

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CRITICAL PRAGMATISM: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EXAMINING PLANNING PRACTICE**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter has shown that in planning theory the term ‘critical pragmatism’ was briefly adopted by John Forester (1993, 2003a) to label an analysis of planning that is sensitive to issues of power and ethics (and hence ‘critical’) and that simultaneously allows for an assessment of issues of concrete, situated action in planning. The concern with concrete, situated planning and with evaluating ideas according to their usefulness in practice is not a surprising trend to follow the deconstructive and relativist post-modern approaches in planning theory. The following section broadly examines the principles of critical pragmatism before unpacking its component parts of context, outcomes, rationality, power and ethics. This theoretical framework will be applied in a practice case, namely the Kathorus Special integrated Presidential Project, in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

The Chapter is composed of the following sections: This introduction draws together the principles apparent in Forester’s writings on critical pragmatism. It then defines critical pragmatism as the basis to the examination of planning practice. The second section extrapolates the learning from the critical and pragmatic traditions that inform this framework. Thereafter the five elements of the framework are considered in turn. They are discussed in relation to the critical and pragmatic traditions and, importantly, in terms of what a critical pragmatic tradition, derived from these traditions, would prescribe for each lens. The lenses are discussed in order of context, outcomes, rationality, power and ethics.

Presently, critical pragmatism is neither a developed planning approach nor an analytic approach. Forester has alluded to principles around critical pragmatism as a means of analysing practice. While his own work refers only briefly to the term, Forester recommends critical pragmatism as an analytic approach that allows us to examine

planning practice and learn from it, not for recipes of best practice but for “the character of critical, pragmatic judgment in planning” (Forester, 1999b:184). Taking this cue, this dissertation develops the concept of critical pragmatism as an evaluative approach to viewing the activity of planning using a specific case study.

In planning, the term critical pragmatism derives from Forester’s conceptualisation of a deliberative planning approach. This approach, detailed in his *The Deliberative Practitioner* (2001), is focused on the deliberations of planners with client groups and with colleagues and other stakeholders. He theorises the lived experience of planners in their offices. These deliberations themselves are the learning points of planning. They are also the points where planners shape public learning and action. Deliberative planning is planning focused on participatory practice, on engagement with people. Forester weaves the stories of planning practice with reflective comment, to demonstrate how deliberative planning can be both pragmatic and politically critical. Deliberative planning is focused on participation and, in particular, on the communicative interactions of planners. This is the activity of planning. These ‘planning stories’ are about communicative interaction. The challenge of making public deliberation work requires manifold skills and improvisation on the part of planners. It requires that planners, while armed with theory, skills and experience, act pragmatically within a deliberative situation.

The principles that are contained in Forester’s writings have been developed through his in-depth analysis and close observation of localised planning activity over a period of twenty years. This analysis forms part of a body of work of several theorists who have used interpretive analysis, analysis of public discourse and narratives in understanding planning practice. This practice-based body of work does not yet stand as a coherent alternative to traditional theory. Nonetheless it is increasingly being seen as a new approach. For Hajer and Wagenaar (2003) it is a deliberative approach, centred on interpretation of the discourse of public policy. In planning theory Forester has shown how planners in concrete situations used interactive and deliberative means to arrive at collective, pragmatic problem-solving approaches for issues that were simply too complicated for formulaic approaches (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). An advocate of

communicative planning in which the planners' most important skills are interactive, Forester argues that planners must listen carefully and critically, since "listening well, we can act to nurture dialogue and criticism, to make genuine presence possible, to question and explore all that we may yet do and yet become" (Forester in Sandercock, 1999). A belief in the possibility of overcoming or facing distortions inspires Forester's call for a "critical pragmatic" planning. This approach is a mode of planning that questions and shapes attention. It is based on the recognition of "systemic sources of misinformation" (Forester, 1989:56) and in a modification of advocacy planning. It is directed at assisting citizens to reveal misrepresentation, sources of misinformation and abuse of authority.

The clues that can be derived for planning analysis from a deliberative approach as outlined above are: planning evaluation focused on the actual activity of planning; planning evaluation that interprets public discourse; and a belief in overcoming distortions inherent in communication through a form of advocacy intervention in communication. The examination of critical pragmatism that is conducted below extends beyond deliberative planning practice to explore how a consciously critical pragmatic approach would deal with the key themes of context, outcomes, power, rationality and ethics. As outlined in the previous chapters, this dissertation takes its cue for a critical approach from both Habermas and Foucault and does not limit the interpretation of power to discourse nor accept without question the potential of communicative intervention to overcome dynamics of power in planning interactions. Rather, it seeks to examine power relations at all levels and to uncover the effects and outcomes of what actually takes place in a planning case.

