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Published in:
International Planning Studies

DOI (link to publication from Publisher):
[10.1080/13563475.2016.1196579](https://doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2016.1196579)

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Publication date:
2017

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript, peer reviewed version

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Lissandrello, E., Hrelja, R., Tennøy, A., & Richardson, T. (2017). Three Performativities of Innovation in Public Transport Planning. *International Planning Studies*, 22(2), 99-113.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2016.1196579>

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The final publication is available in *International Planning Studies*. 2017., 22 (02), 99-113. [10.1080/13563475.2016.1196579](https://doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2016.1196579).

Three *Performativities* of Innovation in Public Transport Planning

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Word count: 8983

ABSTRACT

The article scrutinises planners' stories of innovation in contemporary public transport planning in three Scandinavian contexts (Denmark, Sweden and Norway). This analysis is accomplished by adapting Judith Butler's post-structural feminist critical theory on performativity to the planning context. This theoretical framework is used to illuminate how planning is dynamically renewed, revised and consolidated over time by the individual routine actions of planners. From this perspective, the research identifies a set of repetitive acts - as recognising specific windows of opportunity, anticipate and respond to political signals and create arguments and means of communication and persuasion - that constitute the contemporary transformation of professional practice in relation to planning politics. This analytics of performativity reveals how professional planning practices engage with transformative capacities of reshaping, re-enacting and re-experiencing guidance for the future within a set of meanings and forms of legitimation. These findings are intended to contribute to present and future planning practice and education in Scandinavian countries and elsewhere.

Key words:

Planning professionals; Judith Butler; change; power

Introduction

Planning is performed by a plurality of actors, discourses and practice stories as well as by professional practices (Forester, 1993; Innes, 1995; Sandercock, 2003; Versteeg and Hajer, 2010). In this study, we focus on this last dimension to explore how, through their practice, professional planners aspire to and engage with the transformative capacities of reshaping, re-enacting and re-experiencing guidance for the future within a set of meanings and forms of legitimation, or how they shape the politics of planning practice.

This issue is particularly important and controversial at a time when the authority of the public planner is being challenged and transformed by institutional reforms and new governance dynamics (e.g. Clifford, 2007). Critical academic debates have long questioned professionalism in planning. These debates are given renewed emphasis by the current transformation of professional planning practice that is emerging in relation to discussions of state restructuring, identity and values in advanced liberal democracies (Campbell, Marshall, 2005; Campbell, 2010; Inch, 2012; Grange, 2013; 2014). The academic debate over the

decreasing authority of planners and their (in)ability to influence policy making, as well as their ambiguous conditions in high modernity, has been accompanied by calls for the incorporation of a 'new perception of the political into planning' (Grange, 2013: 225). This has been a recurring theme in planning theory since the 1950s (e.g. Meyerson and Banfield, 1955) with regard to how we can or ought to think of planning as a technical or political activity or as a combination of the two. At the end of the 1980s, John Forester urged planners to 'be rational, be political!' (Forester, 1989: 25). Feminist planning theorists supported this notion (Sandercock, 2007: 134). More recently, scholars have argued that planners are increasingly forced to adopt (neoliberal) values that do not reflect their own (Sager 2009). Others argue that the "acting space", or agency, of planners is increasingly narrowed, reducing planners to mere administrators of policies (Grange 2013). Still others argue that planners are not passive officials who are submissive to repeated planning reforms but are in fact influential in the way these reforms are realised at the "front line" (Clifford, Tewdwr-Jones 2014), particularly on the wave of the English planning reform of 1998-2010 (Inch, 2012; Grange, 2013). Grange (2013) argues, in line with Flyvbjerg, that planners are not sufficiently conscious of power. Thus, they become "a tool" in politics rather than "engaging" with it (Grange, 2013: 226). Hence, Grange argues, "there seems to be a growing discrepancy between planners' motivation and their actual ability to make a difference" (Grange, 2013: 225). In line with Grange (2013) and Sager (2009), Inch (2010) argues that there is an acceptance of a discrepancy between planners' own values and the values that they are obliged to work towards in practice (Inch, 2010), which place the issue of planning professional practice within the 'renegotiation of professional roles and identities' (Jupp, Inch, 2012: 507) within new forms of governance and politics.

However, most of the work in this direction has explored professionalism in planning in relation to a particular nation-state or local-government policy, thus taking as a departure point the way that governmental and societal structures, ideologies and cultures delimit planning and planners' ability to develop further professionalisation. In discussions of the importance of micro-practices and the lived experiences of planning practitioners, macro-dynamics have become more apparent than planners' actions so that the planner appears to be 'the product' of a system of governance constellations that might strengthen or weaken (or even transform) the role and identity of individual planners. Even when inspired by 'practice stories' (Forester, 1999; 2007), recent academic works seem disconnected from planning history and evolution, and planning academics bring particular 'new perception[s] of the political into planning' when they re-tell stories (Mandelbaum, 1991). This article returns to

professional planning practice to contribute to recent debates on planning professionalism in the literature and in the Scandinavian context in particular. This study argues not only for a critical reconsideration of the role of planners (Albrechts, 1999; Forester, 1989) but also for a reconceptualisation of their actions and routines as constructive in planning politics. Planners construct and reflect situations of practice (Schön, 1987); interpreting them and providing useful lessons for planning are academic tasks. These tasks seem urgent in a time when the planning discipline describes itself by noting that ‘how we describe the field has something to do with how the field finally looks and what we take it to be’ (Butler, 2010: 148).

