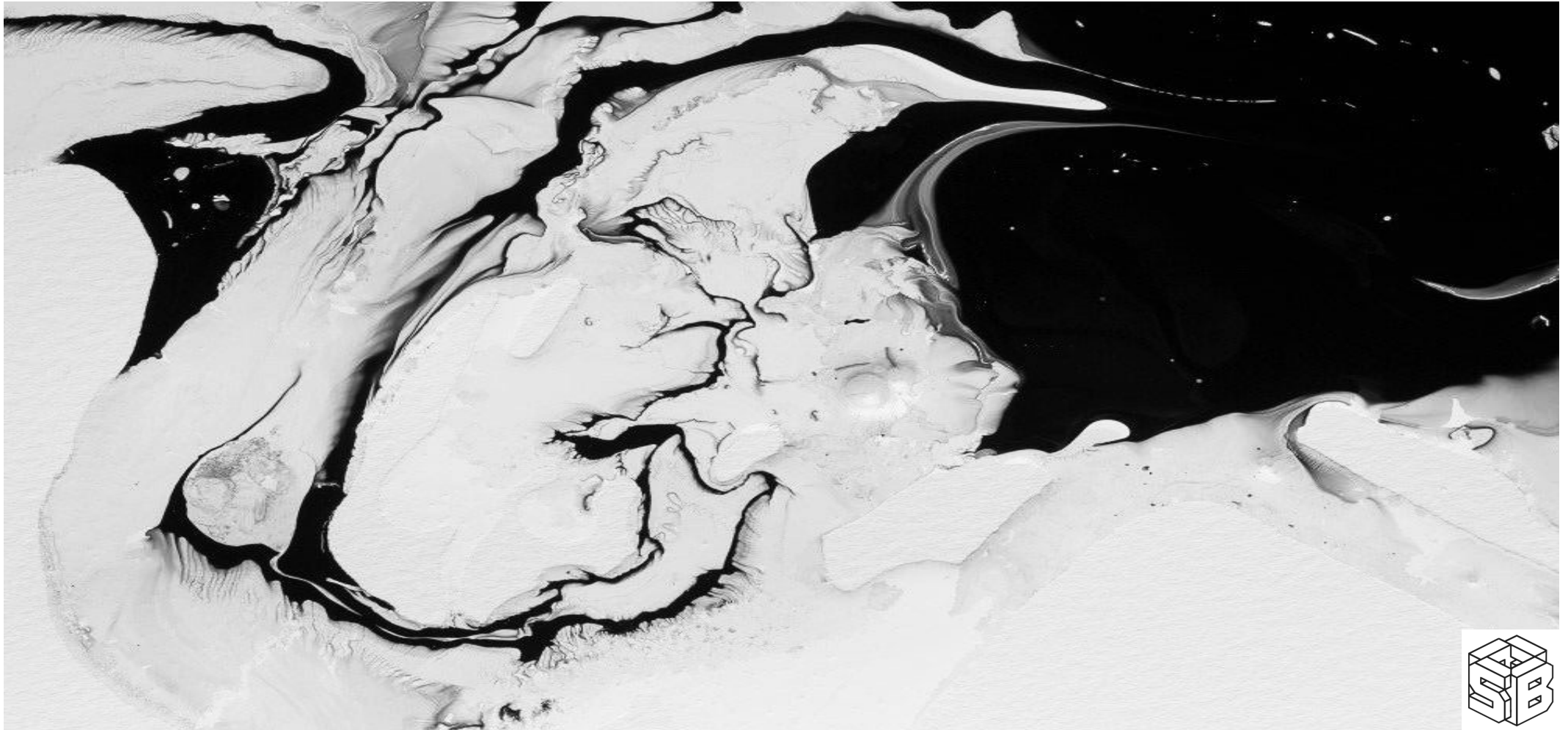


For Planning

On Planning's Identity

April 2026 | By Moozhan Shakeri



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"If planning is everything, maybe it's nothing."
— Aaron Wildavsky, 1973

"There's nothing wrong with planning, it's just not strategy."
— Richard Rumelt, Good Strategy/Bad Strategy, 2011

Executive Summary

Urban planning has struggled with its own identity for over sixty years. Aaron Wildavsky's 1973 question, whether planning can be coherently defined at all, remains unresolved despite successive theoretical turns. Communicative planning, collaborative planning, emotive and storytelling paradigms, each has offered a new account of what planning is for. None has resolved the uncertainty.

