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Extreme planning
Can You Tame a City in Conflict?

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This paper aims to explore the premises and working limits of planning activities and the role of planners within a potentially "extreme" circumstance. "Extreme" in this context refers to situations that emerge after popular uprising or successful revolution when a new ruling class comes to power. Here it will be noted that cities, as the spatial manifestation of changes of power in society, reflect the modes, ideals and requirements of the new people in power. It will be argued that it is perhaps a highly unreasonable assumption to expect planners and planning institutions to withstand the enormous and of the long overdue demands of those who now occupy the seat of the government. In these circumstances, cities are the prime locations in which the expectations and perceived world view of the new dominant classes will be manifest. Planners are on the front line and are given the chance to deliver these demands, not to curb them, not to tame them.

Keywords: City**, S**ocial change, Extreme planning, Iran, Urban conflict.

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Introduction

Planning is described as 'a state-related strategy in the creation and regulation of space, populations, and development' (Huxley &Yiftachel 2000:107). To make use of their professional knowledge and to make 'rational' decisions, planners conventionally deal with three issues of 'regulations', 'consultation' and 'negotiations'. Of course, in some cases, there may be an extra element of 'corruption' involved which can be viewed as an informal type of political influence on the routine application of regulations. The latter can indirectly affect the process of negotiation, consultation and the application of regulations.

Planning establishments emerge and function where an agreed bureaucratic order is in place. The 'power' of planning, therefore, lies in working with and within the political system, such as ministries, local government agencies and municipalities.

In cases of social upheaval or drastic political change, however, where these preconditions might be absent, planners and planning departments are faced with the unknown. Such events, once successful, result in a new political order and an imperative to set up new priorities and requirements that necessitate an urgent response.

Here, the extent and scope for the application of the conventional 'rationality' and professional traditions may be severely limited; and the function of planning departments might be reduced to a technically utilisable tool with a narrowly defined margin of power to act.

In recent years, and due to the rapid expansion of urbanisation around the world, cities have become the scene on which such emergency situations have played themselves out. In fact, the majority of demands and forces of change have emerged from cities in which resources and opportunities are not equally distributed. Social upheavals of this kind come to the fore primarily because of a desire for 'change' and often in opposition to attempts to 'tame'.

The new elite, emerging after the success of these events have their own ideas, whims and visions of how the city and society have to be formed. The level of abrupt and potent 'power' brought to bear, here, is not what planning establishments are conventionally accustomed to dealing with.

Planning in extreme is, therefore, concerned with the fate of planners in the immediate period after a drastic social change where the boundaries of 'power' itself is undergoing change, in which the routine norms, regulations and existing planning establishments may be scrutinised, re-defined or totally re-structured.

Planning and power: A background

The proximity of planning and political institutions, both, in a so-called 'democratic' framework or as a part of a central planning system has given rise to the constantly evolving theoretical paradigm of the relations between power and planning (Forester 1987:51-58).

The synoptic or 'rationalist' tradition of planning developed from the Fifties onwards, paid little attention to the question of 'power' and its effects on planning activities. It was during the Seventies that the writings of the "incrementalist" school of planning implicitly acknowledged its presence and importance (Hudson 1979: 389). Later, other critics elaborated on this field of enquiry noting that 'rational' decision making is not a possibility without paying attention to 'political realties'. As Forester (1989:3) has noted:

'Planners do not work on a neutral stage, an ideally liberal setting in which all affected interests have voice; they work within political institutions, on political issues, on problems whose most basic technical components (say, a population projection) may be celebrated by some, contested by others. Any account of planning must face these political realities.'

The emphasis, in this view is that planning activity 'only' becomes 'rational' if it takes the 'power' structure into account in any given circumstance.

'Only if the practical context of power relations, conflicting wants and interests, and political-economic structures are assessed clearly can planners respond to real needs and problems in anything approaching an actually rational, if not textbook-like, way'(Forester 1989:7).

