

## Rationality and Power

*Bent Flyvbjerg*

In Scott Cambell and Susan S. Fainstein, eds., *Readings in Planning Theory*, second edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, pp. 318-329. Originally from Bent Flyvbjerg, *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*. University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 225-236.

Democratic contrivances are quarantine measures against that ancient plague, the lust for power: as such, they are very necessary and very boring. *Friedrich Nietzsche*

### Aalborg as Metaphor

The Aalborg Project may be interpreted as a metaphor of modern politics, modern administration and planning, and of modernity itself. The basic idea of the project was comprehensive, coherent, and innovative, and it was based on rational and democratic argument. During implementation, however, when idea met reality, the play of Machiavellian princes, Nietzschean will to power, and Foucauldian rationality-as-rationalization resulted in the fragmentation of the project. It disintegrated into a large number of disjointed subprojects, many of which had unintended, unanticipated, and undemocratic consequences. The grand, unifying, and prize-winning policy and plan degenerated into [a] string of petty incidents. . . . Planners, administrators, and politicians thought that if they believed in their project hard enough, rationality would emerge victorious; they were wrong. The Aalborg Project, designed to substantially restructure and democratically improve the downtown environment, was transformed by power and *Realrationalität* into environmental degradation and social distortion. Institutions that were supposed to represent what they themselves call the "public interest" were revealed to be deeply embedded in the hidden exercise of power and the protection of special interests. This is the story of modernity and democracy in practice, a story repeated all too often for comfort for a democrat. The problems with the Aalborg Project do not derive from Aalborg being especially plagued by corrupt policies or incompetent planning and administration.

From Bent Flyvbjerg, *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*, trans. Steven Sampson, pp. 225-36, 272-5. © 1998 by The University of Chicago.

# Rationality And Power Democracy In Practice

**John Sugden, Alan Tomlinson**



## **Rationality And Power Democracy In Practice:**

**Rationality and Power** Bent Flyvbjerg, 1998-02-28 In the Enlightenment tradition rationality is considered well defined. However, the author of this study argues that rationality is context dependent and that the crucial context is determined by decision makers' political power. He uses a real world Danish project to illustrate this theory. Rationality and Power Bent Flyvbjerg, 1998-02-28 It's like the story of Little Town: an influential actor says in *Rationality and Power* when choosing a metaphor to describe how he manipulated rationality to gain power. The bell ringer has to set the church clock. So he calls the telephone exchange and asks what time it is, and the telephone operator looks out the window towards the church clock and says 'It's five o'clock.' Good, says the bell ringer, then my clock is correct. In the Enlightenment tradition, rationality is considered well defined, independent of context: we know what rationality is, and its meaning is constant across time and space. Bent Flyvbjerg shows that rationality is context dependent and that the crucial context is determined by decision makers' power. Power blurs the dividing line between rationality and rationalization. The result is a rationality that is often as imaginary as the time in Little Town, yet with very real social and environmental consequences. Flyvbjerg takes us behind the scenes to uncover the real politics and real rationality of policy making, administration and planning in an internationally acclaimed project for environmental improvement: auto traffic reduction, land use and urban renewal. The action takes place in the Danish city of Aalborg, but it could be anywhere. Aalborg is to Flyvbjerg what Florence was to Machiavelli: a laboratory for understanding power and what it means for our more general concerns of social and political organization. Policy making, administration and planning are examined in ways that allow a rare in-depth understanding. The reader is a firsthand witness to the classic endless drama that defines what democracy and modernity are, and what they can be. The result is a fascinating narrative that is both concrete and general, current and timeless. Drawing on the ideas of Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Foucault and Habermas, Flyvbjerg reads the Aalborg case as a metaphor of modernity and of modern politics, administration and planning. Flyvbjerg uncovers the interplay of power and rationality that distorts policy deliberation. He demonstrates that modern rationality is but an ideal when confronted with the real rationalities involved in decision making by central actors in government, economy and civil society. Flyvbjerg then elaborates on how this problem can be dealt with so that more fruitful deliberation and action can occur. If the new millennium marks a recurrence of the real, Flyvbjerg's *Rationality and Power* epitomizes this development, setting new standards for social and political inquiry. Richly informed, powerfully argued and clearly written, this is a book that no one trying to understand policy making, administration and planning can afford to overlook. Flyvbjerg employs a wide-ranging intellect, an enthusiastic and persuasive voice, academic rigor and great discipline to distill years of research into an outstanding and accessible 250-page civics lesson. It begs for a readership outside academic and professional circles. *Rationality and Power*'s value is undeniable as a handbook and forensic tool for anyone seeking a better understanding of, and access to, the democratic process. *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*. It makes an extremely

