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Making Space for Hope

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VOLUME EIGHT, SPECIAL EDITION
Making Space for Hope

Volume 8 constitutes a new experience for the plaNext. Guest-edited by Lina Berglund-Snodgrass, Dalia Mukhtar-Landgren and Lena Greinke, this volume stems from the AESOP PhD workshop of 2018, "Making space for hope", specifically declined around the ethical, activist and methodological implications of this endeavour. In Tjäro, 35 PhD students and 5 mentors have had the opportunity to reflect on the moral, ethical and epistemological implications of adopting a normative – indeed, political – attitude to researching planning and urban studies. The volume is composed of an editorial introduction, two students' essays and the comments by two of the mentors.

Content

Notes on Contributors

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Foreword

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My very first experience with AESOP happened during the second year of my PhD, when I was lucky enough to be selected for the PhD workshop in Seili Island, Finland. I remember that week of "confinement", so to speak, in an island with a bunch of fellow students and mentors, as a turning point for my PhD. And I am referring not only to the specific inputs I received on my paper; but also to the possibility to share joys and frustrations of a starting academic life in a very horizontal environment, with students and senior researchers. That is why, when I was invited to join the 2018 PhD workshop, again in a northern island, Tjäro, Sweden, but this time as a mentor, I was both flattered and excited. I had the opportunity to contribute to the creation of a similar sense of sharing and academic exchange. Once again, the participation to the workshop was a turning point for my academic career. Indeed, I have learnt more than I can have thought – isn't this the main lesson to be learnt?

All of this to say that I am especially excited to introduce, on the behalf of the Editorial Board of plaNext, this volume 8, which constitutes a new experience for the journal. The volume was guest-edited by Lina Berglund-Snodgrass, Dalia Mukhtar-Landgren and Lena Greinke, and is made up of a special section stemming from the AESOP 2018 PhD workshop (for further details, see the editorial). The topic of the workshop, in line with the main congress in Gothenburg, was "Making space for hope", specifically declined around the ethical, activist and methodological implications of this endeavour. Based upon, this volume is an important contribution to the discussion on the politics of planning, and a rich conversation among scholars from different backgrounds and at different stages of their career.

We are extremely happy of this volume for another reason: the Editorial Board sees the cooperation with AESOP – which supports plaNext both financially and academically – as a crucial component of its endeavour. By giving space and voice to one of the most important activities of AESOP, this volume constitutes another piece of this fruitful cooperation.

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Editorial:
Making Space for Hope: Exploring its Ethical, Activist and Methodological Implications

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This volume is a special issue with contributions that stem from the collaborations of the 2018 AESOP PhD workshop, held 5-8 July at Tjärö island, Sweden. The overarching aim of the workshop was to establish inclusive spaces for dialogue and collaboration between PhD students across countries and continents on issues that pertained to the AESOP's 2018 congress theme "Making space for hope". Furthermore the PhD students got the chance to learn from the invited mentors with long experience from the academic planning field. The theme drew from a recognition of the severe challenges facing the world at present, for example, challenges coupled with the climate crisis, growing social inequalities, rapid population growth in urban regions and de-population trends in peripheral regions. Planning, considered broadly, is an activity that is striving to create better futures. It is an activity for maintaining predictability and stability whilst responding to societal challenges. Yet, it has been pointed out by policy makers as well as by researchers that planning is unable to effectively respond to these challenges with its traditional sets of approaches, calling instead for new and innovative planning methods. But this conference call asks not only for innovative approaches, but also for a more "hopeful research agenda" that challenges the "dystopian" views on the world that is represented in much research, in which cities are "...depicted as dark and dysfunctional places wrecked by endless capitalist crises and social-ecological catastrophes" (Prakas, 2010 in Pow, 2015, p. 464; cf. Torisson, 2015). The AESOP congress local organising committee argued that:

> "...planning **should** contribute to making space for hope [and we] need to go beyond mainstream politics, negation and cynicism. Instead planning debates ought to "excavate" the hidden and submerged desires for better future by exploring hope and optimism" (AESOP bid 2015, emphasis added).

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Following this proposition, innovative and hopeful approaches are thus not enough to respond to these challenges, planning should search for precedents and inspiration in previously neglected spaces, insurgent movements and other peripheral practices. So, if planning *should* contribute to such hopeful and optimistic accounts of the world through such submerged practices, what implications does this proposition have on planning research and practice?

These large - and perhaps elusive - questions were elaborated on between the PhD students and the senior researchers during the workshop through the interrogation of the three interrelated themes: ethics, activism and methodology. The theme *ethics* addressed issues that concern planning responsibilities (cf. Gunder & Hillier, 2007). This included exploring the responsibilities that the planning research community has in making space for hope and interrogating what it means to carry out "responsible planning". In whose interest is planning taking place and for whom is research about planning carried out? How can we as researchers engage with and challenge dominant societal models and their associated terms and concepts, or should we at all? The second theme, *activism*, concerned dilemmas, roles and functions of planning research and practice in making space for hope in the boundary between research on societal change and activism? Often, new forms of urban social movements and different modes of activism are brought forward as particularly hopeful sets of practices from which planning can learn (cf. Wright, 2008). Learning from social movements includes thinking about the ways in which planning research agendas can join up with or be influenced by activism, or whether it should at all? Finally, the third theme concerned thinking through the *methodological implications* of research projects that aspire for hope generate. What are the epistemological challenges that optimistic research approaches on hope face? How can hope-related language be used to develop new methodological approaches and how can one formulate a research project that addresses hope and positive accounts of the world without losing rigorous critical scrutiny?

With this backdrop, this thematic issue comprises four papers. Two contributions are written by mentors, and two contributions are co-written by doctoral students in new group constellations emerging from the workshop. These contributions are also truly collaborative pieces that directly stem from the group sessions during the workshop and have since then developed through an active learning process, in which the PhD students have also been engaged as peer reviewers on each other's work.

Both the papers written by doctoral students are centered around the analysis of activism in research, based on insights and experiences from their own work. Both papers delve into different forms of methods and forms of analysis, and critically scrutinize these from the perspectives of researchers as well as participants, emphasizing both knowledge claims and power relations. In the paper "Activist researchers: four cases of affecting change", the authors, Megan Sharkey, Monica Lopez Franco, Lara Katharine Mottee and Federica Scaffidi situate activist research in planning in the theoretical understanding of Action Research, including examples such as living labs, co-design, or participatory action research. Emphasizing the positionality (stance and role) of the researcher they analyze and discuss the position of the researcher as an insider/outsider to processes at hand, as well as if the contribution is to theory or to planning practices by using a self-reflexive assessment of their own research. In this endeavor they highlight a range of engagement practices undertaken by activist researchers, as well as discuss the critical and/or constructive aspects of the knowledge produced and opening up for future research. In the paper "How power relationships are involved in research methods", Koen Bandsma, Lena Greinke and Danielle MacCarthy explore power relations in what they describe as both traditional and emerging methods in research on activism, and as such they focus on six different research methods

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applied by planners to study activism. The analysis includes three more traditional methods (Participant observations (PO), interviews and surveys) and three more activist methods (Community-Based Participatory Action Research, Participatory Action Research and Virtual Reality). In order to analyze the power relations inherent in these methods John Forester's (1988) power perspective is applied and the six methods are discussed from the four aspects comprehensibility, sincerity, legitimacy and truth. In their interpretation, the activist research methods are "more able to enhance the agency and capacities of activists", compared to the more traditional methods. As such, they also urge for planning scholars to take power relations in consideration when selecting methodologies, as well as also being bolder in their choices.

In addition to the collaborative work of the doctoral students, this thematic issue also includes commentaries by two of the mentors, Tore Sager and Tuna Tasan-Kok. Their articles are partly based on their plenary sessions during the workshop. In Sager's piece "Activism by lay and professional planners: types, research issues, and ongoing analysis", he reflects on his research on activism in planning. Through his review of current practices and theorizing, he elevates the importance of proper classification and opens a number of questions for future studies on activist planning. Here he presents four different types of partisan modes of activist planning, but he also introduces the idea of "activist communicative planning" to suggest a notion of non-partisan modes of activist planning. In her commentary "Exploring critical constructive thinking in planning studies", Tuna Tasan-Kok explores the planning community's responsibility in providing constructive planning solutions whilst sustaining a critical approach. Taking the neoliberal implications on spatial governance as a point of departure, she analyzes how 'radical critical thinking' and 'critical constructive thinking' frame the challenges of spatial governance differently. In developing her argument, she urges us to seek new avenues of analytical and empirical research, exploring and theorizing on the potential to develop critical constructive approaches in planning studies.

Summing up, all papers relate to the overall themes of activism, ethics and methodologies, albeit with emphasis on different parts of the conceptual triad. They open up spaces for hope by taking the question of ethics face on by exploring what activism is or could be, as well as theorize on the methodological implications of being critical - yet not cynical and of being hopeful - yet not naive.

Notes on the PhD workshop

The workshop gathered 35 PhD students from different parts of the world which opened up for unique possibilities to collaborate with and learn from peers with experiences from very different planning contexts, enabling for students' to contextualise their theoretical as well as empirical understanding of planning. The workshop also created possibilities for nurturing existing contacts and to develop new potential partners for future research collaborations. Most importantly, the collaborations didn't stop after the intensive workshop-days at Tjärö, but continued through a process of joint writing and thinking about shared research interests. The contributions in this issue very much demonstrate successful results from this collaboration. This reflects the importance of organising events like the AESOP PhD workshop, but also the importance of instigating processes for collaboration and dialogues, that enables young researchers across countries and continents to join up in writing and reasoning about planning.