Planning theory has moved on since those early comments and current debates in planning theory are to some extent focused on the benefits and disadvantages of the two dominant approaches based on opposing philosophical backgrounds.
During the Nineties suggestions were made that Habermasian communicative rationality could be a 'new paradigm' in planning theory which could provide a basis for dealing with the question of 'power' in this field (Innes,1995). By recognising the existence of various conflictive forces and interests within the planning process, the advocates of communicative or collaborative planning (Healey,1998) have suggested that 'any viable and meritorious approach to planning must include a process which enables differing people with differing theoretical perspectives and substantive interests to engage their differences constructively'(Throgmorton 1999: 69). But ultimately, it is the planner that is at the centre of a communication web and pulls the strings of various agencies, making the whole system work.

'…It follows from this premise that planners should analyse and understand how communication takes place and what they themselves are doing when they engage in negotiations in their offices or in public mediations. The common thread in the communicative field is the interest in, and primacy given to, understanding the communicative actions of planners, and of individual, group, and community interactions.' (Huxley and Yiftachel 2000: 103)

Critics of this approach, however, have argued against the suitability of communicative theory for its particular way of treating 'power'. It will be more effective, they propose, if planners could resort to Foucauldian ideas and face political 'power' with professional 'power'; i.e. to utilise their professional knowledge as a means of 'power' to achieve their goals.
As Foucault's ideas place 'conflict and power' at its very heart, according to these critics, it can provide a more appropriate ground for planning theory to grasp the events at the real world.

'.. Conflict provides a superior paradigm to planning theory than an understanding that is discursive, detached and consensus-dependent. .... Planning is inescapably about conflict: exploring conflicts in planning and learning to work effectively with conflict can be the basis for a strong planning paradigm …' (Flyvbjerg 2002:62).

The notion of 'conflict' as noted above, to a large degree still refers to the clash of ideas and interests within an established planning system, either democratic or central. The nearest planning theory has come to referring to 'extreme' situation, is perhaps the remarks in the World Bank's report entitled 'Conflict, security and development' in which the negative impacts of persistent conflicts, including disputes, political repressions and their post-conflict consequences are discussed (WDR-2011).
Planning in 'extreme' deals with a similar premise, in which both the advocates of Habermasian and Foucauldian approaches of planning seem to be out of touch. In extreme cases, the efforts of the first group in creating a consensus by communicative methods among the new elite who have just attained power, is likely be very ineffective.

Similarly, attempts by the Foucauldian camp to resist the whims of the new order would provoke harsh reactions among the new elite, threatening to obliterate the hitherto existing planning establishment altogether.

It is likely that neither of these approaches would produce any expected results for planners involved in an extreme situation. The first group would be deprived of their conventional means of 'communication' and the premises of action, such as rules, regulations and an established administrative hierarchy. Attempting to utilise professional knowledge as a means of 'power' would also be doubtful; the rationality of its application when facing the brute force of a social upheaval, where armed revolutionary groups are in charge of daily affairs, would be highly questionable.

Planning in extreme: A Historical review

To arrive at their ultimate decisions, planners have to deal with three categories of issues; regulations, negotiations and in some cases, corruption. Their professional knowledge is customarily used to adopt or devise an optimum set of rules to achieve a consensus among the various interest groups involved in a given course of action.

While the main body of planning theory surrounding with question of power has focused on studies relating to routine situations where the first three, and perhaps in some cases the forth element are present, extreme scenarios have gone unnoticed. But if the period of a drastic political change is examined, one would see that all of the above elements are at hand yet in turmoil. This is the period in which the validity of regulations, norms of action, and possibility of negotiation among the equals are in doubt; and the violence, as a variation of corruption is in attendance; this can be interpreted as the corruption of power as well.

A cursory review of the formative years of central planning system in the Soviet Union and its allies demonstrates a classic example of what an ideologically motivated political upheaval can do for the planning establishment. While Howard's idea of 'garden towns' was on the agenda in the years prior to the Socialist Revolution of 1917, the Russian planners went through an intense period of rapid change in order to function as planners for the creation of a socialist city and society. This was a traumatic period in which new planning rules, procedures and bargaining power mechanisms were just evolving (Nilina 2006: 33).

