# Who Makes out The Elephant?
# Disagreement among Urban Planning Theorists' Claim on Rationality

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**Abstract:** Rational knowledge-claims, consisting of theoretical propositions expressing a judgment about complex urban problems, are not new. The audiences, i.e. the public whose lives are affected by such claims, have begun to question the claims of rationality in urban planning. In response, each urban planner, believing in a particular theory or point of reference, endeavors to challenge competing theories in order to make his or her own view legitimate. Each refers to a point of reference as being self-evident. Through this skillful manipulation, planners tacitly justify their own claims as reasonable, plausible, inevitable, etc. These efforts actively suppress all opposing views and consequently portray one particular rational narrative as the complete emergent one. In this context, the competition among urban planners reminds us of the allegory of the blind people and the elephant. Although, in this article, we do not attempt to provide yet another visionary theory, we claim that there exists no visionary position among planning theorists. The planning literature during the past two decades points to such competition between urban planners on the subject of rationality of plans. Could planners build consensus among themselves before they ask the public to do so? Here, a discourse between urban planning theorists is compared with the tale of the elephant. This article, using the above-mentioned allegory as a method of analysis, looks for the possibility of consensus building between two famous contemporary American schools of planning thought. Points of reference of these two schools of thought are categorized and discussed. It is also found that no visionary position exists among planners which explain why people have doubts over planners' claims to rationality.

**Key Words:** Knowledge-Claim, Point of Reference, Rationality, Consensus Building, Planning Theory.

## INTRODUCTION

Urban planning contains knowledge-claims that attempt to explicate cities and illuminate their multifaceted issues. Planning theories are the most eminent examples of those knowledge-claims that try to explain the nature of planning and express how planning should be done. Although this article looks at the theories from the developed countries, it can make a base for a more in-depth discussion on knowledge-claims among Iranian planning scholars and practitioners since all knowledge-claims consist of theoretical propositions expressing a judgment on possible states of affairs. Knowledge-claims in all fields, including planning, are overflowing with these theoretical propositions that usually are basic statements and differ from observational ones, including preferences of individuals. After a knowledge-claim is presented, the most important challenge is to measure the adequacy or inadequacy of that claim. The assessment of knowledge-claims is imperative because the planning of professional activities, influencing human settlements, is affected by them. Thus, people have the right to question these claims; concerning whether planners' claims are accurate or how they can be trusted.

As an upshot, many different attempts have been made by planning theorists to gain public acceptance. In such attempts, planners use reasoning, argumentation, presenting documentation for their observations and measures, and providing an extended list of supporting references. The audience demands explanation and

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continues to question the theorists' reasoning until a point is reached where theorists claim it as a self-evident phenomenon and a truism, i.e. a point where they have built the structure of their theory upon a conceptual reference frame. At this point, the audience can either agree or agree to disagree. Either way, further reasoning or back and forth arguments are futile. The audience can no longer continue this line of questioning. Ultimately, the rationality of theories or ideas rests upon the self-evident nature of this point of reference, which can consist of complete "subjective impressions" or "intersubjective" matter. Often, planning theories are derived from this point.

Friedmann (2011), in a discussion on issues central to planners' endeavors, describes this derivation as the three tasks of planning theory: philosophical, adaptation, and translation.

(The) first task is to evolve a deeply considered humanist philosophy for planning and to trace its implication for practice … The second task is to help adapt planning practices to their real-world constraints with regard to scale, complexity and time… The third task is to translate concepts and knowledge generated in other fields into our own domain and to render them accessible and useful for planning and its practices. (Friedmann, 2011, pp. 210-225)

In his classic Planning in the Public Domain, he had already indicated how planning during the last two centuries has been derived from other fields (Friedmann, 1987, pp. 53-227). It seems almost all of contemporary planning theorists do accept that their ideas rely upon a strong conceptual foundation. Generally, as Friedmann and others like Lefebvre, Taylor, and Sager illustrate, theoretical and methodological debates in other areas inspire planners to articulate or translate a theory within the planning field (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 30; Taylor, 1980, p. 159; Sager, 1999, pp. 89-95).This means that these areas effectively grant rationality to planning theories and play a significant role as their point of reference. Today, we face rational narratives and competing rationalities in the field of urban planning. Planners believe in particular theories or points of view, and hinged on that, venture to challenge competing theories and illustrate their defects and shortcomings in solving urban problems. In addition, based on their points of reference, they implicitly or explicitly claim that their own theories are better, i.e. they are more reasonable, plausible, acceptable, inevitable, useful, justifiable, verifiable, etc.