This article explores an analysis inspired by Judith Butler’s work on performativity (1988; 1990; 2010) of the practice stories of three public transport planners at work in the implementation of three innovative public transport projects in three diverse national contexts (Denmark, Norway, Sweden). This theory is utilised to deconstruct the action of individual planners and serves to re-write three key planners’ stories as indicating a set of repeated acts. The analysis aims to uncover how planning is dynamically renewed, revised and consolidated over time by the individual routine actions of planners. The specific intention of this article is to examine how planning politics is performatively constructed. This perspective does not aim to isolate ‘heroes’, or virtuous or successful planners, as described within the modernist paradigm. On the contrary, planning under an analytic of performativity allows us to identify the dynamics that renew, revise and consolidate planning through the individual actions of planners. The ‘repetitive acts’ investigated here are intended to give substance to planning politics and to provide a reflection on how, understood through an analytic of performativity, planning reveals its transformative character of reshaping, re-enacting and re-experiencing the future within a set of meanings and forms of legitimation. In this analysis, transitions in public transport planning and governance are also revealed. The institutional settings of European public transport have undergone a series of changes (often based on neoliberal logics) in recent decades (van de Velde, 1999) that have made it more difficult to establish well-functioning governance. Some of the institutional changes in Scandinavia include the use of competition, deregulation, and privatisation as well as the establishment of regional authorities with directly elected representation and attempts to establish governance of public transport within urban policies and spatial strategies. These new institutional conditions and dynamics suggest a need to focus on the actions of planners in their role of establishing innovative policy-making and planning practices. Planning as performativity is an analytic that points to the action of individual planners *within* the structural conditions that shape and limit planning actions. This heuristic is particularly relevant in relation to the meaning of

‘innovation’ in planning practice for three diverse planning practitioners¹ operating in three diverse Nordic contexts. The article makes use of conversational in-depth interviews conducted by the authors with three public planners who have navigated the terrain of changing structural conditions that have altered current planning practice. These conversations focused on the planners’ facts, values and strategies involved in their professional practice of planning politics. The article continues with a theoretical discussion of planning professionalism as derived from existing research on the micro dynamics of professional performative qualities and planners’ practice stories. This analysis is linked to Judith Butler’s concept of performativity. An empirical section follows that contains analyses of the three performativities of planning practitioners as a sequence of repetitive acts from which lessons for planning politics are drawn in the conclusion.

Planning and Performativity

Since the 1980s, individual planning practitioners have been the centre of analysis among such scholars as Donald Schön, Howell Baum and Peter Hall, who have examined how planning practitioners think about their work, propose actions and solutions to problems and develop their professional skills (Mandelbaum, 1985). From these skills, we learn to ‘make sense’ of planning as a performed activity (Forester, 1989). The analyses of planners’ practice, involving the procedures, actions and behaviour of planners (Forester, 1989; Sandercock and Forsyth, 1992), have led to diverse perspectives and directions in the last two decades. Stories of individual planners as process managers and storytellers (Mandelbaum, 1991) have been treated as ‘speech acts’ to explore the communicative skills of planners. Planners are arguing for their visions, constructing inclusive processes, negotiating the meaning of key concepts, responding to unexpected events, taking existing rules and prior decisions into account (while seeking to change problematic ones), relying upon their knowledge (while being open to other forms of knowledge and expertise), configuring arguments (in the face of contestable configurations), arguing persuasively in diverse media and forums, and being finely attentive to the *this-ness* of practice (Throgmorton, 2000). Planners are thus the ‘authors’ of texts such as plans, documents, analysis, articles that *emplot* - arrange and shape - the flow of planning actions (Throgmorton, 1992); their texts ‘act’ as

¹ The names of the planner practitioners are anonymised.