This report argues the search has been looking in the wrong places. Planning's identity problem is not a failure to find the right definition of its content or purpose, a better account of what planning is and what outcomes it needs to achieve. Nor is it a failure of procedural rigour. It is a failure to meaningfully link the two. It is the illusion of the control over this link that keeps the field uneasy with itself.

The argument here is, at its root, a revival of a project Faludi began in the early 1970s and that the field subsequently set aside. The idea that planning theory should be built on a rigorous account of how planners make decisions, not on successive redefinitions of planning's purpose or content. This claim is grounded in Richard Rumelt's framework for strategic judgment and in contemporary cognitive and decision science, a field that has undergone significant transformation since planning last engaged with it.

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1. Introduction

Aaron Wildavsky's 1973 question¹, 'If planning is everything, maybe it's nothing?', remains one of the most cited provocations in planning theory. Not because it was conclusive. Because it was never answered.

Over the following five decades the planning field moved through successive theoretical turns, communicative planning, shaped by Habermasian deliberative theory, collaborative planning, an emotive turn that foregrounded the affective dimensions of practice, and storytelling paradigm, just to name a few. Each offered a new conceptual language for what planning is or should be. None resolved the underlying uncertainty that Wildavsky named.

Today, planning theorists continue to reach for Wildavsky to justify the search, to show that the question of planning's nature remains open and that theoretical work therefore remains necessary. This is not an unreasonable use of the text. But it has a cost. Each new theoretical turn implicitly frames its predecessor as inadequate, without resolving the question of adequacy. The search continues, and the field's discomfort with its own foundations continues with it.

This report argues the search has been looking in the wrong places. Planning's identity problem is not a failure to find the right definition of its content or purpose, a better account of what planning is and what it is for. Nor is it a failure of procedural rigour. It is a failure to question the assumption that has remained constant across all efforts, that a rigorous process, whether rational or communicative, reliably produces the desired outcomes.

This assumption has never been established. It has simply been inherited, restated in new language, and carried forward each time a theoretical turn replaced its predecessor. Whether the connection between process and outcome can be controlled at all, and what a more honest account of that relationship would mean for how planners understand and evaluate their own practice, remains unanswered in planning.

The argument here is, at its root, a revival of a project Faludi began in the early 1970s and that the field subsequently set aside. The idea that planning theory should be built on a rigorous account of how planners make decisions, not on successive redefinitions of planning's purpose or content.

What was unavailable to Faludi, and what makes this revival substantively more than a restatement, is the wealth of thinking that has since accumulated in strategic management, cognitive science, and decision psychology.

These fields have developed sophisticated, empirically grounded accounts of how skilled individuals reason under uncertainty, how judgment can be structured and trained, and where the limits of process-based thinking lie. Much of the confusion that has persisted in planning theory, we argue, can be resolved through serious engagement with what they now offer.

This is the first report in the 'For Planning' series, which aims to question several influential assumptions in planning theory and practice and to build, step by step, a positive alternative; planning understood as strategic decision-making, with the individual planner's judgment and cognitive capacity at its centre.

Notes

¹ Wildavsky, A. (1973). If planning is everything, maybe it's nothing. *Policy sciences*, 4(2), 127-153.

2. The Process–Outcome Trap

The rational planning inheritance

Modern planning's theoretical crisis begins with the rise and fall of rational comprehensive planning. The rational model, dominant through the 1950s and 1960s, rested on a specific claim that systematic, scientifically grounded analysis of goals, alternatives, and consequences would reliably produce rational outcomes. This was not merely a methodological preference. It was a causal claim, that rigorous process produces intended results.

Urban renewal programmes in American cities produced displacement and community destruction on a scale that discredited their stated aims. European national plans failed to meet targets. Wildavsky¹ documented that France's indicative plans missed targets across all four periods he examined, and Japan's plans were exceeded by 40–100%, exposing an arbitrary relationship between planning intention and economic reality.