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Activist Researchers: Four Cases of Affecting Change

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Researchers in urban planning are frequently motivated by the desire to facilitate positive social change. In seeking better ways to effect change, the researcher becomes an activist by engaging with social and environmental issues in a meaningful way to solve a problem. It is also often at this nexus where practice and academia meet, where the researcher adopts an activist role. In this paper we argue that activist research requires researchers to place themselves in one of two dominant positionalities or engagement positions: the insider or the outsider, as they join efforts with their research participants and activities. Using four case examples from our own research, we discuss how each positionality influences the production of new knowledge in both practice and theory. We reflect on challenges faced by early-career activist researchers in adopting activist research approaches, highlighting implications for undertaking this type of research in urban planning, and the need for a rethink from current discourses to set a path for a more hopeful future.

Keywords: Activism, planning, engagement, methods, action research.

Introduction

'Knowledge is always gained through action and for action' (Torbert 1981, p 145).

The complexity of urban problems and climate change challenges facing humanity discourages making space for hope. These realities have spurred many young researchers like ourselves to be more proactive in our research changing the way we think, operate, and act in the world.   Our researcher position lends itself to being active in negotiating and participating in these realities across the theoretical divide into everyday practicalities. These experiences and opportunities for deep self-reflection and exploring led us to wonder, are we activists and researchers?

Historically, urban planning and activism have been linked throughout the development of cities. Activism is not easily defined, but generally has been associated with physical action (Svirsky 2010). In the context of urban planning, activism could mean the occupation of space as a representation of a purpose, such as protests or demonstrations (as the most obvious). Activism across the globe does not possess a singular understanding though, it varies according to context, place, and history. Likewise, planning practices are forged from various professional backgrounds, disciplines, or values adopted, yet bonded by a shared interest in space and place (Fainstein & DeFilippis, 2016). Many professional practitioners choose to dismiss theory, however academic researchers rely on theory to inform and improve practice (Fainstein & DeFilippis, 2016). This nexus point where practice and academia meet the researcher can adopt the activist roles: making partnership with other actors, organisations or entities to assist them in positively altering their practices to achieve change (Healey, 1992; Hillier, 2002). If the researcher can be an activist, then what form does that take in urban planning and literature? The activist researcher engages in the practices of activism, placing the academic researcher as an activist through the production of knowledge. Clear definitions are a staple of scientific literature, the ability to classify and organise into neat categories. However, one of the main arguments of this paper is that activist research does not fit neatly into clear delineations. Activists play different roles throughout the engagement and dissemination process, moving between roles, as the research stages and relationships change.

The aim of this paper is to understand the roles of activist researchers who focus on a unique aspect of social and environmental issues in a meaningful way to inform change in theory and/or practice. We begin by defining activist research and the role of the researcher within it, using the theoretical framework of the Action Research participatory enquiry method (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Secondly, we discuss the methodological framework developed for the analysis of our case studies. The Action Research framework is then applied to understand the different positions of engagement a researcher may undertake during research phases, in particular, data collection and dissemination. This presents our own doctoral research as case studies to explore the varieties of activist research in urban planning. The discussion section explores the implications of performing activist research roles, using these methods in urban planning research, and future areas to develop and strengthen the use of activist research.

This paper continues in the next section with an introduction to systems theory which underpins this study followed by a discussion of planning support tools that may be well-suited to support planning at an early stage. After introducing the case study, we describe the strategy-making session and method for analyzing the data that was collected during the session. We then report and discuss the empirical findings. Finally, we conclude the paper

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with a discussion and reflections on both the potential and limitations of the analysis method as it relates to the advancement of professionally supported collaborative planning sessions.

Understanding the Activist Researcher

The lack of connections between practice, theory, activists, and researchers offer opportunities to bridge different processes of knowledge production. Activist research is one way to improve these connections. This section describes the components of activist research, which will frame the case study discussion section. It begins by defining action research to explain how the researcher engages participants as an activist (its positionality), and the impact of the activist role and research role using constructive and critical discourse. The identification of these elements provides the groundwork to code the case studies and support the development and greater use of being activist researchers.

In order to explore activist research, we have chosen to situate activist research in planning in the theoretical understanding of Action Research. Action research is primarily value-laden, with researchers being morally committed and seeing themselves as a participant (in the organisation or activity being undertaken by research participants) (Dick, 2015; McNiff, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Action research is a reflexive process that occurs in cycles (observing, planning, acting and reflecting) in order to solve a problem or understand future predictions of change (McNiff, 2013; Wiliam Foote Whyte et al., 1991). Researchers who utilise this approach are placed on a continuum indicating their relationship with their research participants (See Figure 1) (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Historically used in educational and health research, the defining positionality with research participants provides the grounding to choose analysis methods or deal with ethical issues. In planning, we can see action research taking the form of living labs, co-design, or participatory action research for example. Defining this positionality between researchers and research participants provides context for activist researchers in urban planning fields.

We acknowledge that other theoretical frameworks incorporate aspects of activist research as they engage research with an ultimate agenda to create change. This is particularly relevant in planning as the appropriation of space happens as it is inhabited, creating different marks, models and shapes which challenge or constraint it (Stanek, 2011). Thus, theoretical frameworks to approach and assess planning research in different ways provides insights into different forms of spatial appropriation and can be situated within an activist research dimension. However, for the purposes of this paper, Action Research offers a useful framing for exploring in more depth the position of the activist researcher, and how they may affect change in theory and practice, as discussed further in the following section.

Action Research and the Positionality of the Researcher

Action research frames its understanding of the researcher engagement with its research participants based on the position of the researcher in relation to the reflexive process cycle. This can also be framed as the positionality of the researcher within the process of activist research through which a variety of roles are assumed by the researcher. Thus, positionality is the stance and role of the researcher as an activist during engagement with participants. Positionality in this context is built on three aspects, first is the role of the researcher engagement (insider/outsider) with their research case and participants. Positionality is delineated on a sliding scale from insider or [1] outsider/external researcher showing in grey its contribution to practice and change and in the black its roots in academic traditions as shown in Figure 1 (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

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Figure 1. *Continuum and implications of Positionality, adapted from Herr and Anderson (2005, p.31).*

The second aspect of positionality is the type of iterative reflexive process between the research participants and researcher. Here, the researcher assumes a participative role within the case of research. In planning research, this takes place by engaging in continual iterative involvement with social and urban issues (such as environmental) in a meaningful way to assist in the researched cases' problem. For example, by engaging with the immediate struggles of grassroots movements challenging institutions, power and organization (Choudry & Kuyek, 2012; Jordan & Kapoor, 2016).

Lastly, the level of constructive or critical contributions made by the researcher and their level of reflection within the researched cases' processes. These contributions could relate to two different areas of knowledge production: e.g. practice-based and academic-based. Practice-based knowledge production refers to operational impact on planning practices. Meanwhile, theory-based refers to the academic impact on planning theory and academic discourse. Impact of knowledge to produce positive change may be either constructive or critical, often being both as it is assumed planning research studies aim to produce critical yet constructive contributions to practice and academia.

The activist researcher may empower citizen groups to participate in knowledge creation that will better inform government bodies and businesses in decision-making processes from a constructive practice-based position. Expanding the capacity of co-researchers, decision-makers, and shared knowledge to facilitate community change (Thomas-Slayter 1995; Kindon, 2016; Day, 2016; Herr & Anderson, 2005). Thus, insider activist researchers work *within* the system to constructively identify ways to improve, modify, and alter the existing system. Outsider activist researchers work *external* to the system to observe and recommend constructive practical changes. Similarly, the academic impact of a constructivist provides research on ways to improve, modify, or alter the existing system.

On the other end of the spectrum, aiming to make a critical statement, an activist researcher can challenge and critique the design and implementation of a framework process within a situation they seek to assess. The researcher may actively challenge unequal power relationships towards achieving social justice (Kindon, 2016). Here, both insider and outsider activists work to change a system or society by providing different levels of critical assessments that put in question the current urban planning system and established norms to carry it out. This is a reflective process that has historically been engaged in academia for critical urban planning theory studies. Thus, researcher positionality ideally places practice in an iterative process with academia. New theoretical planning knowledge is produced from practical changes in turn influenced by constant reflexive productions of knowledge.

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Methodology

The primary research method adopted for this paper is a self-reflexive assessment of our own research, drawing from an understanding of positionality as defined by Action Research methods. We selected this framing as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the position of the researcher within activist research. As doctoral researchers using activist research methods in four different urban planning contexts, we wanted to apply this thinking to reflect on our ability to affect change in theory and practice from our individual cases (Figure 2).

Case 1: Social Impacts of Urban Transport in Australia & Netherlands
Lara Katharine Mottee is undertaking research into the implementation of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and management processes in railway infrastructure projects through three case studies: Parramatta Rail Link (see Mottee & Howitt, 2018) and South-West Rail Link in Australia, and the North-South Metro Line in the Netherlands. The thesis aim is to improve on SIA theory and practice to achieve positive social change outcomes from transport projects.

Case 2: Right to Housing in Regeneration of Historic Centres in Mexico
Monica Lopez Franco is undertaking research focusing on developing an assessment on housing strategies in regeneration programmes for Mexican historic centres of Guadalajara and Mexico City. The thesis aim is to assess housing displacement in regeneration processes to promote the reduction of inequality in historic centres of Mexico.

Case 3: Urban Sustainability Transitions & Grassroots Movements in London
Megan Sharkey focuses on the bottom-up community-led grassroots movement's role in socio-technical transitions and its accompanying institutional change. The thesis aim is to understand barriers to grassroots movements in London creating or driving urban infrastructure changes to attain resilient and sustainable cities.