tropes that seek to turn a larger implicit story in a preferred direction (Throgmorton, 2003: 129). A planner's action is thus constitutive and not merely persuasive of planning politics. From Charles J. Hoch's (1992; 1994) stories of planning practitioners acting in particularly wicked situations, we also learn about the importance of emotions, self-esteem and how planners' personal stories construct or distort the planning process at particular crucial moments of policy making. The ability to influence the flow of the planning process emerges as depending - in addition to technical, social and communicative skills - on dedication, which, is an important factor for planners to become 'catalysts and initiators' of change (Albrechts, 1999: 601). John Forester's contribution to our understanding of planning also stems from an analysis of what he calls planners' 'performative qualities' (Forester, 1993). Performative qualities refer to what planners do when giving direction to the future, the sort of planning behaviours they perform when involved in the micro-politics of their work: performing the fine grain of 'diplomatic recognition' - taking the other seriously - or 'moral improvisation' - characterised by being responsible to general principles and obligations while also being keenly and practically aware of the significant particulars in the unique situations at hand - or 'indirect strategies' - which aim to enable learning and to simultaneously build relationships through venues such as field trips, informal meetings that complement formal programs and the conducting of rituals, which (successful) planners adopt in dealing with conflict situations. These performative qualities are skills of negotiation and mediation and lie in the planner's ability to engage with the many variables of social, temporal and spatial dimensions. Forester's work has been fundamental for planning theorists and practitioners interested in learning from planners' experiences and from social scientists interested in studying the manifestation of the 'self' in daily speeches, writing and gestures through which planning is performed. From the oral stories of planners, Forester elaborates traits of behaviours that reveal the details of the messy, everyday actions that shape the identity of the professional planner, the 'world which is deeply within planners' (Mandelbaum, 1985: 3). From Forester's profiles of practitioners' and planners' practice stories, we learn about the skills of professionalism in the ways that the planner and the author talk together about these skills in the politics of planning. Starting from speech acts in conversation with planners, signals and directions of the on-going transformation of professional planning practice (Forester, 1992) are uncovered. From the details of oral practice stories, we can do even more than understand planners' skills and planning practice; we can explore how individual planning professionals *reflect on themselves* as carriers of specific actions that shape the possibilities of action and innovation in planning practice.

From these planners' own stories, we can make sense of planning actions and their 'effect' in the reconstruction of their identity in professional practice. These elements are here treated as an issue of performativity.

Elaborating on Victor Turner (1974), an anthropologist who studied the rituals of social drama, the American feminist Judith Butler reinterprets the concept of performativity as maintained by Pierre Bourdieu's work on language and symbolic power (1991) with the idea that 'social action requires a performance which is repeated' (Butler, 1988: 526). In this view, constituting acts from the phenomenological tradition, Butler argues about issues of identity instituted through a 'stylised repetition of acts' through time (Butler, 1988: 519, 520). Her work points to reiterative processes that characterise the performative agency of various institutions. An 'effect' is thus compounded, in her view, through repetition as well as by reiteration, which is the means by which the 'effect' of an act is established anew, time and again (Butler, 2010).

This theatrical heuristic is applied to planning professionals in this study. As shown above, planning scholars' tradition of the practice stories of planners is used to reveal how planners are not only carriers of specific abilities and skills but also are carriers of specific 'acts' (Butler, 1990). On this basis, we argue that planning is performative; in other words, planning is something 'one does'. We want to inspire a way to conceptualise planning from a theoretical position that takes constituting acts as a departure point. Acts are understood here, as within feminist theory, as a 'shared experience and collective action' (Butler, 1988: 525); the personal is expanded to include political structures. This means that there are nuanced and individual ways of doing planning, but the focus for the individual is *that* one does it and that it is done in *accordance* with certain cultural, political and social apparatuses. Therefore, this is not a fully individual matter. As Butler (1988) notes more generally, there is a theatrical temporal relevance in the fact that the act that one performs is an act that existed before one arrived on the scene. A script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but it requires individual actors to be actualised and reproduced as reality (Butler, 1988:526).

Butler's interpretation of performativity in planning seems particularly inspiring here because planning is a verb and a dynamic activity. It is a process that develops over time and is performed in relation to other societal practices but is specific to a range of normalised practices, and it is constituted by individual professional planners using 'ordinary' language and everyday actions that has certain 'effects'. This perspective adds to existing research on

the individual practice stories of planners a consideration of the dynamic of planning politics. Planning as performative points to what can be understood as an iterative activity based on a repetition - and thus a reproduction - of a specific range of normalised practices. This critical perspective allows us to understand planning practice as constructed through the routine actions of planning professionals 'on the move' of planning politics. This lens is adopted to analyse three particular performativities of innovation in public transport planning.

Three Performativities

Conversational interviews were selected as the method for talking with individual planning professionals about their particular planning actions and routines in planning practice when they deal with change and innovation. 'Active listening' by the interviewers to obtain reflective insider perspectives and the recording and analysis of the planners' oral stories also served to gather other kinds of information regarding the institutional and historical context and to conceptualise particular meanings (see, e.g., Pocock et al., 2009). The interviews were sites of conversation and reflection, exploration, criticism and learning about the planners' specific routine actions when staging and shaping their own possibilities of action in the politics of planning during the process. The three oral stories presented here are derived from interviews with planners working within three diverse institutional and political contexts, with diverse roles and with three diverse projects in public transport planning in three diverse Scandinavian countries.

The planner's mediated negotiations in the policy-making of the light rail in Aarhus (Denmark)

Jens Jensen is currently the project leader of the first light rail ever built in Denmark. He became, over two decades, the face of innovation in public transport planning in Denmark: an innovation that, for the first time, came from a Danish provincial city, Aarhus. Jensen currently works in the special secretariat created for this project within the public transport authority in Midtjylland (2007). When we ask about how he became engaged in this project, Jens traces the story from the 1990s, when a 'small group of planners' within Aarhus county believed in better public transport for Aarhus metropolitan development. Jens says that at that time, the 'input' for new ideas came from the Danish national decision to link together two existing rail lines on the urban scale. 'An 'urban tram project' for Aarhus', however, Jensen continues, 'did not mobilise real interest at the ministerial level'.