strong and to the reviewer's mind incontrovertible argument for placing the analysis of planning within the context of power relations. As a result, it will also make a significant mark on the development of planning theory. *Geographical Journal* A book that is to be recommended doubly first to all those engaged in planning and implementation in a democratic context and also to all those interested in empirical power research. *Rationality and Power* is rewarding even enthralling reading, a seminal contribution to its field. *European Societies* This book is a must for anyone interested in how planning works, a reality shock, excellent and illuminating. *International Planning Studies* ***Rationality and Power***, 1998 *Values, Rationality, and Power: Developing Organizational Wisdom* Brad C. Anderson, 2019-10-21 This book presents an analysis of organizational wisdom via an embedded single case study of a group's attempt to develop and spread a medical innovation within a Canadian healthcare authority. By offering a unique insight into how values, rationality and power interact in a real social setting, the book explores how they create positive change. ***Elgar Introduction to Organizational Discourse Analysis*** Marco Berti, 2017-01-27 Our knowledge and understanding of organizations is both enabled and constrained by invisible relationships of power that are embedded in the ways in which we act and speak. The notion of discourse has been used by many authors to describe and study these phenomena, and this volume offers a succinct but comprehensive introduction to the vast field of critical organizational discourse analysis. Targeted at graduate and doctoral students and at non-specialist academics who need to familiarize with the academic debate on the subject, the book harnesses the power of metaphors to describe the many faces of discourse. *Elgar Encyclopedia in Urban and Regional Planning and Design* Kristof Van Assche, Raoul Beunen, Martijn Duineveld, 2023-12-11 This ground-breaking Encyclopedia provides a nuanced overview of the key concepts of urban and regional planning and design. Embracing a broad understanding of planning and design within and beyond the professions, it examines what planners and designers can do in and for a community. ***The Democratic Plan: Analysis and Diagnosis*** Alan March, 2016-03-16 Despite ongoing technical and professional advances, urban and regional planning is often far less effective than we might hope. Conflicting approaches and variable governmental settings have undermined planning's legitimacy and allowed its goals to be eroded and co-opted in the face of mounting challenges. Deeper organising principles for self-understanding, action and productive critique are lacking. This book takes steps toward resolving these problems by providing a clear theoretical position to practically examine urban planning systems within democratic governance settings, the basis of planning's legitimacy and action. Joining practical planning with political science perspectives and the work of critical theorists such as Jürgen Habermas, it directly examines urban planning as a process of governance. The dilemmas inherent to democracy are used as key organising principles and challenges for planning. Collective knowledge development and steering processes are examined as the core purposes of urban planning. Communicative planning's grounding in the work of Habermas is revisited to develop practical ways of examining overall planning systems. This theoretical approach can be adapted to a range of planning systems and settings beyond those

examined in the book such as corporate or political realms It is one of only a few analyses that bring together theoretical understandings and grounded and practical analyses of an Australian planning system Conceptual and highly practical explanations of how and why the Victorian system does and doesn't work are revealed The book demonstrates how specific placed based understandings and meaningful comparison between planning systems can be made using critical theory to suggest positive change

**Real Social Science** Bent Flyvbjerg, Todd Landman, Sanford Schram, 2012-04-19 A new hands on approach to social inquiry for social scientists who wish to make a difference to policy and practice

**Key Concepts and Theory in Social Work** David Hodgson, Lynelle Watts, 2017-06-09 Social work is a discipline committed to social justice and human rights and to improving the well being of individuals families communities and societies But the world is changing with environmental disasters an increase in violent conflict and the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis impacting negatively on human and ecological well being Social workers are often working at the forefront of these and other challenging situations and they must apply knowledge and skills to their practice in a thoughtful and ethical way What kind of knowledge and skills will social workers need to succeed in this intellectually and emotionally demanding job Broad ranging in scope and depth this highly readable text introduces readers to the key concepts in social work such as empathy reflective practice and notions of risk and provides both a focus on the theory and research literature that informs each one and an examination of how each will aid practitioners in their day to day work With the help of engaging practice examples that contextualize the topics under discussion the book also draws on ideas and literature from other disciplines including philosophy sociology and psychology in order to promote the open mindedness and depth of understanding required for practice with people from all walks of life An accessible text that brings all of the major social work concepts together in one place Key Concepts and Theory in Social Work is an essential book for students and practitioners alike