The Soviet model, the most ambitious attempt at rational planning, produced a defining irony. The targets designed to coordinate economic actors were systematically manipulated by those very actors to serve their own interests rather than

the plan's. The gap between planning aspiration and social outcome was not a marginal problem. It was structural.

The planning field responded with a diagnosis and a solution. The diagnosis blamed rational, scientific method for being too rigid, too abstracted from social complexity, too dependent on a model of human behaviour that was empirically false.

The solutions were divided into two directions. One strand moved away from process altogether; if the rational method had failed, what mattered was then to identify and promote better outcomes, sustainable cities, inclusive communities, equitable environments, and to make those outcomes the organising purpose of planning. Process became secondary, a means to a specified end rather than a discipline in its own right. The other strand retained process as the organising concept but changed its character. Rather than rational-scientific procedure, planning should be guided by communicative, participatory, and deliberative process grounded in social interaction.

Both responses were understandable. Both contained the same foundational error. Neither strand established that rational method was actually the cause of the failures.

The failures were equally consistent with inadequate political will, implementation capacity constraints, resource limitations, or the irreducible complexity of social systems, none of which a different method or a better-specified outcome would have resolved.

The critique was empirically underdetermined. And crucially, the underlying assumption, that the right process reliably produces the right outcomes, survived intact across both responses. In the outcome-oriented strand, it was preserved by inversion; begin from the desired outcome and treat process as its instrument. In the communicative strand, it was restated in new language; a more socially grounded process produces more legitimate and effective results. The target changed. The structure of the claim did not.

The communicative turn repeats the structure

Communicative Planning's claim proved as empirically fragile as the one it replaced. Bent Flyvbjerg's landmark study of planning in Aalborg, Denmark, *Rationality and Power*², followed a communicative planning process in close empirical detail and found it systematically distorted by power relations that communicative ideals could not overcome. Actors with greater institutional power shaped outcomes regardless of the deliberative framework in place. Jean Hillier's *Shadows of Power*³ reached parallel conclusions.

The communicative model presupposed a social openness that does not obtain in practice. Research on major infrastructure projects demonstrated that planning processes generate systematic optimism bias in cost and benefit projections regardless of the deliberative quality of the process producing them⁴.

The theoretical response was primarily to refine and extend the communicative model; to add considerations of power and difference, to move toward collaborative, agonistic, or post-structural variants. Each successive adjustment preserved the essential structure, a better process produces better outcomes or uniting groups around better outcomes would construct a valid process from bottom up.

The source of planning's frustration

There is a practical consequence to this pattern that deserves attention. When planners evaluate their practice against the standard of intended outcomes reliably achieved through correct process, they will always find themselves falling short, not because planning produces no real value, but because that standard cannot be met under the conditions in which planning operates.

Complex social and political systems do not respond to intervention in linearly predictable ways. No process, however well-designed, can guarantee social outcomes. By holding itself to a guarantee it cannot provide, planning often labels genuine achievements as insufficient and legitimate uncertainty as theoretical failure.