Case 4: Local Development by Brownfields Social Innovative Re-Activation in Europe
Federica Scaffidi focuses on the social innovation and social activism in brownfields re-cycle processes (Moulaert et al., 2005; Phills et al., 2008; Bocchi & Marini, 2015; Carta, 2016). Some empirical references selected belong to the European scenario (Italy, Germany and Spain) in which the research activity has been carried out and where some local activists have been analysed. The thesis aim is to assess socially innovative processes that achieve positive effects to the local area.

Figure 2. Case Study descriptions. Source: authors.

Our first step involved developing our conceptual framework, which required an iterative process of self-reflection and engagement with the literature, to identify:

1. Our interpretation of positionality adapted from Herr and Anderson's (2016) Continuum of Positionality, as a sliding scale from insider or outsider/external researcher.
2. The link between positionality, research aims and knowledge production as:
    a. Theory-based or;
    b. Practice based.

Using this conceptual framing, we devised our assessment framework as shown in Table 1. This was then applied to each of our research cases, categorising our own position and contributions to knowledge production against criteria (1) to (6) of the framework (Figure 1). During analysis of our case studies, we identified two broad research groupings based on their primary research aim for knowledge production. The aims could be placed under two broad categories:

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> *Research aim 1:* Analysis of planning frameworks and implementation processes
> *Research aim 2:* Analysis of urban planning changes derived from social movement

Finally, we reflected on our cases against each other using these two broad research aims, and our activist positions, to draw out any common or disparate themes and characteristics during the course of our research. Combined with our literature review, these reflections formed the implications for activist research that we felt are significant for early career activist researchers and the urban planning discipline to consider in affecting social change.

Framing Activism: Four Doctoral Case Studies

In the process of developing research, many roles can be adopted from within (as an insider) or external to practice and process (as an outsider), to effectively gather information and enable participation towards generating positive social change. The four cases of our research are examples of activist research that display the importance of positionality as a research method to assist and achieve change as described in Figure 2. Additionally, it briefly discusses how this positionality might influence knowledge production. Each case focuses on a unique aspect of social and environmental issues in a meaningful way to inform change in theory and/or practice. Each case was assigned a positionality criteria as shown in Figure 3.
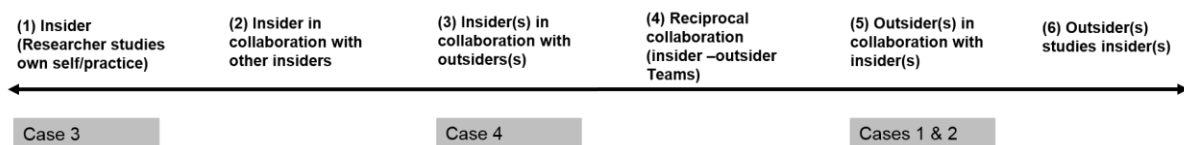
Figure 3. Activist Position of our case examples adapted from Herr and Anderson (2005) to illustrate case study position.

The final outcome from applying our assessment framework is shown in Table 1. The columns 'Practice-based' and 'Theory-based' refer to the impact of the research within the urban planning discourse, whether it aims to make a contribution to theory and/or practice.

Discussion

Activist Research implications of case examples

The four cases highlight different engagement practices undertaken by activist researchers designed to facilitate positive social change through urban planning. The positionality of the researcher in each case varies depending on the level and depth of engagement and the research aim for knowledge production.

The activist position of cases 1 and 2 correspond with criteria (5), which defines researcher engagement as 'Outsider in collaboration with insiders' (Figure 2). While both cases fit into criteria (5), it is important to note that the methods and focus of each research study engages with different urban issues and topics. The commonality of case 1 and 2 is that both aim to 'analyse planning frameworks and implementation processes'. In the research aim 1 cases, the researcher engages on a first-contact basis with key stakeholders, establishing links and in-depth knowledge of issues. The research impacts are shared directly to relevant actors and encourage practical change within urban planning networks.

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Table 1. Example cases coded by positionality and identification of discourse impact within practice or theory-based.

Case	Research Aim	Activist position (see Figure 1)	Practice -based	Theory -based
1	Analysis of planning frameworks and implementation processes	(5) Outsider in collaboration with insiders Researcher obtains in-depth knowledge and uses it to evaluate processes	Approaching through qualitative methods to obtain knowledge about planning processes and implementation, it contributes to assess social impact management	It contributes to existing SIA theory through the assessment and promotion of methodologies which enable wider and more equitable social participation in urban projects
2	Analysis of planning frameworks and implementation processes	(5) Outsider in collaboration with insiders Researcher learns context-based practices and from it yields knowledge	Appraising through qualitative methods to assess official and civic processes to implement rights, it contributes to evaluate inequality through displacement in regeneration strategies	It contributes to discussions relating the Right to Housing as an operative tool to reduce social inequality and to regeneration and housing literature in the global south
3	Analysis of urban planning changes derived from social movements	(1) Insider Researcher studies and is a co-designer with grassroots cycling group	Working alongside the grassroots movements, it contributes to create iterative resources and information with which to different actors make decisions	It contributes by bridging methodology and analysis of socio-technical transitions, power relations between actors
4	Analysis of urban changes derived from social movements	(3) Insider in collaboration with outsider Researcher studies processes as they happen and provides feedback	Combining the community participation with the principles of action research, it contributes to socially innovative processes development	It contributes by observing processes carried out by the social movements to support social activism theory to create new urban regeneration practices and territorial flows

In the research aim 2 cases, the activist positions engage at different levels, with case 3 corresponding to criteria (1) and case 4 to criteria (3). Case 3 is defined as having 'Insider' engagement while case 4 holds an 'Insider in collaboration with outsider' type of engagement. Both cases engage in a practice-based approach in different ways and beyond first-contact to a direct contribution-based relationship. In this way, an agreement is met where an iterative research-social change is pursued and change is derived alongside research analysis. For example, each case has a different level of contribution where case 4 supports activism while case 3 is a part of the activist movement.

All cases (1, 2, 3 & 4) engage with constructive and critical contributions in theoretical or practice-based areas.   We acknowledge all research is in nature both constructive and critical. It is in the action of results delivery and level of social engagement that the discussion should

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be situated. We suggest that the level of research impact is based on factors such as delivery time and engagement barriers. Additionally, the two broad research aim categories discussed will also result in different types of theoretical and practical contributions. For example, case 1 states theoretical impact focus which can be correlated to the time it will take for the research to make an impact at theoretical and practical levels. The information is shared with policy actors and planners representing the near term. While the contribution for case 3 is more focused on its immediate practical contribution. It may be argued that its practice-based theoretical approach is expanding research methods and providing evidence for future research projects.

Implications of activist research in planning practice and theory

Activist research remains underutilised within the urban planning discipline, as many are noting that young researchers establishing their career may be unwilling or unable to take the time required and "manag[e] complex researcher–subject relationships, at a career stage where scholarly publishing is of paramount importance to advancement" (Siemiatychki, 2012, p. 157). Some have noted viability and legitimacy issues of activist research, commenting that it lacks the methodological rigour and technical validity for academic research, or has an over-reliance on the case studies, narrow findings and problem generalisation (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Miller & Brewer, 2003; Jordan & Kapoor, 2016). In the cases exposed here, we have sought to overcome these barriers through deeper collaboration with participants and adopting flexible approaches to our research, constantly validating and improving our findings as we obtain new knowledge.

We recognise and embrace that we cannot dissociate from approaching the participants in our research cases, because this is how we can build trust and engage with them. With the aim of incrementally contributing to the improvement of underlying wider social and environmental issues. It is in the use of these dual roles (as a researcher and activist) where potential to grow and combine theory and practice lies (Gustavsen, 2003). Theory can be enhanced through activist research because any policy advice is rooted in being deeply engaged in one of the many planning processes (Turnheim et al., 2015; Webb et al., 2018; Wolfram & Frantzeskaki, 2016). The learnings are rooted in observations and backed up by empirical qualitative or quantitative data (Corbetta, 1999).

In contributing to theory and practice, there lies a challenge in moving from research findings to recommendations for positive and practical changes for implementation. Our investigations to understand existing environments, plans, programs, and contexts, and in drawing lessons from cases, empowers us with knowledge and experience to make informed recommendations. But how does this influence extend beyond our research? How can we ensure our research turns into actual social change outcomes? How can we best facilitate implementation of our findings? These questions are particularly relevant as we are often external researchers to ongoing processes, we are being critical of these processes, and providing constructive and practical feedback on them, in order facilitate change. These are questions and challenges that the urban planning discipline must consider for the activist researcher's recommendations to have a positive long-lasting influence on society.

Conclusion

This brief discussion and exploration of the question 'are we activist researchers?' opens more questions and implications than space here allows to answer. Our case examples highlight that the role of the activist researcher within urban planning can be both as an outsider and insider, generally moving through both positions. Some research designs may allow for the

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researcher to be embedded in an iterative process of planning and research development; it is argued that this is only one dimension of activist research. While non-iterative processes may take longer to reach practice, the positionality of the researcher as they develop their work may be relevant to affecting long-term change as sought by research goals.

Additional research and commentary are required to explore further implications and barriers. Barriers such as legitimacy of action research, for example within the use of particular methodologies or scopes of analysis in academia and practically. While no clear answers appear to diminish these barriers, the positionality of the cases used in this paper begin to expand on why and how research and practice should be connected. It is through the development of new methodologies and scopes of analysis that the young researcher provides new long-lasting alternatives to generally accepted epistemological constructs. There are significant iterative gains that connect learnings to the development of new theory and practice through activist research. For example, temporal implications of research dissemination post data collection versus dissemination that occurs in real-time dissemination. We argued in this paper that it is also through the co-production of knowledge and practice that new planning solutions to pressing challenges can develop. Consequently, knowledge has an inherently powerful position to shape future actions and experiences. Through this assertion, we are suggesting a change in the dominant discourse by placing the researcher's position not as a passive observer or commentator but as an active insider through which realities may be produced and, as an urban planner, that can create a more hopeful future.