**A Responsive Rhetorical Art** Elenore Long, 2018-10-24 A Responsive Rhetorical Art explores the risk ridden realm of wise if always also fallible rhetorical action the productive knowledge building required to compose and to leverage texts broadly construed for the purposes of public life marked by shrinking public resources cultural conflict and deferred hope Here composition and literacy learning hold an important and distinctive cultural promise the capacity to invent with other people new ways forward in light of their own interests and values and in the face of obstacles that could not have otherwise been predicted Distributed across publicly situated strangers including citizen educators this work engages a persistent challenge of early rhetorical uptake in public life that what might become public and shared is often tacit and contested The book's approach combines attention to local cases with a transnational student organization the Nipmuck Chaubunagungamaug and the South Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix with a revisable guide for taking up wise action and methods for uncovering elusive institutional logics

**Key Thinkers on Cities** Regan Koch, Alan Latham, 2017-05-22 Key Thinkers on Cities provides an engaging introduction to the dynamic intellectual field of urban studies It profiles the work of 40 innovative thinkers who

represent the broad reach of contemporary urban scholarship and whose ideas have shaped the way cities around the world are understood researched debated and acted upon Providing a synoptic overview that spans a wide range of academic and professional disciplines theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches the entry for each key thinker comprises A succinct introduction and overview Intellectual biography and research focus An explication of key ideas Contributions to urban studies The book offers a fresh look at well known thinkers who have been foundational to urban scholarship including Jane Jacobs Henri Lefebvre Manuel Castells and David Harvey It also incorporates those who have helped to bring a concern for cities to more widespread audiences such as Jan Gehl Mike Davis and Enrique Pe alosa Notably the book also includes a range of thinkers who have more recently begun to shape the study of cities through engagements with art architecture computer modelling ethnography public health post colonial theory and more With an introduction that provides a mapping of the current transdisciplinary field and individual entries by those currently involved in cutting edge urban research in the Global North and South this book promises to be an essential text for anyone interested in the study of cities and urban life It will be of use to those in the fields of anthropology economics geography sociology and urban planning      Consensus Planning: The Relevance of Communicative Planning Theory in Duth Infrastructure Development Johan Woltjer,2017-11-22 This title was published in 2000 This text offers a standpoint on communicative participatory planning called consensus planning The discussion takes place in the Netherlands where consensus based decision making is part of the national heritage The book explores recent Dutch infrastructure development experiences and concludes that communicative planning theory does not offer uniform relevance for the challenges that planning practitioners face Building on these experiences it proposes the concept of consensus planning as valuable in a complementary normalized and contingent way Consensus planning in other words has diverse practical appearances and sometimes may not exist or be desirable      Power Games John Sugden,Alan Tomlinson,2013-10-11 Critical and radical perspectives have been central to the emergence of the sociology of sport as a discipline in its own right This ground breaking new book is the first to offer a comprehensive theory and method for a critical sociology of sport It argues that class political economy hegemony and other concepts central to the radical tradition are essential for framing understanding and changing social and political relations within sport and between sport and society The book draws upon the disciplines of politics sociology history and philosophy to provide a critical analysis of power relations throughout the world of sport while offering important new case studies from such diverse sporting contexts as the Olympics world football boxing cricket tennis and windsurfing In the process it addresses key topics such as nations and nationalism globalisation race gender political economy Power Games can be used as a complete introduction to the study of sport and society And will be essential reading for any serious student of sport At the same time it is a provocative book that by argument and example challenges those who research and write about sport to make their work relevant to social and political reform      *New Labour and Planning* Phil Allmendinger,2011-01-17 Following the

Thatcher and Major administrations there was an apparent renaissance of planning under New Labour After a slow start in which Labour's view of planning owed more to a neo liberal rolled back state model reminiscent of the New Right the Government began to appreciate that many of its wider objectives including economic development climate change democratic renewal social justice and housing affordability intersected with and were critically dependent upon the planning system A wide range of initiatives management processes governance vehicles and policy documents emanated from Government Planning like other areas of the public sector was to be reformed and modernised as well as given a prime role in tackling national high profile priorities such as increasing housing supply and improving economic competitiveness Drawing upon an institutionalist framework the book also seeks to understand how and in what circumstances change emerges either in an evolutionary or punctuated way It will for the first time chart and explore the changing nature of development and planning over the Labour era whilst also stepping back and reflecting upon what such changes mean for planning generally and the likely future trajectories of reform and spatial governance

*Advanced Introduction to Planning Theory* Robert A. Beauregard, 2020-04-24 In this original approach to the world of planning theory Robert A Beauregard cuts across the many different ways to think about planning by organizing them around four core tasks knowing engaging prescribing and executing In doing so Beauregard explores how a basic concern with the relationship between knowledge and action has evolved into a complex discussion of democracy inclusion and justice