### **Definition of Critical Pragmatism**

This dissertation develops critical pragmatism as an analytical tool for the evaluation of planning practice. I define critical pragmatism as a concept for evaluating practice as:

*An analytical framework for examining the actual processes and outcomes of planning practice that is contextually situated; that operates within and through pervasive power relations, which are exercised through and influence multiple rationalities, and practice in which the planning choices that are made are value-laden and mutable.*

## Learning from Critical and Pragmatic Traditions

Critical pragmatism is derived from the learnings of critical theory and pragmatism contained in Chapters Three and Four. These learnings may be summarised as follows:

Critical theory is useful in exposing the political nature of planning and in examining relationships and roles of planning actors and activities. The element of power is fundamental to critical theory and thus this analytic approach is informed by critical theory in its concerns with relations of power and with a mindfulness of inequality. In particular it is the communicative strand of critical theory and its planning counterpart, collaborative planning, that is relevant to interactive planning approaches. This strand of critical theory focuses directly on the interactions within planning and the power dynamics as they manifest in dialogue. It also illuminates the role of discourse in planning. A specifically Foucauldian contribution to the concept of power is the notion of power as all-pervasive. In addition, Foucault links power and rationality. Furthermore, power is relative and thus needs to be understood within its context.

Critical theory's limitation in terms of practical alternatives requires that it be supplemented with a more pragmatic framework. In addition, critical theory pays inadequate attention to the role of choices made by individuals. Its limitations in terms of guidelines for ethical choices require that it be further supplemented with reference to theory that addresses planning ethics.

Pragmatism is centred on practice and on purposeful action. Pragmatic frameworks allow for an assessment of the ideas, choices and actions selected and the outcomes that result. In addition, pragmatism's concern with the context of action requires that an analysis of planning activity against the prevailing conditions, physical environment, and socio-historical context of the particular planning intervention. However, pragmatism is limited in analysing underlying structural issues that contribute to outcome and in viewing the power dynamics at play in planning processes. Pragmatism without an acknowledgement of power risks being instrumentalist, technicist and even conservative. Therefore, while the examination of practical action is foremost in this narrative of planning in practice – and thus pragmatism provides an obvious route for analysis – it is essential to broaden the

scope of the analysis. In particular, it is essential to incorporate a study of power in pragmatism.

Pragmatism is implicitly normative in its commitment to reflectivity, but is limited in offering guidelines for ethics although it broadly subscribes to democratic outcomes and the growth of the individual. Because planning is concerned with the distribution and redistribution of resources it is concerned with value judgments. These are influenced by the values, intentions and roles of individuals in the planning process. Planning action in turn has implications for value and justice. The ethical element in critical and pragmatic frameworks needs to be extended for planning.

The notion of a critical pragmatism is built on the key themes extrapolated above. These are the foundation of this analytical framework. They translate into five elements – context, outcomes, rationality, power and ethics. Pragmatism brings to critical pragmatism a strong sense of situatedness and of the importance of outcomes. Critical theory is also committed to the contextualising of issues and provides a strong direction for analysing relations of power. Both traditions have been found to contain a concern with ethics, although this requires specific extension to incorporate justice. The force of rationality binds both. Each of these five elements is a large theme in philosophy and in planning theory.

In the following section each theme is sketched as a lens of critical pragmatism. Within the confines of this dissertation, it is only possible to offer a very limited insight into each theme, given the scale of the theme and of planning debates and issues around these themes. The purpose is to highlight the themes as important elements for analysis and to offer some tentative ideas as to what the nature of these themes or lenses would be in a critical pragmatic framework. This will provide the basis for analysing planning practice in terms of the lenses and thus against critical pragmatism.

## **Lens One: Context in Critical Pragmatism**

The complexity and peculiarity of a planning exercise must be seen in terms of the particular context in which it is situated – it needs to be deeply rooted in situational understanding, and to be transparent about the identities and the values of those involved in the particular case (Flyvbjerg, 2000).

The potential relevance and applicability of different theoretical stances, whether of power or communication or the validity of multiplicity, must pertain differently to different contexts. Huxley and Yiftachel (2000) remind researchers that the convincing high status of theory has been used to enhance the position of national and ethnic elites, often at the expense of peripheral minorities. They warn that without a thorough knowledge of context, the thick descriptions and attention to detail can become ends in themselves, reflecting back the practitioner's own work and understandings, without analysis or challenge.

It is widely accepted amongst theorists that the kind of thinking that is involved in addressing problems depends at least to some extent on the context of the problem.

Critical thinking rejects the notion of generalised problem solving or generalised analysis that is abstracted from the historical, cultural or personal influences in which the problem occurs. Herein lies a tension, however. A concern with contextualised analysis and addressing problems at a localised individual scale, which takes account of the influencing factors of particular contexts opens itself to the problem of all solutions being relative and of no problem being open to wider social scrutiny. Can all issues then be explained and even pardoned through local circumstance and contextual factors? If reasons and reasoning can have different meanings in different contexts then there is no basis for resolution of conflicts. This issue is pursued in the section on ethics, below.

The concept of context, particularly in terms of political and historic situatedness, needs to be extended to incorporate place. Planning theory has often been criticised for its shallow reference to 'place'. As planning theory has aligned itself increasingly with

decision-making and policy issues it has tended to deal with space and place as additional issues, rather than as central to the planning exercise (Harris, 2002).

