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# **Narratives of power: bringing ideology to the fore of planning analysis**

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## **Abstract**

This Special Issue starts from the premise that the concept of ideology holds significant analytical potential for planning but that this potential can only be realised if ideology is brought to the fore of analysis. By naming ideology and rendering it visible, we hope to bring it out from the shadows and into the open to examine its value and what it can tell us about the politics of contemporary planning. The papers in this Special Issue therefore seek to contribute to established academic debates by exploring some of the ways ideology can be deployed as a tool in the analysis of planning problems. This article introduces the Special Issue by exploring the various accounts in the papers of i. what ideology is; ii. what its effects are; iii. where ideology may be identified and iv. what different theories of ideology can tell us about planning. There inevitably remain many un-answered questions, paths not taken and debates left unaddressed. We hope other scholars will be inspired (or provoked) to address these omissions in the future.

**Keywords:** ideology, ideologies, discourse, power, politics

## **Introduction**

These are fractious and unstable times in which old political orthodoxies are being challenged and overturned. We write in the context of ‘Brexit Britain’ where the daily news is filled with the seemingly unending spectacle unleashed by the June 2016 referendum on the United Kingdom’s membership of the European Union which has exposed the frailty of the old constitutional order and divided the country. The USA is currently gearing up for its 2020 general election after almost four years of divisive Trumpism which has shaken the faith of the

international community in the integrity of the American elite liberal order. In January 2019 Brazil elected the right-wing populist President Jair Bolsonaro who has expressed support for the old Brazilian military dictatorship and endorsed political violence by the state in stark contrast to ideas of 'political correctness' (Furtado, 2018). Populist figures on the left and right have gained influence across many states and jurisdictions, including Italy, Hungary and Poland, and delight in not playing by the old rules of the political game. Chile declared a state of emergency in October 2019 as violent protests against rising living costs engulfed the streets of Santiago while in November the Bolivian president Evo Morales was forced into exile following disputed elections and right-wing uprisings. Protests against the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill in Hong Kong meanwhile have posed a serious challenge to mainland Chinese rule, channelling long-standing distrust of the Chinese government into a political uprising. All the while, the spectre of the 'climate crisis' haunts an increasingly uncertain future. Almost everywhere then there seems to be evidence of intensified political rupture and discontent.

These trends and events are all very different in terms of their histories, cultural characteristics and trajectories. However, they can all be characterised as crises of political ideas which are challenging various political settlements that have secured relative stability over recent decades. Dominant political ideas therefore seem to be losing their grip and the post-political order of things is giving way to a period of marked ideological confusion and struggle. Such trends in part signal a crisis of ruling political ideologies that raises significant analytical challenges. This has prompted political theorist Michael Freeden (2019, 6), one of the foremost contributors to modern scholarship of ideologies, to remark that: "The 'ready-made' fixed ideological structure, displaying a high degree of internal coherence and systematization, is vanishing...making way instead for the bitty, the catchy, the ephemeral and the colloquial".

For Freeden, the apparent diffusion of political ideologies does not imply that there are no longer 'patterns of ideological bias and preference', or that political debates and decisions are no longer shaped by such patterns. Rather, emerging patterns cannot be easily mapped on to the familiar legacies of the venerable ideological traditions of liberalism, conservatism,

socialism and so on to which much analysis continues to cleave. Instead, new formations are being assembled from aspects of these, often yoked to populist modes of discourse in ways that re-shape the terrain of political contestation.

The challenges that this raises are stark. Although grand families of political ideologies appear to be breaking apart, the contested political questions which shape them remain powerful and are influencing sometimes radical reframings of political problems and their possible solutions. If the analysis of ideologies is concerned with carefully revealing patterns of ‘ideological bias and preference’ and examining their effects, the contemporary historical moment demands a renewed commitment to the study of ideology in all its theoretical and practical complexity. It is against this backdrop of ideological ferment and fragmentation that this Special Issue of *Planning Theory* on **Narratives of power: bringing ideology to the fore of planning analysis**<sup>1</sup> has been produced to try and bring ideology to the forefront of planning scholarship.