At the same time, while they had no clear procedural basis to act, their partners in negotiations were a revolutionary party determined to deliver its own ideal city to the masses. The goal, set by the Party for the planners, was to create a 'socialist city' in which a collective lifestyle was dominant and all the citizens were involved in socially sanctioned and productive works. The envisaged model was supposed to be an 'economically efficient' and 'socially just' environment in which all citizens had equal access to resources. The capitalist notions of individualism and personal profit making endeavours were to be replaced by 'selflessness and dedication to the collective good' (Nilina, 2006& Andrusz, 1996).

But aside from all these utopian ideals at the forefront of the minds of the new elite was the need to consolidate their rule by any means, and prioritise schemes that helped to maintain their power over the society. In their attempt to create a unanimously socialist society, the Party used force to suppress any political opposition and drew the entire population into the web of suspicion, paranoia and insecurity. Using force as a lever, and revolutionary fervour as a malleable energy source, the Party engaged in the destruction of the remnants of the pre-revolutionary society and its social relations, and created a new way of life complete with a new set of institutions (Nilina 2006:95).

The same ideals- a system of central planning and political motives- were copied elsewhere in socialist countries and the planners involved followed the example set for them. In some cases, the historical parts of the cities were demolished to make space for ideologically required urban spaces.[2] Planning establishments were so immersed in their own duty bound profession that no serious attempts were made to show their concern to preserving their own urban cultural heritage (Abitz 2006:37).

The overall picture observed through these and similar historical experiments in building a socialist and ideologically defined city, is that power of planning systems are greatly diminished and the role of planners is reduced to that of technical assistants to political masters.

No modern Socialist city was really built and no class-less urban environment was actually created. Interventions of socialist planners in their own cities was often a re-arrangement of the urban space in such a way that 'less privileged people were accommodated in high density, mechanically designed housing estates or moved to new towns that were designed in the same way'. Although the 'existing urban areas were divided among the new elite according to their ranks and positions' (Andrusz,1996).

In the aftermath of socialist revolutions, historically speaking, planners were working in an extreme situation in which the ideological forces had gained control of the planning establishment and run them regardless of the professional norms and theoretical knowledge. It is abundantly clear that it is only after a new political order is securely in place and other immediate acts of power, necessary to determine the new social hierarchy, have come to an end, when the planning system itself, as a part of an overall government apparatus, starts to respond to the needs and realities of the society. Planners, as such, have with no real basis of power. They are hard-hit in the beginning, and turned into the tools of the ruling party afterwards.

Iranian case: Revolution and planning

In the late 1950's, the real age of rapid urbanisation in Iran began to make an impact. An ever-increasing number of rural population areas started to migate to the major cities in which newly created services and industries required an hitherto unprecedented number of workers. The basic infrastructure, particularly in the housing sector, was not ready to accomodate these newcommers seeking jobs and better living standards. The result was a number of densely populated and spreading shanty towns surrounding every urban centre which in turn created a constant point of conflict between people and authorities, potential clients and urban planners.

The scale of this underlying confrontation is evident from the available statistics which shows that the number of urban inhabitants in major cities doubled almost every decade. The population of the capital, Tehran, for instance, grew from 210,000 in 1922, to 1.5 million in 1956. By the dawn of the revolution in 1978, this growing number of city dwellers had exceeded four million. Iranian political regimes, both before and after the revolution were unable to tame the city and greater Tehran now has a population of over 12 million. (Hesamian, 2008).

In broader perspective, between 1950 and the late 1970s, more than 11 million people, equal to 13.1% of the whole population, had migrated to various major cities like Tabriz, Shiraz, Isfahan and Mashhad (IOS, 2010). The ratio of urban to rural population, from 30 to 70 per cent in 1956, has now reversed and more than 70 percent of the population live in cities (Iscanews, 2010).