The communicative or collaborative planning tradition is explicitly place-centred. Healey elevates the importance of geography in public policy matters and focuses on collaborative planning as explicitly attempting to situate normative planning theory in space (Harris, 2002). The approach takes the concept of place, however, as a social construct, where place is not equated with space and may be defined differently by different groups. For the communicative school, an important component of context thus becomes the dialogical space. Planners cannot make decisions alone, but act in conjunction with stakeholders. The concern of this school with inclusion of all parties necessitates rooting the planning process within the localised community of stakeholders in the process. Its concern, furthermore, with minimalising distortions of power in the process requires recognition of those power relations and thus contextualising the process within power, albeit the power of language. The individuality of context may be relevant to the dialogical space but it breaks down with Habermas' conviction that a generalisable set of truths or norms is arrived at through consensus – this denies the peculiarity of context (but avoids relativism).

From a pragmatic perspective, context is essential as every action is to be assessed in terms of its consequence for particular individuals, within a particular situation. The situatedness of action is what defines practice as distinct from random activity (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). Pragmatists in the mould of Dewey considered action to be purposeful and situated. Dewey defined a strong relationship between the actor and the environment, in fact an interactive relationship. The importance of context in this sense is that in their work, actors (read planners) improvise with the knowledge and experience they have in a world where problems and solutions are not clearly defined and distinct but are interrelated and have bearing on each other. In addition, pragmatism's concern with multiplicity would hold that the perspectives of various actors would be valid in deriving a complete picture of context. For all this, however, one context does not mesh into all

contexts any more than one action meshes into all others. Rather, the particular context and particular circumstances – in all their holistic complexity – is the frame for action.

Critical pragmatism is likely to insist on a rich contextualising of planning cases. The definition of the context, peculiarities of a case, as well as the role and position of the narrator is necessary for optimising the validity of the case for learning. Being explicit about all aspects of context allows the reader to extract a variety of lessons for his/her own perspective from the case. Importantly, a critical pragmatic approach needs to balance the particular with the reflective in order to be both pragmatic and critical. It would necessarily examine the historic, social, physical and political context within which the planning activity takes place. In addition to contextualising its inquiry within these findings, it would reflect against the structural questions of context (power) including concerns of dominant rhetoric of the time and political agendas within the context. It would be an approach that could bridge the micro-level of the particular and the macro-level of societal questions, of systemic issues, broader social concerns.

## **Lens Two: Outcomes in Critical Pragmatism**

Planning outcomes concern the actual delivery or product of the planning intervention and its impact. McManus (in Yiftachel *et al.*, 2001) suggests that, given the history of poor outcomes in planning, more credit should be given to planners who do succeed in implementing progressive policies and plans.

While critical theory is more focused on process, it is outcome – or the experienced world – that provides the key lens for the pragmatic view of the world. This is an action-theoretic tradition. The validity of planning decisions and actions would be judged on the basis of how these were experienced. Critical pragmatism would draw from this a need to evaluate outcomes of the planning intervention. The elements that are to be evaluated are not specified in the pragmatic approach but would need to resonate with concerns for individual growth, democracy, and for hope – was the outcome an improvement? Given their concern with situatedness pragmatists would furthermore assess outcomes against



the purposes of particular actors. Much of this experience may be expressed, interpreted and analysed through communication but it would also lie in sentiment, emotion and non-verbal experience in all its passion, ambivalence and uncertainty. A critical pragmatism would demand that we assess experience as it is lived, but without being scientific in assessment. Rather we need to be critical, to uncover the structures of domination in experience.

Contemporary planning theory is highly focused on the practice and activity of planning, its collaborative or other approaches. Political and social themes – such as participation, or environmental themes – such as use of energy resources, that might constitute an assessment of outcome, are certainly covered in planning literature. Yet little work has focused directly on the outcomes or product of planning. Rather, this concern is dealt with somewhat parallel to the field of substantive planning theory, in evaluation methodology. Here, outcomes-based planning and evaluation focuses on the benefits that a programme produces to the people who use it, as opposed to benefits to the programme or its defined objectives. MacNamara (1998) outlines the differences between three types of evaluation, using typologies that may well apply to planning as to evaluation. Goals-based planning and evaluation is set up according to goals defined at the beginning of a planning exercise. These are then translated into measures that are used to evaluate the distance between the outcomes of a project and the defined goals. The objective of such evaluation is to determine if the project is ‘on track’ with its stated goals.

Process-based planning and evaluation is focused on understanding how the programme works. It considers how the programme is delivered, its strengths and weaknesses, and ways to improve the programme. Outcomes-based planning and evaluation is focused on the benefits received by clients or beneficiaries of the programme. The focus is neither on goals nor process unless these are material to the outcomes received by beneficiaries. In this evaluation, the emphasis is on the needs of the client and on how the programme has changed his or her life. The programme is evaluated against the client’s goals and whether or not these have been achieved. Actual, demonstrable benefits are shown rather than efficiency of delivery or the achievement of programme objectives.