'Our first local decision in 2000 was to improve the public transportation in Aarhus city and the surrounding area. We decided on a new system of bus lines. We thought that our strategy could be 'to think light railways and to make bus lanes'. Later on, these lanes could be transformed into light rail lines.'

Jensen states that the strategy of mobilisation was first to work with a consultancy company on the technical aspects, taking examples of light rails already realised in other European middle-size cities, especially in Germany and France. Jens organised trips to these cities involving politicians, traffic and urban planners and consultants to mobilise overall interest and discussion on the light rail project. It was a real 'push' to the planning process. Light rail experts from Germany and The Netherlands were also consulted on the possible legal and technical consequences of light rail, such as laws regulating the occupation of soils and the electrification of the light rail combined with the diesel-powered trains already adopted in other contexts, such as in the middle-sized town of Kassel, Germany. Jensen describes a window of opportunity when, in March 2006, the forces for institutional change were all around, and a draft of the national planning report for restructuring local government was published. The process of 'municipal amalgamation' came into effect on 1 January 2007 with the creation of the Midtjylland region and a new public transport authority at the regional level, Midttrafik. The creation of Midttrafik was 'a big step for the project and for me', Jens explains. When we ask why, he answers that the institutionalisation of Midttrafik introduced the possibility that the project would become more than 'an urban project' and even more than just a public transport project. Jensen describes the meaning of this project in view of a new metropolitan configuration. A change in the geographical scale - from urban to metropolitan - was also a change in relation to his individual planning strategy. 'The main strategy I adopted since then has been to cooperate with the surrounding municipalities potentially involved in the light rail project and to make decisions together with them for the light rail' (July 2011). Land use planners in Aarhus municipality were also elaborating the new Master Plan (Aarhus Kommune, 2009) when the work of the environmental assessment (EIA) for the light rail began (Aarhus Kommune, VVM, 2011). Jens describes the Aarhus municipality Master Plan as the first planning document in which the light rail was inserted as an artery for enhancing the accessibility to the surrounding municipalities and new urban residential areas to develop an integrated strategy for metropolitan development. This was the result of a long-term process of dialogue among urban, traffic and public transport planners and politicians in Aarhus municipality in which the light rail was considered an opportunity

to address the challenge of a rapidly growing city and the mobility of its inhabitants. Jens describes the effort for extensive discussions with the municipal environmental and urban planners about the light rail project in relation to new urban developments, future visions of urban green policies, climate change and carbon-neutral cities. When Aarhus signed the Covenant of Mayors with the goal to become CO₂ neutral by the year 2030 (Aarhus Kommune, 2009: 12), the light rail project gained new visibility. This visibility, Jens explains, was also due to the presence of western local politicians within the national committee for infrastructure and traffic at the national governmental level, elected in Midtjylland, when, in 2009, they were in need of a representative project for West Denmark. This decision was a favourable moment for the light rail project to enter the national political agenda and to be considered within the national transportation-financing program in 2009. Jensen describes this moment, with satisfaction, as a real achievement. Both the discussion of urban quality of life and political representation created favourable conditions. When we ask what has actually changed from that moment, Jensen answers that Aarhus' light rail has become, since then, the first large-scale public transportation project with state involvement ever planned outside Copenhagen. Jens says that the only other example in Denmark of public transportation based on cooperation between state and municipality occurred in the 1990s, with the Copenhagen metro. The engagement of the state in this project was very intense, as the state was involved in creating both the construction company and the company that would manage the running of the metro.

'For a long time, local politicians wanted to follow the 'Copenhagen metro model'. I tried to tell them that it was quite unrealistic to expect the same level of state involvement as with the Copenhagen metro model. It never happened for provincial towns around Europe. I tried to provide some input for making a new two-step model. It was important to have state involvement in the construction phase to share risks. For me, it was essential to adjust the expectations of the local politicians further.'

Jensen's two-step model found consensus at the governmental level and gave a new impetus to the work of cooperation among public transport, land use and environmental planners. However, because no rules concerning stops and occupation of the soil for light rails existed in Denmark, Jensen explains that new legislation written at the ministerial level required him to make a new planning effort to navigate in a time of uncertainty. Waiting for 'other

decisions' in the long process of developing state regulations can take a long time, and Jensen explains his efforts to keep the network of actors focused on the project, to talk about the project in the media and with other public transport planners from other municipalities and regions in Denmark and to keep learning, exercising extreme patience and navigating the micro-politics of planning through the minutiae of the everyday work of cooperation.

