough as to either disrupt the development-led regime that is in place to date or to effectuate a real shift towards a more socioeconomically inclusive urban development.

The role and function of planning in urban governance

Urban political economy perspectives have been particularly prominent in theorising the function of planning within the broader urban governance landscape. Proceeding from the position that planning is one of many vehicles available to the state to reproduce the conditions of capitalist society, Marxist schools of thought have traditionally conceptualised it as the "crisis manager" of the built environment (Scott, Rowles 1977; Dear, Scott 1981; Harvey 1987). From the Marxist perspective, the function of planning is on the one hand to break down the boundaries for capital movement and on the other hand – where social conflict erupts – to utilise some mixture of "repression, cooptation, and integration" to contain it, often under the legitimising guise of acting as a "defender the public interest" (Harvey 1985: 176f.). To be sure, attempts by individual agents to redefine this role is a pervasive condition of planning, but it is inherently unstable as "the inevitable reform movement will most probably sweep it away when it is no longer consistent with the requirements of the social order" (Harvey 1985: 177). The lack of real agency prescribed to planning in these readings is further underscored by how the traditionally regulatory nature of planning is assumed to be obstructive rather than generative: "powers to prevent rather than powers to initiate" urban development (Pickvance 1982: 70).

More contemporary writings on these topics pick up on new, more insidious dimensions to this function. Under the emergent neoliberal urban governance landscape and its relentless pursuit of economic growth the role of planning is no longer characterised by steamrolling opposition through the reference of a supposedly neutral "public interest", but by reining in dissident voices through the pretence of participation, agreement and consensus (e.g. Swyngedouw 2009). The implication of this is that the broader ambit of planning is said to have expanded beyond a negative and regulatory function regarding land use towards a more openly facilitative role in the efficient circulation of capital in urban landscapes, which is assumed to be to the benefit of "everyone" in the city according to various forms of "trickle down" logics. Accordingly, while the current political economy-inclined literature tends to ascribe planning and planners with a more active role than previously, this new-found agency does not amount to a potential to actively influence the

fundamental patterns of urban development, but is rather understood to be limited to a facilitative complicity in perpetuating state-led commitments to economic growth (Allmendinger, Haughton 2012; Allmendinger 2016).

Even though the urban political economy literature is very helpful in sketching broader shifts in power relations within urban governance landscapes, it often provides explanations on a somewhat “zoomed out” overarching, structural level. Hence, it only rarely goes into the detail of investigating the variegated ways in which actors come to enact such shifts in and through the organisational forms of urban development practice. This latter question was however centre-staged in the research agenda put forth by Patsy Healey and colleagues at the beginning of the 1990s (see, e.g., Healey 1991, 1992a; Healey, Barrett 1990; Metzger 2015). In their influential paper on the nature of land and property markets, Healey and Barrett (1990) laid the groundwork for theory and methodology which can account for the structuring forces of urban development by relating Giddensian structuration theory to the production of the built environment. Proceeding from a relational approach in which structure is established through the way agents deploy, challenge and potentially alter external pressures, they argue that the task of the researcher is to examine how such “external pressures are reflected in and affected by the way individual agents determine their strategies and conduct their relationships as they deal with specific projects and issues, and as they consider their future stream of activities” (1990: 90). Accordingly, they acknowledge the ubiquity of overarching driving forces of capitalist society but underscore that a productive focus of research attention would be “whether particular ‘driving dynamics’ produce distinctive patterns of agency relations and whether these have particular effects, on what is built, how and for whom” (Healey 1992a: 33).

In relation to the place and function of planning within such broader governance landscapes of urban development, Healey (1992b) identifies three ideal types of such roles: Plans and planners can have as their role to (1) manage urban development, which implies that planning takes “a deliberate role in structuring the conditions in which land and property development markets are formed” and in which the impetus of planning is “to reduce the imperfections within land and property markets, and to give greater priority to environmental quality and community needs” (1992b: 17). For such an approach to be efficient, Healey ar-

gues, development plans must also be “expenditure-linked” by way of an integration with funding strategies for infrastructural investments and the provision of local authority services. In contrast, where development plans (2) follow the market they merely act as “a record of what is expected to happen”. In such situations, community needs which are not manifested in market demands tend to be ignored and oligopolistic tendencies in the developer sector are either promoted or further cemented. The role of planning is reduced to a backdrop for contracts between the state and the market with “little capacity to *transform* the qualities of areas, and thus contributes little to urban regeneration strategies” (1992b: 17, emphasis in original). Finally, plans can purposively function to also (3) create markets. The role of planning is then to “resurrect” market activity in areas and locales which have fallen out of favour with the property development industry. In such situations, the institutions and instruments of planning are typically harnessed to attempt to “transform a locale from one image and set of values to another in which substantially higher values can be realized” (1992b: 18).

Relating Healey’s typology back to our aforementioned two broad types of urban regimes, with subsequent different roles and functions for planning, the planning-led regime could be placed on one end of a spectrum alongside managing markets. It can thus be conceptualised as a stabilised mode of urban governance by which planning is granted an active role and function in urban development and which is primarily guided by publicly-formulated plans that are focused on catering to perceived community needs and maximizing use value. At the other end of the spectrum, we find the market following approach of a development-led regime – that is, an urban governance regime in which regulatory plans function as post-hoc confirmations of contracts between state and market, in which urban development is driven by market demands, and where use value is subordinate to the exchange value of land and property. In relation to the third role of planning sketched by Healey, that of market creation, it can be noted that both types of arrangements involve aspects of such a role in different ways, in the sense that planners in capitalist economies in one way or another will inevitably contribute to shaping the structure of opportunities and the specific direction of flows of capital in land and property markets.

Relating the somewhat general discussion of planning-led and development-led urban

governance regimes to our interest in concrete administrative arrangements and organisational practices, it becomes a pressing point to ask how they may come to contribute to the enactment of one or another type of regime. This is the question that we will examine more closely in the next section, where we investigate how such concrete arrangements and practices have come to produce and uphold particular urban governance regimes.

The role and function of planning in Stockholm's urban governance

Urban planning in Sweden

In Sweden, the regulatory municipal planning framework is generally considered to be one of the strongest of its kind. This understanding is often traced back to the Building Act of 1947 and the introduction of the so-called “Municipal planning monopoly” from which a generation of planners were instilled with the notion that in principle municipalities can dictate when, where and how land within their borders should be developed (Blücher 2006). This power is primarily attributed to the detail plan (*detaljplan*), a politically approved, legally binding document describing land use, as well as the comprehensive plan (*översiktsplan*), the non-binding visionary document aimed at guiding the overarching development trajectory of the municipality. Much of the 20th century saw a successive strengthening of this framework (Strömgren 2007), but from the 1990s and onwards the regulatory planning system has in practice taken something of backseat in favour of “contract planning” where the regulatory plans increasingly become the product of prior negotiations with developers concerning land and property values (Cars, Thune Hedström 2006; Blücher 2006; Ceasar 2016). Such arrangements are spearheaded by so-called “development engineers”, civil servants specialising in land surveying and real-estate development who are generally situated in different administrations and departments than those employed as urban planners (see Metzger, Zakhour 2018). Accordingly, there has been a rather drastic change in the capacity of planners, plan-making and plans to actively influence land use in Sweden.

Managing markets: a planning-led regime, ca. 1930–1990

There are a considerable number of accounts describing Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, as one of the most “planned” cities in the world. This portrayal not only concerns the unusually active public sector in controlling the City’s land use, which by some accounts can be traced back several centuries (Arnstberg, Lundén 1997; Lundevall 2006), but also the remarkably committed way in which various European planning ideologies and design principles have been brought to bear on Stockholm’s urban development – plans and intentions which are to this day readily observable in the City’s built environment (Hall 2009).

The modern traces of Stockholm’s active planning tradition are particularly discernible from around the beginning of the 1900s. The rapid urbanisation and lax regulations of the previous century had opened the door to widespread speculation on the land and housing markets, leading to overcrowding, miserable sanitary conditions and sprawling shantytowns outside the city limits (Lundevall 2006). But the turn of the century marked a period of successive strengthening of cities’ regulatory planning frameworks, in relation to both the market and national government. Cities had already been entrusted with devising and implementing city plans via their own planning boards, but as expropriation and redemption rights expanded and plans were fitted with far-reaching possibilities to regulate the form and function of urban development, the planning framework for local authorities to control their land use (Blücher 2006). However, since much of this framework did not extend its reach outside city limits, Stockholm had around this time begun an active and purposeful land purchasing strategy beyond its borders. While the scale of these purchases has come to distinguish it from many other western cities, it has been Stockholm’s continued retention of this land through the extensive use of site lease holding that has particularly stood out, both nationally and internationally (Bodström 1997).

During the post-war period, the City’s control over urban development was further cemented through the introduction of the planning monopoly in which all development was politically anchored to the detail plan via the City Council and its planning board. The explicit policy of the City of the previous decades – to purchase land from private owners

to acquire power over it so as to be able to use the land for the promotion of the public interest (e.g. constructing non-expensive housing) – thus lost some of its relative importance, but the City administration’s extensive land purchases nonetheless persisted well into the 1980s (Bodström 1994). This combination of a sovereign “planning monopoly” and expansive land policy played an important part in Stockholm’s approach to the construction of *Folkhemmet*, the social democratic welfare project of the post-war period, in which planning and housing policy became focal areas in the effective distribution of welfare. With the help of its municipal housing companies as well as extensive state subsidies, Stockholm was able to plan and build a whole new city district per year between 1950 and 1970, all while the population remained roughly constant (Lundevall 2006). At the height of the welfare state model, the reputation of the City’s Planning Office and its planners was at its peak and helped to establish Stockholm’s international reputation as a city with “a long and active tradition of planning, one that during much of the twentieth century, up until the end of the 1970s, was driven by a social discourse based on a vision aiming to create an egalitarian and less disparate society” (Loit 2014: 249).

Stockholm’s approach to urban development up until the 1980s can thus be understood as a “planning-led urban development regime” in which the role of municipal planning was to both manage and create the conditions of the local land and property markets. Broadly conceived, the planning monopoly allowed Stockholm to control what should be built and where, while the extensive public land ownership provided it with the opportunity to also decide when and by whom (Bodström 1997). In political economy terms, it was a somewhat typical corporatist arrangement in which the City would tightly regulate the market while at the same time generating strictly structured channels allowing for the flow of investment and accumulation of capital, which was understood as a “necessary evil” so as to be able to produce urban developments that were seen to be specifically at the service of socioeconomic integration. Furthermore, the municipal housing companies helped the City to not only exercise control for whom housing was built, but also, by utilising the somewhat unique Swedish Site Leasehold Institute, the City was able to retain the fundamental power of land ownership for an indefinite period of time (Deland 2001). Accordingly, while the Swedish legal planning

framework has always only had a negative regulatory capacity, it was far from the only administrative component shaping the City’s capacity to establish and implement their plans.

Following markets: a development-led regime, ca. 1995–2015

In the early 1990s, Sweden was hit by recession which particularly affected a previously overheated property development industry (Kalbro, Mattsson 1995). This led to an oversupply in the regional housing market, which served to dampen the interest in developing new housing in the Stockholm region – which in turn produced a sharp downturn in the number of newly constructed housing units in the Stockholm region from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. Parallel to this development, government policy in the housing market also took a sharp deregulatory turn, with a radical cutback on housing construction subsidies as well as the repudiation of numerous regulations of the housing and construction markets. This market reorientation was so swift and radical that it has been described as a “system shift” in the Swedish housing regime whereby the housing sector went from being a heavily subsidised part of the economy to becoming a source of income for the state (Borg 2004).

With regards to existing housing stocks, this new housing politics took the shape of massive privatisations of municipal housing stocks, in what has been described in the literature as no less than a “conversion frenzy” (Caesar, Kopsch 2018). In the course of less than a quarter of a decade, the housing stock in the City of Stockholm went from 67% rental apartments in 1990 to 58% in 2000 and 42% in 2013 (Hyresgästföreningen 2014). This shift towards private housing became even more accentuated in 2006, when the new right-wing majority in Stockholm City Hall adjusted the policy for the management of public land to explicitly prioritise the construction of owner-occupied dwellings (formally, cooperative; for an explanation of the Swedish tenure system see, e.g., Caesar, Kopsch 2018), for which public land was sold rather than leased, thus generating more direct short-term financial gains for the municipal treasury. From this year and onwards, the clear majority of the land allocation agreements in Stockholm are explicitly for the construction of owner-occupied apartments (see, e.g., City of Stockholm 2011).

The removal of the “protective shielding” surrounding the housing sector also exposed

municipalities' planning process to more market-orientated approaches as financing for development increasingly had to be sought from the private sector (Cars, Thune Hedström 2006; Blücher 2006). With regards to the administration of public land, this change of policy is most clearly visible in the reorientation of the formal planning process in relation to the land allocation process, in which public land is designated to private or public developers for urban development. Up until the 1990s, the land allocation process was more or less an ad-hoc practice in relation to the planning process, meaning that it was not uncommon that regulatory plans were drawn up and adopted before land had actually been allocated to a developer (Boström 1997). But, according to our interviewees, during the economic crisis of the early 1990s, which in Sweden specifically manifested itself as a crisis in the property and construction sectors, the "allocation grant" was reinvented by Stockholm as an "incentive" for developers to pursue urban development opportunities based on their own priorities, in effect shifting the initiative of projects away from the City unto the market. The reorientation towards this market-based approach eventually came to be formalised in 2010 under a land allocation policy, colloquially dubbed the "Stockholm model", but iterations and traces of it can be found in virtually all public land policy documents since the end of the 1990s and onwards.