An assessment of planning outcomes requires evaluation of planning process and implementation. The evaluation of planning projects has been systematised particularly by international funders of large scale projects, including the World Bank, the European Commission (EC) and the United Nations (UN). These evaluations have had varying success and the quest for improving evaluation methodologies is ongoing. The methodology applied in the second round of evaluation of the Kathorus SiPP (outlined in Chapter Two) provides a useful guideline to the analytical questions that might frame an in-depth analysis of outcomes. It also identifies a range of inputs, activities and outcomes to be evaluated. The methodology is the logical framework approach (European Commission, 1999). This methodology essentially distinguishes between inputs (human and financial resources) used to support the project, activities (project processes) and outputs (products delivered). The projects are evaluated according to the:

- ▶ original project goals;
- ▶ project relevance to context;
- ▶ internal planning and design logic;
- ▶ efficiency;
- ▶ effectiveness; and
- ▶ lasting impact and sustainability.

The limitations of the log-frame approach are noted in Chapter Two.

Evidence-based learning is a further outcomes-based approach to policy and planning assessment. It is a movement that has been linked with ‘new managerialism’ in public service and with the increasing emphasis on performance management. Sanderson (2002) has interrogated the assumptions of this movement. These include firstly, that social systems can be changed or steered by government, secondly, that action to achieve change is more rational to the extent that it is informed by ‘sound evidence’, and thirdly, that policy makers can learn from such evidence and put this learning into action.

In terms of the ability of governments to steer social action, the increasing complexity of the social world and the complexity of governance militate against any linear control of outcomes. The second assumption, of evidence leading to greater rationality and better

policy is encapsulated in British Prime Minister Blair's mantra "what counts is what works" (Powell in Sanderson, 2002: 8).

However, there are severe limits to understanding the causality, the full context and the conceptual bases that have informed actions, processes and thus outcome. In South Africa, Harrison examines the outcomes of Integrated Development Plan (IDP) processes and finds that it is difficult to tease out where impacts or impediments to delivery are a result of the planning processes or of a myriad of other issues (such as land claims) that affect the development process (Harrison, Forthcoming).

In short, Sanderson (2002) notes that what works for one context is unlikely to be transferable to another. The final assumption, of the possibility of learning from previous experience and putting such learning into practice further implicates the fallibility of theory based evaluative processes. For these are not divorced from institutional, social and moral issues.

In a critical pragmatist framework, outcomes are thus intimately tied to context. This situated approach breaks the mono-link between planners' actions and project outcomes. Planners may act well but a project may fail because of the actions of others or planners may act ineptly but a project may succeed for other reasons. Therefore, planners' actions need to be seen within a political and historical context. When and how their actions and deliberations do well or poorly is as much an examination of process as of outcome (Forester, 1999b).

In terms of action, the critical pragmatic approach follows the pragmatic trajectory of possible and hopeful planning intervention. This is also contained in the deliberative planning approach. Defining planning as "the organisation of hope", Forester argues against cynicism and resignation and in favour of can-do planning. He tackles the relationship between action and outcome in his micro-political view (Forester, 1999b). Critical pragmatism recognises the limits and constraints that political, class, racial or

corporate power may place on the exercise of planning. It nevertheless resists the idea that these constraints totally inhibit planning. It encourages practical action.

Forester foregrounds process and action ahead of outcome. Pragmatism, however, would foreground good outcomes. Although outcome and process are not independent of each other and there are tensions between the two, I argue that a critical pragmatic approach needs to be cognisant of both process and outcome.

### **Lens Three: Rationality in Critical Pragmatism**

Rationality lies at the heart of the philosophical differences between critical theory and pragmatism and is also the link, for it was on the basis of embracing an interactive rationality as opposed to a unitary reasoning that Habermas integrated pragmatism with a core of critical theory. As discussed in Chapter Three, critical theorists have argued that reason – particularly instrumental rationality – has been used as a tool by the state to control institutions, law and debate. The rationality that critical theorists would call for in the face of the relationship between power, control and reason is a rationality imbued with critique – a constant questioning and a seeking to uncover the power relations in planning activity. Pragmatists have adopted an approach that does not exclude the application of any rationality in order to address outcomes. While they have been accused of being positivist and of embracing a scientific rationality, their alignment is not bound to scientific rationality or to any other (MacGilvray, 2000). In fact the tradition embraces the concept of multiple rationalities, choosing to look at the reality of a situation in terms of its complexity and to understand the many rationalities at play amongst many actors.

Communicative rationality informs one stream of critical theory and is the dominant component of collaborative planning. Healey (1997a) argues that in practical reasoning we do not separate fact and value. Our process of reasoning and the giving of reasons are grounded in our cultural conceptions of our worlds and ourselves. She links this to Habermas' different forks of reasoning: instrumental-technical reasoning, which links evidence to conclusions; moral reasoning, which is focused around morals and ethics;

and emotive-aesthetic reasoning, derived from emotive experience. Scientific reasoning treated other forms of reason as the “irrationalities of the practical world” (Healey, 1997a:51). But these have gained increasing importance. They are at least an equally valid form of reasoning as argued by pragmatists (Harrison, 2002b; Harper and Stein, 2006) or are even more central than scientific reasoning – as proposed by postmodernists. The concerns of the latter are with the centrality of cultural and emotional influences and with the death of modernism in planning (Sandercock, 1998b).