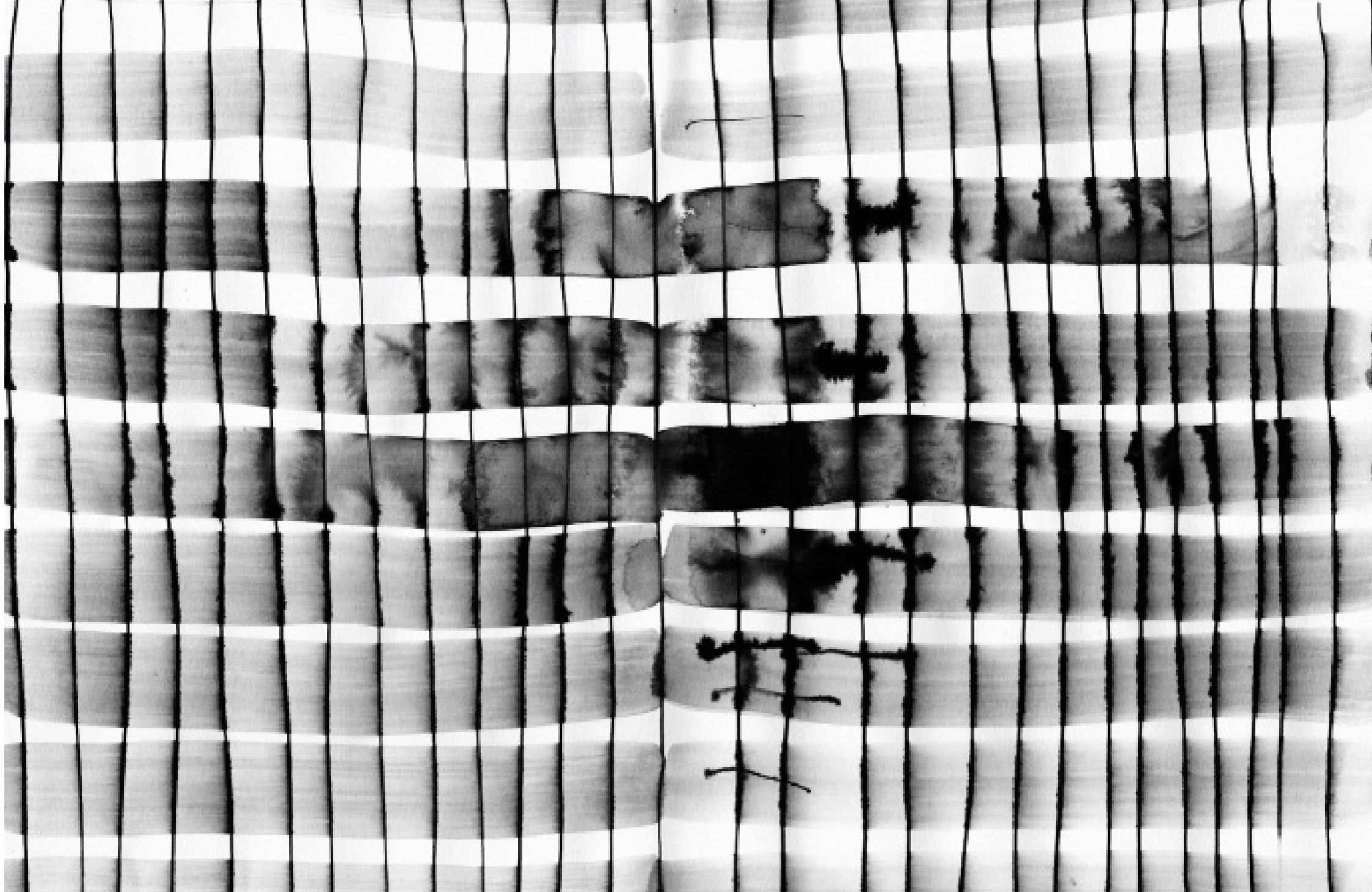
Notes

1 Wildavsky, A. (1973). If planning is everything, maybe it's nothing. *Policy sciences*, 4(2), 127-153.

2 Flyvbjerg, B. (1998). *Rationality and power: Democracy in practice*. University of Chicago press.

3 Hillier, J. (2003). *Shadows of power: an allegory of prudence in land-use planning*. Routledge.

4 Flyvbjerg, B., Bruzelius, N., & Rothengatter, W. (2003). *Megaprojects and risk: An anatomy of ambition*. Cambridge university press.



3. What Strategic Decision-Making Actually Is?

On Strategic Decision Making

Strategic decision-making offers a different standard, not a lower one, but an honest one. Strategic decision-making, as developed in contemporary management theory, is not a planning substitute or a corporate import. It is a framework for how any actor, individual, organisation, or public body, can reason well about a difficult problem when resources are limited, information is incomplete, and outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

Richard Rumelt's formulation, developed in his book, *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy* and across several decades of research at UCLA, offers the clearest account. At the core of strategy is what he calls the kernel; three interlocking elements.

A diagnosis defines the nature of the challenge, simplifying a complex situation by identifying which aspects are critical and which are not. A guiding policy establishes the overall approach chosen to address the diagnosed challenge, specifying not only what to do but, crucially, what not to do. Coherent actions are the coordinated steps and resource commitments that carry the guiding policy into practice.

The kernel is defined as much by what it excludes as by what it includes. It does not include a guaranteed outcome. It does not include a comprehensive plan. It does not include a prediction of social behaviour. A strategic decision is a focused commitment of attention and resources toward a well-diagnosed challenge.