### **Ideology and planning theory**

Given the highly political nature of planning as an idea and practice, it is unsurprising that analysis has long sought to question and challenge the patterns of ideological bias and preference embedded within its workings and the ways in which they shape the built environment. Although far from a dominant concept in planning theory, ideology has made repeated appearances throughout the history of the discipline, evoked in a variety of both pejorative and positive terms to address foundational questions for the field, including:

- problems of incoherence and fragmentation in the contested meanings of planning and the status of the knowledges underpinning its practice (Foley, 1960; Guttenberg, 2009; McAuslan, 1980);
- the need for planning to establish its own rationale and meaning (Fagence, 1983; Foley,

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<sup>1</sup> This title has been changed from that in the original call for papers to better reflect the focus of the Special Issue.

1960) and the challenges to achieving this, whether due to inherent instability of meaning (Stead and Meijers, 2009; Taylor, 2003), the vested interests of professionals (Reade, 1983) or the structural contradictions inherent to planning's position in capitalist societies (Harvey, 1985);

- the psycho-social ambiguity of concepts central to planning which can serve to legitimise and secure investment in the dominant order of things (Gunder, 2010; Gunder and Hillier, 2009);
- the need to engage in pluralist debate through open, rational communication geared towards overcoming distortions and achieving agreement (Coaffee & Healey, 2003; Healey, 1997, 2003);
- the apparent post-political domination of neoliberalism over planning thought and practice, including through the 'totalitarianism' of consensus (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010, 2012; Purcell, 2009),
- the effects of political ideologies on change in planning ideas and practices (Shepherd, 2018, Thornley, 1993) and;
- the variation in cultural expressions of planning practice across space and time (Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009; Sanyal, 2005) and the politics and power-relations involved in their transformations (Grange, 2014).

These treatments of ideology in the planning literature are united by a common acceptance that ideas, concepts, the ideologies they comprise and the discourses through which they find expression matter, and that they matter because they have the power to shape the terms by which political and social reality is understood, articulated and (re)shaped through planning practice. The variety of ways in which the concept of ideology has been used in the planning literature, however, suggests both its strength and weakness as an analytical tool. On the one hand, it highlights that the concept of ideology in its various forms can be a powerful means to help us understand the political nature of planning. On the other hand, echoing Wildavsky's (1973) famous critique of planning, it might also suggest that ideology as an analytical category could come perilously close to encompassing everything and therefore nothing (see also

Eagleton, 2007).

This Special Issue of *Planning Theory* starts from the premise that the significant potential of the concept of ideology for analysing planning can only be realised if its role is *brought to the fore* of analysis. Arguably, this premise is itself based on an acceptance of the twin propositions that ideology ‘exists’ and that it is a worthwhile analytical tool - propositions about which there is not necessarily a straightforward consensus. There are some who have held variously that actors are primarily animated by rational self-interest rather than political ideas<sup>2</sup> (see Dowding (2009) for a review), that ideology ceased to be a useful analytical category after the second world war (e.g. Aron [1957] 1968; Bell, [1960] 2000) or the fall of the Iron Curtain (Fukuyama, [1992] 2012), or that it is *discourse* rather than ideology which deserves analytical attention (e.g. Foucault, 1980 – see Purvis & Hunt (1993) for a discussion). The pragmatic and normative orientations of planning theory towards action may also generate a certain impatience or suspicion of ideology critique, where it might be seen as an analytical orientation that too often points to the disabling effects of structural powers, leaving too little room for agency or the pursuit of alternatives (see e.g. Forester, 1999; Campbell et al, 2014).

This Special Issue does not set out to offer a ‘defence’ of the concept of ideology or to argue that it necessarily provides any categorical answers to these challenges. Rather, it seeks to contribute to established academic debates by exploring some of the ways ideology can be deployed as a tool in the analysis of planning problems. By calling ideology by its name and rendering it visible we hope to bring it out from the shadows and into the open to examine its value and what it can tell us about the politics of contemporary planning.

The remainder of this introductory article therefore examines what the papers within the Special Issue tell us about ideology and planning. We do so by exploring the various accounts in the papers of i. what ideology is; ii. what its effects are; iii. where ideology may be identified

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<sup>2</sup> Although, according to some conceptions of ideology, political ideas partly serve to legitimise, and assist in the pursuit of, self-interest or to convince others that they share the interests of powerful

and iv. what different theories of ideology can tell us about planning. What follows is not, therefore, a complete exploration of the issues set out above, but rather a consideration of the various ways they have been addressed in the papers comprising this Special Issue. There inevitably remain many un-answered questions, paths not taken and debates left unaddressed. We hope other scholars will be inspired (or provoked) to address these omissions in the future.