Sandercock (1998a) and Flyvbjerg (1998a) question whether communicative action is the ‘significant departure from the rational comprehensive model’ that is claimed of it. This relates to communicative theory’s reliance on a general, universal principle – even if that principle is the force of the better argument it is a fallacy that all differences can be resolved by this principle. Communicative or collaborative planning is concerned with moving debate toward agreement rather than competitive interest (Oelofse, 2003a). However, a critical pragmatic approach would recognise the necessity to analyse the rationalities at play in terms of the powers and manipulations that are present within the planning process.

In a critically pragmatic, multiple-rationality approach the contributions of communicative and Foucauldian planning rationalities are combined. The approach approximates what Alexander (2001) defines as “interdependence”. However, its assumption of benign parties does not reflect reality in ways that are analytically useful. Foucault, by contrast, provides a tool for analysing the real world in a particular and direct way. This realism is weak in providing a normative direction – it does not prescribe what planners could actually do about a given power situation (Alexander, 2001). Forester acknowledged that communicative rationality must always be imperfect in practice. However, he argues that the objective of eliminating distortions and fostering open communication must become the ethical framework of planning (Forester in Sager, 1999). Bounded communicative rationality is realised when mutual understanding is pursued despite the restrictions that inhibit dialogue. The pragmatism of Forester’s later approach assumes that planners improvise all the time. Such improvisation involves

doing the best possible within the circumstances and resources at hand. It involves making practical judgments on location rather than “going by the book” (Forester, 2001:9), testing differing rationalities in practice. Forester (1999a) values an integration of diverse knowledges, what he terms differing “local value rationalities”. This argument indicates that planning practice and the examination of that practice will always run into imperfection and contingency.

In providing practical advice Alexander counsels planners to act communicatively if they want to be good planners: practicing collaborative processes to produce plans that represent a consensus amongst all stakeholders. By contrast, they are advised to act quite differently if they wish to be effective: to engage actively in the political ‘game’ to develop a plan and to commit the relevant actors to its implementation. Alexander searches for a way that planners can aspire to ideal communicative practice while practicing realistic strategic politics, producing sound plans and achieving their implementation – arguably a critical pragmatic perspective. Thus he outlines the integrating concept of interdependence, which involves strategic action that, coupled with a high degree of empathy and interdependence, becomes an enabling rather than coercive power (Friedmann, 1998).

Interdependence then integrates rationalities. Every situation demands at least a blend of communicative rationality with strategic rationality (Alexander, 2001). This requires that planners consciously identify when to apply which rationality. For example, in dealing in situations of powerful interests, planners need to engage not only traditional technical rationalities but may need to develop strategies (coalitions, cooperation) to augment their own influence and power.

For, as Dalton asserts:

If academics truly want to see planning practice change, they cannot be satisfied with debating the meaning of rationality and lamenting its dominance, but must be able to demonstrate how other forms of knowledge and processes for plan making can work in practice. (1986:149)

## **Lens Four: Power in Critical Pragmatism**

Yiftachel (2001), following the Foucauldian concern with historically grounded action, notes that analysing the actual material consequences of spatial policies can reveal much about the long-term social roles that such policies play. Yiftachel believes it is only by treating planning as a contingent political phenomenon and not as a cherished or desired phenomenon in its own right; and by recognising that so-called ‘planning principles’ are often used to rationalise oppressive policies that we can advance towards a “robust” understanding of planning. This use and abuse of power by and for planning with a conceptualisation of planning as an arm of the state and of dominant social elements has been termed the dark side of planning (Flyvbjerg, 1998a, 1998b; Yiftachel, 2001).

By contrast to Foucauldian approaches, pragmatist writings are thin in their engagement with issues of power and conflict. Dewey, like Habermas, had been faulted for underestimating the disruptive power of conflict, dissonance and asymmetrical power relations (Harrison, 2002a). Harrison (2006) notes, “the writings of the pragmatists offer far fewer insights into power than does the work of Foucault”. Yet these writings offer an alternative to the nihilist critique of modernity and planning as a tool. Dewey has suggested a more constructive approach, an approach that suggests a critical awareness of power relations can be used for positive effect. His point of departure is an analysis of who has the power, which opens the way for finding ways for others to access the power for better purposes (Harrison, 2002a).

A critical pragmatic approach to power is centred in the aspect of Forester’s work that is probably the most overlooked in critiques. Forester has been criticised for his association with a Habermasian view of communication (Yiftachel and Huxley, 2002). While his earlier work may have leaned on communication in an inadequately nuanced way, and thus, appear to assume that consensus is always possible; this is not true of the critical pragmatic approach in his recent work. The conscious alignment of Forester’s more recent work with critical frameworks suggests an evolution of an approach to viewing the power relationships of planning as complex and unavoidable. Moreover, he asserts that public deliberation (including the activity of planning), far from being an ideal form of

dialogue, suffers from inequalities of power, poor information, inadequate representation, histories of violence brought to the table and histories that silence the voices of many parties (Beauregard, 1998; Guttman and Thompson, 1996; Sandercock, 1995).