Rumelt is explicit that bad strategy, which he argues is endemic across public and private sectors alike, is precisely the substitution of aspiration for diagnosis, the production of goals, vision statements, and desired futures that name outcomes without identifying the challenge or explaining how the proposed approach creates leverage against it.

Plans Versus Strategy

Rumelt draws a sharp distinction between planning and strategic decision-making. Planning, in his view, produces lists of goals, initiatives, and coordinated activities, but not strategy. Strategy begins with a rigorous diagnosis of the central challenge, followed by a guiding policy and a coherent set of actions designed to address it. Without this

diagnostic step, organizations substitute ambition for logic, mistaking goal-setting for strategic thinking. For Rumelt, strategy is closer to design than to planning, it requires making hard choices, concentrating resources, and accepting trade-offs, rather than producing consensus-driven documents that try to cover all bases.

Planning theorists will recognise the description; aspirational frameworks, visions of sustainable cities, resilient communities, inclusive growth, frequently exhibit exactly this structure; desired outcomes stated without a grounded diagnosis of what is making the challenge difficult, or a coherent account of how the proposed intervention creates meaningful leverage. They are, in Rumelt's taxonomy, bad strategy presented in planning language.

What has historically been called urban planning comprises two quite different functions that sit uneasily under the same name. The first is genuinely strategic; diagnosing spatial, social, and environmental challenges, formulating guiding policies, and making consequential choices about where to commit attention and resources under conditions of genuine uncertainty. This is what strategic decision-making theory describes.

The second function is closer to what public administration has traditionally done; translating strategic choices into statutory plans, zoning instruments, development control decisions, and regulatory frameworks, and managing the processes by which those instruments are implemented. Urban planning has always contained both functions, but has rarely theorised them separately.

The conflation has consequences. It imports the accountability demands of public administration, procedural compliance, stakeholder management, democratic legitimacy, into what should be the space of strategic diagnosis, and it imports the aspirational standards of strategic vision-making into what is fundamentally a regulatory and implementation function. Separating the two, conceptually if not institutionally, clarifies what kind of thinking each demands and helps explain why planning theory has found it so difficult to develop a coherent account of either.

On the public-private distinction

The most common objection to strategic decision-making frameworks in planning is that strategy is inherently a corporate tool, concerned with competitive advantage, and unsuited to public planning under democratic accountability and statutory constraint. This objection is weaker than it appears.

Private strategic decision-makers operate under conditions structurally similar to those facing public planners; incomplete information, regulatory requirements, stakeholder pressures, resource scarcity, social and market dynamics they cannot control. They make irreversible commitments knowing that outcomes depend on factors beyond their reach.

Strategic management theory has never claimed otherwise. The content of public planning's purpose differs, community benefit rather than shareholder value, but the epistemic and decision-making structure is the same, limited resources, genuine uncertainty, consequential and often irreversible choices.

The claim that planning is too constrained to act strategically is, in part, an artefact of planning's own theoretical excess. That is having promised more than any process can deliver, planning experiences its real constraints as disabling rather than as the normal conditions of professional judgment. Good upstream strategic thinking, a clear diagnosis, a focused guiding policy, reduces downstream implementation difficulty.

Much of planning's investment in participatory process design is a response to implementation failures that are frequently the product of poor strategic diagnosis, interventions designed without a clear account of what the central challenge is, what leverage the proposed response creates, or what commitments would need to be sustained for results to materialise. Participation cannot compensate for this. It can add legitimacy and local knowledge to a well-framed strategic decision, but it cannot substitute for the quality of the underlying reasoning.

4. The Cognitive Gap: A Parallel Revolution Missed

A historical coincidence with lasting consequences

The emergence of rational planning in the 1950s and 1960s coincided with the earliest phase of scientific inquiry into human mind. Herbert Simon, whose foundational work on bounded rationality dates from 1955, was developing his framework at exactly the same moment planning was adopting rational process models. This coincidence carried an irony that shaped planning theory for decades.

Simon called this bounded rationality. It did enter planning theory, selectively, unevenly, and never at the level that disturbed the process-outcome assumption. Lindblom's incrementalism¹, developed in the same period, was in many respects a practical policy response to Simon's finding. He argued that if cognition is bounded and comprehensive rationality is unavailable, then successive limited adjustments are the realistic mode of navigation.