### **What is ideology?**

The concept of ideology has a complex genealogy. This extends from its earliest positivist Enlightenment incarnation as the ‘scientific study of ideas’ which was developed to “extricate human thought from the grip of ‘phantoms’” (MacKenzie, 1994, 3), through to its more recent post-positivist incarnation in which it conceals and simultaneously reproduces the semantic and phantasmagorical indeterminacy of political and social worlds (Žižek, 1989). Eagleton (2007) identifies six different meanings of the concept which might be simplified here to three broad categories: the general production of ideas, beliefs and values in social life (an understanding which approaches the broader concept of ‘culture’); the mobilisation of ideas, beliefs and values in the promotion and legitimation of sectoral interests against opposing interests; and a third more pejorative form in which ideas, beliefs and values are mobilised to legitimise powerful interests through distortion and misrepresentation.

This diversity means that scholars have a number of traditions to choose from when deploying the concept of ideology as an analytical tool. And for ideology to have any distinct value, it is important for analysts to be clear about the theoretical traditions they are drawing upon when using the concept. Otherwise, it risks losing its definitional boundaries and blurring into related concepts such as discourse or culture. In this Special Issue, all the papers are united in taking a broadly ‘sociological’ rather than an overtly ‘critical’ (or pejorative) perspective on ideology (Purvis & Hunt, 1993). That is to say, they adopt “a plural conception of ideology as the outcome or result of the specific social position of classes, groups or agents” (Purvis & Hunt,

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groups.

1993, 478) rather than framing it as being exclusively a mode of subordination of dominated groups (although this may still be a desired or actual *effect* of some ideologies in the sociological conception). The dominant conception of ideology running through these papers is therefore one that holds that there are potentially many ideologies or ‘mental frameworks’ at play, with ‘the ideological’ being a terrain of contestation over political meanings, priorities, problems and solutions. It is this specifically *political* and *practical* orientation, and the exertion of power over ‘the political’ that ideology entails, which distinguishes it in these pages from the broader concept of ‘culture’.

For example, Davoudi et al draw on the work of Michael Freeden (1996 - see also Shepherd, 2018) to present ideologies as being “socially and historically constructed bundles of contested and contingent ideas, values and beliefs with recurring, yet fluid and dynamic, patterns” (Davoudi et al, 2019, 16)<sup>3</sup> and which provide “the framework in which political struggles in and about planning concepts and institutions are discursively played out” (Davoudi et al, 2019, 4). Sager (2019) in his analysis of the relationship between what he calls ‘authoritarian populism’ and planning theory also presents ideology as a recognisable framework of political ideas oriented towards political change. Through his analysis of ‘authoritarian populism’ Sager considers the implications of a single, recognisable ideological system or ‘-ism’, albeit one he recognises as a ‘thin-centred’ or ‘incomplete’ ideology, compared with the ‘thick centredness’ (and relative coherence) of political ideologies with longer and more venerable histories such as liberalism or socialism.

Like Davoudi et al, Inch & Shepherd (2019) also adopt a view of ideology which includes space for distinct articulations of different concepts in the ideologies of political parties, drawing on Stuart Hall’s ([1983] 1996, 25-6) definition of ideology as “the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out

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<sup>3</sup> Due to the timing of publication, in this introduction article the page references for papers included in this Special Issue refer to the ‘online first’ versions, rather than the pagination which appears in final published versions.



and render intelligible the way society works”’. Zanotto (2019, **page refs**) meanwhile draws on van Dijk (2006) to adopt an “approach to ideology as a socially shared belief system that controls the attitudes and identifies the values relevant to a social group”. For Zanotto ‘neoliberalism’ (rather than a particular programme of a specific political party) is a hegemonic ideology whose influence and implications must be critically examined.

