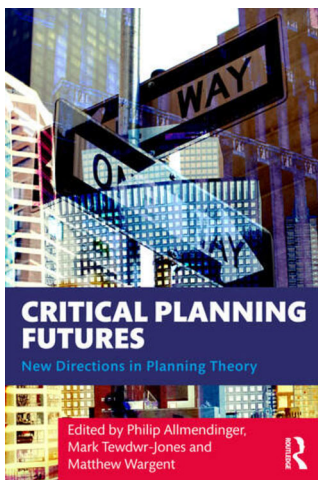


Allmendinger, P.; Tewdwr-Jones, M.; Wargent, M. (eds.) (2025): Critical Planning Futures. New Directions in Planning Theory


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The edited volume “Critical Planning Futures. New Directions in Planning Theory” is a follow-up to the book “Planning Futures: New Directions for Planning Theory” (Allmendinger/Tewdwr-Jones 2002), put out almost a quarter of a century ago by two of the three editors of the publication at hand: Philip Allmendinger and Mark Tewdwr-Jones. The earlier book was published sometime after the first major critiques of the then-dominant communicative (or collaborative) planning theory, with notable criticism coming

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from the editors themselves (Tewdwr-Jones/Allmendinger 1998). So, the book focused on blind spots of communicative planning theory, alternative approaches to it and new directions for a basis of planning theory.

Since then, planning thought has diversified greatly, and no single theoretical discourse can be said to hold a paradigmatic position – unless power studies in planning is considered one. In the aftermath of Bent Flyvbjerg’s famous Aalborg study (Flyvbjerg 1998), a host of Foucault-inspired studies of structural and embodied power in planning (digging deeper than power studies in communicative planning theory) have appeared, especially in relation to neoliberalism.

Another planning-theory discourse that emerged in the 2000s is the post- (or de-)colonial planning discourse that revealed aspects of colonial power in planning theory itself, which had previously been viewed as universally valid, or at least had shown no concern with societal contexts other than those it took for granted. Several planning theorists have emerged that have highlighted the contextual limitations of ‘planning theory for the Global North’ that builds on liberal democracy, strong societal institutions and legislation, and clearcut property rights. In the postcolonial Global South we may find drastically different societal conditions, such as informal settlement development alongside the official planning system inherited from colonial rule; land conflicts where the settlers’ land property system fails to acknowledge the indigenous people’s different relationship to land; public governance taking the form of dictatorship or coexisting tribal governments; and major refugee settlement challenges.

While a variety of new directions in planning theory are addressed by its several contributors, the book “Critical Planning Futures. New Directions in Planning Theory”

gives postcolonial critiques of planning theory a heightened role. The first four chapters, following the editors' introduction, take this approach. Two of them elaborate on critiques of planning theory for the Global North on a more general level, questioning the lack of the critical indigenous perspective (*Janice Barry*) and problematizing the idea of 'good life' (*Ihnji Jon*) in planning. The other two take lessons from case studies in Kathmandu (*Pranita Shrestha*), and Delhi and Dhaka (*Nithya Rajan* and *Efadul Huq*). The tenth chapter too, by *Nancy Odendaal*, takes a postcolonial approach in critically examining hegemonic tendencies in smart urbanism and planning discourses.

The other contributions in the book address a variety of planning-theory discourses or gaps in planning theory. *Lieven Ameel* discusses the storytelling approach to planning theory, dating back to James A. Throgmorton's famous book "Planning as persuasive storytelling" (Throgmorton 1996). Drawing on narrative and literary theory, Lieven Ameel's approach complements planning researchers' less elaborate use of storytelling in planning. While his distinction between storytelling *for*, *in* and *of* planning adds clarity to analysis, there is room for more thorough analytical perspectives on planning as storytelling, where narrative and literary theory can provide useful conceptualizations, if not practice-oriented tools, for developing the storytelling capacity of planning further.

One area where storytelling is utilized as a methodological tool is scenario planning. Incorporating scenario planning into strategic spatial planning has been of increasing interest among researchers in the field. Strategic spatial planning was one of the major planning-theory discourses that gained momentum in the 2000s. However, none of the chapters in the book address it. This is a little curious, especially as regards *Miriam Jensen*, *Daniel Galland* and *John Harrison's* chapter which seeks to argue that the dimension of time has been missing from spatially oriented planning theory. Their criticism takes a rather old-fashioned perspective by focusing on the blueprint-type approach to spatial planning, disregarding that work on strategic spatial planning has indeed sought to overcome the spatial fixity of traditional and statutory planning, and has taken time and future uncertainties as its central concern.

In her chapter, *Lucie Laurian* calls for planning to address far more distant futures, from 100 to 1000 years, than what is commonplace in contemporary planning where time horizons are generally from 5 to 20 years. She discusses this especially as an educational challenge and expresses astonishment at her students' difficulties in developing far-reaching future imaginaries. In the present times this is understandable, as imagining the world even after the next five years has become difficult, with global crises closely following one another and disruptive technologies (especially AI)

altering our lives and livelihoods in an unprecedented manner.

Angelique Chettiparamb's chapter insightfully traces the origins of complexity theory in systems thinking, dating back to Ludwig von Bertalanffy's seminal article "General system theory: A new approach to unity of science" (von Bertalanffy 1951). As the newest frontier in systems thinking, it informs planning research, in Angelique Chettiparamb's view, to take a second-order approach to planning as a self-referential complex system, to steer it towards societal goals in the public interest, acknowledging the contingencies and uncertainties inherent in this effort. To me, this does not sound very much different from the meta-planning idea that was advocated by Andreas Faludi over fifty years ago in his "Planning theory" (Faludi 1973) – although there is greater appreciation of the complexity of the system to be modelled and steered, alongside increased computing capacities and ample data to trace and monitor it. A crucial question is whether this meta-level steering is itself to be considered part of the self-referential system being steered – and, if so, how should the self-referentiality of this steering be addressed?

Communicative planning thought is not sidelined in the book, as the two remaining chapters address participatory planning. *Raúl Díaz-Padilla* calls for an ethics of care and emotional and symbolic involvement in participatory planning, while *Yasminah Beebeejaun* criticizes the "cruel optimism" of participatory ideals left unfulfilled in actual planning practices, and the "epistemic injustice" of these practices when the participants find their knowledge claims marginalized.

While not intended to provide a complete picture of the variegation of planning-theory discourses, the book "Critical Planning Futures. New Directions in Planning Theory" serves to demonstrate it. However, in their epilogue, the editors maintain that the alternative theories that have emerged during the last 20 to 30 years have not adequately supplanted communicative planning theory as a body of knowledge. At the same time, they embrace the present diversity of planning-theory ideas, questioning the appropriateness of seeking for a solid foundation of planning theory. Rather, they call for fluidity of planning theories to accommodate the geographically, culturally and legal-administratively variable conditions of planning. Still, the editors claim that planning-theoretical thought has not managed to transition from its previous state to a new one and argue that "there is work to do to provide an intellectually respectable body of knowledge to sustain a discipline worthy of the name" (p. 230). These are fair ponderings for the next quarter of a century of planning theory as a heterogeneous field of inquiry.

Full reference of reviewed title

Allmendinger, P.; Tewdwr-Jones, M.; Wargent, M. (eds.) (2025): *Critical Planning Futures. New Directions in Planning Theory*. New York. 264 pages, 13 b/w illustrations.

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