Schön's reflective practitioner² drew on a closely related tradition, arguing that professional judgment operates through situated, improvisational knowing-in-action rather than the

application of formal method. Both were serious engagements with the limits of rationality.

What planning did not engage with, and what carried the most lasting consequence for its theoretical trajectory, was what Simon himself did next. Simon did not conclude that bounded rationality was a permanent ceiling on decision quality. In a 1959 RAND report³ co-authored with Allen Newell and J.C. Shaw, *The Processes of Creative Thinking*, the three argued that human cognitive limitations could be modelled, extended, and in principle replicated by computational systems. Even creativity, the cognitive capacity that appeared most resistant to formalisation, followed identifiable heuristic processes that a computer program could simulate.

The Logic Theorist, developed in 1955, and the General Problem Solver, which followed in 1957, demonstrated exactly this, that systematic algorithmic processes could produce intellectual outcomes, including solutions to problems that appeared to require creative insight. The implication of Simon's programme, taken as a whole, at least in the direction his work pointed, was an argument for building better process

machinery that, unlike the human mind, would not be subject to attentional limits, computational shortcuts, or motivational distortion.

The implication for planning theory was significant and almost entirely missed. Simon's programme reinforced the process-outcome assumption at precisely the moment it was most vulnerable. If human cognition is limited, and if computational systems can replicate and extend those cognitive processes, running algorithms more reliably, processing more information, avoiding the biases that distort human judgment, then the process-outcome link remained available as a theoretical commitment. It simply required better instruments.

Planning absorbed Simon's language of bounded rationality as a critique of rational method without following the argument to its conclusion. That conclusion was not that process cannot deliver outcomes, but that better-designed process systems, eventually, computational ones, could do what human planners could not reliably do alone.

The revolution that proceeded without planning

Between the 1960s and today, cognitive science and decision research underwent a transformation. Planning theory did not engage with it. From the 1960s onwards, researchers in psychology and cognitive science approached human cognition from a premise quite different from Simon's. Rather than treating cognitive limitations as engineering problems, this tradition attended to the full texture of skilled human experience, judgment, and creativity.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's decades of empirical research on creativity and expert performance, synthesised in *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*⁴, showed that skilled human cognition involves states of absorbed engagement and intrinsic motivation that resist reduction to explicit process steps.

The totality of how humans think and decide, on this account, exceeds what any formal model of it captures. Over the following decades, successive bodies of research each shed light on specific aspects of how decisions are actually made; the systematic patterns through which human judgment departs from formal rationality (Kahneman and Tversky, 1970s and 1980s), the recognition-based decision processes of experts working under real-world pressure (Klein, 1990s), the dynamic interaction between fast intuitive and slow analytical cognition (Kahneman, 2011). Each illuminated a dimension of skilled decision-making. None claimed to exhaust it.

Gary Klein's naturalistic decision-making research, developed through the 1980s and 1990s, went further. Studying expert decision-makers, firefighters, military commanders, intensive care nurses, working under conditions of time pressure, uncertainty, and high stakes, Klein found that experts do not optimise across alternatives. They recognise patterns from prior experience, rapidly construct a mental simulation of how a response would This recognition-primed decision model is fast, contextual, and deeply dependent on accumulated expertise. It is not rational optimisation, but it is clearly skilled, clearly learnable, and clearly effective.

Planning theory's move from rational process to communicative process bypassed all of this. The field moved from an inadequate model of individual rationality to a model of social interaction, skipping the scientific programme that was simultaneously building a more accurate account of how skilled individuals actually think.

Its periodic returns to the human, to practitioner experience, emotions, local knowledge, and the recognition that planners are not neutral technicians, have not been driven by engagement with this research. They have been reactive, responses to the perceived over-objectification of planning methods, motivated by what the rational or communicative model excluded rather than by what cognitive science had actually established.

The result is a persistent asymmetry. Planning theory has a sophisticated account of social dynamics, power relations, and deliberative process, and an almost entirely undeveloped account of individual cognition and its processes of decision-making.