This paper attempts to answer the question if a visionary position could exist at all or not? This is done through an analysis of planning articles using the tale of the elephant, explicitly involving planners.

## THE METHOD OF ANALYSIS

When scholars insist on their theories as being more rational than others, they first need to suppress all opposing views. The competing theories and claims, described above, remind us of the tale. This tale has been variously narrated in different cultures via oral and written literature. In the tale, an elephant in a dark room is described by different people.

The people, who cannot see the elephant as a whole, endeavor to recognize the nature of the elephant, relying on their cognitive abilities, by using their senses, by referring to their former experiences and observations, or by making logical deductions. Obviously, their location vis. the elephant decisively affects their cognition. For example, one touching the elephant's leg treats it as a pillar, another touching its trunk conceives it as a tube or snake; another close to the elephant's ear imagines it as a fan.

Narrators, after telling their version, make conclusions depending on their own purposes and attachments. For instance, Hoch points out that the story warns us about the danger of misplaced inference– taking the part for the whole (Hoch, 2002, p. 54).Conditions get complicated when, despite deep disagreements, everyone around the elephant conceives his or her image of the elephant as complete and correct. Obviously, in such a situation anyone can be accused of misunderstanding the other's ideas and the people inside the room cannot convince each other. In the same work, Hoch invites planners to think about a conceptual question: "What must happen for the people to recognize not only that they inhabit different positions, but also that such differences distort their judgment about the whole elephant?"

In order to analyze this story and relate it to our contention, it would be useful to simplify the features of the story:

The nature of being in a dark room is the main issue of the story.

All those around that entity – the elephant in this case -claim that their descriptions are as complete as the storyteller's, and everybody strongly believes in his or her own image.

With the people in the tale, who insist on the precision and perfectness of their own conceptions, assuming there is any opportunity for a discussion among them, one of the following could take place:

Everyone endeavors to prove his or her own conception and disapprove others'.

Everyone accuses others of misunderstanding his or her argumentation.

They end the discussion without any result. They

agree to disagree.

Ironically, consensus would be built only when all of them accept the storyteller's agenda and try to see like the storyteller does.

The simplification above leads us back to the question regarding the claims on rationality. If there were several "rational" claims on the nature of the elephant, we could make similar arguments on the behavior of planners.

Since such articulation could not be found in any previous work; therefore, it can be said that this article deliberates on the above tale from an unorthodox perspective. We do not make any value judgment on which one on those narrations for the tale of the elephant is correct. We neither assess their conclusions; rather, we take note of the commonality between the narrators, i.e. the storyteller who utilizes a version of the tale and makes his or her own conclusion. Through this challenge we encounter a person with two noticeable abilities. First, our storyteller has adequate knowledge and power to distinguish among competitive alternatives. This means that the storyteller is able to see all of the people around the elephant and knows their disabilities one by one, e.g., their blindness, their inaccurate positions, their incomplete descriptions. By this ability he or she can criticize others and exaggerate their faults and accuse them of incompetency.

The second ability is more effective than the first. Our storyteller is able to see the whole elephant. Thus, the storyteller's description and explanation of the elephant would be the best due to his or her standpoint and view over the elephant. This brings forth a controversial question that necessitates more deliberation: What is the storyteller's position that can allow him or her to see the whole elephant and realize the defects of the others?

It seems that the story of the elephant plays a particular rhetoric role, directly or indirectly, in theoretical and practical planning debates. Contemporary urban planners continuously criticize the actions and beliefs of the others. By doing so, they question the trust in others' plans, projects, and theories. But where is this visionary position? To answer this question, we first discuss the significance of this position.