All of these conceptions are based on the view that there are various ideologies each comprising articulations, systems, frameworks, or relational clusters of political ideas and concepts that shape and promote the values, priorities and interests of social *groups*. However, Davy (2019) in his analysis of the concept of property and how it is employed in planning practice takes a somewhat different approach. While not denying the validity of the above conceptions, he prefers to explore ideology as ‘powerful ideas’ that are often not reflected upon by those that hold them. In this case the particular, ‘powerful idea’ of ‘exclusion-based’ property (where the property owner is sovereign) is described as ‘an ideology’ that shapes planning practice more powerfully than an ‘alternative ideology’ represented by the competing conception of ‘property as a social function’ (where the property owner has an obligation to society).

This conception of ideology operating through the workings of individual concepts can be reconciled with the approach taken by the other papers if we think of property as one of the ideological concepts or ideas within the system of ideas and concepts which shape a broader ideology. The meaning and implications of the concept of property are potentially contested from various ideological positions and it is such contestation to which Davy wishes to draw attention in his paper in order to disrupt the ‘unreflected-upon’ assumptions of planners.

### **The effects of ideology**

By focusing on one ideological concept, Davy makes a clear argument about what ideology *does*. In his paper he explores how the ideology of the ‘exclusion-based’ conception of property

so saturates the foundational assumptions of planners that its legitimacy is not reflected upon and so alternatives are not seriously considered. In this conception, which contains echoes of Engels' classic account of 'false consciousness', ideology *obfuscates* by curtailing the expansiveness of the human imagination and delimiting understandings of what is considered possible. However, this curtailment cannot be total, because alternative conceptions do exist in the currency of ideas, such as the idea of property as a social function which Davy also explores. This suggests that whilst ideology can act to distort and conceal, it might also *reveal* by helping to marshal competing perspectives, problematise dominant ideas and propose alternatives. However, whilst he describes both the Western liberal 'exclusion-based' and the 'social function' based conceptions of property as ideological, only the former currently seems to have the overtly obfuscatory power and effect which Davy identifies as a particular quality of ideology.

In their analysis of planning reforms introduced in England after 2010, Inch & Shepherd explore how ideas of planning fit within the longer-term historical context of what Hall & Massey (2010, 66) call the 'neoliberal conjuncture'. They argue that 'thinking conjuncturally' means trying to trace the influence of ideology alongside the other processes which coalesce in an historical conjuncture, defined as "a period during which the different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society come together to give it a specific and distinctive shape" (Hall & Massey, 2010, 57). Following Stuart Hall they argue that a key role of ideology is to (re)secure the hegemony and contingent stability of a particular conjuncture in the face of challenge by "organising the complex and frequently contradictory terrain of popular common sense" (Inch & Shepherd, 2019, 4). In the context of English planning, this means paying attention to ideological contestations regarding the articulation of political ideas about planning, and how these relate to the contradictory social, political and economic processes which shape the contemporary conjuncture and its distinctive crisis tendencies. In doing so they make a case for planning as a relatively autonomous site where contradictions in the wider conjuncture can be exposed and where "ideology is deployed as part of ongoing efforts to secure, renew or challenge a broader (contingent) hegemonic settlement" (Inch &

Shepherd, 2019, 3). In this conception, as with Davy, ideology can both conceal and reveal but the key issue is which meanings and articulations become hegemonic and therefore come to dominate the common-sense of planning practice.

Inch & Shepherd's paper is an attempt to place ideology in a broader yet specific historical and political context without unduly privileging the ideational over the material. This is also the approach taken by Davoudi et al (2019, 5) who explicitly acknowledge that "ideological shifts are not just a matter of ideational struggle over abstract concepts, they are also responses to material conditions and policy dilemmas". They therefore pay attention to the constraining and enabling influence of cultural contexts to trace how these condition the (re)configuration of the conceptual morphologies of political ideologies as they relate to planning in different historical periods in Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands. For Davoudi et al ideologies therefore serve to organise and frame material conditions and policy dilemmas in different ways depending on the distinctive ideological and cultural legacies of these three countries. However, they also argue that in all three contexts, culturally variegated incarnations of neoliberalism have come to be "embedded in planning practices, and embodied by planners through strategies of legitimisation" (Davoudi et al, 2019, 16). In this conception, the 'dominant ideology' of neoliberalism acts to frame certain planning policy problems and solutions as natural and self-evident while obfuscating or de-legitimising competing visions. To understand how this is achieved, they argue it is essential to examine the rhetorical persuasiveness of various ideologically informed discursive formations through an analysis not just of *logos* (argument), but also *ethos* (the virtue of the speaker) and *pathos* (emotion). The latter category speaks to contemporary concerns for the ways in which ideologies gain their 'grip', interpellating subjects affectively and psycho-socially rather than purely rationally (e.g. Glynos and Howarth, 2007, in planning see Gunder, 2010).