[2] Destruction of the old urban monuments and cultural symbols, replacing them with the new land-marks, changing the composition of the residential areas, and redistribution of urban land among the supporters of the regime are common phenomena in a number of countries that have experienced drastic social changes.

What was the reaction of the Iranian planning establishment to these changes, one might ask? What was their approach on facing such an historical transformation?

Planners and 'consensus' over urban land policy:

For the Iranian urban planners during the Seventies 'urban land' became a major issue. It was recognised as the decisive factor in controlling the rate of urban growth and channelling the movement of the rural-urban population. There was a 'consensus' between the politicians, municipal officials and planning establishment that in the absence of accommodating urban infrastructure, adopting effective land policies would bring about their desired result of curbing the rate of urban growth in Iran.

Iranian urban land policies, from 1950s onwards, can be seen as classic examples of a 'rational' planning establishment aiming to control a process of rapid urban expansion through its internal 'consensus'. In fact, during the period from 1948 to 1962 (both falling within the realm of the First Development Plan (1948-1956) and the Second Urban Development Plan (1956-1962) urban land procurement was a non-issue. Planners did not seem to be alarmed by the current rate of rural-urban migration and the subsequent rate of urban growth. The situation seemed manageable. The general consensus was that traditional market forces would take care of it all.

From the Third Development Plan (1962-1976) onwards, however, land issue became a dominant topic of legislation and a focal point for urban housing policies. Early instances of 'comprehensive urban plans (CUP) were produced from 1966 onwards, showing a growing tendency towards providing the government with a legislative basis of action over the urban land issue. Municipal authorities were then encouraged to use the (CPUs) to determine the directions of ongoing urban developments, by enforcing control over the way urban land-use plans were devised by planners.

Two years before the revolution, in 1976, it was proposed that a 25-year exclusion zone should be drawn around the major cities. On the basis of this boundary, all urban development projects had to be controlled and any 'illegal' construction beyond that not to be permitted (Keivani, 2008).

The envisaged patterns of urban land-use, exclusion zones and controlled housing developments, however, were not able to withstand the ever-increasing wave of rural-urban migrants. The proposed plans, urban limits and designated land-uses were brought down, together with Iran's entire political system, by the very people that planners aimed to control. The urban poor, in search of access to a better life, became the strong arm of the revolution in which they finally gained, what, the new leaders argued, had been denied to them through legislations and planning control measure.

Immediately after 1978, the revolutionary government established one of its first organizations, the 'Housing Foundation'. The re-distribution of public urban land and the abolition of the urban exclusion zone were also among the first measures that the new administration adopted, and with it handsomely rewarded its supporters with almost complete access to urban land.

There was an overall ideological justification for all of these changes. The goal, set by the supreme leader for the planners, was to create an 'Islamic society' in which a religiously motivated lifestyle was dominant and all the believers were involved in divinely sanctioned and approved occupations. The envisaged model was supposed to be an 'ideologically sound' and 'socially just' environment in which all the God-fearing people had equal access to resources. The capitalist notions of individualism and personal profit making endeavours were condemned, and the authorities promised to create an urban environment that was dominated by selfless deeds, in the cause of the God. This goal still remains to be achieved.

In the early decade of the revolution, there was no 'consensus' or indeed need for it, between the government and planning establishments.

The planning organisations were treated as if they were the oppressing tools of the previous regime by depriving the poor from their share of communal resources. In this environment, the planners of the Ministry of Housing, Planning and Budget Organisation (PBO) and related offices had to do what was required of them, according to the new rules of the government. Planners followed these rules even with some degree of professional regret that why they have not being able to attend to the urgent needs of the urban poor earlier.