From Jensen's story, we learn that his repetitive routines of planning politics consist of adjusting to new situations and repetitively seizing political 'windows of opportunities' due to strategic documents and reforms such as the municipal amalgamation, the signature of the Covenant of Mayors in which Aarhus wished to become CO₂-neutral in the near future and political reasoning regarding the need for a 'flag-ship project' in West Denmark. Furthermore, Jensen's story illustrates other routines in his everyday activities, such as networking and sharing responsibility, finding means for mobilisation and cooperation through organising trips and informal conversations, shaping new meanings for the project during policy making in relation to its regional configuration, developing arguments that re-frame the light rail project as a key strategy towards a sustainable urban future, and adjusting the expectations of local politicians and attempts at institutional design while keeping the network of actors focused on the project during policy making.

The planner's political perception in the making of a regional public transport planning in Skåne (Sweden)

Roger Svensson is a public transport planner who has recently retired after playing a central role in the development of a regional public transport planning over the last two decades in the Region of Skåne. We ask about the first point at which he was involved in this process, and he refers back to the 1980s, when he moved to the public transport authority in the county council of Malmöhus/Malmötrafik, assuming an administrative role on 'regional planning issues'. Svensson explains that at that time, public transport authorities were fragmented among the county council of Malmöhus/Malmötrafik, the county council of Kristianstad/Länstrafiken Kristianstad and the cities of Malmö, Helsingborg and Lund. Travel by public transport across municipality and county borders was extremely complicated, and commuting by public transport between residential locations and work places and services was also extremely difficult. Svensson says that at that time, public transport was as characterised by a 'territorial thinking' in which an atmosphere of competition and conflicts among municipalities and among politicians and transport authorities dominated.

‘The two county councils and public transport authorities of Malmöhus/Malmötrafik and Kristianstad/Länstrafiken Kristianstad were like ‘cats and dogs’, and the local politicians were not particularly interested in public transport. Public transport worked as isolated systems, local islands in a Skåne with no overall vision.’

Svensson says that while working at Malmötrafik in an administrative role, he first received the task to analyse ‘regional planning issues in relation to public transport’. This was, for him, an opportunity to learn about the current unclear repartition of governance responsibility. As he tells the story, the county council of Malmöhus had no direct influence on Malmötrafik, even though the county council had elected representatives to make decisions for the citizens. The citizens should therefore have the ability to reward or to punish their decisions through elections. The county council owned one-third, the city of Malmö owned one-third, and the other municipalities in the Malmöhus area owned the last third of Malmötrafik. The county council invested consistent resources, but its influence over Malmötrafik was very limited. Svensson repeats that ‘public transport was just something outside politics’ and that at that time, ‘politicians simply had no opinion about public transport’. Svensson’s idea and action was therefore to build repetitively persuasive arguments to attract the attention of politicians about public transport. Svensson describes his argument for writing a report about the problematic organisation and lack of accountability of public transport as a central issue for regional governing dynamics in Skåne. He describes his effort to haunt the ‘corridors of power’ and to take any opportunity for informal discussions with politicians. When we ask about the specific opportunities that he saw in his work, Svensson describes the moment at which he received the specific task of preparing a draft for a new public transport organisation to submit to municipalities in Skåne to solicit their reactions/consensus. The writing of this first document, he says, was his opportunity to detail his ideas further into a concrete proposal: the county council, together with the municipality of Malmö, should become responsible for public transport.

‘I wrote this document with the intention to focus on how a new public transport organisation could better engage with democratic processes and accountability, gaining in transparency and resulting in a more effective public transport network.’

The reactions of the municipalities, Svensson remembers, were negative because ‘accepting this document meant for them to give up their influence and ownership over Malmötrafik. However, Svensson found another opportunity to further press his ideas later, in 1992, when the Malmöhus agreement was signed. This agreement was aimed at a large infrastructural investment package with the scope to integrate the new Öresundbridge with the rest of the existing transport system in Skåne. Svensson explains that it was within a framework of cooperation among the city of Malmö, a local federation of municipalities, the public transport authorities (including Malmötrafik) and the Swedish government that this infrastructure package was negotiated and decided. Svensson was then employed as a secretariat officer. At that time, Svensson remembers ‘there was no organisation representing the whole region of Skåne in the negotiation of the agreement with the Swedish government’. This lack gave Svensson an opportunity because ‘the only report available at that time was my proposal’, he states. The report described the reorganisation of public transport; thus, in the making of the Malmöhus agreement, Svensson’s proposal found a wider audience. Public transport was thus inserted within the broader agreement on the organisation of the overall transport system in Skåne. Svensson says that in 1992, a new regional organisation named Kommunalförbundet Malmötrafik, was established according to Svensson’s proposal. Malmötrafik then became responsible for public transport and became Svensson’s new workplace. The newly established Kommunalförbundet Malmötrafik needed clear political goals, but at the same time discretion was required to make the necessary decisions when acting on a market. His idea was to design a new ‘steering-control system’ of governance for public transport.

‘...there was a tension among the leading politicians in Kommunalförbundet Malmötrafik. There were those who were oriented to a liberal market who aimed for the least possible political interference. There were also politicians oriented towards strong political interference.’

Svensson introduced a third option: a new model of a ‘steering-control system’ that pointed to the need to combine long-term political goals for the development of a regional public transport system with great room for Kommunalförbundet Malmötrafik to engage with the market conditions.