Through an analysis of the proliferation of suburban gated communities (SGC) in the Metropolitan Region of Curitiba (MRC) in Brazil, Zanotto also examines the neoliberalisation of planning. The paper takes neoliberalism to be the dominant ideology which conditions how

policy problems are defined and possible solutions considered. Zanotto's analysis is not so much about neoliberal ideology 'in the abstract' as about how specific articulations of neoliberal ideas condition the discourses shaping how SGCs are perceived by powerful actors in the MRC. Through a close analysis of these discourses, Zanotto therefore seeks to trace the *effects* of the hegemonic neoliberal settlement in Brazil on how potentially controversial planning issues are perceived and solutions enacted. While careful not to proceed from an *a priori* assumption regarding the positive or negative characteristics of neoliberal ideology, her analysis of the effects of the ideology through discourse leads her to argue that "when employed to form the basis of the dominant discourse about SGC in the MRC, neoliberalism legitimizes actions that might perpetuate environmental degradation and social exclusion" (Zanotto, 2019 - **page ref**).

Sager (2019) does not focus so much on the effects of ideology as he is more concerned with mapping the characteristics of authoritarian populism and identifying 'confrontations' and 'contact points' between communicative planning theory and 'populist currents' to encourage planning theorists not to limit their critiques to neoliberalism. However, he does make the important argument that a function of what he terms authoritarian populism as an ideology (albeit a 'thin centred' one) is to simplify the complexity of political issues by presenting an unsophisticated critique of elites alongside a celebration of the unity of the populist 'people', in doing so avoiding the "dilemmas and the many conflicts of liberal democracy by cheering the strong leader" (Sager, 2019, 1).

Although not explicitly argued in the remaining papers, this 'simplification' effect runs through the conceptions of ideology in this Special Issue. Ideology helps actors navigate the indeterminacy of the political world by creating narratives which give it form and meaning (Freedon, 2003, 50), including obfuscatory effects that curtail the range of political options and alternatives. Ideology therefore seems to have an important role in packaging political problems in to simplified form and thus closing down the true diversity and complexity of 'the political'.

### **They seek it here, they seek it there...**

Reflecting on the relationship between ideology and planning inevitably involves thinking about ‘where’ ideology actually resides. Is it in the hearts or minds of individuals comprising social and political groups and classes? Or perhaps it takes root even deeper in their individual and collective unconscious? Is it in the discourses through which these individuals and groups communicate and express agency? Is it embedded in the recursive relations between the material world and human agency that both shape and are reshaped by ideology? Is ideology therefore everywhere? And, if so, does it remain a useful analytical category? Or, perhaps it is just a phantom in the minds of those deluded theorists who insist on its value as an analytical tool?

In keeping with its roots in the dialogue between Hegelian idealism and Marxian historical materialism, the papers here all agree that ideology, as a set of mental frameworks or articulations of political ideas and concepts, takes root in the minds of individuals which comprise social and political groups and classes. However, they also recognise that it is also traceable in the material effects of ideological political thought visible in, for example, institutional arrangements, policies and the broader organisation of society. Without fully embracing the psycho-analytical strands prevalent in contemporary theories of ideology (e.g. Gunder, 2010), several of the papers also recognise a need to explore the emotional registers through which ideologies operate and gain traction, securing commitment to a particular order of things.

This is a focus of Davoudi et al’s paper, which examines how political ideological formations have “become embedded in policies and practices” in different ways in Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands. Similarly, Inch & Shepherd in their conjunctural analysis of planning for housing in England identify ideology as being present in the organisation of policy programmes for planning through, in this case, the political ideology of a governing Conservative Party, as well as the political controversies and debates generated by attempts to institutionalise their

ideas. They connect these ‘mid-level’ manifestations of ideology with the broader concept of hegemony which is presented as “a contingent *process* of struggle between dominant, residual and emergent social forces rather than a closed and totalising structure” and which is both challenged and (re)secured through processes of ideological contestation at various levels and ‘positions’ (Inch & Shepherd, 2019, 4). Inch & Shepherd also identify various material, political and emotional effects of the neoliberal strategy of promoting homeownership and a limited role for the state in house building. In so doing they link political ideology as *thought* to the production of lived and felt material realities.