*Handbook of Decision Making* Paul C. Nutt, David C. Wilson, 2010-05-17 HANDBOOK OF DECISION MAKING This handbook offers a state of the art overview of research and theories on decision making in organizations at the strategic level of analysis Chapters are authored by leading international scholars with some illustrative case vignettes from practitioners Each contributor was selected for his/her special knowledge of the field The Handbook addresses key questions confronting the decision making research of the past and the present offers critiques and suggests future research directions Topics covered emphasize the classic decision theory perspectives while also incorporating recent insights from the fields of strategic choice risk uncertainty scenario planning and complexity theory with a broad social science perspective on the disciplinary roots of decision theory in economics politics and social theory This is a landmark reference volume for the field offering scholars and practitioners Comprehensive but accessible coverage of classic and recent developments Chapters by established international experts Case analyses illustrating practical consequences of theories Guide to new research directions and theory

**Cities to be Tamed?**

**Spatial Investigations across the Urban South** Beatrice De Carli, Francesco Chiodelli, Maddalena Falletti, 2014-07-08 Across the global South the rapid urbanisation and uneven development that have occurred over the past few decades have brought to the surface a tight connection between social conflicts and urban space Indeed the physical conformation of urban space is one of the primary factors that trigger social tensions with repercussions at the metropolitan regional and national scales Such tensions are related to the conditions of social and spatial inequality which characterise many urban areas across

the South they can also be connected to contingent political and institutional orders which find in the materiality of space both the means and the cause of conflicts among different groups amidst diverging territorial demands and the overlapping of competing struggles for power At the same time new possibilities arise in the concreteness of space including innovative forms of local activism adapting strategies of self organisation and unconventional relations between the formal and the informal city On acknowledging the multifaceted nature of the urban space there arises a question which constitutes the core problem addressed by the book are cities to be tamed This volume gathers a series of cross disciplinary contributions on these topics spanning from architecture and urban design to planning social theory and geography These contributions revolve around two core themes The first concerns the agency of design in contexts of informality and centres on the missing unexpected pursued exchange between projects and realities The second concerns the complex relationship between spatial planning politics and conflicts in contexts characterised by marked ethnic political and social tensions Contributors Alessandro Balducci Scott A Bollens Jeffrey Chan Kok Hui Francesco Chiodelli Laure Criqui Viviana d Auria Beatrice De Carli Bruno De Meulder Annalies De Nijs Maddalena Falletti Nabeel Hamdi Joud M I Khasawneh Hamed Khosravi Olivier Legrand Colin Marx Carmen Mendoza Arroyo Lina Scavuzzo Erez Tzfadia Ignacio Castillo Ulloa Faith Wong and Oren Yiftachel

*Handbook on Planning and Complexity* Gert de Roo, Claudia Yamu, Christian Zuidema, 2020-06-26 This Handbook shows the enormous impetus given to the scientific debate by linking planning as a science of purposeful interventions and complexity as a science of spontaneous change and non linear development Emphasising the importance of merging planning and complexity this comprehensive Handbook also clarifies key concepts and theories presents examples on planning and complexity and proposes new ideas and methods which emerge from synthesising the discipline of spatial planning with complexity sciences

**The SAGE Handbook of Power** Stewart R Clegg, Mark Haugaard, 2009-02-27 Power is arguably one of the key concepts within the social sciences The SAGE Handbook of Power is the first touchstone for any student or researcher wishing to initiate themselves in the state of the art Internationally acclaimed Stewart R Clegg and Mark Haugaard have joined forces to select a collection of papers written by scholars with global reputations for excellence These papers bridge different conceptual and theoretical positions and draw on many disciplines including politics sociology and cultural studies The sweep and richness of the resulting handbook will help readers contextualise and grow their understanding of this dynamic and important subject area

**Discourse Dynamics in Participatory Planning** Dr Diana MacCallum, 2012-11-28 This book introduces the methodology of critical discourse analysis CDA to the study of participatory planning CDA uses linguistic analysis to elucidate social issues and processes and is particularly suited to institutional practices and how they are changing in response to changing social conditions Illustrated by two case studies from Australia it examines the talk between the various participants in a formal stakeholder committee context over five years during which time they went through several phases of changing power dynamics conflict and reconciliation The book demonstrates the



value of CDA to this field of research and develops specific techniques and conceptual tools for applying the methodology to the formal talk context of collaborative planning committees It also sheds light on the dynamics of interaction between stakeholders and bureaucracies particularly with respect to inherent communicative barriers power inequalities and the development of new discursive practices

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