Dewey's call for a critical awareness of power relations leads Forester to call for planning to do more than identify power relations. He requires planning to engage with and in power relations to turn processes towards a better use of power. Referring to Habermas and Foucault, Forester defines at least three types of power that the planner is involved with: the power to make decisions, the power to filter issues onto or off the decisions-makers' agendas, and the power to shape others' perceptions of issues, needs and even themselves (Forester 1993, 1999a, 1999b). We cannot understand the possibilities of planning practice until we have looked at planning stories. These can teach us about planning theory and allow us to look at the limits and vulnerabilities of power, and importantly can inform progressive planning. Stories require us to consider the demands and the vulnerable and precarious nature of engaging in participatory planning practice. Taking the Foucauldian concern with elevating suppressed, subjugated and marginalised accounts, Forester claims that the stories of ordinary planners working to address issues of welfare, injustice, need and suffering should similarly be elevated (Forester, 2001). He concludes that these stories are not to be examined for best practices, but for the character of critical, pragmatic judgment in planning. Stories in other contexts can help us explore the challenges in our own contexts and devise our own practical solutions to problems we share as planners. This is explored further in Chapter Nine, in relation to the value of the case study I have used for other instances of planning practice.

How planners proceed in the context of power relationships is critical to moving beyond a pure description of power, or of rationality or discourse in the planning project. "In their day-to-day activities, planners may use a variety of means to resist, or not enthusiastically enact, policies emanating from various levels of government" (McManus in Yiftachel *et al.*, 2001:46). The positive role of power and the ability of planners to exercise power are mentioned in contemporary planning theory.



### **Critical Pragmatism and Structures of Power**

An analysis of the systems, power dynamics and roles of actors with respect to power is a key element of a critical pragmatic approach to analysis. This approach requires a critical perspective of questioning, of being sceptical about the perceived relations of power and about elements of participation in planning action. The pragmatic perspectives of egalitarianism, self-development and democracy requires an investigation into the extent and limitations of beneficiaries' participation in projects while the critical perspective requires that the possibility of and limitations to changing relations of power through the project be examined. In short, critical theory specifically seeks to uncover distortions, oppressions and inequalities, while pragmatism is limited in explaining how these occur even if it does have a commitment to not perpetuating them. Both traditions require that power as interpreted, applied and manipulated in actual deliberation be considered. The complexities of participation need to be examined empirically, and not left as general assertions. As Harrison (Forthcoming) notes, it is important to examine how participatory practices are actually being undertaken and what the effects of these processes are on the lives of ordinary citizens.

### **Critical Pragmatism and Communication**

As a key protagonist of the communicative school, Forester has called for planning theory to go beyond an identification of the existence of power in planning. Forester has adopted the term critical pragmatism in his reassertion of this intellectual field in planning. Forester (1999a) highlights the potential for a critical pragmatic approach to bridge the concerns of communicative action with issues of power. He calls for planning theory to step out of its denial of power, its trap of ending where it should begin-with "the recurrent discovery that planning is about power" and to address 'better' and 'worse' approaches to acting in the face of power. He suggests that as planners we need "now more than ever... the searching analysis of how to do better, pragmatically and critically, really, in a world of power" (Forester, 1999b:177). Planners are obliged to anticipate and respond to predictable relationships of power (Forester, 2001).

A critical pragmatic approach would call for a continual inquiry into distortions, illusions and interests that masquerade as Truths. It would not be bound to one grand theory but would be dynamic in its theoretical approach, drawing on various perspectives. A critical pragmatic approach would seek to analyse the particular case for relations of power, be mindful of the roles of various actors and the activity of planning itself in relation to power. It would further examine the discourse and deliberative aspects of a case. Finally, it would be concerned with the nature of ‘community participation’ in particular as it impacted on the potential of individuals to fulfil their potential as participants in the project, including the space for dissent (as opposed to consensus).

### **Critical Pragmatism and Discourse**

The terminology of planning, whether at a general level or a language popularised in a particular context, becomes central to the way in which issues and planning interventions are spoken about and applied. This concept of ‘discourse’ is derived from Foucault: bodies of ideas, concepts or theory mediate power through their impacts on the way we act. A central contribution of Foucault to the development debate has been his assertion that discourse and power shape the way we think and what we see as truth and untruth. Discourse is the product of power relations and becomes a means of controlling the idea (Said, 2003). McManus (in Yiftachel *et al.*, 2001) notes that terms such as ‘communities’ are given meaning through their social context and that any discussion of power needs to recognise the power relations operating in the discourse, and not simply the power relations in the material outcomes. The notion of discourse and its link to power is necessary for understanding the power relations at play in development projects and is adopted in this dissertation. How discourse shaped the passage of the KSiPP and the overall context in which it was operating is examined in later chapters. However, critical pragmatism would not assume that discourse is inevitably at the mercy of the state and powerful interests. Rather, deliberative critical, pragmatic planning approaches engage in discourses of power. Implicit in this is a hypothesis that the discourse – like other aspects of the development agenda in a terrain of conflict – can be appropriated and won over for progressive interests.

