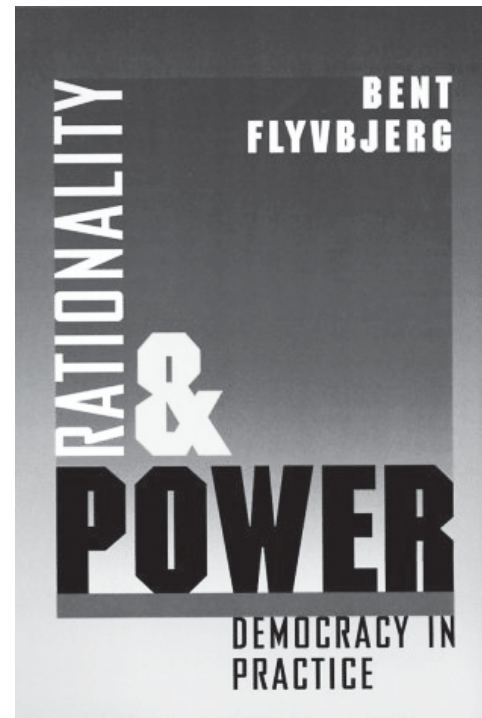


Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice

Flyvbjerg, B. (1998, English Translation)
Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press
290 pp.

The power issue is rarely talked about in planning, and the influence of power toward the outcome of planning is even less discussed openly. However, it is that focal point that Flyvbjerg is trying to convey in this book, which could eventually bring us to question the most fundamental aspect of our current democratic world: rationality. This book is about policy making in Aalborg, a small city in the northern part of Denmark, where related parties try to reach an agreement on how they want to renovate and develop the downtown part of the city, which is called the Aalborg Project. The focus of this book is the dynamic relationship between rationality and power, which is given in empirical depth and attention to detail narratives.

After a description of Aalborg Project and related parties involved in chapter 1 and 2, Flyvbjerg elaborates his views of the relationship between power and rationality according to Thucydides, Machiavelli, Nietzsche to Michael Foucault. Using rich and detailed narratives, through the next chapters, Flyvbjerg brings the readers through the streets and alleys of Aalborg, explores the maze of actual practices of politics and administration, and builds awareness of the issues of democracy, rationality, and power in planning. The story of the Aalborg project dated back from year 1977 with its construction began in 1988 to 1994, going through several major redefinitions, even drastic revisions and frequent turnovers of the man-in-charge. There are originally four main intentions for Aalborg project which are: urban renewal, land use, traffic and environment. However, it is conveyed how over time the original intentions deviated towards more



biased goals through struggles between power and rationality. The formerly not so important traffic planning came to the fore, all because the rationality of the shop owners along downtown part of the city states that most of their customers are those using private cars. And with the intervention of Chamber and Commerce in Aalborg, the goals of the Aalborg Project turn toward a distinctly different direction. However, the available data did not support this rationality, which in turn made a hot issue in the community that demands explanation and more transparency in the project design. Eventually, as the result of heavy discussion and media exposures, a new round of comprehensive planning of Aalborg Project for urban renewal, land use, traffic, and environment were formulated.

In the last part of the book, Flyvbjerg suggested ten propositions from the finding of the case, which are derived as grounded theory from the Aalborg case. The propositions which are quite controversial from planning point of view, can be rounded up in a quote from Pascal: "power has a rationality that rationality does not know" (p. 225), which ultimately questions the role of power in

defining rationality, and thus a challenge for democracy. Flyvbjerg argues that the notion of rationality which is deemed context-independent in Enlightenment ideals, is actually context-dependent and the context of rationality is power.

This book is an excellent example of rich and detailed narratives that is derived from detailed content analysis of documents and in-depth interview of related parties. Although highly unusual, the easy flowing style of story-telling makes it easy to read, and familiar everyday atmosphere found in the story makes it quite an enchanting reading in itself.

My criticism for this book is that it is not clear how Flyvbjerg derived the grounded theory which is given in the ten propositions. The propositions he suggested may constitute more of a hypothesis than a grounded theory, because it lacks the supporting explanation from factual evidence. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledge that the context-dependent interpretation of a social phenomenon makes it difficult for generalization, which will be different according to different actor experiencing it.

Even though the case study of this book is The Aalborg Project, the power struggle described here can happen, will happen and is happening everywhere. And whether or not this book has something to do with it, in March 1995, The City of Aalborg is awarded The European Planning Prize by The European Union in Brussels for its new approach in planning that ensure the participation by the community (the Danish version of the book was first published in 1991). This is what makes the contribution of the approach of this book unique, because it narrows the gap between planning academia with its actual practice.

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Security and Site Design: A Landscape Architectural Approach to Analysis, Assessment, and Design Implementation

Leonard J. Hopper and Martha J. Droge (2005)

Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons

208 pp.

This book was written by an expert author team led by past ASLA (American Society of Landscape Architects) and LAF (Landscape Architecture Foundation) president Leonard Hopper. Currently he is a faculty member at the City College School of Architecture and Environmental Studies, Columbia University, and SUNY (State University of New York) Farmingdale in New York.

A back cover blurb of this book is written as follows: "*A handy source of the latest information on the assessment and design of site security*". So, it is written for the design professional, this book offers basic concepts for site security design and risk management, and their relationship and integration into the overall site design projects.

This book consists of five main chapters: 1) Security Site Design, 2) A Framework for Understanding Site Security, 3) Site Security Design Concepts, 4) Case Studies, and 5) Conclusion. More than half of this book is devoted to Case Studies.

Chapter 1: Security Site Design

This chapter gives explanations which are extremely important that the landscape architects know the anticipated threats based on thorough analysis of the threat, the site, and its context. Moreover, this chapter presents the GSA (General Services Administration)'s security guideline and the