The shift towards a development-led urban governance regime also gained increased momentum when public land was reinvented as a crucial source of income for the City in a re-prioritisation of direct land sales over long-term leases. With this new understanding of public land as a financial asset to be realised, rather than a tool to implement a political project, the City soon grew to rely on incomes from sales of public land as an important supplement to the City's tax incomes, which – combined with the lease incomes today – constitute about ten percent of the City's total annual revenues (City of Stockholm 2017a). With time, the requisite to produce a financial gain for the City administration has also become the fundamental imperative for any urban development project on public land, which – despite the sales – still constitutes the vast majority of land subject for development in the city.

The responsibility between land use and land ownership has in Stockholm almost always been separated between the planners of the City's Planning Office and the development engineers of the Real Estate Office (and later

Development Office), respectively. But while the planners used to have substantial influence in the overarching development process, this changed markedly via the introduction of the Stockholm model and its project-based approach. As the practical framing of urban development projects in terms of location, scale, expenditure and even form of tenure came to be all but completely decided upon through agreements between developers and the development engineers, the role of planning has increasingly been reduced to a following capacity, taking the appearance of a "record of negotiation". The planners we interviewed identify two key problems with this development-led regime. First, the introduction of the Stockholm model coupled with further rationalisations of City's urban development process has led to an abandonment of long-term, comprehensive planning strategies in favour of small project-based planning model taking place "within the framework of individual detail plans" (Planner E). Between the vague abstractness of the comprehensive plan and the technical specificity of the detailed land use plan "there was no level where you could enlist these more general questions to be able to get an overall picture of qualities, needs, challenges and what it could mean in a broader context" (Planner E). The implications for the City's development trajectory has, according to them, been rather severe with environmental qualities being built away, green linkages threatened, potential synergies between new developments removed for the sake of a few buildings, and so on. These accounts are also in line with the City Planning Office's follow-up of Stockholm's previous Comprehensive Plan, which shows that only two percent of the projects that were initiated during the investigated period had clear links to the plan's ambition of strengthening "strategic relations" in the city (City of Stockholm 2014).

Second, the treatment of public land as a realisable financial asset and source of income has finally resulted in the classic "sorting" effect visible in most other cities that utilise the exchange value of land as the basis for investment distribution. While Stockholm's planners are ostensibly tasked with promoting "social sustainability" through targeted interventions in underprivileged areas, our interviewees underscore that the financial logic underpinning Stockholm's urban development nonetheless tends to counteract such measures:

"We have a mandate to work with social sustainability, but there are no resources to do so since the projects we set up do not generate

the type of revenue for the City which can finance these measures. Which is deeply unfair. It's so uneven. And I don't know why it is this way. It has been like this for quite a long time" (Planner E).

The more affordable variety of housing developed through the City's housing companies are also subject to the same logic and thus "in many cases end up in districts that already have some kind of socioeconomic stigma" which rather than counteracting socioeconomic segregation is expected to "accelerate such a development" (Planner C). In a recent report carried out by the City's own Sustainability Commission, it is also highlighted that the prevailing land policy has done little to counter Stockholm's residential segregation, which has increased significantly over the last two decades compared with many other Swedish and European cities (City of Stockholm 2017b).

Redux planning?

The foundations of the market-led "Stockholm model" were laid in the mid-1990s and were further developed and refined in iterations over the following two decades.² A shift in political majority in the City of Stockholm in 2014 towards a left-green-pink coalition again led not only to a new, ostensibly more egalitarian and socioeconomically inclusive agenda for urban development, but also to the introduction of some administrative reforms to facilitate the impact of these ambitions. Perhaps foremost among these was the introduction of "Area Planning", a new administrative routine emerging from the City Planning Office. This new planning approach has been delegated to a group of "area strategists", six full-time "senior" planning positions in the Planning Office tasked with developing a holistic understanding of the prerequisites, needs and limits of a number of geographic sub-regions that together cover the entirety of the City. The official administrative documents that introduce this new routine promise a more expedient and participatory planning process along with the fulfilment of various policy goals pertaining to ecological and social sustainability. However, these planners are a bit more modest in their aspirations and instead see as their primary task to fill the above-identified gap left behind following the reorganisation of the development process by, as one of them puts it, acting as a "link between the comprehensive plan and the detail plan" (Planner G).

Figure 1 gives a rough description of Stockholm's current urban development design together with the designated responsibilities for the Development Office and the City Planning Office. As can be seen, the land allocation process, i.e. the Stockholm model ("owned" by the Development Office), by which developers are granted development projects on public land, currently takes place prior to the legally regulated planning process proper where the actual detail plans are developed (and for which the City Planning Office is responsible). Area Planning operates somewhere in between these two processes. While not vested with the executive power of proposing concrete detail plans on behalf of the City, the task of the area strategists is instead to bridge the gap between what each geographic area is seen as needing and what the developers hope to build. This is primarily done through the aforementioned surveys of each area's prerequisites which are then translated into several maps as part of the comprehensive plan. These are then used to communicate the City's agenda to both the developers and the Development Office via the "early joint assessments" taking place prior to the detail plans are drawn up, as shown in Figure 1.

All the interviewees agree that the new administrative practice of Area Planning has produced small incremental shifts in the daily work routines among the City's departments, which together have made it much easier to generate and realise a common, more long-term vision for Stockholm's urban development. These routines include better and earlier collaboration regarding development projects between offices; a clear mandate and a good evidence base to decline projects that do not align with this vision; and more time and resources to try and find creative ways of bankrolling the more difficult projects which do align.

However, the introduction of this new role was not supported by any broader organisational reforms of the municipal urban development process, nor was there any major reallocation of resources. While the City Planning Office along with some of the other departments in the City have adapted their organisation and routines to Area Planning's new mode of governance, the Development Office is lagging and it is still lacking a corresponding post to the area strategist: "They are still completely organised based on what type of pressure there is from the market, and on when applications arrive" (Planner F). As a result, conflicts frequently emerge regarding the given geographic area of projects, wherein the planners' argu-

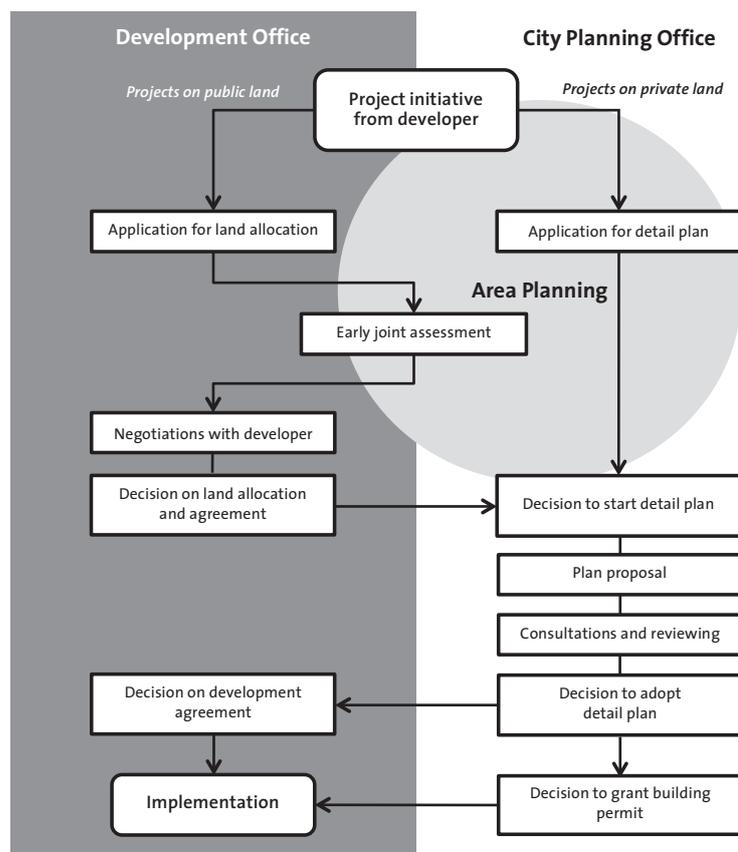


Fig. 1: The current urban development design for projects in the City of Stockholm.

ments for investments in nearby areas are dismissed by the Development engineers, since they consider such considerations to be outside the purview of the developers' inquiries. Accordingly, the persistence of the organisational structure of the development-led Stockholm model means that the planning process is still taking place after the land allocation process, and further that most urban development initiatives are still very much the product of the initiatives, negotiations and agreements between the Urban Development Office and property developers, primarily aiming at producing a financial profit for the City and private interests. Thus, rather than a reconfiguration of the major roles and events involved in the urban development process, the new administrative routine for them means that "the market and us can interact in a slightly more harmonious way" (Planner B).

As expected, many of our interviewees grapple with trying to reconcile these facts with the proactive aspirations that underpin Area Planning:

"The Stockholm model is a bit like, we come after and we are waiting for an initiative. But Area Planning is based on the idea that we shouldn't do that. And this can coexist now if we understand the prerequisites and what we want, what the City wants, and use that as basis for discussion with the developer. But of course, there is a conflict there. Between the two approaches" (Planner B).

In the eyes of the Area Planners, the key challenges to their role are thus still tied to the Development Office's small-project based approach in which all municipal investments in the built environment need to turn a profit or break even – and they are continuously frustrated by the City's "logic" of deviating from "what is preferable from an urban development perspective" because "it does not really generate as much money as other solutions" (Planner B). This is particularly noticeable among the planners who are overseeing development in socio-economically weaker sub-regions of the City:

"We who work in [one such sub-region] would like to promote new qualities in the

neighbourhoods that may cost; that is, municipal investments that we in the City Planning Office think are necessary. But then, in order to secure funding, we also need to build somewhere [so as to generate land sale revenues]. Which is quite absurd.” (Planner E).

The planners interviewed all express commitments to their mandate regarding the promotion of sustainability, but they argue that much of what is needed to translate it into practice still remains outside their sphere of responsibility. One planner explains this discrepancy:

“If you draw that which you can control in spatial planning (*fysisk planering*) to its conclusion, it’s ‘Where do you put the streets?’ ‘How do you design public spaces?’ or ‘How do you design the settlements?’. That’s basically what we can control. [...] So these are, of course, things that are linked to social sustainability, but for a lot of things, which are more of land politics and economic politics, we don’t have these... We may have *knowledge* of them and *commitment* to them, but we have no way to control them with the tools that we have at our disposal, which are, sort of, planning documents and planning regulations” (Planner C).

Due to the lack of institutional affordances for tackling such issues, the planner concludes that they “take on a little more responsibility than what is reasonable” (Planner C). Ultimately they all argue that what is really needed to introduce a more social and ecologically sustainable urban development is political decision-making: “It has to cost somewhere. And it’s only the politicians that can decide over that cost. Because we are in another kind of logic” (Planner B). However, our investigation into political decision-making practices in the Development Board offers little evidence to suggest that the political representatives are fully aware of how much influence the politics surrounding public landownership might have on urban development. The representatives interviewed portray the decision-making procedures as fairly uncomplicated and seldom grounded in questions regarding what is built, how and for whom. As one of the politicians bluntly puts it, the land allocation process should mainly “take into account the volume to ensure that the investment is feasible, economically, and it shouldn’t give a damn about how it should look or material used or something like that” (Politician D).

To conclude, Area Planning has to some extent begun to address one of the two key identified problems which accompanied the mar-

ket-following reconfiguration of the urban development process, namely making it easier for planning to influence what is built and how – even if ever so indirectly. But it has yet to address the second key problem and the more fundamental question concerning for whom this is built. In its present form Area Planning neither entails nor aspires to go “back again” to earlier managerial modes of governing the land and property markets in Stockholm, and could instead be understood as a continued reproduction of the development-led urban governance regime that has pervaded Stockholm’s urban development in the last two decades. But consistent with the literature on these topics, the political aspirations behind Area Planning are also reflective of a contemporary “win-win” ideology where planning has expanded beyond a regulatory function to supposedly act in the interest of “all” concerned parties involved in urban development (Allmendinger, Haughton 2012; Loit 2014). The elements of “creation” are thus stronger than in previous decades in the sense that the role of the planners is not only to follow market developments but also to employ a “soft touch” to lower transaction costs and attempt to lure the market forces to steer their capital investments into geographical areas that are perceived to be more productive for the public interest, for instance, into “challenged” suburban neighbourhoods instead of infill in the inner city. To what degree such a “soft” approach can actually actively contribute to creating less socioeconomically segregated urban environments remains to be seen.