Strategic thinking as creative cognition

This gap matters most when we consider what strategic decision-making actually requires of the individual practitioner. Diagnosis, the first element of Rumelt's kernel, is not a data-retrieval or analytical operation. It is an act of reframing, confronting a complex, multifaceted situation and identifying which aspects are critical, which are peripheral, and what kind of challenge is actually being faced. The strategist must impose a structure, a simplified but accurate

model of the situation that makes focused action possible without distorting the essential features of the problem.

This is the cognitive structure of creative problem-solving. Creativity research consistently identifies the same underlying operation in expert performance; the construction of a new mental model that makes a previously intractable problem tractable. Roger Martin, in *The Opposable Mind*⁵, calls this integrative thinking, holding two opposing models of a situation simultaneously and generating a resolution that captures the advantages of both.

Karl Weick's work on sensemaking⁶ describes how actors construct workable interpretations of genuinely ambiguous situations, a process that is generative, not merely descriptive (*Sensemaking in Organizations*, 1995). Klein's recognition-primed model describes expert cognition that is simultaneously experiential and imaginative: pattern recognition is the foundation, but the mental simulation that tests a potential response is a creative act.

Strategic decision-making is creative work in a precise, non-metaphorical sense. The strategist produces something that did not previously exist, a diagnosis that makes a complex situation legible, a guiding policy that focuses attention and commitment, a coherent response to a challenge that others are experiencing as intractable noise.

These are cognitive products of the same kind as those produced in creative problem-solving in any domain. They require judgment, not formula. They depend on the quality of the individual practitioner's cognitive flexibility,

accumulated experience, and capacity to hold complexity without collapsing it prematurely.

Developing planners means developing that capacity, not equipping them with better process templates or more comprehensive domain knowledge, but strengthening their ability to diagnose, reframe, and commit coherently under uncertainty. This is trainable. Strategic management education has developed methods for it. Expertise research identifies the conditions under which strategic judgment matures. Planning education has barely engaged with either.

Notes

1 Lindblom, C. E. (1979). Still Muddling, Not Yet Through. *Public Administration Review*, 39(6), 517–526. <https://doi.org/10.2307/976178>

2 Schwartz, H. S. (1987). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*.

3 Newell, A., Shaw, J. C., & Simon, H. A. (1962). The processes of creative thinking. In *Contemporary Approaches to Creative Thinking*, 1958, University of Colorado, CO, US; This paper was presented at the aforementioned symposium.. Atherton Press.

4 Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. HarperPerennial, New York, 39, 1-16.

5 Martin, R. L. (2009). *The opposable mind: How successful leaders win through integrative thinking*. Harvard Business Press.

6 Weick, K. E., & Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations* (Vol. 3, No. 10.1002). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.

5. Resuming Faludi's Project

The argument of this report is a resumption of a project that planning theory began and set aside. Andreas Faludi's *Planning Theory*¹, published the same year as Wildavsky's critique, drew a distinction that has never been adequately resolved in the subsequent literature. Substantive theories of planning concern what planning is about, the content of its goals, the domains it addresses, the social values it serves.

Procedural theories concern how planners go about their work; the structure of their reasoning, the methods through which they reach decisions, the professional norms that govern their exercise of judgment. Faludi argued that procedural theory is the proper core of planning science. His later work, particularly *A Decision-Centred View of Environmental Planning*², made this more precise. He argued that planning is fundamentally a decision-making discipline, and planning theory should be a rigorous theory of decision-making in complex public contexts.

The planning field did not follow this direction. The communicative turn, for all its real contributions, was not

a development of procedural theory, it was a displacement of it. By redefining planning as the design and facilitation of communicatively rational social processes, it shifted the unit of analysis from the individual decision-maker to the collective deliberative arena; from process to an outcome.

The procedural question, how does a skilled planner exercise judgment in uncertain conditions? was displaced by the social question; how should deliberative processes be designed to produce legitimate outcomes? The second question is important. But answering it does not answer the first.

Henry Mintzberg's distinction between planning and strategy, developed most fully in *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*³, makes the same cut from a management perspective. Planning is fundamentally about decomposition and programming, breaking a goal into steps and scheduling their execution. Strategy is about synthesis and insight, making sense of a complex situation, identifying where focused commitment creates leverage, producing an account of the challenge that others have not yet

formulated. Planning theory has developed sophisticated accounts of process decomposition. It has almost entirely neglected the synthesis question.