The rider to this hypothesis is however contextually bound. All development outcomes cannot be explained in terms of power, discourse or even planners' choice and action. Outcomes are bound in a socio-historical context.

### **Lens Five: Ethics in Critical Pragmatism**

Forester (1999b) admonishes contemporary planning theory for paying too little attention to ethical judgment and practice: the moral aspects of planning rhetoric. He claims that there is a need to go beyond demonstrations of inequality, to explore what really and feasibly ought to be done. Furthermore, Forester requires that planners make judgments about the rightness or wrongness of different claims. This is onerous and relies heavily on individual planners' moral judgements. The guidelines offered in critical and pragmatic texts for such judgement are thin.

To the extent that a critical pragmatism can provide guidelines for incorporating value and ethics into analysis then it is concerned with the limited critical and pragmatic perspectives on ethics. The Habermasian view offers a discourse ethics as well as a concern with decentring, as discussed below.

Habermas was concerned with the danger of relativism in a position that elevates the individual local circumstances over generalised perspectives. Habermas wants to provide some criteria for the arbitration of moral issues to avoid the relativism to which a complete denial of reason and truth can lead. His criteria for reasoning about such normative issues – to avoid the pitfalls of a universalist position – are that such reasoning must be grounded in historically defined human activity and not in a universal set of rules (Endres, 1996). His 'discourse ethics' argues that for any claim to be valid everyone affected by its adoption must freely accept it. His approach, on the one hand, seeks to find universal criteria for unfettered dialogue and, on the other, is rooted in the real needs of everyday conversation (and is thus pragmatic).

Within dialogue, however, the individuals' own history necessarily affects their approaches to conversation. Habermas' approach requires that we consciously recognise the contextual and personal factors that impact on how we approach problems and our understanding of those problems. By extension, in order to enter into an effective dialogue about the problem, it is necessary to distance or 'decentre' from those personal attitudes about objects, social relations and previous experience. This raises an obvious tension between recognising humans as grounded in a personal and social history and expecting them to achieve a distanced perspective. But this is not unique to Habermas: it is a tension embraced by most critical theorists who are concerned with how thinkers avoid common confusions, fallacies and myths. Habermas' project seeks to find a foundation for an ethical theory since he sees this form of critical thinking as essential for the most fundamental form of human communication. But his work is critical in that it views thought as embedded in social history and knowledge as a product of human goals and interests rather than idealised objects, independent of human contexts (Endres, 1996).

For critical pragmatism then decentring is essential. While decentring may be too rigorous a task for planning engagement and analyses, perhaps openness to the positions of participants in planning, as well as a reflection on one's own position, suffices to provide adequate distance and space for empathic engagement in the planning process. While this does not allow the rigour that Habermas demands, it does comply with the ethical requirement that as interdependent social beings we are obligated to struggle to empathise with those who are different from us (Endres, 1996).

The communicative school calls for planners to take a proactive role in furthering the cause of disadvantaged, particularly those with limited 'voice' in deliberations. It is, however, more explicitly concerned with promoting normative agendas of increasing democratic behaviour in planning than of radically giving 'voice' to marginalised groups. Collaborative planning calls for all stakeholders to be included in a complete way in the planning exercise. But the favouring of multiple clients within the public has been questioned by Tewdwr-Jones (2002) who questions why this is assumed to be an ethically correct position? The public, he contends is only one client and is itself

conflicted. Whose ends should a planner serve, the ‘public’, the employer, the political employer, personal conscience, future generations or the profession? He argues that in fact planners have often – understandably – been more comfortable with a more technocratic approach than a participatory one – which they see as furthering the interests of already powerful groups.

What is right for a pragmatic approach is likely to be what the community agrees.

Pragmatism’s failure to adequately engage in issues of power necessarily limits its engagement with ethics and justice. As Allmendinger (2002:15) concludes:

... probably the most relevant criticism has been the conservative nature of such an approach and how it does not address issues of embedded power relations... Of more concern is the relativism at the heart of the pragmatic approach. There is no ‘privileged’ position within pragmatism.

Harrison (2002a) argues that pragmatists do not attach weight to idealised norms that cannot be achieved in practice. Ethical deliberation takes place in relation to the particular context rather than in an abstract or transferable sense. The situatedness of this approach to ethics opens the approach to criticisms of relativism. Harrison contends, however, that although Dewey located moral reasoning within the community, he required that the norms of community be intelligently questioned. This moral stance is flexible and does not offer strong guidelines for planning which is highly challenged by questions of justice as in South Africa. Furthermore, the pragmatic approach of communitarian values is insufficient in a context that requires specific redress against a history of group values having been used as a tool of domination. Oelofse (2003a) shows the high possibility and the dangers of different groups holding on to different principles in the planning of housing programmes. Real struggles exist between different, opposing ethical stances. Given the history of concerted deprivation in South Africa, it would be necessary to extend such an analysis to incorporate specific issues of justice. Essentially the questions would have to concern whether the least advantaged members of society benefited adequately from the intervention. These are crucial questions in the case study of this dissertation, which is situated in an area of extreme deprivation.