Concluding discussion

Much has been written on Stockholm’s reorientation towards a “neoliberal planning regime” centred on competitiveness and growth (Forsell 2008; Ramberg 2016), and on the various legitimisation techniques that tend to accompany such regimes (Loit 2014; Tahvilzadeh 2016). What has however received less attention as of yet is the minutiae of organisational practices and components which put such regimes in motion and hold them in place. Such regimes always take the form of palimpsests of superimposed organisational routines emanating from variegated political ambitions and administrative reforms, some of which turn out to be more obdurate than others. A recognition of the importance of mundane administrative routines suggests that it is important not only to focus attention on ideologies or major structural shifts

if one wishes to understand the situated role of planning as a governance of place, but also to complement such perspectives with a more institutionally inclined analysis of the specific organisational practices and components that influence the form and content of urban development processes.

In this paper we have looked at the shifting capacities of publicly-led planning in Stockholm to influence land use in relation to various administrative components. These components have often both developed and disappeared as a response to different external pressures, but their arrangement and organisation have nonetheless been crucial in accounting for the role and place of planning in the broader urban governance of Stockholm. Much can be (and has been) said about the failures of the distinct political project espoused by Stockholm's politicians and planners during the post-war period, but it is noteworthy that their aspirations were at least accompanied by the painstaking construction of an urban governance regime with a capacity to enable the local public authorities to actively constrain market pressures in urban development with the purpose of achieving democratically anchored political goals. However, once this regime was understood to run counter to emergent ideologies and major structural shifts, the remaining parts of the old planning-led regime such as public landownership, municipal housing companies and the planning monopoly became radically reorganised to serve completely new functions within a radically different (and somewhat distinctly "neoliberal") market-led urban development regime. Political control of municipally owned land was still formally exercised, but decisions came to be grounded solely in fiscal and business-case considerations, and were hence disconnected from any considerations of how these decisions may come to affect the possibility of fulfilling other stated political goals, such as how to achieve a more integrated urban environment.

Whilst Stockholm is at present attempting to pick up its active planning tradition again, it is questionable whether enough purposeful effort is being put on considering the institutional design work that is demanded to again reconfigure the relation between and practical functioning of these administrative instruments.

In relation to this we note that the recent loudly voiced ambitions concerning socio-economic inclusion in urban development in Stockholm have not been followed by any more

substantial efforts at reforming the existing organisational routines in this area within the City of Stockholm. One hypothesis could be that what we are currently witnessing is only the beginning of a lengthy process of incremental regime change, whereby new and existing parts will continuously serve to reconfigure Stockholm's urban development regime into one that could more readily meet the high demands placed on it. If so, this could be a politically savvy tactic for affecting more structural change without openly confronting the entrenched power of the civil servant corps within the City and perhaps, particularly, that of the "development engineers" in the City Development Office. However, if there is an underlying plan for structural change behind what currently comes across more as ad-hoc and incremental changes of the current praxis, it is not being publicly communicated, which makes it difficult to discern any such deeper reform ambitions. Further, none of our informal conversations with politicians and high-ranking officials within the City administration seem to confirm any such further reform ambition.

In lieu of such an explicit, more fundamental reform agenda, the introduction of Area Planning comes across more as the introduction of an element of quasi-formal mediation within the existing framework. Rather than encompassing a shift from a following to a managing role for planning, or from facilitation to regulation, it comes across as a shift in focus in the ever-present supplementary role of planning as market creation, but without any form of ambition to push back on the discretion of property developers to set the agenda for where urban development occurs, in what form and for whom. A consequence of this lack of thorough administrative reform is the persistence of a fundamentally development-led urban regime that appears to constantly reproduce the exact effects of socio-economic exclusions that the new political agenda takes aim at counteracting.

To round off, the overarching purpose of a phronetic study such as the present is to investigate and illuminate a specific situated empirical case, focusing on the extant power relations and values that can be discerned to be at play in the given case situation, with the extended aim of problematising the situation so that the research account can serve as the grounds for a reflection on the current state of affairs in relation to that specific case. However, this research of course also raises the question to what extent

the situation in Stockholm is a special case in the Nordic context and to what degree the developments there are representative of the situation in other comparable cities. In Sweden, the reconfiguration of the urban development process, in which the formal planning process has eventually come to be something of a product of earlier agreements and priorities concerning land and property, is not unique to Stockholm; rather it seems that the capital mostly stands out in how dramatic this reconfiguration has been (see, e.g., Caesar 2016). Accordingly, we warmly welcome further research on how planners and local actors have responded to such shifts in Sweden and to presumably similar pressures in the Nordic context and beyond.

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Notes

- 1 The documents include, among others, Stockholm's annual budget reports and investment strategies over the last few years, official statements and board decisions on several urban development projects, and the last decades' policy documents for land allocation and urban development processes. In addition, one interview was conducted with a representative of one of the major property development companies active in the Stockholm market, so as to corroborate our analysis of the situation. However, since the focus of the present research has been on the routines and organisational design of the City authorities and not the developers, we have not performed any more thorough investigations into the perspectives of the latter.
- 2 The period between the 1990s and today have seen a number of shifts in political majority in Stockholm's City Hall, which have all been accompanied by some adjustment of urban development policy. This article cannot cover all the nuances of these shifts, so instead limits itself to outlining the foundations of the Stockholm model in more general terms and investigating in more detail the existing, present praxis of administering public land ownership in Stockholm.

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Paper III

The politics of new urban professions: the case of urban development engineers

Jonathan Metzger and Sherif Zakhour

Introduction

Against the backdrop of one of the most difficult housing crises in Stockholm's history, the City Council recently promised the delivery of 140,000 more dwellings before 2030 – the equivalent of building a third of the city in 15 years. Given the scale of these ambitions, it is interesting to ask what considerations will guide these planned developments, and who are those that will have influence over how they are realised. Since about 70–80 per cent of all housing currently produced in the city actually takes place on land owned and managed by the municipality itself (City of Stockholm, 2016), one set of key actors in this process are those public officials who have as their task allocating the use of publicly owned land. In Stockholm, this work primarily falls within the ambit of the somewhat newfangled professional category of 'development engineers' – which has risen to prominence as a key player in the Swedish urban development process in recent decades.

Based on the above premises and the overarching topic of this book, this chapter will aim at exploring four interrelated questions regarding the role of the development engineers in the urban development process in Stockholm:

1. What is the influence of development engineers on the urban development process in Stockholm?
2. What is this influenced premised upon?
3. What are the effects of this influence?
4. Could the influence of the development engineers be thought of as part of a 'new urban technocracy'?

In answering these four questions we draw upon our ongoing qualitative research which investigates recent shifts in the balance of power between various professional groups that participate in the urban development process in the City of Stockholm. Our findings suggest that the rise to prominence of the professional category of development engineer has led to the institutionalisation of a narrowly conceived and short-termist economic optimisation rationality which to a large extent has come to steer urban development considerations in the City of Stockholm. This rationality, which is institutionally solidified in legally binding agreements between the city and property developers, comes to set a very rigid frame for any additional considerations regarding, for example, social justice or balanced urban development that other professional groups may try to introduce further downstream in the urban development process. We conclude that while it might be expected that public land ownership would allow public authorities to promote a more 'progressive' and mindful urban development, the development engineers who are presently in the proverbial driving seat of the management of public land do not see the pursuit of such goals to be part of their professional responsibility. As a consequence, from having historically aimed at actively buffeting and counteracting market forces, the administration has now in itself become a profit-seeking agent in the property market, complete with acquisition strategies and profit stipulations which frame close to all development projects in relation to net present value. By narrowly focusing on optimising the city's performance as a profit- and output-maximising market actor the practice of the development engineers thus fits neatly into the frame of practice that has been lambasted as 'post-political techno-managerialism' by, for example, Erik Swyngedouw (2009). However, the question remains of who is to be burdened with the responsibility of allowing this arrangement to persist.

The role of the development engineer in Swedish public land management

In Sweden, municipal land ownership has long been used to promote and control urban development. The overarching logic that has historically underpinned public landownership in Stockholm, and in Sweden more generally, was that by controlling the availability of land, speculation would be kept to a minimum which in turn could pave the way for good housing at affordable levels irrespective of market conditions. Only secondly was it considered an instrument for securing increments in land value (du Rietz, 1973).

But from the 1990s onwards much changed in the management and organisation around public land. As state-backing of active municipal land policies wavered in hand with the weak economic climate, the city's land acquisitions significantly slowed down (Bodström, 1994). And while land was still leased to developers for new rental apartments, from the 2000s onwards public land that is contracted for owner-occupied housing development has primarily been sold according to 'market value'. While the shift was presumably underpinned by the longstanding conviction that appreciation of public land should fall on the city and not the property owners, Tonell (2016) has reasoned that it also represented an ideological shift away from the unanimous understanding that the city is rich if it owns land towards the notion that it becomes rich when selling.

The public officials who are vested with the task of organising the sale of municipally owned land are the project managers at the City Administration's Development Office, who are colloquially titled 'development engineers' (*exploateringsingenjörer*). They are the ones who carry the main responsibility for negotiating and drawing up the contractual arrangements derived from the cities' position as landowners rather than public authorities, and whose role therefore also has become increasingly important in urban development projects in Stockholm in recent years. Even though development engineers are officially considered a subcategory of land surveyors, there is no absolute demand that those working within this professional role actually have a degree in land surveying. Further, even though designated as 'engineers', there is also no demand that they possess a degree in engineering. Job adverts for development engineers often ask for applicants with a land surveying and/or engineering degree 'or equivalent competence and educational background'; often also mentioning individuals with, for example, a law degree specialising in property law as also being formally qualified for the job.

As there is no given educational background for development engineers, and no dedicated professional body either, one can ask whether it is really correct to define it as a 'profession', per se. Rather, it is perhaps more productively understood as a professional *role*, that can be filled by people from a number of professional backgrounds, although it seems that many of the practitioners in this role nonetheless do come from a background in engineering and land surveying. What is important to keep in mind is that due to the lack of formalisation of this professional role, there is no established Code of Conduct or similar document guiding the professional practice of the development engineer. Rather, the only formal loyalty of the development engineer

is towards her/his employer and the fulfilment of the goals of the employing organisation. This is also important to keep in mind, seeing that the careers of development engineers often include switching employment repeatedly between public bodies (generally municipalities) and private enterprises (often development companies or consultancies). Thus, the parties to the type of negotiations that development engineers are involved in often have a deep knowledge and understanding of the bargaining position of those on 'the other side of the table'.

The work of development engineers in the City of Stockholm

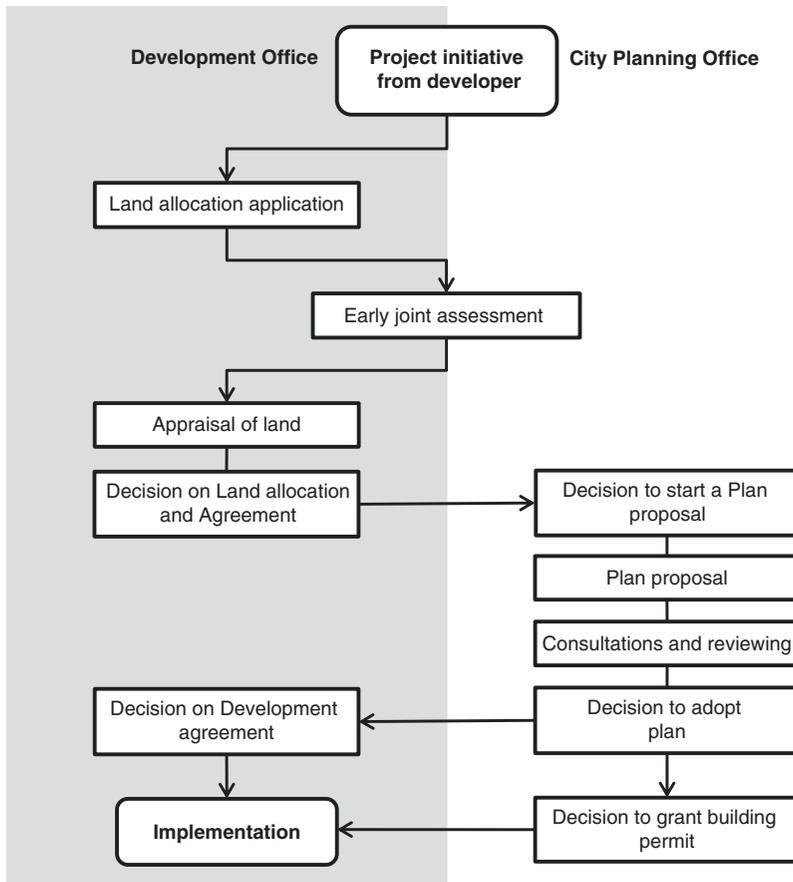
In Stockholm, it seems that the move towards a more market-led and contract-oriented urban development process, and the subsequent rise to prominence of the development engineers, took place simultaneously with other substantial changes surrounding the management of public land. In the recession of the 1990s, the City introduced what is referred to as the 'Stockholm Model'. According to the interviewed development engineers the idea was, and still is, to provide developers with incentives for finding unique and innovative solutions to areas that have been difficult to fully develop, where being granted the land serves as the 'reward' for coming up with an innovative development proposal.