'Public transport is not like other public services such as health care and care for the elderly. Public transport is also a commercial activity. Revenues are needed to fund the traffic, and therefore, the traffic must be designed to attract customers. Political objectives that show the overall direction are needed, but detailed decisions must also be made on commercial terms'.

The design of this model of steering public transport persuaded the politicians in the board of the Kommunalförbundet Malmöstrafik, and it was adopted by other regional organisations that replaced Kommunalförbundet Malmöstrafik. An overall regional organisation also took over the responsibility for public transport in the whole of Skåne. Svensson's repetitive acts thus focus on a critical political understanding of local and regional development and on making persuasive arguments in relation to concrete potentials not yet considered; writing reports, taking any opportunity for informal conversations with politicians, and continuously adjusting expectations from diverse actors are all part of his routine acts. Svensson continuously shapes and reshapes public transport as an integral part of societal development that contributes to the creation of a new institutional design based on a new meaning of regional development and public transport.

The planner's communicative strategies in the making of the Trondheim Environmental Package for Transport (Norway)

Olav Pettersen is a public planning official at the urban planning department in Trondheim, the face of the Trondheim Environmental Package for Transport in 2008 (MoT 2008). We ask how he came to be involved in this project, and he answers that it was after having spent approximately eighteen years working as a private consultant, dealing with transport and land use planning issues and collaborating on diverse projects with the municipality of Trondheim. Pettersen says that since the 1990s, Trondheim municipality has adopted various programs in which integrative environmental and transportation measures were analysed. He explains that this adoption was quite pioneering for that time, as he describes a situation in which municipal urban, land use and transportation planners together with consultancy companies were involved in working on the connections among these diverse sectorial policies on integral urban planning. Pettersen describes this context when he was first engaged in the analysis for the Municipal Transport Plan as a private consultant. Pettersen produced a report

for the municipality on parking policies. Local politicians in Trondheim adopted it and used it as a basis for the municipal land-use planning.

‘This report was not actually just about parking policies; it was about measures to adopt in transport and land-use planning. The most important part was about the road occupation and parking spaces for business locations. As an effect of the Transport Plan 2007, some roads in the city centre were transformed into public transport lanes. This change was the true first experimental step that gained visibility. The media, Oslo, became interested and curious about what Trondheim was doing.’

Pettersen explains that his engagement with the Trondheim Environmental Package for Transport came directly from local politicians. The politicians wanted to shape a document together with urban planners at the department. He says that he was simply called in for a talk. The politicians presented to Pettersen a document of intentions and asked him to develop their initial ideas in a feasible planning document. Pettersen says that it was just a simple request to know ‘how this could be done in practice’. This question was, for Pettersen, a window of opportunity because, even if the idea came from the politicians, many discussions were already ‘in progress’ among municipal planners. Pettersen says that it was not easy to implement the politicians’ intentions, as there were many ideas in their document, and Pettersen’s first task was to select and focus on a few of them. Pettersen talks about the initial meetings with local politicians, the discussions on the name chosen by local politicians, stressing the word ‘environment’ in a positive and constructive way for the first time in an integrative municipal planning document. Pettersen also describes his effort to create coherence among ideas that all seemed at first equally important: toll roads, national investments allocated for new road construction and increasing road capacity outside the city, non-motorised means of transport and public transport within the city and strategies for decreasing carbon dioxide emissions by 20%. When we ask Pettersen what characterised his work for Trondheim Environmental Package for Transport, his answer is immediate: ‘to act quickly’. He explains that the political goal was to complete the Trondheim Environmental Package for Transport by the 2011 political election. Pettersen says that from the point of view of the municipal planners, if the Trondheim Environmental Package for Transport was ready before election, then after the 2011 election, a municipal plan for the urban future of Trondheim would be in place. When we ask about his repetitive concrete actions, he talks about his strong engagement with the mayor of Trondheim and with a few land use and

traffic planners in the same department (and later the Norwegian parliament). His planning action was to navigate the governance conditions according to an ‘unusual planning procedure’.

‘I spent most of my Christmas holidays writing the proposal for the Trondheim Environmental Package for Transport, and most of the time I worked alone. When you have enough time, you can reflect and talk with others, but in this case, I wrote the report and discussed it mainly with the mayor, particularly about how the toll-road system could work and practical solutions for public road administration. I worked on it very intensively from November 2008 till January 2009. It was not how normal planning procedures usually work.’

Pettersen describes how communication with politicians was crucial. Complicated transport models for persuading politicians were not utilised by him and other collaborating municipal planners; it was instead very important to incorporate local and empirical experience in the planning practice and the practical evaluation of consequences as considered based on the various options for the overall urban situation in Trondheim. An essential repetitive practice for Pettersen was the continuous work of communicating intentions and partial results. Communication skills, Pettersen says, concerned a very clear description of objectives to politicians, an intensive engagement with the steering committee - appointed for the project - every month, the media and the information provided to citizens in relation to the status of the planning and responses to public expectations:

‘My work as a planner was to filter political ideas and to set them in a concrete urban planning direction. With politicians, we decided upon ten main goals, and I worked shaping their description. In a synthetic document of 10-15 pages, I summed up the objectives and possible future directions. These directions are actually new urban planning strategies. The first strategy is to transform 5 km of car lanes in the city centre into bus lanes.’