## THE LIKELIHOOD OF ATTAINING THE VISIONARY POSITION

John Friedmann, as a salient planner, mentions that planners define planning depending on how each of them delineates it for his or her specific purposes (Friedmann, 1987, p. 40). Special purposes, institutional or individual intentions, disciplinary perspectives, and so forth cause deep conflicts and disagreements across a wide range of planners on what urban planning is, what exactly urban planners are doing, what they should do, and how plausible planning should be done. These questions have been the concerns of experts such as Friedmann during their whole careers (refer to Friedmann, 2011, p. 2).

Different ways of thinking about contemporary urban settlements stem from different backgrounds. In other words, having different and mostly contrasting ideas of plausible planning is a result of diverse definitions and perspectives on urban settlements as presented by different planners. Thus, finding the visionary position and standing there grants planners an effective perspective that leads them to cope with the complexity of non-parochial urban problems and set out to solve such problems. Therefore, the people around the elephant let go of their own conceptions and take a unified and complete one, as the storyteller's. They think they have got the visionary position via different paths, such as education, experience, intuition, etc. They believe that seeking the position paves the way for removing conflicts and establishing an impenetrable and stable base upon which to build consensus among officials, citizens, and disciplines involved in the planning process. Thus, the answer to the above question will be as an elixir. During recent decades, theorists have attempted to prescribe their own cure for treating conflicts according to their own diagnosis (Innes, 1996; Innes & Booher, 1999; Forester, 1996; Healey, 1992, 1997b; Hopkins, 2006).

For instance, when Hoch mentions the tale, he highlights a few questions that have the same connotation:

"What if the people had listened to one another? How might they have come to recognize their differences as less due to commission than omission? What if the people had spoken with one another about their observations? (Hoch, 2002, p. 55)"

We have analyzed the details of parts of the western planning literature, and have found that competing ideas criticize one another and question their competencies while, at the same time, supporting other ideas.

## PLANNERS' SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

During recent decades, two kinds of thought had a chance to influence urban planning. On one hand, many planners have adopted the concepts and insights of 'political economy', which refers to a broad stream of thought developed in the 1970s. Such a definition owes allegiance to Marxism (Friedmann, 1987, p. 264). Thus, for political economists urban planning is a 'social event', and planners should attempt to deal with the contradictions of capitalism such as inequality, poverty, minorities, lack of collective consumption goods, and so forth (Sandercock & Berry, 1983, p. xi).These planners apply political economy to critical analysis of the state and to urban space as the projection of society on space (Castells, 1977, p. 115).Two other planners who represent this point of view are Mickey Lauria and Marsh Feldman.

On the other hand, there are planning theorists who use ideas from the intellectual traditions of pragmatism, rhetoric, phenomenology, and discourse analysis, as introduced as 'interpretive turn'. Charles J. Hoch stands on this ground, presuming that the rationale for a pragmatic approach to planning theory is respectable. The ideas of pragmatism resurfaced in the 1980s and led planners, interested in public policy questions, to focus on the practices of 'democracy' and governance and on how key actors go about making practical judgments (Hillier & Healey, 2008, p. 355).

The debates were collected in detail in 1997 in Planning Theory (Vol.17), which had Patsy Healeyas its guest editor. This debate gave participants enough time to articulate their ideas and critiques through letters. Thus, this publication gives us an opportunity to deliberate on the arguments as an apt case study and to analyze them rhetorically so as to clarify our question, regarding the search for the visionary position of the storyteller within a specialized context.

Our engagement includes three steps. First, we try to compare the debate with the tale of the elephant and examine the correspondence between them. This will be done because none of the participants used the tale explicitly. Second, we will attempt to seek the positions of contributors in the debate to understand what point of reference they relied on to make their judgments. This will be done by rhetorically analyzing the contents of the letters. Third, answer this question: Would the points of reference be the visionary position? All of these steps will be taken by emphasizing the issue of consensus among people involved in the planning process. Eventually, a conclusion will be drawn or other questions will rise as potential for other studies.

## DISCUSSION
## THE NATURE OF THE DEBATE

### Step 1: Examine Correspondence between the Debate and the Tale

The features of the tale - as mentioned above - and content of the debate are compared.