The legal contracts that are subsequently negotiated between the prospective developer and the city are primarily manifested in the form of land allocation agreements (*markanvisningsavtal*): options which give developers the right to exclusive negotiations with the city for a period of time regarding the sale or tenure of public land once a development permit has been officially confirmed by a local development plan. The introduction of these agreements has served to substantially reconfigure the design of the Swedish development process (Caesar, 2016). Where a land allocation used to be an extension of the development permit only granted following the conception of a local development plan, it is now to the contrary often the first formalised document relating to a planned development, so that the local plan and development permit instead come to be based on the agreements reached in the land allocation process.

An idealised version of the current urban development process is shown in [Figure 14.1](#). On public land, developers are to find suitable locations, by their own accord conceive of a competitive enough idea that aligns with the comprehensive plan and, if the land is

publicly owned, apply for the granting of a land allocation from the Development Committee.¹ While the application document has no formal requirements regarding content or format, it should nonetheless provide some substantial specifications about the project, such as the volume, form of tenure, accompanying commercial activities, preschools and so on. Following a first assessment by one of the development engineers, an early joint assessment is made with one of the planners from the City Planning Office regarding the design of the project. For projects where the land will be sold, an appraiser from the Development Office is brought in to determine its market value, a sum determined by estimating what the buildings will be worth by

Figure 14.1: The urban development process for projects initiated by developers on public land



Source: Authors

gross floor area (GFA) on the open market once they are complete. After subtracting the developer's construction costs, interest expenses and expected profits the number is weighed against the market adjusted prices for comparable previous public land sales. The land allocation agreement is then drawn up between the city and the developer which details the negotiated prices and other obligations pertaining to the project. Once the Office's board of representatives has signed off on the agreement – a fairly uncomplicated procedure according to our interviewees – the Development Office, not the developers themselves, applies for the drawing up of a new local development plan for the land in question from the City Planning Office, whereby the formally designated planning process proper is initiated. Only when the new plan is approved and the building permit granted is the land officially transferred to the developer, thus starting the implementation stage whereby the Development Office again becomes the main responsible party for the project.

Between what is stated in the official documentation and what can be garnered from our interviews it seems that the overarching purpose of managing public land according to the above-described procedures is primarily guided by two strongly emphasised goals which to some degree feed into each other: the promotion of development for housing and the generation of revenue for the city's coffers. Due to the current strongly formulated quantitative goal for an increase in the housing stock, one of the first aspects that the development engineer evaluates in any given project before moving forward is its potential for housing. At the same time, this might be inconsequential if the project doesn't conform to the second purpose of generating revenue. As one of the engineers notes, beyond promoting development their responsibilities also include 'representing the land owner, that is, the tax payers'. The practice of selling public land, which sometimes generates up to six times more in returns per apartment than leases (which on the other hand lets the municipality retain long-term control of the land) is also legitimised by this responsibility: 'It is simply better that the taxpayers get their share of the market price, so to speak, than that the developer gets an even higher profit, right?' Indeed, between the leases and the land sales the Development Office generates roughly one tenth of the overall yearly income of the municipality (including taxes) (City of Stockholm, 2017) making it, as another engineer notes 'one of the engines of Stockholm's economy', and by far the biggest 'earner' among the city administration's different departments.

While the revenue from tenures and land sales go straight to the city treasury, however, the city's yearly investment budget for the

administration's various projects is still partly calculated according to its aggregate incomes (City of Stockholm, 2017). In other words, the costs associated with urban development are not framed as 'investments' which could be balanced with future returns from an expanded tax base or a surrounding land appreciation, but capital costs which should be balanced directly with the present value inherent in the land on which the project will stand. Or put differently, the development administration is organised in such a way that for urban development to continue without municipal spending, each project should produce a short-term profit. Thus, a somewhat informal stipulation that seems to have grown organically from within the Development Office is that 95 per cent of projects initiated on public land must be profitable in and of themselves. But according to some of the officials in the Development Office it seems that in practice this number doesn't mean more than that all projects should by default be profitable or, at the very least, break even: 'What we feel to our bones, and know, is that our projects should not take a loss.'

Many of our interviewees, primarily those from the City Planning Office, highlight a number of worrying implications pertaining to the Development Office's explicit concern for the citizen-as-tax payer. For instance, since the revenue generated from a high-profit project cannot be balanced with a project with little or no profit, it means that land considered attractive to developers and where the exchange value is high is likely to receive a higher amount of investment by the Development Office in amenities and surrounding infrastructure than areas that are deemed unattractive. As a Senior Advisor from the City Planning Office notes, if you still want to develop on the latter 'you must try to forgo something else, so to say; you don't invest in developing the park, or you can save on something else so that you can still walk on both sides of the street.'

Generally, it seems that the dominant attitude among the development engineers is that it is not within their professional responsibility or right to take into account the city's social aspirations within their professional practice, such as for instance the officially stated goals of staving off spatial segregation or enabling development in impoverished areas (see also Tonell, 2016). And while the land allocation agreements are used to make housing more energy-efficient, they are not used to make it more affordable – the reasoning being that due to the Swedish utility rent system and market forces more generally stipulations regarding rent levels or housing costs would only benefit the first renter/buyer. Thus, it seems that the practical approach towards providing more affordable housing is to simply build

more housing, *tout court*, no matter whether affordable or not, since – as one development engineer puts it: ‘if we can handle the quantitative target, then it should of course be a better balance in the market. That is what one can hope, in a sense.’

Another worrying implication of the administration’s commitment towards the citizen-as-taxpayer is the conflicting role ascriptions this engenders. On private land, one can imagine that the interests among actors are relatively clear: developers want high development to generate high profits whereas it is the city’s responsibility to weigh its commitment to other public interests, including those of local residents. But on public-owned land both developers and the Development Office have an economic interest in pursuing higher development, whereby the responsibility of pursuing long-term municipal commitments is placed solely on the formal plan-making department within the city, the City Planning Office. And given all the contractual commitments that have been made, all the resources and time spent on the project up until the initiation of the formal planning process, it is relevant to ask whether the legally stipulated public consultations that then ensue are likely to have any impact whatsoever. While the interviewees from both the Development and City Planning administration argue that such activities can and do result in changes to projects on public land, only rarely are these changes substantial enough to warrant the renegotiation of the land allocation agreement with the developer. As the chairman of the Development Committee notes, what is subject for change is not the actual project, its purpose, nor its location but ‘more about if all the buildings there are going to be built, or in this way, this high, or whatever it could be’. Indeed, some of the interviewees state that from their own experiences the public consultations that can sometimes garner significant decreases in scale are generally offset by instead increasing the scale of the development in another area within the same project – sometimes, one committee member notes, in areas where the demographic configuration makes the project less likely to be contested by the locals.

How do the urban development engineers influence Stockholm’s development, and why?

We have now in turn examined the current design of the urban development process in Stockholm, the role of development engineers within this and finally the wider ramifications of this arrangement. In the following discussion we will revisit the four questions posed in

the introduction and try to answer them on the basis of the material presented in the preceding sections.

What is the influence of urban development engineers on the urban development process in Stockholm?

With the introduction of the ‘Stockholm Model’ of urban development in the 1990s’ recession it came to fall within the ambit of the Development Office to set the fundamental framework for urban development projects in the city. There are in fact numerous professional categories represented at the Development Office, including, for example, ecologists and urban planners. However, our investigations evince that they for a large part find themselves frustratingly sidelined in the internal work processes. Those who really occupy the proverbial driving seat within the office are the project managers, also known as development engineers. These, in turn, consider their professional expertise and role to be that of maximising revenues for the city as well as the quantity of housing produced. As a consequence, these issues are those that are focused upon within their daily work practice, and all other considerations are given secondary priority. Thus, the development engineers’ sphere of influence over the development process could to some degree be productively grasped through the lens of Lukes’ (1974) second dimension of power, wherein certain issues are mobilised out of the decision-making process. With the engineers having the capacity to set the agenda of the development process, issues which do not pertain to ‘hard facts’ (understood as purely technical issues, see also Tamm Hallström, 2015) or market logics lose their relevance.

What the development engineers thus in practice effectuate is the rendering-technical of potentially contentious political issues. Questions regarding which values and goals should have priority in urban development politics become resolved by a seemingly self-given focus on profit and quantity maximisation, enacted as issues pertaining to technical optimisation, and are thus removed from the ambit of political debate and contestation (see further, for example, Barry, 2001; Berman and Hirschman, 2014). As a consequence, crucial questions regarding the values that should guide the urban development in the city – that is, political issues of ‘right and left’ – are, in the spaces of negotiations where the fundamental agreements regarding the scope of format of urban development are drawn up, instead transformed into technical questions of ‘right and wrong’;

not asking *if* profit and quantity maximisation should be the all-encompassing goals of such negotiations, but only *how* this can be achieved (Baeten, 2009).

What is this influence premised upon?

It should be noted that the power seemingly vested with the engineers is not something that is inherent in their nature, that is, as managers and owners of land, as economists, or as land surveyors and so on – but rather something that has developed through processes and relationships located outside their professions, for instance: the recession and the rollback of state interventions; the reconfiguration of the development process and introduction of the aforementioned Stockholm Model; the engineers close relationships and mutual interests with external agents which thus allows them to build coalitions. Nevertheless, we can't ignore the way in which their positions are *legitimised* by their standings as managers of property and the particular knowledge claims this is part of (Flyvbjerg, 2002). They are seemingly in possession of 'hard' knowledge which is translatable into quantifiable measures and which therefore gains an upper hand early on in the formative stages of the urban development process and becomes prioritised before other types of 'softer' knowledge which is understood as value-laden and more difficult to account for (Tamm Hallström, 2015). This is particularly noticeable in the contemporary context of market liberalism wherein knowledge claims which are not based on profit-maximisation have difficulty in sustaining their worth (Lamont, 2012).

Our research, however, indicates that to a large extent this 'hard knowledge', for example, the mastery of procedures of property valuation, is not as technically advanced as one might imagine. Somewhat to the contrary, we would like to suggest that a large part of the power of the development engineers lies in their 'strategic ignorance' (see, for example, McGoe, 2012) of other aspects and goals pertaining to the urban development process in addition to profit and quantity maximisation, which in themselves rarely conflict. Having such a clearly formulated goal frame, and quite simple quantitative metrics of their achievement makes it much easier to prioritise among projects and the desirability of various options, than for instance the planners in the City Planning Office, who see their professional role as a much vaguer weighing of various incommensurable and difficult-to-measure goals and values against each other, such as those pertaining to, for example, ecological and social sustainability.

What are the consequences of this influence?

As evinced above, the resultant narrow focus on profit and quantity maximisation that is the upshot of the development engineers' practice leads to a practical side-lining and marginalisation of other political goals, such as those pertaining to social equality and ecological balanced developments. These goals, when (or even if) introduced further downstream in the development process, can only be addressed on the premises set by the previously negotiated agreements that solely aim at maximising the city's revenue and number of housing units. Of course, formally, the democratic political process according to Swedish administrative law allows for numerous backstops and opportunities for revising or cancelling the agreed upon plans and the legal contracts between the municipality and the developers that underpin them. However, given that there are large amounts of time, money and goodwill invested in such negotiations by both sides to the deals, these agreements – and their resultant plans – appear to be only very rarely backtracked upon. The extent of such overturns and substantial revisions of initial agreements are methodologically challenging to reliably estimate, although our interviews with both elected officials and public servants also tentatively suggest that this therefore almost never occurs. To the extent that substantial revisions are introduced further downstream in the process, this generally appears to amount to the shifting of some part of the development to another local site, rather than the complete dismissal or reorientation of plans.

Finally, at the 'end of pipeline', the production of a materially manifest urban environment with specific characteristics, the narrow focus on profitability has led to a radical driving up of property prices in Stockholm. From initially having been introduced as a political means of providing cheap land access for the development of affordable housing for all, in the 1990s the public landownership in Stockholm was reimaged as a potential major source of direct incomes for the city's budget. The subsequent shift from a focus on long-running ground leases for rental housing, which in effect retained public long-term control of the land, the priority is now to sell off land for the development of owner-occupied condominiums.² Due to the market pricing of such owner-occupied housing, in contrast to the level of rents which is controlled, this means that many economically weak groups are excluded from the segments of the housing market that are currently being expanded. With the failure of imagined 'filtering' mechanisms to materialise, this shift is by many commentators being

seen as one of the main factors behind the present housing crisis in Stockholm, in which particularly economically and socially less privileged groups today are experiencing difficulties in finding any form of permanent residence within the Stockholm area. Further, when housing is nonetheless constructed in less privileged areas, the profit demand leads to the construction of substandard surrounding public urban environments, according to the logic that when the revenues from land sales are lower, the local budget for investments in public amenities must correspond to this fact, so as not to incur a financial loss for the city on a per-project basis.

Could the influence of the urban development engineers be thought of as part of a 'new urban technocracy'?