If Inch & Shepherd and Davoudi et al concentrate mainly on the work of political elites in and around central or state-level policymaking, Zanotto in her paper instead concentrates on planning and development professionals involved in practice ‘on the ground’. Through her empirical analysis of their discourses, Zanotto traces the saturation of neoliberal logics through planning practice as it relates to suburban gated communities in Brazil. This suggests that the conditioning of neoliberal ideology frames how planning is conducted and therefore helps shape the built environment.

Davy in his paper also concentrates on planning professionals and how they are failing to challenge ideological assumptions regarding the meaning and role of private property in ways which legitimise ‘speculative vacancies’ in cities. He gives a personal anecdote to suggest that professionals (in this case lawyers) are trained through their education “not to think too hard about the ideological underpinnings of property” (Davy, 2019, 3). This recalls Althusser’s ([1971] 1984) concept of the Ideological State Apparatus via which hegemony is secured through public institutions including schools and universities. This is echoed in Davy’s (2019, 6-7) claim that “[v]ast parts of the scholarship on property help conceal the ideological kernel inside property’s formal shell”. This is a salient reminder to those working in planning education to be mindful of their own assumptions and the assumptions of the dominant planning paradigm and to be careful about how these are presented to students.

The ideological orientation of the planning academy is also a key concern of Sager’s paper in which he compares and contrasts the characteristics of emergent forms of authoritarian populism and neoliberalism with the ideals and aspirations of communicative planning theory (CPT) to “give planning scholars a basis for broader critique of political ideologies” (Sager, 2019, 2). Sager’s aim is to sharpen scholars’ understanding of these ideologies as they relate to the values of CPT, presented sympathetically as the dominant planning theory-driven practice paradigm in contemporary liberal democracies. Although Sager does not make this argument, his analysis raises questions about the relations between ideology and theory; could CPT itself be considered a kind of ideology in that it is a value-laden theory which sets out a programme for praxis based on the prioritisation of political ideals relating to inclusion, ‘un-distorted’ speech, diffusion of power and consensus?

Based on the arguments in these papers, ideology is therefore ‘present’ across the particular political ideologies of political parties, in the saturation of particular formations of political ideas through a society, in the contestations and debates between competing ideological positions which play out in the policymaking process through various levels of the state, in the policies and practices of political institutions such as planning, in the public institutions which educate planners, in the every-day interactions and subjectivities of politicians and professionals, in planning decisions and in the material effects of those decisions. However, it is not *only* ideology which is present in these places - as some of the papers argue, there are many processes at play and ideology is but one of these. Ideology is not, therefore, either everything or nothing.

### **Out from the shadows?**

This Special Issue has sought to draw attention to the (sometimes hidden) operations of ideology and to examine its effects. By doing so the papers have sought to make a case for the value of ideology as an analytical tool in planning while preventing it from losing specificity and meaning. But has this been achieved? Have these papers in fact succeeded in bringing ideology

‘to the fore’ and therefore out from the shadows, rendering it visible as an object of planning theoretical attention?

While the papers do generally focus on ideology as an analytical tool and seek to identify its presence and effects, it does still perhaps remain somewhat elusive. It is notable that none of the papers tackle ideology ‘head on’, but instead discuss its role and effects within particular political and historical contexts, by focusing on particular concepts or ideas, or through tracing its influence in adjustments to planning practices. This is no doubt partly due to the focus of the Special Issue on ideology *and* planning, which requires ideology to be positioned in relation to the particularities of planning rather than focused on in the abstract. Yet, because the contexts in which ideology is embedded are so complex, it is also very challenging to trace its influence alongside the multiplicity of other determinants of historical change. Focus ‘too much’ on ideology, and the importance of other factors can be suppressed; focus ‘too little’ on ideology and it ceases to be of much analytical use. The papers in this Special Issue assume various positions on this sliding scale. This is not necessarily problematic, but the question of what position to adopt remains a foundational challenge for those who set out to write about ideology and planning.