The practical sensitivity in relation to the consequences and the strategic selection that Pettersen operates constitute some of the performative qualities that Pettersen describes as part of his work. His repetitive acts that promoted change relied on keeping the ‘objectives’ on the political agenda, undertaking experiments towards the directions chosen and communicating the planning efforts to the politicians but also to the media and thus to the citizens. These experimental phases were seen by Pettersen as the way to make the measures and their effects visible to the people, politicians and administrators along the policy making.

When Planning is Performative

From these three planners' stories, we learn about the specific abilities of professional planners to deal with change. At first sight, they all seem to correspond to Leonie Sandercock's description of subjects who 'seek to link areas of knowledge into a more integrated approach to planning and development' (Sandercock, 1997: 92). Indeed, these planners, starting from specific competences in public transport planning, show the ability to exert influence far beyond a single area of knowledge. Although these three planners are sensitive to civil society in relation to the potential of public transport planning in their particular areas, in relation to their local knowledge (Geertz, 1983), they shape a heuristic of public transportation as a sign of a progressive society and as a possible solution for improving urban and regional planning. An important issue that emerges from the three planning stories is that innovation in planning is not just about elaborating new projects to give substance to 'the organisation of hope' (Forester, 2009). Jens Jensen, in relation to the light rail in Aarhus, Roger Svensson, in relation to the public transport model for Skåne, and Olav Pettersen, with the Trondheim Environmental Package, are all examples of Scandinavian planners who bring a transformative character to planning through their everyday routine actions. This is not only because they are all conscious of 'power' (in general) but also because they all 'engage' with the politics of planning in diverse ways. Bringing 'innovation' in planning, as in the way Jensen figures out the light rail in Aarhus or Svensson brings a regional public transport system to Skåne or Pettersen establishes the Trondheim Environmental Package, implies the creation not only of a great 'plan' but also of a new meaning for these projects as a way to renew planning. A lens of performativity allows us to see innovation in planning as a project that reflects individual capacity and to bring to light the repeated actions through which planning is renewed, re-enacted and re-experienced within a set of meanings that are derived from mundane and ritualised forms that exist prior to individual actions (Butler, 1988: 526) but that legitimate the politics of planning *through* individual actions. From the practice stories of these planners, repetitive/routine aspects through which the politics of planning is renewed, re-enacted and re-experienced can be synthesised as the way planners recognise specific windows of opportunity, anticipate and respond to political signals and create arguments and means of communication and persuasion. In Table 1, these specificities are synthesised by drawing on the three planners'

oral stories. The identification of these planners' routines acknowledges the performativity dimension of planning politics as dynamically constructed.

Table 1. Three performativities: Repetitive/routine aspects through which the politics of planning is renewed, re-enacted and re-experienced

Recognise specific windows of opportunity

In the oral stories of the three planners, the renewal of planning occurs through the routine actions of recognising specific windows of opportunity along a planning process. From Jensen's story, we learn that institutional change can constitute a window of opportunity for innovation in planning and its forms of legitimation for planning. The reform of local authorities as well as the creation of a new public transport authority have created the institutional conditions for Jensen to carry on the light rail project as well as to 'reframe' the meaning of the project not just as an urban project but in relation to a regional configuration in cooperation with the surrounding municipalities. Svensson's story stresses this aspect of recognising windows of opportunity over time and repetitively in his story about his routine actions when he reflects on his proactive writing, which consists of various reports that have functioned to fill gaps in the knowledge of particular aspects when new institutional arrangements have been created. From Pettersen's story, we also learn that the routine actions of a planner consist of seeking openings in the political cycle – such as the time of election - as a window of opportunity. The temporal pressure of politics and the limited number of actors engaged is seen as an opportunity for innovation in planning. Recognising specific windows of opportunity allows these planners to gain visibility in relation to a wide public audience.

Anticipate and respond to political signals

From Jensen's story, we learn that routine actions consist in of networking and sharing responsibilities with other policy actors and seeking potential channels of legitimation with new actors (municipalities and consultancies) while maintaining a focus on how to further the planning process in relation to political expectations. From Svensson, we also learn about the importance of developing a strong civil servant ethos, of taking into account in everyday practice the accountability aspects of governance and of making sense of his planning scope with an abstraction while engaged in everyday planning practices. Pettersen's story stresses his repetitive actions towards consensus building; he is a planner who acts together with

politicians on technical, cost-related and administrative problems. Pettersen's story is also about his transformative effort in the routine of planning-and-listening to political signals and waiting for favourable moments in which new ideas can be communicated and shared with other policy actors and the public sphere.