To answer this question, an important definition pertains to how we understand the 'old' urban technocracy. Somewhat crudely put, the image of the traditional urban technocrat has historically focused on the planner-architect, whose influence was based upon claims to privileged expert knowledge regarding the functioning of integrated urban systems (even though it repeatedly turned out that these knowledge claims were perhaps somewhat spurious and inflated). Similar to the technocratic planner-architects of yesteryear, the emerging professional category of development engineers also appear to have their basis of influence to some degree founded upon claims of access to an expert body of knowledge. However, this body of knowledge does not pertain to the supposed optimisation of the functionality of urban environments, but rather relates to the optimisation of financial gains from land ownership and urban development. So while the urban development engineers today occupy a central position of influence in the urban development process which, just like the traditional planner-architect, is founded upon and legitimised by claims to expert knowledge, their role is not imagined to be that of optimiser of the performance of urban systems, but rather of economic profitability.

Another interesting question relates to whether urban development engineers could at all be considered an 'expert profession' in the same sense of, for example, the traditional architect-planner. Although many development engineers appear to come from a background in engineering more generally and land surveying specifically, this is not an absolute demand. Further, the lack of a professional organisation, accreditation and any form of code of conduct suggests that the development engineer is perhaps best understood as a professional role rather than a fully-fledged profession per se. This in turn implies that

the formal loyalty of development engineer lies completely with her or his employer rather than with some (however vaguely understood) 'public interest'.

A slight complication, however, emerges with the insight that development engineers often transition back and forth between the public and private sector in their professional careers, for example, between working for municipalities on the one hand, and on the other hand with the development companies that sit 'across the table' in negotiations with perhaps the same municipalities in relation to specific urban development projects. Relating to this, one can – perhaps somewhat speculatively – ask to what degree development engineers participating in negotiations with developers on behalf of municipalities also sometimes may harbour a personal interest in maintaining good personal relations with their supposed adversaries, with a view to facilitating future employment opportunities. Further, it is interesting that it appears as if municipally employed development engineers participating in negotiations with private developers may, due to their professional background and focus, actually hold an intuitively deeper understanding of the goals and priorities of their supposed adversaries than they do for their colleagues from other professions who are active within the municipal administration. In theory, understanding the motifs and logic of one's opponent is of course crucial for success in negotiations, however one may also wonder to what degree such liminal positions may also generate situations in which development engineers come to act as corporate 'Trojan horses' within the municipal administrations, either by choice or by circumstance. This suspicion is, however, difficult to substantiate, and would need much more research before constituting anything other than pure speculation.

Conclusions

To round off: while it might be expected that public land ownership would allow public authorities to promote a more 'progressive' and mindful urban development agenda than that which a more unrestrained property market would produce, our investigations have evinced that the category of public officials presently in the proverbial driving seat of the management of public land do not seem to harbour such aspirations. To the contrary, by treating the exchange value of land as the basis for investment distribution across the city, the Development Office has in effect personified any other profit-seeking agent on the property market. To some degree, what the Stockholm case (yet again) evinces are signs of a neoliberal politics of urban development, performed

through the ‘technification’ of admittedly contentious political issues. Thus, by merely focusing on optimising the city’s performance as a profit- and output-maximising market actor, aiming at maximising the returns of the ‘owners’ of the municipality imagined as citizens-as-taxpayers, the practice of the development engineers fits neatly into the frame of practice that has been lambasted as ‘post-political technomanagerialism’ (see, for example, Swyngedouw, 2009).

Nonetheless, we also feel that it is important not to take such a development for granted or necessary, but to also ask how this has come to be. Is it a historical necessity or the result of a conscious strategy? Our research shows that none of these sets of explanations appear to provide a completely satisfactory answer. Rather, our findings point towards the role of a series of historical contingencies and conveniences that come together in the formation of the present arrangements. The introduction of the market-led model of urban development named the ‘Stockholm Model’ made good political sense even from a ‘progressive’ perspective when introduced by the Social Democrats in City Hall in the mid-1990s. This administrative innovation set the development engineers in a central gatekeeper position with regards to what projects actually came to make its way through the urban development process, and in what format; also further setting the premises of engagement for all those other professional groups with their specific matters of concern that came to be involved in the process further downstream.

So who is to be blamed for the now increasingly apparent lacunae and adverse effects of this administrative arrangement? The development engineers themselves? We would suggest otherwise. Of course, any professional must take responsibility for their own individual actions – but we believe that it is further of crucial importance not to see the emerging power of the development engineers as the fundamental *cause* of the direction that urban development has taken in Stockholm, but rather as a *symptom* of an emerging entrepreneurial public land management regime. Perhaps those who are ultimately responsible for this modus of operation are those who would have the formal power to forcefully contest this, but nonetheless choose to make themselves comfortable with the current arrangement – that is, the political majority and opposition in City Hall. It is in our eyes given that it is with them that the primary political responsibility rests to again remake the purpose of public landownership in Stockholm into a political rather than a narrowly technical question. It also appears as if the present political majority in City Hall has cautiously begun to recognise these problems, and are currently manoeuvring to attempt to generate the bureaucratic leeway to do something about this, by

exploring new ways to more directly place centre-stage questions of, for example, ‘social sustainability’ and housing affordability in the urban development process, also at an early stage. However, it remains to be seen how much effort and prestige they are prepared to really invest in forcing through such a fundamental change, and if so, to what degree they are successful in this ambition.

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Notes

- ¹ With the shift in political majority in Stockholm City Hall in 2014, the new governing coalition is presently trying to develop new administrative routines that aim towards introducing a more proactive planning approach. This new ‘area planning’ approach contrasts with the ‘Stockholm Model’ in that planners are to develop a common, holistic understanding of the development needs and limits of larger geographic areas before the city proceeds into discussions with developers. While there is currently a lot of discussion surrounding this shift, these routines have at present not reached the Development Office’s organisation and it seems that the ‘Stockholm Model’ still constitutes the default development procedure, and is also expected to remain so in the majority of cases in the near future.
- ² These are formally generally administered according the Swedish law of housing cooperatives, but in effect generally function as private condominiums.

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Paper IV

The democratic legitimacy of public participation in planning: Contrasting optimistic, critical, and agnostic understandings

Planning Theory

1–22

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journals.sagepub.com/home/plt**Sherif Zakhour** 

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Abstract

How does public participation in planning and environmental governance engender democratic legitimacy? Drawing a distinction between the optimistic and critical participation literature, I argue that both these strands of research have tended to neglect the public's perspective on this question. This oversight has, in effect, produced strongly normative and essentialist understandings of democratic legitimacy that treat legitimacy as intrinsic to either process or substance of participatory governance. Proceeding from an anti-essentialist understanding of democratic legitimacy, which primarily relies on contemporary social perceptions and expectations of democratic institutions, I outline a normatively agnostic framework for exploring how legitimacy is engendered through participation. Using this framework to investigate citizen experiences of participation processes in Sweden, I highlight how democratic legitimacy can gainfully be understood as a multidimensional, provisional, and contingent quality that individual citizen participants “confer” and “retract” in a plurality of ways. Based on this, I conclude by suggesting that sustained research engagement with the public's expectations and experiences of participatory governance can reveal critical insights into the potentials and challenges for realizing democratic planning outcomes.

Keywords

agnostic perspective, citizen perspective, deliberative democracy, democratic legitimacy, participatory democracy, participatory governance, participatory planning

Introduction

The past decades' enthusiastic deployment of public participation activities in planning and environmental governance have partly been fueled by participation's expected potential to revitalize liberal representative democracy and confer democratic legitimacy

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to public institutions that are increasingly perceived to operate at a distance from the private lives and concerns of ordinary citizens (Fung, 2015; Monno and Khakee, 2012; Tahvilzadeh, 2015). But how does public participation engender democratic legitimacy according to the scholarly debates in this field? And how is it engendered if viewed from the perspective of those who are to confer legitimacy: the public?

In this article, I argue that these debates have tended to neglect actual legitimacy demands and what determines them in favor of broadly abstract, theoretical-normative understandings of democratic legitimacy which foreground *if* it is engendered or not, but rarely how, in what forms, and by whom. In line with recent calls for more normatively agnostic and measured approaches to the study of participatory governance (Braun and Schultz, 2010; Metzger et al., 2017; Turnhout et al., 2010), my overarching aim is to bring attention to how strong normative assumptions regarding the inherent democratic merits of participation conceal many of the complex motivations, expectations, and experiences these arrangements produce among citizens.

In the article, I employ Alvesson and Sköldberg's (2018) *reflexive problematization* methodology which involves a three-step approach of "identifying, articulating and proposing an alternative to a dominant assumption" (p. 398). The methodology proceeds from the idea that between empirically driven "gap-filling" research and excessively critical "overproblematizations," there are also occasions for assumption-challenging investigations of existing research facilitated through the provision of alternative frameworks. In a first step, I sketch a typology of the existing literature by drawing a distinction between *optimistic* and *critical strands* of participation research in planning and environmental governance. I suggest that an ongoing source of contestation regarding the democratic merits of participation can be traced to their use of different democratic theories which produce different normative standards of assessment. The optimistic strand has primarily drawn on deliberative democratic theory to foreground how the political and symbolic meaning of the process of participation provides citizens with a foundation to confer public trust toward established institutions, whereas the critical strand has drawn on participatory democratic theory to emphasize how public trust is engendered through a strengthened self-determination that comes from having concrete influence on substantive political issues.

These conflicting standards have produced ample empirical investigations supporting both claims. The recurring theme in the critical literature is that delegation of power away from authorities onto marginalized groups or the general citizenry only account for the outliers among participatory activities which, rather than revitalizing democracy, has shown to further the "disenchantment and distrust among citizens" (Monno and Khakee, 2012: 86), lead to "consultation fatigue" (Bickerstaff and Walker, 2005: 2135), and "obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro-level inequalities and injustice" (Cooke and Kothari, 2001: 14). Indeed, the two strands are more or less in agreement that devolution of authority is rarely at stake in participatory practice. But the more optimistic scholars have on their part empirically traced how such activities may still engender "aspects of democratic citizenship," which are said to be at least as important to a "healthy democracy" than whether or not citizens "have real power and a say in decision-making" (Michels and De Graaf, 2010: 489). Despite, or reflecting both such findings, researchers in the wider field of public administration who try to take stock of the

long-term effects of direct forms of citizen engagement tend to conclude that “so far, the effect of participation on legitimacy is unclear” (Fung, 2015: 513; see also Abels, 2007; Marien and Kern, 2018; Wang, 2001).

In the article, I argue that the impasse between the two strands also reflects what they have in common: lacking an explicit empirical grounding in citizens’ own expectations and experiences of participation, both come to produce somewhat essentialist understandings of democratic legitimacy which treat it as an intrinsic property to either the process or substance of the individual participatory event. In a second step, I contrast these commonalities to a more open and searching understanding of democratic legitimacy, in the article facilitated through the work of historian Pierre Rosanvallon (2011). Proceeding from an anti-essentialist understanding of democratic legitimacy, Rosanvallon traces a pluralization of emergent demands on democratic institutions which straddle and go beyond dominant assumptions regarding citizens’ expectations of public institutions. Combined, they frame democratic legitimacy as a multidimensional, contingent, and provisional quality which, precluding empirical analysis, cannot easily be confined to either substance or process of political decision-making.

Accordingly, in a final third step, I employ Rosanvallon’s understanding of democratic legitimacy as an “empirically-based theory” in the context of participatory governance practices in Sweden. My aim here is not to perform “legitimacy audits” of Swedish public participation, nor to work inductively or test a framework against “empirical reality.” Instead, the empirical material, primarily consisting of citizen accounts of participation activities, is used “as a way to work ‘against’ dominant thinking” (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018: 398). The experiences framed here help render democratic legitimacy a multidimensional quality that can be “conferred” and “retracted” in a plurality of ways, sometimes by one person in the same participatory event. Based on this, I argue that a sustained research engagement with the social expectations and experiences of participatory governance can reveal critical insights into the potentials and challenges for realizing democratic planning outcomes.

My ambition with the article is not to denigrate the rich contributions made by the existing literature, but to build on them by teasing out new avenues for exploring the pluralization of actual legitimacy demands that has accompanied the past decades’ somewhat euphoric deployment of participation activities in planning and environmental governance. The article proceeds from the idea that the continued pursuit of procedurally narrowing down “what works best when” (Rowe and Frewer, 2004: 547) as well as the sustained critical exposition of the at times “tyrannical” (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) manifestations of participatory governance can gainfully be strengthened through a more lucid understanding of the ambiguous and contested nature of democracy and how the basis for its legitimacy changes as part of its development.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: in the next section, I sketch a typology representing the core thinking in the scholarly debates in planning and environmental governance surrounding participation and democratic legitimacy. In the third section, I introduce the key points of Rosanvallon’s treatment of democratic legitimacy, which is then contrasted with the above conventional understandings. In the fourth section, I employ Rosanvallon’s considerations as a framework for investigating citizen experiences of participation activities. The article concludes with a summation of the

Table 1. Optimistic, critical, and agnostic understandings of democratic legitimacy and participatory governance.