These difficulties perhaps suggest one of the reasons why ideology has so rarely been explicitly discussed in the planning theory literature. The concept of ideology haunts those parts of the literature that deal with the political dimensions of planning practice and the power relations which structure them, yet there are still relatively few empirically grounded attempts to make ideology visible. This may be because “ideologies exist on a largely undetectable ground, or on ground that requires an eye trained to pick them out” (Freedon, 2019, 6). Some may take the view that if the ground is undetectable then it does not in fact exist and, therefore, those ideological ephemera which others claim move across its surface are mere phantoms. Others might accept that ideologies, ephemeral as they may appear to be, do exist in some form but may not be inclined to develop a well enough trained eye to clearly identify them and their effects. Some may simply not be interested at all in such questions.



However, we choose to ‘give the gift of belief’ to the concept here so that we can explore its potential as an analytical tool for investigating questions of meaning and power in contemporary planning. In doing so we hope the papers illustrate the continued explanatory value to social and political theory of working through the considerable complexities of ideology. We also hope they pass the pragmatist test that sits close to the heart of planning theory which involves not asking whether ideology is ‘real’ or ‘true’ in itself (which would be to apply an inappropriate and meaningless test), but whether the analyses it provides are *useful*.

### **Ideology, planning, planning, ideology...**

So what do these papers tell us about planning? Has the explicit application of theories of ideology to the study of planning in fact been useful? In various ways the papers remind us that planning is “an institutionalised set of ideas and practices” which is “concerned with mediating the relations between social, economic, political and environmental pressures relating to land and property” (Inch & Shepherd, 2019, 6). This means planning has deep connections with fundamental political questions about the proper relationships between arrangements of property ownership rights, individual and collective economic freedoms, the rights of the wider community or society and the role of the state; all long-standing concerns of political ideologies (Shepherd, 2018).

Most of the papers explore planning’s roles in articulating and enacting various possible answers to these political questions as they relate to land use and land ownership. Planning is therefore examined in terms of its responsiveness to the ideological preferences of those with power to articulate the means and ends of planning. The papers are therefore concerned with revealing what these ideological preferences (or unexamined assumptions) are, how they find form in the institutional arrangements which shape planning practice at various levels and what the material effects of this crystallisation of ideology may be. This is useful because one significant function of ideology can be to close down or obfuscate alternative answers to the

fundamental political questions which shape planning. By revealing the nature and provenance of the political ideas which structure planning, the papers remind us both of the qualities of ideology but also the possibility of creating different political formations shaped by different assumptions and priorities.

Significantly, the papers also show that planning is more than a passive recipient of the political ideas of the powerful. Because it is a space in which competing priorities for the use and development of land and property are mediated, planning can become a space of political contestation where alternative visions and political ideas can be articulated. While such contestation may eventually be closed down resulting in the ‘reproducing and sustaining’ of the ideational status quo for planning, it also has the potential to challenge and transform it (Zanotto, 2019, **page ref**). This could entail planners examining their “own taken for granted assumptions” (Zanotto, 2019, **page ref**) and perhaps adopting a conception of property which is not based on Western liberalism, but its social function (Davy, 2019) or fighting against the dangerous simplifications of certain populists (Sager, 2019). Or it might mean diagnosing a shift in the ‘Overton window’ through which more progressive ideas regarding the proper function and priorities of planning might be articulated in mainstream political discourse (Inch & Shepherd, 2019). Exploiting such opportunities could mean deploying various combinations of rhetorical appeals to character, emotion and identity (Davoudi et al, 2019) linked to property and place in order to agitate for progressive change.

However, for any real change in how planning is thought about and practiced to occur it must be recognised that the really significant sphere for contestation is not necessarily the deliberations of practicing planners, but rather the broader political systems and cultures which shape and delimit dominant ideas of planning. In many contexts the state and the political actors who debate and deliver political change remain central to this. For this reason, planning theoretical debates must necessarily continue to grapple with the complex challenges raised by ‘changing patterns of ideological bias and preference’. Individually and collectively, the papers here take this task forward. As the ideological faultlines which mark the historical present

continue to deepen and fracture, it is a task that will grow both ever more challenging and ever more important.

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