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How Power Relationships are Involved in Research Methods

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With the rise of activism and activist research, this paper explores how power relationships are involved in traditional and emerging methods used in research on activism. This question matters as research methods have the potential to both improve the capacities of activist groups and enhance knowledge of agents involved: researcher and activist. The added value of the paper is that it presents a range of methods used in research on activism, including new methods that are relatively uncommon in planning research. The second contribution of this paper is that it is based on a power framework by Forester; it analyses how power is embedded in the use of a particular research method. The authors find extant differences between the methodologies when analyzed through this framework, especially in their potential to involve with activist communities. The authors encourage researchers to be braver in using activist research methods and to be aware of the underlying power discourses in their choices.

Keywords: Research methods, Activist research, Power, Community-based participatory action research, Participatory action research, Virtual and augmented reality.

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Introduction

Within cities and public spaces, activism is increasing. Examples of this increase include the emergence of tactical urbanism (Mould, 2014), austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012), social movements (Schoene, 2017) and insurgent spaces (Roy, 2005). Activists challenge the tacit, neo-liberalist assumptions behind many plans, spatial interventions, regulations and policies. Subsequently, they challenge the monopoly of urban planners in triggering socio-spatial transformations (Sager, 2016). In this way, activism challenges and changes existing power relations, social norms and values.

Therefore, it is no surprise that this rise in activism has drawn the interest of several planning scholars (e.g. Sager, 2016; Mould, 2014; Scholl, 2017, p. 46). A central characteristic of planning research on activism is that such research aims to benefit the powerless and expose (unequal) power relations between urban planners and activists (Cancian, 1993). It may provide a new perspective to researchers about how local communities and groups of activists can be included in academic research. The involvement of participants in research projects may improve understanding of activism as a transformative practice of communities and spaces, as well as develop the (research) skills of activists.

While urban planning researchers have lately started to study activism, little is known about the methods researchers use. This is problematic, as it can lead to the use of methods 1) that may be less useful in understanding activism and 2) that draw information from activists for answering the research questions of researchers, while not boosting the knowledge or skills from activists. As answering research questions is only possible when the correct method is chosen (Baarda et al., 2013), it is important to understand the various methods planners could use and their advantages and disadvantages. Otherwise, it may result in a lack of insight into activism as an important force of spatial and social transformations. For instance, tactical urbanism initiatives are typically local, short-term implemented, resource-scarce changes of the streets and plazas that make up a city. They are interesting for researchers as they challenge formal, bureaucracy-led planning and involve small scale changes of public spaces that benefit locals (Silva, 2016). To fill this gap, more attention needs to be paid to the full range of research methods that exist: methods which can be used to study activism and the knowledge they produce for both the researcher and the activist. This paper fills this gap.

Planners studying activism frequently opt for more traditional scientific research methods, such as interviews or observations. However, a range of potential activist research methods has been developed that might be useful in expanding the methodological repertoire of planners. The focus will concentrate upon six research methods that are used by planners to study activism: participant observations (PO), (semi-structured) interviews, surveys, Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPR), Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Virtual Reality (VR).

The authors explore the extent to which power relations play a role within these methods. Power plays an important role in carrying out activist research, as conducting research involves a reciprocal relationship between the researcher (the user of a method) and the activist. Furthermore, research methods can be used to expose unequal power relations. However, as will be discussed, some methods are more able to do so. Finally, methods can be used by researchers to enhance the power of activists. To analyze the role of power existing between the planning researcher and activist, the authors apply a well-known framework by Forester (1988). Finally, the paper indicates that more traditional methods do not enhance the capacity of activists, whereas these new research methods are more able to do so. Furthermore, the authors plea that planners might be bolder in selecting their methods.

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The paper follows a structure which begins by outlining the six research methods that the authors identify as most familiar to the study of activism; in planning; the second section explores Forester's framework of power. Next, the authors link Forester's framework to these six research methods to explore how these empower activists.

'Classic and Frequently Used' and Activist Research Methods

The authors interpret 'classic and frequently used' methods here as; participant observations, surveys and (semi-structured) interviews and as such it is a categorization through which to compare. These research methods continue to generate robust results and are useful. Therefore, the authors do not consider these methods to be outmoded. However, there is a range of new methods developed in other research areas (e.g. public health: CBPR) that might complement observations, surveys and interviews in conducting activist research.

The first research method is observation research. Participant observations (PO) may involve a researcher observing the activities of activists, without actively intervening or controlling in the observed situation. Such observations are conducted by a form or protocol and logged afterwards (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 1). An important advantage of POs is that they allow researchers to study activism in a socio-spatial context: in the street, neighborhood, park or city where it therefore occurs and affects the surrounding community. However, the researcher does not intervene and quietly observes what occurs. A disadvantage is that they only describe what participants are doing, not why they do something. Another deficiency is that some behaviors are relatively rare; such as spontaneous criminal activities and certain other forms of activism (e.g. graffiti) (Baarda et al., 2013). Thus, many forms of activism may be missed and undocumented.

However, what is highlighted in particular is the process and relationship between the researcher and participants. Planners as researchers participate in activities or events to observe events and subjects. As a result, they operate from an external point of reference, necessary to enable them to observe situations and processes but not to influence them. This makes the scientist a ´silent observer´. A potential difficulty is that the researcher might misinterpret the behaviors of activists, which may lead to false conclusions (Allmendinger, 2008).

The second method used to study activism are surveys (e.g. Knigge, 2009; Scardaville, 2005). As a frequently used method, a questionnaire is used to generate information about a larger population by a smaller sample (Kaase, 1999, p. 11). The advantage of surveys is that a lot of data can be collected in a relatively short time and is less likely to trigger socially-desired responses (as surveys are generally anonymous). Furthermore, surveys offer the possibility to establish causal links and make inferences about the broader population. However, surveys can present disadvantages. One weakness may be a difficulty in reaching particular target groups (e.g. activists) or when participants of the survey are not representative of the broader population (i.e. sampling bias). Furthermore, the format and quality of surveys are highly dependent on how the questions are presented and understood and lastly, only a limited amount of questions can be asked (Baarda et al., 2013).

A third and common method in social science research are qualitative, semi-structured interviews (QIs). The interviews are often conducted by pre-established interview guidelines (Alsaawi, 2014, p. 151). Semi-structured interviews allow researchers the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge and richness in responses (Bryman, 2008 in Alsaawi, 2014, p. 151) of experiences, beliefs and norms of activists. Their open nature retains the potential for activists to bring their topic to the table and in this way create innovative knowledge that is unfamiliar

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to the researcher. On the other hand, this method only succeeds if there is a degree of 'rapport' between the researcher and activist, i.e. the degree of harmony and trust in a conversation (Hennink et al., 2010; King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 3). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews reveal the truth of the activist, but this is a subjective account of what occurred. Moreover, causal links cannot be made using this method. Finally, in the case of sensitive topics, it can be difficult to recruit respondents. Although each of these three methods is frequently used to study activism (e.g. Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Knigge, 2009), they represent only a few on offer. In addition to these established methods, three emerging research methods in the field of activist planning research are examined: PAR, CBPR and methods based on VR.

PAR is an approach in which action and social change are central. PAR stresses a strong collaboration between participants: researchers and activists (Burns et al., 2011, p. 15). PAR involves a reciprocal exchange of knowledge, skills and power: researchers enhance activist's knowledge of research skills, while activists provide knowledge and resources about the community (Kim-Ju et al., 2008). One way of doing this is by creating a joint project, such as using music, painting or theatre to bring activists, researchers and others together (van der Vaart, 2018). The use of music, painting or theatre has the potential to create interactions between the creators, users and planners and within communities themselves (Simonsen et al., 2014). Participants are given space for critical self-reflection and analysis of reality to generate more authentic knowledge (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2015, p. 470). One disadvantage of PAR is the time and effort required of both the researcher and activist. Another disadvantage is its focus on individuals (activists) that are part of the community, not the community itself as the object of study (Kim-Ju et al., 2008). This focus on the individuals in a community is a key difference with the next method CBPR.

CBPR is a research method directly focusing on the relations between academic and activists (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006, p. 1). According to Minkler & Wallerstein (2003), academic and activist partners are involved in the research process: they collaborate in the creation of the research (sub)question, as well as the data collection and analysis. Thus, the research questions and process is the responsibility of both the activists and researchers: the researcher somehow becomes a part of the activist community. This method seeks to change the roles of the researcher and stakeholders (Burns et al., 2011, p. 5). CBPR is a place-based research method, which focuses on an activist community, not the individuals. With a combination of different data, for example, from interviews, focus groups or mapping-processes, again conducted by both researchers and activists, the researcher receives their results (Burns et al., 2011, p. 6).

Another activist technological-method is VR, which can be used to visualize planning processes or scenarios, for example, for activists to illustrate future developments (Portman et al., 2015). With the help of future artificial spaces, activists can actively experience possible effects of their actions. For example, computer simulations can imitate experiments and make them ´real´ (Portman et al., 2015; Natapov et al., 2016; Psotka, 1995). 3D green spaces, as well as virtual square or park designs, can be experienced. This new methodology is beginning to be utilized (Psotka, 1995, p. 405). With the help of this technique, participants can explore and engage with their environment in a new way. It can provide both visual but also other sensory stimuli and offers a range of data and presentation for both the activists as well as the researcher. However, VR is continually being upgraded and rapidly evolving, and so the uncertainties in these processes must be clearly articulated (Portman et al., 2015, p. 381). A disadvantage of VR can be that it often takes place in laboratories, and therefore the behaviour of people in real space cannot be understood. One advantage is, however, that virtual developments can be depicted realistically.