Critical pragmatism must take its cue from the foundations of critical theory and pragmatism in order to develop a sound guide for ethical choice in planning. The space that may be explored for ethical choice between the critical theory of Habermas and pragmatism is a space between the normative, universalistic codes offered by critical theory and the specificity of particular contexts called for by pragmatists. Here Campbell's work, as noted in the previous chapter, is instructive. Her guideline for situating justice does not, however, go far enough in terms of the normative requirements of actively redressing injustices in South Africa. Even within a framework that prizes 'justice' as a key measure of good choices in planning, tighter criteria are required to assess planning and to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable forms of power configuration. Without such normative criteria there is no reason to suggest that present unacceptable systems of power might be replaced by any systems that are less dominant or repressive.

Oelofse (2003a) goes beyond the more tentative approach of Campbell to suggesting actual normative principles that planners should adhere to, in pursuing a particular mode of ethics – social justice. Oelofse argues for a Rawlsian approach, which accepts diversity and difference while calling for adherence to a political conception of social justice (Oelofse, 2003a). The outcome of this approach is a planning stance that consciously favours and empowers the disadvantaged. Planners acting within this ethical framework would take into account the impacts of decisions and decision-making on the poor and disadvantaged in the first instance and would overtly act to benefit vulnerable groups. Further, Oelofse proposes a unified code which adds just content to just procedure, based on Rawlsian equity and difference principles. In these terms “the best distribution is one which conforms with (Rawls’) equity and difference principles, protecting the basic rights of all whilst arranging inequalities to benefit the least advantaged” (Oelofse, 2003a: 289). This directive, it is argued, fits within pragmatic concerns for the individual as well as critical concerns for a normative position [in this case the conscious benefiting of the least advantaged]. It satisfied the requirement, of both traditions, that ethical positions be contextually appropriate. It is taken as the key ethical question for critical pragmatism in this dissertation.

## Conclusion

Following from the philosophical and theoretical chapters, this chapter has drawn out elements of critical pragmatism that are implicit in philosophy and in the brief attention to critical pragmatism in planning theory and made these explicit. It has developed an analytical framework for a critical pragmatist approach to the examination of planning practice. The framework consists of five elements: context, outcomes, rationality, power and ethics. Each of these has a particular meaning for critical pragmatism as derived from the intersections of critical and pragmatic principles in philosophy and planning.

In examining the context of planning practice, critical pragmatism requires a rich contextualising of planning cases. Critical pragmatism requires that planning analysis be both situated and reflective. It requires an examination of the social, physical and political context within which planning takes place as well as a reflection against the relations of power that operate in that context. Further the micro-level concerns of context need to be understood as they shape practice.

In analysing practice against outcomes, critical pragmatism requires a strong concern for what actually happened in the planning process and what outcomes were actually delivered. Both process and ends are important in understanding the passage and effect of the planning intervention. In terms of outcomes of process, what actually happened in planning interaction needs to be understood for its political as well as technical implications. Outcomes, in terms of results delivered, are to be assessed also for whether they achieved democratic ends.

In terms of rationality, critical pragmatism is open to employing a variety of rationalities, allowing these to be tested in practical circumstances. In terms of power, critical pragmatism draws from the wider definition of critical theory. On the one hand, this foregrounds communicative power present in the interactions that are the substance of planning activity. On the other hand, it takes the view of power being all pervasive and so analyses the power relations present at a structural level, as well as the power of planners

to act in the face of multiple power dynamics. This accords both a critical and an interventionist, pragmatic approach.

Finally, critical pragmatism is limited in offering guidelines for making ethical judgments in planning situations. In appealing to the foundations of critical theory and pragmatism, however, it is clear that a critical pragmatic approach to ethics requires both a judgement at a specific, situated level and an appeal to normative values. In terms of normative values, the South African context requires that Rawlsian principles of justice, of consciously benefiting the least advantaged, be applied. This is taken as the ethical starting point for a critical pragmatist analysis of planning choices in the South African context.

Importantly, the five elements of a critical pragmatic framework for evaluation are not five silos. They interact with one another and cannot be neatly separated. The discussion will take each element individually but within the analysis it will be shown, for example, that outcome is tied to context, to rationality, to power and to ethics.

The following section of the dissertation applies this analytical framework to a case study in South Africa. This will allow for the assessment of the value of the analytical approach as well as the refinement of such an approach in practice. The case study component of the dissertation comprises the next three chapters. Chapter Six sketches the context within which the KSiPP was undertaken. Chapter Seven outlines the process and outcome of that planning exercise in terms of a conventional approach to evaluation. Chapter Eight re-examines the case study in the light of a critical pragmatic approach to analysis. These three chapters, in turn, inform the findings of the dissertation, contained in Chapter Nine.