### The Main Issue of the Debate

Healey portrays the debate between the representatives of two conflicting trends in contemporary American urban planning theories. She points out:

"In this discussion arena, those concerned with the conceptual underpinnings of planning field can reach across the divides of national systems and practices and of substantive policy preoccupations to debate together (Healey, 1997a, p. 10)".

Clearly, this quotation indicates that the seminal issue in the debate is what should be done as plausible and desirable urban planning, and how it should be done. In other words, they have a discussion about the nature of being in the dark room. Hoch also says:

"Planners would consider this statement as just plain common sense, an obvious statement of what planning is about. Pragmatic understanding reminds us that this allegedly common conception requires thoughtful and attentive efforts to keep making sense (Hoch, 1997, p. 26)".

### Insisting on Their Claims as the Most Complete Image

Hoch begins with this quotation: "I know my paradigm's sublime, the others all seem wrong…." (Hoch, 1997, p. 13).Then he apparently neutrally mentions that Judith Innes described 'interpretative turn' as a paradigm shift (Hoch, 1997, p. 14). In addition, Hoch believes that the urban political economists shifted the paradigm way back in the 1970s when their ideas flourished according to their claims (Hoch, 1997, p. 14).On the other hand, Feldman writes:

"Hoch uses the term of 'paradigm' to defend from criticism a theoretical approach that does not see itself as science, that has little use for 'structure', and that is decidedly counter-revolutionary. Just consult the title to Kuhn's book to appreciate this humor (Feldman, 1997, p. 46)".

Through an overview of the debate, it would be understood that he tacitly indicates that the only side entitled to use 'paradigm' within this dispute is 'political

economy', which relies mostly on plausible and certain knowledge and methods. This treatment will be promoted by considering Lauria's claim:

"All interpretative theorists wandered down the wrong path. They were disenchanted with the structural political economy arguments. (Lauria, 1997, pp. 14 &19)"

Today, regarding the outstanding work of Kuhn, we know that using the concept of paradigm is like seeing the elephant as a whole. Feldman says: "After all, only such causal powers enable us to change the world, which in the last instance is what planning is all about" (Feldman, 1997, p. 89). Eventually, Healy like a storyteller concludes that both views are incomplete:

"I have argued that we need more than neo-pragmatism; just as we need more than an account of the interplay of economic and political power… (Healey, 1997a, p. 77)"

## Dialogue among People in the Dark Room

### a) Accusing one another Especially due to Misunderstanding

The debate is full of accusations on both sides, especially of misunderstanding each other. The following have been selected as a few quotations of direct accusations.(Healey, 1997a, pp. 12-70):

Table 1: Accusations floating around among the debaters

| Hoch | Lauria & Feldman |
|---|---|
| This misunderstanding becomes apparent when Lauria discusses his own adoption of the 'communicative approach' to inquiry (Ibid, p. 19). Lauria and Whelan overlook how their method has its own rhetoric (Ibid, p. 18) This skeptical critique misses important dimensions of the work (Ibid, p. 15) Lauria and Whelan's criticism misses the point (Ibid, p. 17). Feldman insists, completely misses the fact that 'practice' is implicitly a theoretical creation (Ibid, p. 20). They engage in tautological reasoning (Ibid, p. 20). Feldman really goes ballistic after reading my claim that the episodic narrative does not serve theory, but the characters and their actions (Ibid, p. 26). | This misinterpretation of our criticism reappears in his representation of our evaluation the paper (Ibid, p. 40). This inference belies a misunderstanding of our ontological and epistemological framework (critical realism) (Ibid, p. 41). He filters our comments through his own lens, reading some things into what we say and not recognizing others (Ibid, p. 43). I urge my readers to dismiss the entire enterprise as misguided and distracting ….the communication folks are leading people down an historical dead end (Feldman-1995). Hence, they (the pragmatist ideas) are misleading and obfuscating (Feldman, 1996). Hoch's paper has many of the errors… (Ibid, p. 44). |

### b) Ridiculing one another's Ideas

Although Hoch scoffs at the other side in an implicit way, others challenge one another's ideas in a ridiculing manner. For example, he describes criticisms coming from Feldman and Lauria as sprinkling in his own ideas (Hoch, 1997, p. 13).Feldman, however, spares no effort at discussing Hoch's ideas and, instead, allocates a major part in his letter for ridiculing him. In explaining the steps in his paper, he says:

In this reply I do three things. First, I give examples from Hoch's paper to demonstrate its parodic and humorous impact, if not his intent. Then I summarize the main jokes and explain why they are funny. Finally, I turn to planning itself and ask why what seems like

democratic planning to some audiences may seem like a joke to others. (Yes, the irony and sarcasm are deliberate.) (Feldman, 1997, p. 44)

### Finishing up the Debate without any Consensus

Hoch points out: "I don't expect that my remarks will convince the critics…"(Hoch, 1997, p. 17).And he winds up his conclusion in this way: "These beliefs remain contested" (Hoch, 1997, p. 36). Moreover, Feldman satirically expresses his disappointment in reaching at any agreement through his article titled "Can we talk?"(Feldman, 1997, p. 43). Healey also mentions that "it is unlikely to conclude the discussion among planning

theorists …" (Healey, 1997a, p. 12). Clearly, they agree to disagree.

Feldman has also maintained speed on presenting ideas in the realm of political economy (Feldman…). Lauria, presenting thoughts on regime theory, has not bowed toward others either.

During the past three decades, neither Hoch's pragmatism has been influenced by political economy, for example, nor have the other sides' arguments been affected by Hoch's pragmatism.

Some may consider the mere dialogue as the beginning of process of reaching consensus. If this were the case, why is it necessary to talk about consensus in place of dialogue? Furthermore, if we considered it as a beginning of a process, shouldn't we have seen some sparks of consensus after four decades of debate?

### Step 2: Seeking the Points of Reference

After examining the similarities between the debate of the two urban planning thoughts and the tale of the elephant, now we search for the basis of the participants' claims. In other words, we need a point of reference to pinpoint the claims on which they can know their rivals' faults and therefore to ridicule them. So far, this paper has not been concerned with what the participants argue about but with how they interact. The following table - showing how the participants interact - includes two columns for each participant. The first indicates their own point of reference; in the second they make judgments about others' point of reference (Healey, 1997a, pp. 12-70).

**Table 2: Points of Reference of the Debators**

| | Own Point of Reference | The Other |
|---|---|---|
| Hoch | *) I will offer a brief rationale for pragmatic planning theory…about the meaning and usefulness of pragmatism to planning thought (Ibid, p13).<br>*) Neopragmatic ideas not only offer an alternative to these rationalist dualisms, but speak directly to the conventional understanding many planners use to describe and justify what they do (Ibid, p. 22).<br>*) Pragmatism can help them cope with these problems not because it resolves long-standing philosophical disputes…The planning intelligentsia…should consider pragmatism as a useful alternative (Ibid, p. 23).<br>*) A pragmatic and rhetorical approach to reasoning does not ask about truth or falsehood… (Ibid, p. 30).<br>*) The pragmatists hope to find and persuade willing participants to stop discriminating and enforce fair housing policy (Ibid, p. 35). | *) Lauria and Whelan want to foster a critical Scientific approach to the study of human settlements …. (Ibid, p. 14).<br>*) The critical edge of the statistical study flows from the discipline of this kind of social science method...their treatment through a series of statistical tests…(Ibid, p. 17).<br>*) They want us to believe that empirical findings…... (Ibid, p. 18).<br>*) He uses a NeoMarxist inspired vocabulary to propose a chain of arguments … (Ibid, p. 21).<br>*) They choose …'geo-historical' social theory that describes the complex set of causal relationships… (Ibid, p. 28).<br>*) The political economists would take their critical argument upstream, seeking the structural causes for this local manifestation of societal racism (Ibid, p. 35). |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Lauria, & Feldman | *) we wish to encourage the continued development of a planning theory shaped by a more inclusive rational explanation of urban political economy (Ibid, p. 40-L&W).<br>*) To take a political economic approach is view the economy as socially and politically embedded and as structured by power relations (Ibid, p. 41).<br>*) Here is where our concern for theory and method can help us out (Ibid, p. 42).<br>*) I used this metaphor to represent any real, macroscopic causal 'force'... (Ibid, p. 45).<br>*) critical realism is emancipator because it licenses knowledge of real possibilities for humanity… (Ibid, p. 46).<br>*) We can "use" science because its predictions help us manipulate the world for our purposes (Ibid, p. 47). | *) we argue that he provided no evidence or logic for the reader to rule out other plausible alternative explanations (Lauria and Whelan, 1995).<br>*) A pragmatist is comfortable with a relativist position in the adjudication between different interpretations and explanations (Ibid, p.41).<br>*) This is a difficult task because Hoch's underlying metatheory, neo-pragmatism, has very subtle… (Ibid, p. 43).<br>*) neo-pragmatism dismisses all knowledge of things about which we can do nothing (Ibid, p. 46).<br>*) neo-pragmatists reject 'scientific trump' but not 'bourgeois trump' (Ibid, p. 46). |