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Forester as a lens to understand power

The authors use Forester (1988, p. 144) to map how power relations are intertwined while conducting activist research (see Table 1). Forester perceives power as a socially-constructed, reciprocal relationship between two or more agents that is reproduced and changed by human (inter)action (Tait & Campbell, 2000). Forester provides four criteria to analyze power relationships. While Forester's criteria are more broadly applicable as they involve the power relations between agents, the authors translate these criteria to operate at the level of the power relationship existing between the planner-researcher and the activist (community). In operationalizing, the authors followed two rules: 1) the interaction was between a researcher and activist, 2) the researcher selects and executes a particular method, and 3) the researcher is influenced by the standards and ethical codes of conduct in academia. Table 1 reveals established operationalization.

Table 1. Operationalization of Forester´s criteria (1988)

Criteria	Operationalization
Comprehensibility	Clear questions. No formal (theoretical) language. No distraction. No framing of information.
Sincerity	Neutrality of the researcher (no bias towards activists). No hidden agendas. Equal partners: researcher as not having more or less knowledge than activists.
Truth	Information given to activists is factually correct. Information given to the researcher is correct. Information is given to correct misunderstandings or improve the knowledge (and consequently their agency) of activists.
Legitimacy	Legitimacy of the method used. Taking advantage of having more knowledge. Ethical norms in research.

Forester distinguishes four key criteria to analyze power relations: comprehensibility, sincerity, legitimacy and truth. As comprehensibility, Forester means that activists should be able to understand the questions they are asked to them and the purpose of the research. It involves how questions are formulated, and how the researcher presents themselves. Trust is about the degree of trust between researcher and activists. It entails the degree to which researchers are neutral observers or favor particular world views (e.g. the researcher as an advocate of neoliberalism). Legitimacy refers to the extent activists perceive the goal of the research and the use of particular research methods as being legitimate. It involves the ethical rules and norms that come with using a method, such as not misleading participants (activists) or taking advantage of having more knowledge. Finally, truth is about the degree to which the claims, beliefs and information given by the researcher and activist correspond with the factual truth. This criterion involves the degree to which activists gain (accurate, factually correct) information from the researcher. It is important to acknowledge that Forester (1988) stresses that these criteria can never be fully satisfied.

Balancing the elements of the criteria play an important role in researching activism. Firstly, the criteria help illustrate how the use of a research method is perceived and experienced by the activists. Secondly, the criteria can help in determining how the selection and use of a research method is an act of exercising power. Besides, the researcher is bounded by the ethical and moral academic codes, constraining their conduct and selection of methods during

the research (Allmendinger, 2008). Finally, it helps explaining how the use of different methods can enhance the agency of activists, as they might learn from the research process and outcomes of the research processes.

Analyzing Methods: How are They Linked to Power?

In PO, the researcher does not have any direct involvement in the activist community. The researcher retains an outsider perspective and does not - in any way - limit, direct or influence the actions of activists. If the method is well applied, the purpose is clear. This makes the method comprehensible for the activists (comprehensibility). If the participants feel unobserved in this method, they express themselves without any constraints (Baarda & De Goede, 2013, p. 250). This may be problematic when the observed behaviour concerns illegal actions and may lead to the incrimination of activists. They express their opinions openly and so, the reality of the activist can be revealed (sincerity & truth). The methods can be used in certain research contexts only and may not be suitable for all topics due to the passive role of the researcher and the rareness of certain behaviors/actions (legitimacy).

The second method the authors consider is surveys. Concerning comprehensibility, surveys can be problematic. The formulation of the survey questions can unconsciously steer participants towards certain answers or lead to misunderstanding (e.g. Rooney et al., 2005). As it is generally not possible for participants to ask for clarifications, researchers must be cautious in how they formulate questions. Pilot testing can help to improve comprehensibility for activists (Baarda & De Goede, 2008). Subsequently, sincerity might also be problematic. Researcher and activist are not equal in a survey: surveys are a rather one-way method that draws data from activists, while activists generally do not have much influence on the questions asked. Also, the framing of these questions can contain a hidden agenda or steer participants towards certain outcomes. Moreover, the legitimacy of surveys is dependent on the research topic. Surveys can be less legitimate for sensitive research topics, as less trust can be built between the researcher and the respondent than in other methods (legitimacy). This may mean that participants will choose not to reveal personal details about sensitive topics. Finally, the truth criterion is a strong advantage of surveys. Surveys can be used for both qualitative and quantitative research questions and subsequently provide the opportunity to answer a wide range of questions (Jansen, 2010). An important factor further contributing to 'truth' is that surveys offer the possibility to conduct statistical analysis (e.g. in SPSS) to improve their accuracy and establish causal links (Baarda et al., 2014).

In interviews, the interviewer and the activist experience a face-to-face connection. For this reason, they both can enter into a more 'relaxed' form of a conversation devoid of formal language and challenging questions. The interviewer has the chance to clarify situations, themes and topics for the interviewee to prevent any misunderstanding (comprehensibility). If the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer is built on trust, interviews permit the researcher to gain contextual meaningful information about how the real world is perceived (Denzin, 2001 in Alsaawi, 2014, p. 154) and provide in-depth and creative knowledge (Shallwani & Mohammed, 2007, p. 31) about the activist. Both the researcher and the activist are equal partners in the interview (sincerity & truth). Interviews impress with their flexible and open design (Alsaawi, 2014, p. 154) and can, therefore, be adapted easily. On the one hand, the researcher has the power regarding his research (ibid.) and thus must act ethically while doing it (legitimacy). On the other hand, ´the interviewee has power as a "privileged knower"´ (Nunkoosing, 2005, p. 699 in Alsaawi, 2014, p. 154).

The first activist method is PAR. PAR can be considered as being comprehensive. The main argument is that the research questions and data collection occur in cooperation with the

activists. The involvement of activists may mean that the research questions and methods are selected and equate with those of the community which is the subject of research (Kim-Ju et al., 2008). The use of music, painting or theatre can also make PAR understandable for a large number of actors (comprehensibility)(van der Vaart, 2018). However, a potential danger for researchers of PAR may be that they lose their neutrality, as the researcher may become too involved with the activists. This may be problematic, as it may lower the criticality of the researcher towards the activist community (Levinson, 2017). However, a potential danger of PAR is the exclusion of certain elements or activists, as some activists may not be willing to participate due to time or financial constraints (Levinson, 2017). This method is especially legitimate for research topics in which trust of the activists is necessary, as this method starts with the building of trust between researcher and activists (legitimacy). Finally, trust is necessary, especially for sensitive research topics, such as gaining an understanding of illegal activities (Ochocka et al., 2010). When trust exists, this method may teach activists new research skills and knowledge, while researchers learn about the way activism is carried out whereby the method can be legitimized (legitimacy; Kim-Ju et al., 2008). As with all qualitative methods, PAR can reveal the perceptions, norms and beliefs of participants, but not the factual truth or establish causal links (Hennink et al., 2010). Whether the revealed perceptions and norms are 'true', dependent on the degree of trust between researcher and activists, is crucial.

CBPR is based on the assumption that complex problems cannot be solved by experts alone. Researchers need key insights provided by a group (Burns et al., 2011, p. 5). An advantage of CBPR is that the knowledge is produced at a low-threshold level. The actors work together on decision-making processes on an equal basis. Since all partners should have, at least in theory, equal rights, they can share their interests and fight for them in the research process. If the process is well-organized, this method results in a broad scope of action for all actors (comprehensibility), which makes it possible to participate honestly and improves transparency (sincerity). Furthermore, by cooperating with researchers, activists may improve their understanding and knowledge, for instance about how research questions are formulated or a research method is used. This stimulates activists' agency (truth). Also, most spatial interventions that come from outside do not often create the desired results (Burns et al., 2011, p. 5) because of a lack of understanding of the case specifics. Moreover, on the one hand, a challenge is to create and maintain legitimacy between the participants, as tensions or conflicts may arise during the research process (between researchers and activists). Especially as CBPR focuses on the long term, such conflicts or differences in opinion may emerge. On the other hand: ´there is value and legitimacy in knowledge of individuals, families, and others in the community´ (legitimacy, Burns et al., 2011, p. 5).

VR methods make it possible, primarily through various visualizations and new techniques of representation and experience, to put people into situations more easily and sometimes even recognize the immediate consequences of their actions (Portman et al., 2015; Natapov et al., 2016,; Psotka, 1995). Thus, the threshold of participation is relatively low and makes the process understandable for various people (comprehensibility). The challenge, however, is how the potential results can be linked and generalized to the non-virtual world or activist community. One difficulty for certain groups and the researcher can be to generalize the results because they have to legitimize the goal of the research and stick to ethical norms (legitimacy). This method involves a high degree of uncertainty in the process, because it is based on a virtual world, which must be clearly articulated (Portman et al., 2015). Otherwise, participants are not be able to use the method adequately or understand it, as building a virtual or 3D model requires much technical knowledge and skills. VR-based methods do not enhance the knowledge or capacities of activists (truth). With regard to criteria four, this aspect can overtax activists. This could limit their room for action because they may not feel as equal partners in the research process due to the lack of knowledge about virtual technology (sincerity).