	Optimistic	Critical	Agnostic
Underlying democratic theory	Deliberative democracy	Participatory democracy	Non-essentialist understanding of democracy
Mechanism for engendering legitimacy	“Integrative logic”: resolving conflict, reaching the mutually acceptable, and nurturing common understandings promotes public trust	“Interest-based logic”: expressing interests in confrontation with other interests strengthens self-determination and influence, promoting public trust	Multidimensional: reflexive governance, impartial decision-making and proximity between governed and governors
Conceptualization of legitimacy	Justification: process is legitimate if it lives up to normative procedural ideals. Intrinsic property of a correct procedure	Acceptance: process becomes legitimate by people believing it so. Intrinsic property of <i>devolvement of authority</i> onto the people	Justification and acceptance: relies on both institutional norms and social perceptions
Democratic legitimacy	Essentialist, normative, property		Non-essentialist, empirical, quality

insights obtained from utilizing this framework as well as what they potentially mean for further research.

Participation and democratic legitimacy

Legitimacy is a concept of central concern for scholars in planning and environmental governance, addressing not only the justification or securement of the individual plan or policy decision but also the democratic nature of the political-administrative system from which planning derives its authority (Mäntysalo et al., 2015). Yet, despite how participation and collaborative-type planning have long been seen as critical vehicles for “re-enchanting democracy” (Healey, 2012), there is considerable disagreement on the democratic merits of participatory planning (Day, 1997), all the while the actual mechanisms behind its legitimacy-enhancing capacities have long been left implicit in the debates (Taylor, 2019). In this section, I outline a typology of the participation-focused literature in planning and environmental governance (see Table 1). The aim is to identify the underlying assumptions in this literature in an effort to articulate what is often left unexamined or taken for granted in the debates: the public’s own expectations of participation activities. I build on Chilvers’s (2009: 401) helpful entry-point to this literature and his distinction between, on one hand, *optimistic* strands of research incorporating both the “developmental” and “evaluation” literature concerning concrete methodologies for how participatory activities can be institutionalized and evaluated, and on the other hand *critical* strands of research clustered under their shared ambition to better

understand the “construction, performance, and discourse” of participation (see also, for example, Tahvilzadeh, 2015; Turnhout et al., 2010).

Deliberative and participatory democracy

The contrast between the optimistic and critical research strands could, first, be understood as a difference in relative emphasis between different democratic theories. Much of optimistic research has explicitly drawn on deliberative theories to either develop (e.g. Healey, 1997; Innes and Booher, 2010) or evaluate (e.g. Fiorino, 1990; Webler, 1995) participatory governance practices. Emerging around the 1990s as an academic normative-political project before their proliferation into actually existing practices, deliberative theories hold that the ideal political decision-making scenario is one that takes place between equal individuals who defend their claims with reason and who are swayed not by self-interests or others’ coercion but by the force of the better argument (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1996).

The scholarly critique leveled at optimistic participation researchers is well rehearsed, the core of which concern their seemingly naïve view on power relations and how the emphasis on “consensus” serves to maintain rather than challenge existing hierarchies (see Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998). It is on these grounds some critical theorists conceptualize participatory arrangements as neoliberal governance strategies deployed to neutralize resistance to, and placate victims of the past decades’ welfare restructuring policies (e.g. Purcell, 2009). But the undercurrent to such critique has since long been a central part of the participation debates in planning, harking back to Sherry Arnstein’s (1969) *Ladder of citizen participation*, which bluntly conveyed the idea that activities which do not entail actual delegation of power to citizens only serve as “manipulation” of public trust. Underpinning much of this critical strand of research, then, is a less explicit but no less normative position grounded in different variations of participatory democratic theories, the roots of which can be traced to the social movements and democratic debates of the 1960s (see Pateman, 1970). If deliberative theorists are concerned with democratizing decision-making, participatory theorists have aimed at “democratizing democracy,” seeing as their concern the transformation of the structures which obstruct “opportunities for individuals to participate in decision-making in their everyday lives as well as in the wider political system” (Pateman, 2012: 10).

Integrative and interest-based logics

A second point of contention between the two strands of research—largely informed by the theoretical distinction above—concerns the mechanisms for how democratic legitimacy is engendered through participation. The optimistic strand often foregrounds procedural dimensions of participation. Here, the legitimacy-enhancing capacity tends to concern the way in which the perceived “fairness” of the process (Tyler, 2003), the networks, and “social capital” gained from the experience (Putnam, 2001) and how a mutual understanding (Habermas, 1996) and moral agreement (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996) around political decision-making are expected to foster citizen engagement and public trust toward established democratic institutions (e.g. Healey, 1997; Innes and Booher,

2010; Webler, 1995). Gustafson and Hertting (2017) aptly refer to such notions as based on an *integrative* logic since attention is paid to participation's capabilities to resolve conflict and nurture common understandings. In contrast, the critical strand proceeds more from an *interest-based* logic where democratic participation is conceptualized as a space for disagreement on substantive political issues and where the merits of such activities are pinned on their relative possibility for—often marginalized—individuals and groups to express themselves in confrontation with other interests (e.g. Hillier, 2002; Mirafteb, 2009; Monno and Khakee, 2012). Here, then, the legitimacy-enhancing mechanism of participation concerns how citizens are expected to foster public trust through a strengthened self-determination and increased influence over a political system that serves them.

Justification and acceptance

A third point of contention concerns how the two strands conceptualize legitimacy. As Bernstein (2011) notes, deliberative theorists tend to proceed from the reasoning that for authority to be considered legitimate it needs to be justified on explicit theoretical and normative grounds. This conceptualization is also prevalent in the optimistic participation strand where normative procedural criteria function almost as “legitimacy audits” of participation activities (e.g. Webler, 1995). By contrast, critical scholars rely on a more sociological and empirical conceptualization of legitimacy, being more concerned with *how* actors come to justify processes as legitimate and how they come to be accepted as such (see, classically, Flyvbjerg, 1998). Nevertheless, as noted above, many critical scholars proceed from the normative assumption that such acceptance primarily comes from the devolvement of authority. In other words, that citizens' motives for engaging in participatory arrangements mostly stem from an ambition to discuss and influence concrete issues (e.g. Monno and Khakee, 2012).

The missing perspective of the public

While the assumptions underpinning the two strands function as important normative grounding for the development, evaluation, or critique of participatory governance practices, they nonetheless lead to something of a double bind in the debates where the emphasis on one dimension tends to engender a critique on what is left out. As much as the two strands differ, this impasse also reflects what they have in common.

First, the expectations, motivations, and experiences of the public have long been in the background in the participation debates. This is an understandable lacuna in the optimistic literature where procedural criteria are derived explicitly from normative theory (but see, for example, Santos and Chess, 2003). But it is also recurrent in the critical literature where—arguably resonant of the historical roots of participatory democratic theory—those who do rely on the testimony of citizen participants often limit their analytical lens to already committed citizen activists with clearly defined grievances in need of redress, which effectively foregrounds the same interest-based mechanisms which the literature already draws on (but see, for example, Inch, 2015). The critical strand's emphasis on the “action” of citizen engagement is somewhat mirrored by the optimistic

strand's tendency to investigate satisfaction with participation activities immediately after the event (but see, for example, Gustafson and Hertting, 2017). Second, then, is that these biases toward the normative-theoretical and the immediacy of the outcomes of participatory governance produce rather essentialist understandings of democratic legitimacy, where it is a priori assumed as an intrinsic property of either the process or substance of the individual participatory event.

Both these tendencies arguably reflect what some describe as the “unhistoricized” treatment of democratic legitimacy in the wider political theory literature, where standards are developed from contemporary understandings of democratic *theory* despite how the basis of legitimacy has changed over time and as part of the development of democracy (Bernstein, 2011: 22). For instance, critical planning scholars have been exceptionally good at investigating the democratic legitimacy of planning institutions in the context of emergent neoliberal restructuring policies (e.g. Mäntyselä et al., 2015), but demands placed on these institutions—that is, the social perceptions of what democratic legitimacy substantially is and should be—are often treated as constants.

It should be duly noted that this typology is intended to represent some of the key sources of disagreement in the participation debates and the relative difference in emphasis scholars tend to make in this literature. Accordingly, there are many other assumptions and approaches underpinning the participation literature. Furthermore, most authors have increasingly come to acknowledge and incorporate contributions from both sides of the debates (e.g. Healey, 2012; Hillier, 2003). But as should be clear from the discussion above, there is also much to be learned from moving beyond normative, theory-based understandings of democratic legitimacy onto the more empirical question regarding what citizens demand from democratic institutions today. In the next section, I explore this question through the work of historian Pierre Rosanvallon.

The pluralization of democratic legitimacy

Rosanvallon's (2011) inquiry into the nature of democratic legitimacy is resonant of both the deliberative and participatory democratic tradition. His polemic targets are also aggregative, “minimalist” understandings of democracy and his ambition is to expand its meaning well beyond the electoral-executive functions of the state. But this ambition is guided as much by normative ideals as it is by empirical observations of actual legitimacy demands in the historical development of democracy.

Using a mixture of historical and recent empirical research, he begins his inquiry by tracing the contemporary disillusionment with democracy to the inherent ambiguities about its meaning. According to Rosanvallon (2011), democratic regimes have since their inception struggled with trying to reconcile a tension between two contradictory democratic ideals: the “will of the majority” and the “will of the people.” The conventional legitimacy of democratic governments, he contends, rests on a twofold conflation between these ideals. First, that majority rule can act as a stand-in for the whole of society and, second, that the circumstances in which a government is established—the ballot box—is representative of its democratic nature. This “double fiction” where “the part stands for the whole, and the electoral moment stands for the entire term of government” has “little by little come to be seen as an intolerable distortion of the truth” (Rosanvallon,

2011: 2). This is especially the case in recent decades, he argues, when socio-political identities have diffused, decision-making processes have become more opaque, and neo-liberal restructuring policies have made governments unable—or unwilling—to secure legitimacy through sweeping political projects. But the dissolution of this fiction has in turn led to new demands on democracy and to a “radical pluralization of the forms of legitimacy” (Rosanvallon, 2011: 8).

Rosanvallon (2011) catalogs these demands under three “qualities,” which are now complementing and competing with the legitimacy-conferring capacities of a regime’s electoral-executive functions: the legitimacy of *reflexivity*, *impartiality*, and *proximity*. A demand for reflexivity is traced from the rise of constitutional courts which are subjecting electoral majorities to outside scrutiny. For Rosanvallon (2011: 6) it corresponds to a “multiplication of the expressions of social sovereignty,” that is, the demand for more complex understandings of “the people” and how to represent it. Growing demands for impartiality are elicited from the proliferation of independent regulatory authorities that act as correctives to legislative powers. Here Rosanvallon identifies new expressions of the founding ideal of democracy: power as an “empty space” which no one can monopolize. These institutions’ impermanence and independence converge with demands for “more public justification of policy decisions, greater openness, and above all, greater impartiality” (Rosanvallon, 2011: 82). Finally, proximity refers to the growing demand for its complementary opposite: a “close attention to the particularity of each situation” that can be met by “caring about each individual, taking the diversity of contexts into account, and preferring informal arrangements to mechanically applied rules” (Rosanvallon, 2001: 172). Here, he draws on social psychology studies (e.g. Tyler, 2003) as well as the recent decades’ proliferation of literatures on the “politics of care” (e.g. Held, 2006) to underscore how citizens have become as conscious of the *behaviour* of decision-makers as to the exact *content* of the decisions they make.

An agnostic understanding of democratic legitimacy

Having presented some of the key points in Rosanvallon’s understanding of democratic legitimacy, I now move on to clarify how his point of departure differs from the two dominant modes of thinking in the participation literature as well as how it might be gainfully used as an alternative, agnostic framework for investigating participation (see Table 1).

In contrast to how much of the optimistic and critical literature elicits their understandings of democratic legitimacy, the demands outlined above are not grounded in established democratic standards since, for Rosanvallon, these are precisely the ones that are dissolving. The demands are “historicized” in the sense that they are elicited empirically in regard to what a democratic populous demands from institutions today.

For this reason, the identified demands largely transcend the distinction between integrative and interest-based mechanisms for how democratic legitimacy might be engendered through participation. Contrary to the critical literature’s interest-based logic, where citizens are assumed to mainly judge participatory governance according to its relative treatment of concrete issues to discuss and influence, the identified demands allow for a more open understanding of the complex motivations and expectations that

people may attach to political processes. But also in line with the critical strand, and as Rosanvallón (2011: 202) takes great care to point out, the affirmation of new forms of legitimacy that emphasize how politics is portrayed as much as the precise nature of what it hopes to achieve might well transform politics in a “more fundamentally democratic direction,” but “it can also instigate a fatal decline” as the accomplished performances of affable decision-makers potentially conceal “the revival of old and terrifying perversions of democratic rule.” Accordingly, acknowledging democratic legitimacy’s multiple dimensions by not assuming an all too normative position on what it constitutes does not negate a critical examination of its potential subversion.

For this reason too, the demands transcend the conceptual distinction between legitimacy as “justification” and “acceptance.” For Rosanvallón (2011), they include both these dimensions as they “share with institutions the ability to embody values and principles, but at the same time they remain inoperative unless socially recognized as such” (p. 7). Rosanvallón (2011) understands democratic legitimacy as a socially constructed and contingent phenomenon, a dynamic quality or “invisible institution” (p. 8). Like “trust,” it is “never definitively acquired,” remains “precarious, always open to challenge, and dependent on social perceptions of institutional actions and behavior” (Rosanvallón, 2011: 7). This anti-essentialist, broadly sociological approach avoids treating legitimacy as an intrinsic property of the process or substance of the individual participatory event. Rather, it becomes a question of contingency open to empirical scrutiny at different time-spaces whose dimensions of participation might be more or less important for the engenderment of democratic legitimacy.