All of these many quotations are lumped together to clarify the points of reference of the debate participants. Three points can be highlighted:

Certain notions have a main role in the debate, such as pragmatism, Neo-pragmatism, Neo-Marxism, relativism, inquiry, rhetoric, metatheory, basic theory, reality, critical realism, positivism thought, method, and objective analysis.

All the notions can be summarized into two major established realms: philosophy and science.

The participants acknowledge the second point, although they find the interpretation of their point of reference distorted by the other sides of the debate.

### Step 3: Verification of the Bases of the Reference

If planning theories were shaped as second-hand theories with main approaches taken from philosophy or the sciences, disagreements among planners indicated conflicts among philosophers and scientists. It is possible, however, to think that planners failed to grasp the core of philosophical ideas or scientific approaches.

### The Myth of Science

In Tractatus, Wittgenstein explicitly mentions this notion: "…The totality of true propositions is the total natural science or the totality of the natural science" (Stroll, 2002, p. 64).One result of this way of thinking is that academic disciplines want to have a place at the trough. The attempt of planners in this way is embedded as "rational comprehensive and synoptic planning" that planners around the world insist on following up when they make plans. As Faludi portrays:

"Comprehensive planning is neutral and compares alternatives in a quantifiable manner and uses quantitative models of resource use and allocation and decisions are centralized and at high levels. (Faludi, 1973, p. 150)"

Thus, standing on such position illustrated through this account of science allows every expert to make claim indubitably, like our storyteller. Wide-ranging reviews of science and its foundations and methods became top of the agenda for some eminent intellectuals, like Quine & Kemeny (1952), Polanyi (1958), Hanson (1958), Toulmin (1961), Kuhn (1962), Feyerabend (1975), and Rorty (1979),who worked on the frontiers of science.

However, it is clearly evident that there is no agreement among intellectuals on the nature of science, scientific methods, scientific theories, scientific observations, and so forth. How could the storyteller see the whole elephant if he or she was to rely on science? As Neurath points out, scientists are like sailors who have to rebuild their boat at open sea. (Pombo, 2011, p. 68). Scientists can only grope in the dark.

### The Myth of Philosophy

Is there any glimmer of hope for consensus among philosophers? Since the 1970s, many of the celebrated philosophers have endeavored to respond to this question. In a conference held at Yale University in April 1998, seven prominent philosophers were asked to answer this question. The papers presented at the conference were collected and compiled into a book. This is the book's brief extract in the editors' words: "There are as many answers to the question 'What is philosophy?' as there are

philosophers" (Ragland & Heidt, 1998, p. 5).It seems they are quite right about this statement because there is a broad spectrum of opinions among just seven contemporary eminent philosophers answering the mentioned question. On one side Karl-Otto Apel, a German philosopher, is the only representative herein of the "transcendental mode of philosophizing".Apel divides philosophy into first philosophy and speculative metaphysics. (Ragland & Heidt, 1998, pp. 153-157)

On the other side, Barry Stroud, an American philosopher, rejects Apel's idea about first philosophy and argues:

"We can never achieve a detached theoretical point of view on the world, and that although such a viewpoint would perhaps be what philosophy aspires to, the only understanding we can actually attain is a human, self-understanding. There is no "view from nowhere." (Ragland & Heidt, 1998, pp. 25-45)"

These two opinions are completely different. While "first philosophy" would offer the visionary position to the storyteller, this idea is dismissed by others. There are others who also disagree on the nature of philosophy. Althusser, for example, defines philosophy as "class struggle in theory", thus radically separating himself from those who claimed philosophers could adopt a "God's eye view" as a purely neutral judge (Althusser, 2006, p. 251).