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Table 2. Link of the methods to power relations: using Forester´s criteria (1988)

	PO	Surveys	QI	CBPR	PAR	VR
comprehensibilit	Researcher retains an outsider perspective and does not in any way limit, direct or influence the actions of activists.	Survey questions can unconsciously steer participants towards certain answers or lead to misunderstanding.	Face-to-face interaction without formal language make the methods comprehensive.	This method can result in a broad scope of action for all actors.	The involvement of activists in the research process may improve the comprehensibility for them.	People can put themselves into situations more easily and sometimes even recognize the immediate consequences of their actions (virtually).
sincerity / **truth**	Participants conduct their behaviour openly, without any perceived constraints (as the researcher is a silent observer).	Surveys offer the possibility to analyze the results of surveys statistically (e.g. SPSS) to improve their accuracy and establish causal links.	Interviews permit the researcher to get meaningful contextual information to the real world. Researcher and activist are equal partners.	If the process is well-organized, participants can work honestly. This helps to be transparent in the (research) process.	Method starts with the building of trust between researcher and activists.	If the actors can not use the method sufficiently or even understand it, they feel overwhelmed. Using this method may require many technological skills. This aspect can also overtax them and limit their room for action.
legitimacy	The methods can be used in certain research contexts only and may not be suitable for all topics due to the passive role of the researcher and the rareness of certain behaviors/actions.	Surveys are less useful when the research is about sensitive research topic (requiring high degree of trust between researcher and activist).	The researcher has the power regarding his research and therefore should act ethically while doing it.	On the one hand, a significant challenge is to create and maintain legitimacy between the participants. But on the other hand, ´there is value and legitimacy in the knowledge in the community.	The method may teach activists new research skills and knowledge, while researchers learn about the way activism is carried out.	The challenge is to link the results with the non-virtual world and to legitimize the goal of the research.

While each method has its advantages and disadvantages, the analysis and framework of power (see Table 2) shows that the activist research methods are more able to enhance the agency and capacities of activists, compared to interviews, surveys and PO. However, these activist research methods may run in opposition to academic standards and conventions (Cancian, 1993, p. 92; van der Vaart, 2018). Therefore, the power of these research methods for academia may be lower, as using them may make it hard to publish in academic journals (Mark Chesler in Cancian, 1993, p. 105). However, it presents the opportunity of greater community involvement and more societal impact, which is in the end what planning is about (Cancian, 1993, p. 105).

Conclusion

In summary, the paper aims to illustrate recent and innovative methodological choices against those which are more established, more routinely utilized and those emerging in recent research. When presented together they reveal differences in underlying power discourses which are embodied in the various methodologies. And when examined through the lens of Foresters' (1988) criteria of power, it appears that the dimensions of power operate unevenly throughout the selection of methods. Forester distinguishes four key criteria to analyze power relations: comprehensibility, sincerity, legitimacy and truth.

The authors demonstrate that the first criterion highlighted by Forester, comprehensibility; involving the degree to which the participants understand the questions asked of them and accordingly the purpose of the research rests with the skill of the researcher in the case of both classic and frequently used and newer methods. However, due to greater involvement of the activist and co-creation of methods from the beginning of the research for activist research methodologies, the authors would argue that one can see a higher trend of comprehensibility in the activist research methods. The same may be argued for the criterion of sincerity, as equal partners; researcher and activist and attainment of neutrality when carrying out the research showed more strongly for innovative research methods due to the nature of participation and ability of activists to respond honestly. This, in turn, creates a level of transparency between researcher and activist. For the criterion of legitimacy, where the authors found that use for future research processes depends on the context in which it is intended for dissemination. While in the case of the newer methods, legitimacy is established and a value placed if the knowledge is returned into the community. However, questions remain around the suitability of methods for publications within academia, which may contradict the efficacy of the research and threaten legitimacy. In so far as qualitative methods deal with perceptions, norms and beliefs of participants but lack an absolute truth, the criterion of truth is maintained through an agreement of shared factual truths and the correction of misunderstandings. Neither surveys, PO's nor VR's, offer this possibility, whereas CBPR, PAR and interviews can.

The authors have highlighted that there are opportunities but also risks associated with the relations of power within the various methodologies. For researchers, this choice should be investigated and evaluated in light of these dimensions of power to help determine their selection. The authors hope to have illustrated the need to develop awareness across a spectrum of characteristics existing within the choices of methodologies but also to encourage greater insight into the practice of activism which can be achieved through a careful choice of methods. Ultimately, the researcher can enable activist efforts which place the researcher in a more active position, not only as a passive bystander but critical to wielding power equitably. Conclusively, through a careful selection of methodologies, 'brave' and innovative choices are possible.

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Activism by Lay and Professional Planners: Types, Research Issues, and Ongoing Analysis

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Activism was one of the main themes of the AESOP PhD Workshop 2018 in Karlskrona and Tjärö, Sweden. One of my presentations was about the activist roles of planners working for local governments and lay planners affiliated with civil society organizations. I have kept a close eye on the academic literature on activist planning for many years, and am still working in that sub-field of planning theory. My aim is to explore the limits of how professional planners with an activist intent can practice their line of work inside a bureaucracy, and to study how actors from the civil society can use spatial planning and local environmental planning in combination with direct action as a strategy for achieving their goals. To specify the kind of planning I have in mind, I follow Healey (1997:69), stating that: 'Spatial and environmental planning, understood relationally, becomes a practice of building a relational capacity which can address collective concerns about spatial co-existence, spatial organisation and the qualities of places'. Activist planners can contribute to the processes of such planning and help collect and form the input to spatial and environmental plans.

In this paper, I propose a classification of activist planning types, point out a few issues for discussion in the study of activist planning, and question if the idea of an activist communicative planning makes sense. In addition, I explain my own approach to delimitation of the activist planning concept and give a brief account of my ongoing work.

Why Activist Planning?

Injustice and repression may be upheld by prevailing social institutions and thus need to be combated by strategies going beyond – and possibly breaking with – the accepted practices of these institutions. However, activist planning does not necessarily entail a heroic fight for recognition, freedom and equal rights. The driving force may, for example, be the mobilization of community resources in order to improve living conditions through locally desired neighbourhood plans and urban renewal projects on terms set by the present inhabitants (Addie 2008). In other cases, the motivation for activist planning comes from civic groups' disagreement with public planners and elected politicians about the organization of the official planning process and the goals for city development (Legacy and van den Nouwelant 2015). The basis for activist planning can be democratic disagreement as well as a fight against repression. Activist planning can be legitimate even in well-governed liberal societies.

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Cooperation between public activist planners on the one hand and activists in social movements and protest groups on the other can be mutually beneficial (Hysing and Olsson 2018). Civil society activist organizations can help professional planners put pressure on unduly self-serving stakeholders, and marginalized groups can benefit from professionals' information, support and advice.

Some Issues in the Study of Activist Planning

Problems related to this area of planning theory concern the delimitation of activist planning and classification of the different types of such planning. Moreover, the existing literature has a narrow scope, and scant attention is given to activist planning initiatives that are neither radical nor insurgent, but valuable as alternatives to official planning proposals in relatively well-functioning democracies.

Delimitation of activist planning. Direct action and an activist style of working is required. Activist planning implies working outside the normal channels for reporting and handling problems in the organization where the planner is employed. Some publications pretend to deal with activist planning even if the narrative is about politics or protest with only insignificant attention given to planning. There is admittedly a conceptual and practical segment of overlap between politics and planning, but it is most often easy, when it comes to concrete cases, to see if the activists have initiated a planning process, developed any spatial planning ideas, or co-authored any planning documents for the contested area.

The distinction between invited and invented space is useful in delimiting activist planning (Ay and Miraftab 2016). Ordinary citizen participation takes place in invited space and is not activist planning. Invented space is created by the activists and is an arena where interchange with government and stakeholders can take place on terms influenced by the activists. Sometimes, invented space comes into being by transformation of invited citizen participation to types of interaction that the authorities had not asked for or anticipated: agonist political discussion or protests transgressing the confines of the project that the bureaucrats and politicians wanted to inform people about.

Planning done by university academics to assist communities struck by natural disaster or downward spirals of blight and poverty constitutes another borderline sort of activist planning. Campus-based community outreach is a legitimate activity at many universities and is within the scope of approved academic work, and it is in this respect a peripheral form of activist planning (Reardon 2008). For the same reason, I do not see service learning initiatives as activist planning (Kennedy and Tilly 2019, Pinel 2017).

Activist planners are engaged in specific cases. They have to be hands on, actually working on the planning process or the plan for a particular area and taking part in direct action. Many activist planners belong to groups or movements that in turn are members of umbrella organizations one step removed from the concrete planning situation and the stress and strain of conflict. There are a number of such networks on the citywide, national and international scales. Some are umbrellas over poor people's local grass-roots organizations, such as Homeless People's Federation (Philippines) and the Federation of the Urban Poor (South Africa) at the country level, and Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) internationally. Other umbrella organizations offer planning advice to individuals and communities or administer the networks and resource supplies of progressive planners, such as the Planning Aid section of the Royal Town Planning Institute (UK) and the Planners Network (USA), respectively. I treat the work of umbrella organizations

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as activist planning only when they are directly engaged in local planning processes of the types displayed in Table 1.

The last borderline to be drawn here distinguishes activist planning from action research. An example close to this borderline is INURA, the International Network for Urban Research and Action (INURA 2003, Lehrer and Keil 2007). The issues that network members are involved in include major urban renewal projects, the urban periphery, community-led environmental schemes, urban traffic, and social housing provision. However, INURA as organization is not involved in planning.

Classification of activist planning types. Table 1 concentrates on partisan planning and gives room for both lay and professional planner roles. An alternative to partisan planning is outlined in the next section. Three of the four main categories in the table contain important sub-types of activist planning (Sager 2013:66–95).