Conduct persuasive actions

From Jensen's story, we learn that persuasion can be enacted by reporting other concrete examples found elsewhere through organised trips to gather concrete knowledge and to mobilise an interest - in this case, about light rail – from similar urban situations. From Svensson's story, we learn that his routines consist of developing the imagination for creative and proactive work to investigate potential opportunities and to create persuasive arguments to communicate with others, particularly politicians. We learn from Svensson's repetitive acts that transformative planning is pursued if planners develop the awareness of the audience to be persuaded and, therefore, the importance of crafting arguments repetitively directed towards particular subjects at a particular time. From Pettersen, we learn that persuasion also entails communication and dialogue in planning routines, both with politicians and with the media as a way to repetitively legitimate and render visible measures to be adopted and their effects on citizens. Experiments and further adjustments are part of his routine actions.

Create a heuristic of (public transport) planning

Jensen repetitively constructs the meaning of the light rail during the long-term process in diverse ways. In this project, a heuristic of public transport is created and repetitively sustained as the first step towards a 'sustainable urban mobility' for the Aarhus regional area towards becoming CO₂ neutral. This heuristic has been persuasive in facing the economic investments needed to further the planning process of the light rail. Svensson creates and repetitively maintains a main heuristic that public transport is not an end in itself but, rather, an instrument for the development of society, an integral part of societal development. From Pettersen's story, we learn that his heuristic of public transport is also delivered repetitively across the time-line of the environmental package as an integrated part of urban development, not only as a sectorial service but also as a means of shaping urban futures. Such a heuristics of public transport seems to articulate the planning ideals of less polluted environments, more equity in mobility and more democratic integrative planning domains and practices.

Conclusions

Through a performativity analytics, this article has illuminated the way that planning is dynamically renewed, revised and consolidated over time through the individual routine actions of planners. When planning is understood as performative (Forester, 1989; Butler, 1988), the planning field is seen as dynamically shaped through action. The repetitive routine actions derived from the oral stories of planners all speak to planning politics; they recognise specific windows of opportunity, anticipate and respond to political signals, conduct persuasive actions and create a heuristic of (public transport) planning. Discussions with civil society actors or with the users of public transport were mentioned by the three planning professionals, especially in relation to their heuristic of public transport planning as a means of achieving more sustainable and liveable urban futures and democratic societal development. This view of performativity, one can argue, emphasises that routines of planning activity shape planning politics.

The central relationship between planning and politics is not a new observation in Scandinavian planning research. The important relationships between planners and power in local politics as well as the politicisation of planning in the face of macro-economic growth-oriented logics of neo-liberalism (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Sager, 2009; Andersen and Pløger, 2007; Olesen, Richardson, 2012, Hrelja et al. 2012) have placed renewed interest on the 'new' role of planners. Scandinavian scholars have recently shown that pressure on the institutions of planning and ideologies of neoliberal planning transform the 'regulative' role of planners towards that of entrepreneurs (Sager, 2011) and have suggested an emerging planning culture in which the role of planners is transformed to be based less on authoritative behaviour and standardised approaches and more on personalised trust relations with effects on situation-specific planning (Tait, Hansen, 2013). In practice, an important dynamic that has emerged in the course of the research project from which this article is derived (Hrelja et al, 2013) during the in-depth interviews with the three key planners and in focus meetings and workshops with public planners in Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) is that the implementation of innovation in public transport planning presupposes the engagement of planners with the political realm.

A performativity analytics allows us to see how planning is reconfigured not by roles but through action. The decreasing authority of planners and their (in)ability to influence policy making as well as planners' position within the ambiguous conditions of planning in high modernity are conclusions that are frequently derived and that reproduce planning and

politics within two diverse disciplinary binaries. These assumptions are similar in other fields across the social sciences. As Judith Butler notes, they are at the fundament of the very way we conceptualise a field (see the discussion of economics and politics in Butler, 2010). The concept of performativity explored in this article allows us to understand how planning actually progresses when we see the field of planning not as a priori defined but as reproduced and enacted and deeply rooted in action. We are not evaluating planners' actions as good or bad, right or wrong, or corresponding or not to the national frameworks of strategic planning or neoliberal or market logics. Instead, we conclude that the planning field is itself re-configured through the actions of planners. Thus, we are not advising planners to become (even more) aware of politics; we are re-telling stories of planning politics. We participate in the planners' stories told here as we believe that 'stories gain credibility as they are retold and as they are assimilated into our actions and beliefs' (Mandelbaum, 1991: 210). This approach has consequences for our understanding of planning professional work and the conclusions we can draw in our research. We assimilate the oral stories of planners when we argue for a critical reconceptualisation of planners' actions in planning politics. Judith Butler's work on performativity inspires us to break from the dichotomies and to provide a way to envision how the planning field is redefined once again through action. In this way, we offer a perspective on professional planning practice that focuses on the repetitive acts of planners, acts that are both individual and collective, socially shared and historically constructed. This is necessary because, as scholars of planning, we still need to reveal the transformative character of planning when reshaping, re-enacting and re-experiencing the future within a set of meanings and forms of legitimation. This article may open new possibilities for further planning research grounded in existing methodologies of work through the oral practice stories of planners to further theorise the everyday practice and action of planning politics.

Acknowledgements

The research on which this article is based was funded by the Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems (VINNOVA - project number 200697). The authors would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

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