Rorty also explains the sharp conflicts within three famous philosophers. He says (Rorty, 2010, p. 9):

"The first is common to Husserl and his positivist opponents which is the most familiar. On this view philosophy is modeled on science…The second is Heideggerians who turn away from science to poem… The third is Dewey and his pragmatist followers turn away to the engineers and the social workers. They conceive of philosophy as politics."

In retrospect, it is about time to claim that "science" and "philosophy" cannot be the visionary position. Our discussion is not to say that one cannot attain a position of science or philosophy. Rather, we have to admit that such a position does not furnish omniscience.

## CONCLUSION

The visionary position is the position of the storyteller. In this article, we argued that such position does not and could not exist among planners. Patsy Healey, as the guest editor of the Planning Theory issue mentioned in this article, not only introduces the precedence of the debate between planners but intervenes in the debate as well. She claims:

"I also think that we need to recognize that the diversities and differences we are aware of in urban contexts are more than just between the power position of different groups, or about the variation among individuals. (Healey, 1997a, pp. 66-67)"

On further reflection about her letter we realize that she is clearly playing the role of storyteller. She utilizes the mentioned allegory through the debate and makes her own judgments. However, Healey, like Hoch, Feldman, Lauria, and others, is groping in the dark and nothing more. Her judgments rely on Anthony Gidden's ideas, which have no advantage over Neo-Marxists or Neo-pragmatists. Thus, if all participants in the planning theory debate tacitly suppose that their own point of reference is much more complete than others, then how can we think, let alone talk, about building consensus among them?

In this article, we even made a hypothetical assumption that it could be possible to build a consensus among the allegorical characters in the elephant story. Even so, we cannot claim that the new consensus-based description of the elephant is more complete than the individual descriptions before. Such a claim is itself derived from a point of reference that has no privilege over other points of reference. Thus, it is crucial to understand that the visionary position is a megalomaniacal delusion inspiring many theorists to imagine they can see or observe the whole of the elephant better than others. This delusion grants them arrogance to face competing theories in a manner not unlike Quixotic knights. This delusion can cause chaotic behavior among experts, especially when encountering ideas not fitting their desire.

Although we do not force one single planning theory to be accepted by all theorists, in this article we have tried to indicate that one can hardly expect to build consensus among theorists about the nature of urban planning and how it should be done. As noted, it seems that building consensus among planners is essentially impossible. Not only consensus has not been reached in the past three decades, diversity and gap has increased. Diversity in optimistic view has added to the strength of urban planning.

Thus, the audiences, i.e. the public, remain deeply suspicious of planning claims and decisions. New challenging questions arise: What is the necessity of building consensus among theorists? Why it is impossible? These questions motivate other studies on debates surrounding planning theory. Furthermore, these questions pose something of a paradox. If building consensus among planners is a prerequisite for building consensus on planning practice, as non experts expect, then we intentionally obscure variation in ideas and opinions. This leads us to a new kind of dogmatism

making consensus nonsense. On the other hand, if building consensus among planners, who have learned about the importance of some issues like collaboration, deliberation, participation, and consensus, is unintelligible and impossible, then how can we claim to build consensus among various groups and individuals with conflicting interests and desires involved in all planning projects. Planners should acknowledge that their audience has the right to be suspicious about their claims, especially consensus building.

A criticism on above argument deals with a question which needs to be addressed as well: Does this argument means that we must adhere to one theory in planning that all should have consensus on? This criticism is based on two assumptions: a) one cannot ignore diversity in theories, and b) reaching consensus is the best we planners can do. The first assumption is axiomatic. This article, however, has challenged the second assumption. How can we accept the possibility and necessity of this idea that "my theory" is a theory within the diverse theories? The evidence presented here does not support that.

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