Table 1. Partisan modes of activist planning

	Government planner	Civil society planner
Loyal to group or community	1 Official partisan planning	2 Community-based activist planning, Advocacy planning
Committed to substantive cause	3 Equity planning, Inside issue advocacy	4 Radical planning, Critical-alternative initiatives

The official partisans in cell 1 work in close contact with local people. The planners can easily be frustrated by the gaps they observe between obvious needs in the community and the resources granted. This may trigger community-loyal action that goes beyond the mandate given for the planner's work.

In cell 2, advocates come from outside the client community and talk on behalf of it. In contrast, community-based activists are members of the community in need of protection or improvement.

In cell 3, inside issue advocates may aim for safeguarding of the natural environment, democratization, or women-friendly cities, for example. They pursue their favoured cause from a position inside the agency. Corburn et al. (2015) report from health equity planning in Richmond, California. Hysing and Olsson (2018) give an account from Sweden of how green inside issue advocacy can work. In equity planning and inside issue advocacy, the planner typically seeks cooperation with external allies, supports the allies by politically motivated activities, and tries to make the external allies push towards sustainability or a fair process and plan.

In cell 4, radical planning challenges the system or the regime, while critical-alternative initiatives are not insurgent, but lodge objections at the policy level.

Table 1 can be helpful, as it gives room for most familiar types of activist planning, but the classification scheme is not without weaknesses. First, the same action may be taken both out of loyalty to someone and to support a particular cause. It is sometimes hard to know whether activist planning for, say, environmental improvement or more transit-oriented transport systems belongs in the upper or lower row of the table. Second, the distinction between radical planning and critical-alternative initiatives in cell 4 is unclear in cases where the criticized policy is crucial to the regime's political programme, turning activism against the policy into insurgent conduct. Third, in cell 2-cases, the community's own activists sometimes

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partner with an outside activist organization, making it difficult to decide whether the case exemplifies advocacy planning or community-based activist planning.

Narrow scope of the existing literature on activist planning. There are still types of activist planners whose stories have not been told. In a recent article (Sager 2018), I tried to expand the field of activist planning by including spatial planning by members of intentional communities. These are activist communities that people join by intention, not because they belong to a particular ethnic group, because of tradition or because of cultural pressure. Note that some direct action of the intentional community must connect to its spatial planning in order to constitute an activist planning case. A faith-based intentional community concentrating all its direct action on spreading its religious message would not qualify.

Intentional communities are home to some of the most dedicated activists. They do not only leave their mainstream residential areas for a short while to take part in a demonstration or some other direct action. They take their opposition to the commercialized market society further by organizing alternative communities where they can practice their deviating lifestyle. Intentional communities are interesting also because they link to the self-organization theme in planning theory. It would be an unwarranted narrowing of the activist planning field to leave out the planning experiences of intentional-community activists trying to live as they preach. For example, the planning carried out by activists in ecovillages has so far not been analyzed and documented.

Another omission is the planning activism of socially engaged artists decorating public space. Some of them install artwork in new or existing neighbourhoods with the explicit intention to affect the behaviour of people using the place. In their role as activist planners, such artists aim to make better communities which strengthen people's feeling of belonging. The artists are activists when their paintings, sculptures, or other installations are put in place as part of a process that is not controlled by the owner of the place (Loftus 2009, O'Kelly 2009). They are planners when aiming to build relational capacity in the community and addressing spatial co-existence and the qualities of the place, as already suggested in the preceding quote from Healey (1997). A case in point is the Swedish artist and curator Kerstin Bergendal, living in Copenhagen. She has made several counter-plans for urban commons, replacing official master plans for the areas. See the chapter on Trekroner Art Plan in Roskilde, Denmark, in O'Neill and Doherty (2011). Bergendal wanted to allow artistic interventions within a prescribed environment that simultaneously critiqued the planning process and gave local residents a chance to contribute to their built surroundings.

Emphasis on spectacular and heroic radical planning cases? Typical cases of radical planning are shack dwellers' movements campaigning against evictions and for public housing and poor people's right to the city (Pithouse 2009), and the work of organizations such as Reclaim the Streets, The Transition Network, and Right to the City. Some of them contain an element of insurgency. Reasonably well-functioning democracies should put more emphasis on the critical-alternative initiatives of Table 1 (Sager 2016:1272–73). Such planning-based protests against particular policies are part of the normal democratic dealings in liberal societies with room for citizen initiatives. Critical-alternative initiatives are part of the discussion in the public sphere about how to make democratic governance produce better results (Long 2013). There will always be agonism over the best means to achieve social goals when developing a city centre (Nyseth 2011) or planning for integration of immigrants with foreign cultural backgrounds (Shakir 2008), for example.

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Activist Communicative Planning?

I introduce the idea of 'activist communicative planning' to suggest that there are non-partisan modes of activist planning in addition to the partisan modes displayed in Table 1. Moreover, it is of interest to explore the possibility of an activist version of communicative planning, arguably the most discussed kind of planning since the 1980s.

It is not self-evident that the term 'activist communicative planning' makes good sense. Communicative planning implies a striving for dialogue, and in the theory of communicative action developed by Jürgen Habermas – which inspired most communicative planning theorists – dialogue is narrowly defined. Utterances should be comprehensible, factually true, sincere, and appropriate within the normative context at hand. Participants in dialogue should be committed to reaching mutual understanding, and nothing should coerce them except the quality of arguments (Sager 2013:4–7). This is too much to ask of people in conflicts where the stakes are high. To make activist communicative planning an interesting category for describing planning practice, dialogue must be less of an ideal type concept (Bächtiger et al. 2010).

It is more probable that modified forms of Habermasian dialogue can be observed in processes with a relatively low level of conflict – that is, more likely in cases of critical-alternative initiatives than in radical planning. However, the full potential of activist communicative planning does not become clear unless an extra row is added at the bottom of Table 1. The cells on this new row should contain planning initiatives in which the activists are committed to a relational cause. This means that the activist planner does not take a partisan position, but aims at improving the relationship between contending parties in the planning process. The planner performs activist mediation in the spirit of Lawrence Susskind, as described by Forester (1994).

Activist mediators must take into consideration that disinterested neutrality reproduces existing inequalities of power. Mediators ignoring obvious power imbalances are not being politically neutral. Active, non-partisan mediation gives the planner some leeway to strengthen weak parties through information, training and agenda-setting procedures (Sager 2016:1274). The idea is that, for example, skill-building training can be given to parties who really need it, as long as the offer is made to all parties, even powerful groups who will not benefit from it.

Gallent (2014) reports on the work of the independent support group *Action with Communities in Rural Kent* (England) trying to avoid confrontation between borough councils and community planners at the parish level. Another example is provided by Kohl (2003), examining how NGOs carry out the role as intermediaries between the government and the impoverished majority following enactment of the 1994 Law of Popular Participation. This law brought resources and participatory planning to Bolivia's largely rural municipalities for the first time. Dialogue stands a better chance in planning like this, where the point is not to win a conflict, but to bring the parties together for mutual understanding and search for win-win solutions.

Work in Progress: Collection of Activist Planning Cases

My current work on activist planning takes the classification in Table 1 as its point of departure. For each of the types – community-based activist planning, advocacy planning, radical planning, critical-alternative initiatives, and equity planning – I search the English-language planning literature globally for well-documented cases where planning activism has taken place after 1990. The minimum requirement for inclusion in my archive is that the case is

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comprehensively described in at least one academic journal article or book chapter. For cases meeting this requirement, I supplement the portrayal of activist planning with information from other sources when available, such as conference papers, PhD dissertations, research reports, and internet pages. I have consulted the Web of Science, Google Scholar, and the Journal of Planning Literature, using a number of search terms related to activism, participation, and planning.

At least since the launch of advocacy planning in the mid-1960s, there has been an interest in activist planning, predominantly in Western-type democracies. Nevertheless, only a limited number of cases are described in enough detail to be suited for analysis. A preliminary count suggests that the number of useful cases is unlikely to exceed twenty for any of the activist planning types over the last three decades. My aim is to analyze the cases in ways relating to the current discourse in planning theory by focusing on keywords such as gentrification and relocation, citizen participation, direct democracy, and right to the city.

The comprehensive collection of cases will enable me to analyze each type of activist planning from different angles. For example, I can trace possible links to ideologies: Are there populist ideas behind some of the activism? Is activist planning sometimes triggered by opposition to neoliberal policies (Sager 2016)? Many other perspectives may be of interest: Does identity politics motivate activist planners? Do the cases often result in social innovation? Is the planning conflict sometimes transformed, or do the case histories end with the same antagonism or agonism that prompted the activist planners to get involved in the first place? Green ideas have left their mark on politics, but has the quest for sustainability also spurred activist planning? Does activist planning sometimes follow in the wake of unsuccessful and disappointing collaborative processes? Does informality play a role in initiating the planning controversy or in the solutions proposed by activist planners? Are activist planning initiatives successful?

Last but not least, the case collection documents what activist planning is in practice. My impression at this stage is that activist planning is a nearly global phenomenon that takes on more different forms, and takes place in a greater variety of conditions, than is readily realized by reading the standard works of prominent activist planning theorists – such as Paul Davidoff, John Friedmann, Norman Krumholz, and Leonie Sandercock.

Conclusions

There is a rich and half-century old planning tradition to draw upon when looking for ways to conduct activist planning. Such planning is used both by professional and lay planners, by planners inside and outside government, and for partisan and intermediary purposes alike.