Dissolution of MPO

After three decades, the unwelcome legacy of mistrust and the lack of 'consensus' between the planners and revolutionaries surfaced once more in Iran. The case of the abolition of Management and Planning Organization (MPO) in Iran is a noteworthy example of planner's choice to resist or co-operate with political pressure in extreme circumstances. It demonstrates that finding a solid ground for opposition, where the customary context of planning theory is disturbed, can be very a risky procedure. Particularly when it occurs within an environment in which the new elite is not accustomed to the conventional concept of 'consensus', where it is determined to enforce its own views and orientations over the conventional or rationally devised planning rules.

The establishment of this central planning institution in Iran has a sixty year history, going back to the economic chaos in Iran, following years of gradual occupation from 1943 to 1946. The subject and necessity of establishing a regular body to undertake economic planning in Iran came about within a decade after the World War II.

Based on recommendations made by and borrowing from the World Bank for carrying out structural reforms, the Iranian government established a central office for devising national development plans in 1948. This centre, later named the Planning and Budget Organisation (PBO), was in charge of the supervision and approval of economic and urban development plans in Iran from that date onwards. As a supervisory body in control of devising and distribution of yearly budget, as well as producing consecutive development plans every five years and monitoring their proper implementations, the PBO was envisaged to be a separate entity from the other ministries and state administration. Its relative independence was the key factor in its structure, enabling it to assess and evaluate the government's performance and pay their approved budgets accordingly (Ansari, 2005).

In early 2006, however, and following the president's disagreement with MPO over the application of its planning rules and imposition of procedural requirements, the head of state decided to dissolve the institution for good. It was declared that MPO was oversized and bureaucratic, and therefore it had to be dissolved; its duties were divided between and merged with various other ministries under the president's rule. (Ebtekar Newspaper, 2007)

Initially, the planners involved and other decision making bodies reacted in anger and disbelief towards the proposed plan. Some MPs also added their voices to the dispute by declaring the proposed 'merger' of the MPO would undermine its original independent role, and perform as the government's 'brain'. It was argued that such an 'unqualified' decision would be 'doomed to failure' and had to be seen as 'dangerous' for the country. Other observers remained critical so much that a prominent Iranian economic planner stated that the president was not authorized to order an alteration or merger of such an important organization and it could only be done through the parliament. Calling it as an outright 'illegal' act, he called the decision a *coup de grace* of the structure of the national management organization, stating that the establishment of MPO was a result of fifty years of experience in 'scientific planning' in Iran, but it was the deliberate aim of the government to undermine its efficiency.

Furthermore, the government was accused of subverting the efforts of professional planners, and causing the MPO as a whole to go through decline in the years that this administration was in power.
The real objective, it was argued, was to gain total control over fiscal matters and to rid itself of a 'democratic supervisory body' at the same time. Thus the main objective of the administration was to rid itself of the monitoring role that was assigned to the MPO in the assessment and evaluation of the proposed economic and development policies of the government.
MPO's Chairman wrote a letter to the president outlining the repercussions of such a 'hasty' act and called on him to delay the implementation of the decision until 'the expert studies' were completed. But within the existing political structure of the country, the head of the MPO was no match for the head of state. He could bypass rational objections by mobilising its own centres of influence and dissolve the MPO nevertheless.
In response to these heated debates among the law-makers and professional bodies, the head of the Majority Faction in Economic Committee of the parliament promised a 'thorough study' of the government's decision would be soon undertaken to determine its 'potential consequences'. No such thorough studies were conducted afterwards. On the contrary, the Interior Minister, who inherited the power of budget allocation from the MPO, welcomed the changes as a 'great step' that was in line with the government's 'decentralization policy' (Payvand News-2006).

Conclusion: where do we stand now?