In the remainder of the article, I employ this understanding of democratic legitimacy as an agnostic “empirically-based theory” to explore citizens’ experiences of participatory governance practices in Sweden. To be sure, Rosanvallón does not elicit these demands from the social expectations of participatory governance processes but from the historical ensemble of various institutions in the development of democracy. But my concern is less on the specific contextual meanings of each demand per se and more on how they help underscore the plurality of ways in which people have come to judge institutions as (un)democratic. As Rosanvallón (2011) notes, they can more broadly be read as different ways of examining the “will of the people”: “The idea is that there is more than one way to act or speak ‘on behalf of society’ and to be representative” (p. 8). Accordingly, I use them as a resource to underscore how a different way of thinking about democratic legitimacy can open new avenues for exploring the democratic merits of participation. The legitimacy of *reflexivity* and the demands for more complex expressions of social sovereignty are used as a framing device for material that highlight the complexity of citizens’ experiences of participation and the ambiguous and provisional outcomes such complexity produces. With *impartiality*, I frame experiences that point to more generalized dimensions of democratic legitimacy that transcend specific occurrences within the individual participation event. Finally, *proximity* is used to frame citizen experiences that are not necessarily tied to integrative or interest-based logics but instead to the behavior of public officials. Together, they help render democratic legitimacy a multidimensional, contingent, and provisional quality, which thus impedes on conclusively framing it as an essential part of the process or substance (or process *and* substance) of any given participatory event.

The public's experiences of public participation

The empirical material's context concerns participatory governance of Swedish local authority planning, where the motives for deploying such activities are often strongly tied to the expected legitimacy-enhancing capacities of participation. In Sweden, one of the more instrumental policy sectors shaping contemporary participatory arrangements can be traced to the millennial parliamentary inquiry aimed at investigating the state of Sweden's democracy (SOU, 2000). While Sweden had and, by international standards, still has a strong civil society, high voter turnouts, and high levels of trust toward political institutions (SOU, 2016), the inquiry took urgent note of how Sweden's ability to secure democratic legitimacy through welfare output was showing sharp signs of faltering. This vulnerability, it was concluded, necessitated a move towards a more "participatory democracy with enhanced elements of deliberative democratic theory" (SOU, 2000: 243). The past two decades has thus seen a strong upsurge in interest and deployment of participation activities among municipal authorities. Today a large majority of municipalities affirm that they work with public participation alongside the statutory planning consultations (SOU, 2016). But despite this widespread interest, Swedish local authority politicians remain relatively skeptical of delegating authority to citizens outside the channels of conventional representative institutions (Karlsson, 2012). Expectedly then, case studies conducted in Sweden suggest that substantial influence on political issues is rarely at stake in these participation processes (e.g. Monno and Khakee, 2012; Wiberg, 2018). The Swedish context is thus resonant of developments abroad in how policy-makers and planners tend to construe participatory arrangements as something of a threat to representative democratic institutions and yet paradoxically view participation as a critical means for strengthening democracy (Tahvilzadeh, 2015).

Notwithstanding this generalized context, the three studied municipalities, *Täby*, *Järfälla*, and *Norrtälje*, represent a somewhat diverse case selection. They are all part of Stockholm County and have a similar population size ranging between 60,000 and 80,000 people, but they substantially differ in terms of income and education levels, demographics, as well as experiences with participatory governance. *Täby*, located 15 km north of the City of Stockholm has one of the highest average incomes in Sweden and it has traditionally been hostile to population growth and urban development. However, recent political majorities have changed their tune and the municipality now has several ongoing urban development projects, consequently provoking discord between many of its citizens and public authorities. By contrast, *Järfälla*, a neighboring municipality to the City of Stockholm, has had a rapid population growth since the 1960s and more closely mirrors Stockholm County in terms of income, education, and demographics. However, a regional negotiation regarding infrastructure investments has committed *Järfälla* to further urban developments and densifications in the municipality, which has also provoked several citizen protest movements. *Norrtälje* has a relatively low average income compared to both *Täby* and *Järfälla* and, relative to Sweden, low education levels. Located in the northern rim of Stockholm County, it also has a much larger rural population than any other municipality in the County with roughly half of the population living outside urban nodes. While recent urban densification projects have provoked some discord among urban residents, there is also a deeply rooted schism

between the rural population and the municipal administration in *Norrtälje*, developed under what is perceived as decades of austerity measures favoring the municipality's urban centers over its rural parts (Degerhammar et al., 2019).

These contextual differences necessarily create different conditions for how the public come to produce their expectations and experiences of participatory arrangements. Nevertheless, the empirical material presented here (while admittedly contingent on its particular and local context) is used as a more generalized backdrop to explore the limitations of existing theory regarding participation and democracy legitimacy, as well as what a more agnostic reading could bring to light.

Methods

The material has been constructed through a qualitative research methodology. It is based on the combination of observations of municipally led participatory activities and semi-structured interviews with citizen participants of these same activities. The first stage of the research was conducted in 2017 when I observed 20 participatory activities in the three municipalities. The activities ranged from plain information meetings regarding development projects to stakeholder consultations and workshops concerning regulatory plans and policy documents.

Using contact information secured during the observations, I conducted in-depth interviews with the citizen participants of these events in the spring and autumn of 2018. A total of 37 participants were interviewed; 23 of these were men and 14 were women; 21 were of working age and 16 were seniors. In an effort to put less emphasis on the immediate experiences of the events, the interviews generally took place between 5 and 10 months after the activity in question had taken place. The questions asked to the participants were fairly open-ended in an effort to elicit narratives regarding their experiences. The earlier observations were particularly helpful in this regard: providing context to the questions, sometimes jogging the memory of the interviewees, and serving to explore alternative and divergent understandings of particular situations or events—including my own.

In the article this material is presented as “breakdowns,” that is, empirical encounters “facilitated through the selective interest of what does not work in an existing theory” (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018: 388). Each section begins with observations of participation events which are largely illustrative of existing theory, but which are then followed by citizen accounts that in one way or other conflict with such a reading. Finally, these encounters are interpreted in relation to Rosanvallon's approach to democratic legitimacy to facilitate a more “productive and non-commonsensual understanding of ambiguous social reality” (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018: 388).

The legitimacy of reflexivity

The demand for more reflexive and complex expressions of democratic rule is here used to highlight how citizens' complex expectations and experiences of participation produce ambiguous and provisional outcomes. This, in turn, impede on conclusively

treating democratic legitimacy as intrinsic to integrative logics, which the optimistic research strand tends to emphasize, or interest-based mechanisms, as highlighted by the critical strand.

At a first glance, many of the observed participation activities seemed to fit firmly into the frame of practice which critical scholars have condemned as veiled attempts to placate victims of the recent decade's neoliberal restructuring policies. Such was ostensibly the case for a series of participation activities in the outskirts of *Norrtälje*, the large rural municipality situated on the northern rim of Stockholm County. Officially, these activities aimed at collecting local residents' input on a new rural vision program. But the timing of the activities clearly revealed its political trappings: first on the list of visits were precisely the same rural communities targeted by a recent school decommission ordinance, prompting a number of disparate communities to organize in resistance ("The ruling majority depends on these meetings going well," the planner in charge had candidly told me). In the meetings, the angered citizenry managed to wrestle the agenda away from the municipality's highly prescribed workshop-format (which had involved posters, post-its, and colored pencils) onto their issue at stake: the reopening of their schools. However, the ensuing verbal onslaught of the municipal representatives seemed to do little for the locals' cause and the schools remained closed even after a local referendum came out in favor for their issue.

In the ensuing interviews with some of these citizen participants, many still express dissatisfaction with the participation activities due to the lack of prescribed opportunities to lift their particular issue. Such discontent largely echoes the interest-based logic of the critical strand in which the democratic value of participation activities rests on their relative displacement of authority onto the citizen, or as one participant puts it: "We don't want a *feeling* of participation, we *want* participation" (woman, thirties). At the same time, some of these same participants also express satisfaction with collectively demonstrating their discontent toward the municipal administration. One of the citizen activists remembers how they "took over that meeting" from the perceived narrow framing set by the hired consultants: "We said, 'We will not do it like that, this is what we will discuss, this is what we think is interesting; we do not intend to do as you intended,'" adding, surprisingly, "And they actually adapted to it" (woman, thirties). The format of the ensuing meetings in other rural communities also came to be substantially different from the prescribed workshop-design of the earlier ones, which was picked up by some of the original participants who had chosen to continue to engage in the activities:

It was a bit semi-semiotic in the beginning, with the cutting and pasting and the colored pencils, and then ending with some general write-up on a poster. But then they changed the format. After two meetings or so they adapted. In the beginning we laughed at them, but it got better to be sure. And that's wise of them. (Man, forties)

Some of the other participants in these ensuing meetings express clear dissatisfaction with what was still perceived as narrow frames for discussions and with how their opinions seemed "filtered" by the consultants so as to be "consistent with what was already written down" (woman, fifties). But others seemed highly satisfied with both process and substance of the rural meetings, likening them to that of "democracy seeping all the way out in its limbs" (man, fifties).

Similarly ambiguous outcomes could be observed in virtually all participation activities studied in the three municipalities. But it was particularly evident in how many of the interviewees found it difficult to confer meaning to the activities without first knowing how their views had been considered by the authorities. This often led to conditional statements such as, “if [the participation meeting] has any effect, it was very democratic” but that “it remains to be seen” (man, fifties). Interestingly, even when the eventual planning decisions seemed favorable to participants, many still report feeling sidelined since the decision was not supplied to them from the mouths of the local authorities but instead “confirmed when we saw it in the local newspaper” (man, sixties), or when they “heard it from the boat club” (woman, forties), or when they were “told about it by a guy who had been to political rally” (man sixties) and who had presumably heard it directly from the Mayor. For many, such experiences served to imbue authorities’ decision-making procedures with an aura of capriciousness where even if their input did have bearing on the decisions made, it became less meaningful since “you never really get to know so” (woman, seventies).

These ambiguous outcomes and experiences add to the well-rehearsed critique of the optimistic strand’s ambition to procedurally narrow down what constitutes “successful” participation, since what ostensibly made some activities a resounding failure—that the prescribed format was “hijacked” by citizen activists—was precisely what made it meaningful to some of the participants. But conversely, they also illustrate how the critical strand’s interest-based logic fails to fully capture the complex nature of citizen’s demand for political influence. For even when seemingly hollow participatory activities were deployed in a rather blatant attempt to placate an angered citizenry it not only failed, but the space also became a meaningful site for locals to express their dissatisfaction toward the municipal administration; to voice their concerns and demand accountability. In a similar way, the provisional and conditional manner in which other participants ascribe meaning to the activities also highlight the inherent problems associated with utilizing normative theory as a ruler for measuring the democratic nature of participatory activities. In line with Rosanvallon’s reading of democratic legitimacy, these experiences of participation activities render it as dynamic quality that can never definitely be acquired nor conclusively linked to either an integrative or interest-based mechanism.

The legitimacy of impartiality

Here, demands for impartiality are center staged in an effort to illustrate the generalized dimensions of democratic legitimacy which render it as a kind of capital, dependent on the history of actions of institutions rather than on any specific person, action, or event.

In contrast to the contentious meetings in *Norrtälje*, there were some participation activities which from only observing them seemed to be more consistent with what the optimistic strand emphasizes: the role of such activities in securing important public goods through conflict-resolving forms of deliberations while engendering public trust in the process. In the City Hall of *Täby*, the more affluent municipality of the County, the Planning Office had set up a series of consultation meetings concerning a new comprehensive plan. In line with the County’s ambition to combat the ongoing housing shortage, large areas were designated for densification and many were affected, including

homeowners who had spent as much money on their homes “as an ordinary worker earns in their lifetime,” as one of them disclosed. But if the plan was controversial the atmosphere in these meetings rarely let that on, which often seemed calm and cautiously optimistic. The municipality had opted for an “open-house” set up with half a dozen planners spread across 30 or so citizens. With the consultation proposal spread in front her, one planner pointed to the chapter titled “The public interest,” to explain to some participants why their homes had been targeted for densification. In another engagement, a planner was explaining to a couple that since the municipality does not own the land the densification cannot be carried out without the homeowners’ consent, while adding that the plans likely entailed a lucrative increase in their property values. By the end of these evenings, it was not uncommon that some homeowners would ask the planners which developers come recommended, seemingly eager to translate the plans into reality.