Activism involving lay planners can be of interest to professional planners for several reasons: (1) Planners in public agencies may benefit from cooperation with external allies. Such alliances can more effectively put pressure on private actors who ignore the plight of vulnerable groups or are unduly self-serving when pursuing their own interests at the expense of society.
(2) Public planners may sometimes want to support planners affiliated with civil society organizations in order to create a more diverse city with respect to housing types, lifestyles, and cultural expressions. An understanding of citizens' aims and worries often proves useful.
(3) New ideas about urban place-making can emerge from the activism of planners representing civil society organizations or movements.

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Exploring Critical Constructive Thinking in Planning Studies

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> "Critical constructivists avoid reductionism and the naïve realism that accompanies it"
> Joe L. Kincheloe (2005)

One of the distinctive characteristics of urban planning as a discipline is its responsibility to educate practitioners who have to *'go out there and get things done'*. The world of planning today is seen by scholarly literature as an exciting, but also a challenging, profession in reference to the political economic framework which is dominated by authoritarianism, neoliberalism, informality, crime, fragmentation, depoliticization, and populism (see Filion, 2011; Gunder, 2010; Kunzmann, 2016; Ponzini, 2016; Ruming, 2018; Tasan-Kok & Baeten, 2011; Thornley, 2018; Sager, 2009; Roy, 2015). Although the practitioner's role is prone to high levels of political and economic pressures in this 'dark' impression, recent studies have shown that there is a tendency among planning practitioners to push boundaries (Forester, 2013; Tasan-Kok et al., 2016; Tasan-Kok & Oranje, 2017) and even to become activists (Sager, 2016). Furthermore, work with planning students shows that radical critical approaches in planning education may turn into mere cynicism when they do not offer an analysis of problems or offer tools for alternative and emancipatory ideas (Tunström, 2017). Keeping this viewpoint in mind, and the theme of the 2018 AESOP Congress in Gothenburg, Sweden, which was *'Making Space for Hope'*, I proposed to place 'critical constructive thinking' in planning research under the spotlight as a topic for discussion with PhD students and young scholars during the AESOP PhD workshop, which followed the same theme of 'hope'. It provided an excellent platform to debate for planning researchers on how to remain critical while still being able to provide constructive solutions in a landscape of complex social, economic and political relations and power dynamics. These are, I believe, also fundamental characteristic of planning practitioners and should be highlighted in planning education.

In a very simple way critical constructive thinking refers to searching for answers, alternative solutions, new approaches and methodologies while staying critical, which involves constant reflection and revision in the process of research. In order to explore the idea of critical constructive thinking in research we need to understand the idea of critical constructivism, which opposes positivism and argues that nothing represents an objective, neutral perspective (Kincheloe, 2005). This way of thinking has its foundations in social constructionist studies

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that seek to replace 'fixed and universalistic' approaches with more 'dynamic and particularistic' concepts (Weinberg, 2008). It means that over-generalizations should be avoided while being more reflective to the particular realities. Critical constructive thinking encourages analytical approaches in the research process but has a particular view on the knowledge as it is temporally and culturally situated and socially constructed in a dialogue between culture, institutions, and historical contexts (Kincheloe, 2005). Recognizing 'knowledge' as a social construction, and showing sensitivity to the local context and path-dependency are necessary characteristics of research in planning studies in order to: avoid presumptions, over-generalisations and stereotyping; to understand the complexities of the reality and its challenges; and to think of solutions for those challenges. With this in mind, I will, in this short essay, use the neoliberal political economic ideology and its implications on spatial governance, especially considering the actor relations, as a case to briefly illustrate how 'radical critical thinking' and 'critical constructive thinking' may frame the challenges of spatial governance differently, and how new avenues of research can be explored by deploying critical constructive approaches. Neoliberalism is the political economic ideology that marks the characteristics of state-regulated capitalism. I use neoliberalism here to refer to the market-oriented approach to urban development.

Planning practitioners make political choices to safeguard public interest, take proactive roles or even become activists within the machine of bureaucracy, which is in contrast to the elitist, self-centred view of modernist planners, recognizing the importance of collaboration, co-production and negotiation with public- and private-sector actors and social groups (Tasan-Kok et al., 2016; Tasan-Kok & Oranje, 2017). However, these progressive actions tend to mute the planners' individual stories of endeavor and hope, and mask the role these individuals have played in hard-fought victories by radically critical scholarly literature. The good news is that there is a new generation of planning studies which contains new approaches, formulations and methodologies which do not only invite us to formulate the challenges and problems based on research and data, but also to change our ways of conceptualizing, problematizing and operationalizing. Planning, from this uplifting perspective, can be defined as the 'organisation of hope' (Campbell, Tait, & Watkins, 2014). Although it sounds promising, this perception of planning requires the exploration of new approaches to deal with the current challenges planning practice faces today. Moreover, these new approaches should also reflect to the planning education and encourage critical constructive thinking in the curriculum.

With this perspective in mind, if we briefly look into how the 'stereotypes and characterizations' in spatial governance are formulated, we can see a polarized view in planning studies. On the one hand existing power relations are put under the spotlight and criticized for protecting market-centric state agendas, and for undermining or even blocking the possibilities of counter-hegemonic developments (Roy, 2015). In this approach simplified characterizations are deployed to present political power as a zero-sum game, leaving little room to comprehend the complex public and private sector profiles, instruments and relations that exists in the city (Raco, 2013). On the other hand, recognizing that the characterizations and stereotypes are based on dominant traditions in public policy (Campbell & Fainstein, 2012), 'sole criticism' is argued to be counterproductive as it tends to ignore the progress made in practice and misses opportunities for finding constructive solutions that can lead to social innovations and be taught as 'transformative practices' in planning schools (Albrechts, 2017). Contemporary planning studies contain new approaches such as activism, social action or co-production that link these polarized views under the umbrella of critical constructive thinking. Constructive thinking, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is about having, or intended to have, a useful or beneficial purpose and if advice, criticism, or actions are constructive, they are useful and intended to help or improve something. Critical constructivist thinking asserts that understanding the

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positioning of the researcher is essential to the 'production of rigorous and textured knowledge' (Kincheloe, 2005).

From this perspective it is fundamental to develop a 'dynamic appreciation of the way power works' at both macro and micro levels to shape our understandings (ibid., p. 119). With the neoliberal political economic ideology and its implications on spatial governance in mind, this requires: understanding the complex layers of multi-level urban governance; understanding the diversity of actors and "view of diverse actors" in diverse levels of governance; and preventing over-generalizations and stereotypes by making detailed studies on the complex web of networks and actor profiles and the knowledge they co-produce together. If we take the studies that relate the planning and property industry as an example, we can see one-dimensional views of property markets in solely critical analysis, which assumes an inevitability about the negative nature of urban development outcomes, while more critical constructive studies suggest that planning researchers and practitioners should develop a much more sophisticated understanding of the pressures and priorities of developers and their investors (Campbell et al., 2014). In other words, stereotypes or negative framings on property markets and market actors may overshadow the reality, which requires more detailed research and empirical knowledge to understand the complexity and diversity within the market. Another example is the post-political debates which debunk the 'consensus approach', which is grounded in Habermasian communication theory for circumventing disagreement and for excluding and marginalizing contestation and conflict, which leads to exclusionary practices (Bengs, 2005; Fainstein, 2000; Flyvbjerg & Richardson, 2002; Harris, 2002; Purcell, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2005). However, consensus is not a pre-defined and static outcome but a dynamic and sensitive process that planners could facilitate through accommodative roles that address disagreement by taking an adaptive, proactive and more human stance (Ozdemir & Tasan-Kok, 2019). These kinds of examples are on the rise in planning studies, which are dissatisfied with sole criticism and seek ways to step aside from 'standard (critical) analysis' in order to see the overlooked choices and missed questions, and misperceptions (Campbell et al., 2014). It requires, however, new empirical and analytical research to consider the process of planning in which some lessons can be produced to limit the negative impacts of rapid development on urban built environments and communities (Raco et al., 2018). A good example of this is the way 'slow planning' is explored by Raco et al. (2018), which studies regulatory complexities of the institutionalisation of a development-led, viability-based planning system based on planning gain negotiations and principles and shows how it has slowed decision-making time frames. This study shows that the slowing down has actually enabled more powerful interests to negotiate outcomes that are more favourable over the longer-term, and opened up opportunities for adaptable and well-resourced development interests to engage in market capture (ibid., p. 9). Such insights illustrate the antagonisms inherent in studies that focus on power relations in market-led urban development approaches, which prevents thinking outside the box and expanding on alternatives and solutions.

Planning education prepares practitioners for the reality by equipping them with theoretical and practical toolboxes to be able to comprehend the wider political-economic context in which spatial activities take place, and to be able to think outside the box. Planning education, due to the nature of the profession, also has to provide solutions and answers to the challenges of neoliberal urban development to prepare future planning practitioners by theoretically and practically equipping students to think critically and search for alternative solutions. To do that, I believe, planning educators have to follow critical constructive approaches to provide a platform for learning certain skills, developing ways of thinking or toolsets while theorizing on the fundamentals of the scientific discipline of urban planning. Some new studies such as Campbell et al. (2014), which 'speculates on' alternative results of events that might have been different and therefore could be different in the future in the face of neoliberal policy agendas;

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or Raco et al. (2018), which analyses a situation (of slow and complex planning arrangements) and turns it around to discuss new opportunities, shed light on what can be done by exploring new critical constructive approaches, deploying new research methods and using new interdisciplinary linkages. Considering the challenges of neoliberal spatial governance today, planning studies urgently need new approaches to allow deeper analysis, review overlooked choices, and provide critical constructive thinking based on new, analytical and empirical research, which should not leave any room for bold and stereotyped argumentations.

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