In his analysis of the Iranian Revolution of 1978, a contemporary Iranian philosopher and activist (Soroush-2012) had termed it a 'revolution without a theory'. By using this description he was alluding to the fact that, apart from its religious rhetoric and opposition to the social impacts of Modernity, this drastic social upheaval has had no specific theoretical ground or claims. This was contrary to other important world revolutions that, according to him, were firmly based on some new moral or political concepts and proposed to bring about a new social order. His comparison is of course, with that of the French Revolution of 1799, which sought to uphold the universal principles of 'liberty, equality, fraternity' or the Russian Revolutions of 1917, which claimed to be based on advanced philosophical understandings in which the ideal goal of humanity was to establish a socialist and non-class based society.
It can be argued, however, that although the Iranian revolution and other current political movements in the Middle East might not have started with some novel principles or had expressed their aims in such a clearly defined philosophical context, but they certainly have had their own rationally clear-cut propositions and goals. The theory behind these movements, although not very new in intellectual terms, one might argue, was most clearly to establish a new social order in which access to the withdrawn resources from the urban poor and underprivileged was facilitated.
Urban movements that have given rise to the current social upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East are also inspired by the accepted notions of 'human rights' and a legitimacy in opposing the forces that tend to limit them. Most visibly the aim of these demonstrators is to gain a legitimate recognition for living in cities without a fear of threat by various government agencies, and to share freely the benefits of urban life, most fundamentally access to work, health, shelter and education. The increasing rate of expanding urban centres and the speed of growing populations in these cities are among the direct causes of creating conflicts between the 'haves' and 'have nots' in these societies.
The majority of participants in these movements aim to break the existing historical barriers which certain groups of people are deprived of their now universally acknowledged rights of turning into citizens. And this is probably the commonly accepted 'theory' that some our commentators have neglected to observe.

In this perspective, people who set themselves on fire, take arms to revolt against the national army, and endure various sorts of hardships and imprisonment, do not necessarily need to act under a banner of some egalitarian principles to feel justified. These are the people who often have little to lose and possibly everything to gain if they succeed. Jobless migrants, the urban poor, hard-pressed employees in the public sector, political dissidents and the ethnically disenchanted are among those that have no way of getting themselves out of their untenable situation, unless to resort to revolt.

For the same reason, if and when these movements succeed and people in revolt ascend to the position of power, their primary aims are to access what had been denied to them for so long. They see themselves as reasonable and hitherto 'oppressed' people that deserve to enjoy the fruits of their struggle. They often have very little patience for professional and procedural obstacles tending to slow them down, or to 'tame' them, so to speak. These are the clients that planners face after a major social upheaval; where the structure of power is altered and shifted towards the newly emerging elite.

In this situation, all the current policies, norms and rules of a planning system in that given society are looked at with suspicion and distrust. After all, these were the systems and regulations that had blocked their access before. Planning systems may undergo drastic changes; its policies and regulations might be changed and sometimes completely reversed. The new elite would put forward their own ideals and ideas that might differ with those of the past. Here, cities are the scenes on which emerging new classes in commanding roles engage in power play with the legacy of the old system. This is probably not an easy case in which making a clear-cut choice between 'working with' and 'taking a stand against' can be made. Can planners take an impartial stand and wait for an opportunity to act by applying a notion such as 'room for manoeuvre' (Safier, 2002)?

What planners might consider as a solution is to adopt a dual view towards the extreme situation they find themselves in. Thus, they might prepare themselves to move with the flow of the events while keeping faithful to their professional ethos wherever possible.

In these circumstances, they may resort to taking a short and long term stand, as the current of events might change. In the short term, perhaps a time span of between five and ten years, the immediate needs of the emerging elite, their supporters and the topical requirements of the movement in general need to be addressed. The response to planning obstacles in this period would certainly be met by an unusual amount of force, if not with physical or institutional violence. This is the period of high ideals and hard decisions, quite often professionally unsound, where plans with unpredictable consequences can affect the fate of the planners involved.

It is mainly after this initial period, if a solid framework of social coherence and the rule of law is finally established, that one can expect a modified system of government and a newly agreed set of power relations to be established. In such cases, the newly formed factions and interest groups might start to compete for power and influence once more. Under these circumstances, a planning system might return somewhat back to its customary state of operation, within a regulated framework in which planners can possibly take sides with their related stands and utilise their professional power to advance their causes.

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