Wildavsky, whose challenge opened this discussion, looks different from this vantage point. He correctly demolished the rational planning model's claim to process-outcome control. But at the decisive moment, when he found that adaptive, modest, circumscribed planning became indistinguishable from ordinary decision-making, he treated this as a reduction: planning reduced to good judgment is no longer planning.

Rumelt would make precisely the opposite move. Good judgment, well-structured, is exactly what strategy looks like. Wildavsky demolished the planning school and made the case for the strategy school, then declined to follow the argument where it led.

Notes

1 Faludi, A. (1973). *Planning Theory*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

2 Faludi, A. (1985). A decision-centred view of environmental planning. *Landscape Planning*, 12(3), 239-256.

3 Mintzberg, H. (1994). Rise and fall of strategic planning. Simon and Schuster.

6. Implications for Practice, Education, and Organisations

For planning Practitioners

Strategic decision-making places professional accountability with the quality of individual judgment, not with the outcome of processes that cannot be fully controlled. This is more demanding than process compliance. A planner accountable for the quality of their strategic reasoning, the clarity of their diagnosis, the coherence of their guiding policy, the coordination of their actions, cannot deflect to procedure when outcomes disappoint.

It is also more honest. Planners who understand their work as strategic decision-making can communicate with stakeholders and communities about what they are actually doing, making the best possible judgment under genuine uncertainty, with a clear account of the challenge and a realistic understanding of what can and cannot be controlled. This is not a reduction in planning ambition. It is an alignment of planning's claims with its actual conditions.

For planning education

Current planning education is organised primarily around domain knowledge, land use, transport, housing, environmental systems, and process skills, statutory procedures, public participation, stakeholder engagement. These matter. They do not, however, constitute a theory of professional judgment, and they do not develop the cognitive capacities that strategic decision-making requires.

Developing planners as strategic decision-makers requires a different emphasis; teaching the structure of strategic diagnosis, developing guiding policy reasoning, and building coherent action thinking. These are learnable cognitive skills, best developed through case-based deliberate practice on realistic problems with structured reflection on the quality of reasoning, not the correctness of outcomes. If strategic diagnosis is a creative cognitive act, then planning education must develop creative problem-solving capacity as a core objective, drawing on design thinking, analogical reasoning, and cognitive flexibility methods that are not currently central to planning curricula.

7. Conclusion

Planning's theoretical crisis has lasted long enough to become a kind of comfort. The successive turns, communicative, collaborative, emotive, post-structural, have generated genuine insights, but they have also established a pattern; the field renews itself by contesting its own identity, each turn offering a revised account of what planning is for, each implicitly framing its predecessor as inadequate. The search has become self-sustaining. A field that measures its theoretical productivity by the sophistication of its identity debates risks mistaking the map for the territory.

The argument of this report is that the search has been misdirected. Planning does not need a better theory of what it is. It needs a rigorous theory of what it does, specifically, how skilled planners make consequential judgments under genuine uncertainty, and how that capacity can be developed, evaluated, and institutionally supported. That theory is available. It has been developed, in fragments, across strategic management research, cognitive science, expertise studies, and decision psychology. Planning has not engaged with it.

The lines of inquiry that engagement would open are not marginal. What does expert strategic judgment in planning contexts actually look like, and how does it develop with experience? How do planning organisations sustain

diagnostic capacity through political and institutional change? What conditions allow a guiding policy to focus collective attention rather than diffuse into aspiration? How can planning education develop cognitive flexibility, the capacity to reframe, to hold complexity, to commit coherently under uncertainty, as a trainable professional skill? These are empirically tractable questions. They are also theoretically consequential. None of them is answerable from within planning theory's existing repertoire.

There is a particular urgency in the timing. The AI research that Simon and Newell initiated in the 1950s is now arriving in planning practice in the form of algorithmic tools that can process spatial data, model scenarios, and generate recommendations at scales no individual planner can match. Planning theory, which did not seriously engage with Simon's original provocation, is now confronting its practical consequences without the theoretical preparation to evaluate them. The question of what human judgment is for, what it contributes that algorithmic process cannot, is more urgent than it has ever been. It requires exactly the theory of individual cognition and strategic judgment that planning has not developed.

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