In the ensuing interviews, some do express satisfaction with how the open-house format and one-on-one talks allowed one to “dwell back and forth a bit” (man, forties) with municipal representatives. But for others, the same format made it difficult

to mix high and low since you’re standing next to a local resident who’s very upset about what will happen on his or her property in relation to their neighbor who’ll be getting something better. (Woman, forties)

Accordingly, some participants had attended these meetings less out of concern for their own property values and more with an ambition to better understand what the densification proposals meant for the municipality as a whole. But with “too few officials and politicians, where even when you finally got hold of someone they disappeared to someone else,” the format left them feeling neglected in favor of participants with more clearly defined interests (man, sixties). Participants of other consultation meetings voice similar frustrations over the perceived institutional bias toward participants with “stakeholder entitlements,” somewhat bewildered by how those who represent collective concerns are seemingly attributed with less credibility than those who represent themselves (i.e. the “authentic” public; Braun and Schultz, 2010).

Many also challenge a conventional treatment of planning consultations as a space for negotiating the “private interests” of local inhabitants and the “public interest” which the planners and policymakers make claims to represent. Their experiences instead seem to point to a reversed role ascription in which locals come to represent more collective concerns. This is a struggle nonetheless deemed difficult due to a salient conviction that decisions are more likely to be determined by ingrained economic interests, short-term profit motives, and semi-fraudulent conduct than the result of carefully weighed deliberations. “Corruption” is a recurrent term used among some of the interviewees, especially in the rural areas of *Norråälje* where the municipality’s planning procedures are usually the subject of local controversy. “You get afraid when you start digging into these processes; who owns what and why? Who is a friend with whom?” one local notes, frustrated by a bitter dispute with the municipality regarding leasing rights of one of the closed public school buildings (woman, thirties). Most seem to share the stance of one citizen participant of the *Täby* consultations who, reflecting on his own previous work experience as a planner, contends that “these are processes that take place completely outside the purview of any ordinary citizen” (man, eighties).

In sum, the accounts framed here highlight a demand for impartial procedural arrangements which are not just ideals which participants refer to in the abstract, but which seem central in shaping their expectations and subsequent experiences of participatory activities. Such demands are thus consistent with parts of the integrative logic emphasised by the optimistic literature, where people come to judge institutions based on how they live up to the precepts of a kind of “procedural justice” (see Tyler, 2003). But contrary to both strands, which tend to treat legitimacy as intrinsic to the process or substance of the participatory events themselves, the accounts also point to Rosanvallon’s (2011: 95) sociological reading of demands for impartiality as a more generalized quality that “cannot be instituted by a simple procedure” but “needs to be perpetually constructed and validated.” As shown above, participants draw as much on their *previous* life experiences and the history of actions of public authorities as they do on their current circumstances for conferring judgment on institutions. Accordingly, this dimension of democratic legitimacy shines light on the limited capacities of participation to engender public trust in communities where it is already well eroded, and on how such capacities are highly linked to the responsiveness of public management toward issues far outside the participatory planning framework.

The legitimacy of proximity

So far, I have highlighted how the complexity of participants’ experiences elude conclusive treatments of democratic legitimacy according to either research strand’s logics, as well as how demands for impartiality potentially impede its engenderment through any given action or event. Here, I look at another dimension of legitimacy which is not necessarily tied to the process or substance of participation in order to highlight how the actions and behaviors of decision-makers during these events may still have bearing on citizens’ disposition toward public institutions.

In a detached housing area in *Järfälla*, the municipality which shares its borders with the City of Stockholm, several neighbors had mobilized against the municipality’s plan for a new residential building in a nearby green space. The Planning Office had therefore decided to host information meetings with the locals to inform about the project, as well as the delays that had arisen due to the possible discovery of a protected bat species in the area. Similar to the meetings in *Norrtälje*, the atmosphere in these meetings was consistently tense, and the municipal representatives were overrun with critical sentiments and queries by the locals.

But in the interviews with citizen attendees, some of them still express satisfaction with the meetings. One attendee emphasizes how the municipal representatives’ knowledge of the green space’s social and ecological qualities was gratifying:

You got the chance to make your voice heard. And [the municipal representatives] expressed their own opinions. And these environmental aspects were made clear. The person who was in charge of environmental concerns, or I’m not sure if he was, but he highlighted things that I had no idea where there. (Woman, sixties)

Another participant was so pleased with how one of the planners behaved, with “a good a tone of voice and the like,” that he called him up the next day to offer praise,

reasoning that “you have to distinguish between the issue and the person, so to speak” (man, sixties). Similarly, in another consultation meeting in *Järfälla*, members of a local crafts association were concerned about how a school refurbishment plan would affect their leasing rights of a nearby locale, but in the interviews with participants they mostly emphasize the municipal representative’s “politeness,” “honesty,” and “architectural knowledge,” prompting one of them to reflect that “I didn’t think it was so democratic so I was quite surprised” (woman, seventies).

Such positive sentiments about the behavior of municipal representatives might well be products of what Rosanvallon and others have described as the accomplished performances of decision-makers used to neutralize opposition. But in none of the above cases did the engendered satisfaction with the participation activities alter the participants’ fundamental positions on the matter at hand. Regarding the contentious information meetings in *Järfälla*, one participant remembers that “the overall impression was that I was very happy when I left,” while adding somewhat amusingly, “except that it was still getting built, that is” (man, sixties). And for some participants, the planners’ insightful awareness and evocative recognition of various qualities in their local environments only seemed to have further entrenched their positions: “It made me even more excited and I felt that of course we need to keep this space” (woman, sixties).

Many participants were also conscious of behaviors among municipal representatives which felt depreciative toward them and their grievance, as was the case in the very first of the rural meetings in *Norrtälje* where many simply decided to leave due to the consultants’ perceived “spritely attitude” (man, forties) and deployment of “kindergarten methods” (woman, forties) in the face of their issue at stake. Among citizens whose motives for engaging in a participation activity was not grounded on a specific issue in need of redress, the conduct of municipal representatives was also recognized. Another participant of the *Täby* consultations retells his impressions of one of its representatives:

This one official just dismissed me, who was there to get some information, to go and talk to his boss’ boss’ boss’ so to speak. And that wasn’t very nice of this person. We talked about that on the way home. But it doesn’t have much to do with your research, it’s more of a detail and what I remember in the context. (Man, sixties)

This way of expressing more affective memories surrounding the behavior of decision-makers, where it is framed almost as a parenthesis and seemingly unimportant to participation research, was somewhat typical among the interviewees, despite how behavioral impressions was at times more vividly recalled than, for instance, the specificities of the projects which the meetings concerned.

To conclude, the accounts here highlight how participants not only attach meaning to participation activities in relation to their relative influence as the critical strand tends to argue, or for that matter the relative fulfillment of procedural criteria, which is emphasized in the optimistic strand, but also based on whether or not the participants feel they have been listened to, treated with respect, had their grievances acknowledged, or their local environments appreciated. Combined with the earlier accounts above, this renders democratic legitimacy a multidimensional quality which can be “conferred”

and “retracted” in a plurality of ways through participation activities, sometimes by the same person and at the same time.

Concluding discussion

The aim of this article has been to explore how democratic legitimacy may be engendered as part of participatory governance activities if viewed from the perspective of the public. My concern has proceeded from the argument that the existing literature in planning and environmental governance has tended to neglect this perspective, which in effect produce broadly normative and essentialist understandings regarding the democratic merits of participatory governance. The optimistic literature on this subject has primarily drawn on the deliberative democratic theories to underscore the procedural and more intangible democratic merits of involving citizens in environmental planning and governance. On the other hand, critical researchers have primarily grounded their normative claims in participatory democratic theory to highlight how the lack of substantial influence at stake in actually existing participation tends to frustrate any potential endangerment of public trust these activities might otherwise promote. Although the underlying distinction between the two strands is a fundamental one, it should not be mistaken for an essential difference in how they understand democratic legitimacy: lacking an explicit empirical grounding in citizens’ own expectations and experiences of participation activities, both treat democratic legitimacy as an intrinsic part of either the process or substance of the participatory events.

To offer a less compromising position on the subject I have employed an alternative, more open and searching understanding of democratic legitimacy to investigate citizens’ experiences with participation in Sweden. The framework essentially involved situating citizens’ experiences at three levels of investigation, producing three lenses or dimensions for understanding democratic legitimacy in relation to participatory governance. The experiences framed concurrently affirmed and problematized the two dominant strands in the participation literature. The ambiguous outcomes at a distance from any unequivocal measure of failure or success served to underscore the inherent difficulties associated with utilizing procedural normative theory as a democratic measurer for participatory activities. But conversely, and in contrast to the grand narrative of the critical research, the accounts also suggested that citizens may come readily equipped with ideas about procedural (and behavioral) dimensions of democracy and judge institutions accordingly, even when such judgment would seem counterintuitive to their material self-interest or pursuit for self-determination.

Admittedly, ambiguities such as these are partly why procedural theorists insist on the need for “some ideal against which to compare its performance” (Webler, 1995: 38). But regardless of the merits of such ideals, as shown above, they nonetheless risk obscuring the “unpurposeful infrastructures” (Metzger et al., 2017), which always organize participatory arrangements into a practice with “fundamentally unpredictable outcomes” (Turnhout et al., 2010: 37). In line with previous agnostic approaches to the study of participation, these outcomes frame participatory governance as a complex ensemble of arrangements that can be “both enabling and restricting at the same time” (Braun and Schultz, 2010: 404). This also shines further light on the need for “reimagining planning

as caring” and how “cultivating compassion” among planners could potentially create spaces for critical political expressions to emerge even within the highly constricted and narrowly delimited framings participation activities tend to produce (Lyles and White, 2019; Wiberg, 2018).

At the same time, assuming a less essentialist understanding of democratic legitimacy also necessitates exploring ways in which it might be engendered beyond prescribed forms of public participation. Indeed, given the pluralization of expectations and demands placed on participation, it is difficult to imagine that it can somehow reach a “perfect equilibrium.” Rather than some form of “stairway to democracy heaven,” the multiplicity of ways people interpret participation and democracy instead seems to render the well-known *Ladder of citizen participation* more akin to what recent voices describe as an M C Escher lithograph: “an apparent upward motion which nevertheless surprisingly seems to constantly remain on the same level” (Metzger et al., 2017: 2532). Accordingly, it should not come as a surprise when participants, finding themselves caged by prescribed forms of engagement, routinely decide to “jump of the participatory ladder” so as to “articulate an independent political voice and disrupt the planning process” (Laskey and Nicholls, 2019: 348).

Indeed, such obstructive public mobilizations might, alongside prescribed forms of engagement, also serve as important vehicles for furthering democracy, especially in light of the neoliberal and increasingly undemocratic governance tactics employed by public authorities. However, they also come with considerable and often overlooked costs, including the individual social and economic costs among those who choose to mobilize (Inch, 2015), as well as potential systemic and institutional costs of placing the onus of responsibility for safeguarding democracy solely in the arms of the active citizen (Zakhour and Metzger, 2018). Rosanvallon (2006: 97) acknowledges the intrinsic democratic nature of this disruptive and episodic form of citizen engagement, observing that “the people is indeed in this case truly universal, a realized promise of social totality, and an immediately active force of sovereignty.” But he nevertheless contends that “the whole question of democratic politics” concerns the fate of the democratic subject after such episodes have taken place, that is, “How can it retain a recognizable form, and how to hear its disappeared voice when the event is over and done?” (Rosanvallon, 2006: 97).

Interestingly, possible venues for exploring such questions could potentially be found in some of the classic but much maligned texts in planning theory. Andreas Faludi’s procedural planning theory is still often interpreted as an undercurrent to instrumental rationality and a defense of the technocratic style of planning that public participation was meant to challenge. However, much of his early work was actually dedicated to a scathing critique of the positivist planning paradigms of yesteryears and the capricious “creative leap” promoted by their Geddes-type master planners—“a ‘method’ fit for working with the enlightened maharajas who gave Geddes planning commissions but not for democratic planning” (Faludi, 1987: 9). Accordingly, Faludi’s overt emphasis on the “procedure” and “methodology” of planning—as opposed to its “substance”—can gainfully be read as a controversial but nonetheless serious attempt to temper planners’ supposedly transcendental reasoning with more impartial and democratic decision-making instruments. In a similarly regretful reading, Patsy Healey’s (1997) groundbreaking *Collaborative Planning* has had the somewhat dubious legacy of being widely translated

as “more participation,” which sadly overshadows one of the central arguments made in the book: that the point of generating democratic legitimacy among governance institutions is so that the public does not feel the need to participate. As Healey (1997) noted, “hard infrastructures” (e.g. ethical judgments, non-formal courts, redistribution of resources, rights and duties) could have the possibility to transform planning institutions “such that people would trust their governance machinery sufficiently that challenges were the exception rather than the norm” (p. 239). Rereading some of these two thinkers’ works thus evinces a clear concern with the precarious democratic nature of planning and environmental governance institutions and a committed search for institutional measures that could strengthen their legitimacy—within participation but also well beyond.

Yet, such a pursuit for broader democratic institutional arrangements also requires engaging with new and unexplored avenues. If democracy is to be understood in a less essentialist manner, a concept whose meaning shifts over time and as part of the history and future development of democracy, it would also require a continuous engagement with the public’s perceptions and expectations of democratic institutions. To put it differently: a sustained democratization of democratic theory-development. Accordingly, my intent with this article has not been to downplay the rich contributions made by existing participation research, which has thus far kept the question of participation’s democratic merits a permanent item on the research agenda. I hope this article can be a contribution to this sustained engagement.

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