

Chapter 1

Planning as Agonistic Communication in a Trading Zone: Re-examining Lindblom's Partisan Mutual Adjustment

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Abstract This chapter re-examines Charles E. Lindblom's theory of *partisan mutual adjustment* (PMA), by reflecting on the recent ideas on cross-cultural cooperation and communication, developed in sociological studies of science and technology. While the critical arguments of the so-called communicative (or collaborative) planning theorists on PMA are well known and well placed, they may have overlooked the complexities of planning communication. Especially Peter Galison's concept of *trading zone* offers a fresh outlook on these complexities. In this chapter, Lindblomian bargaining and compromise seeking are reinterpreted in terms of creating a local trading zone between the stakeholders representing different cultures of meaning and value. This approach challenges two assumptions that have become commonplace in the planning theoretical debate around PMA: *firstly*, that trading between interests would not necessitate mutual dialogue and generation of a realm of shared understandings and, *secondly*, that approaching planning communication as trading between interests would mean adopting the political ideology of (neo)liberalism.

Keywords Communicative planning theory • Incrementalism • Exchange language • Meaning system

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1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, our aim is to re-examine Lindblom's (1965) theory of *partisan mutual adjustment* (PMA), by reflecting on the recent ideas on cross-cultural cooperation and communication, developed in sociological studies of science and technology, and discussing their relevance in the context of planning. While the critical arguments of the so-called communicative (or collaborative) planning theorists on PMA are well known and well placed, they may have overlooked the complexities of planning communication. In sociological studies of science and technology especially, Peter Galison's concept of *trading zone* (Galison 1997, 1999, 2010) offers a fresh outlook on these complexities, thus justifying the re-examination of PMA and the critical debate around it.

PMA is part of Lindblom's broader theory of incrementalism. In a later chapter, Lindblom has also relabelled PMA as *incremental politics*, making a distinction between two areas of concern in incrementalism: incremental analysis and incremental politics.¹ By discussing PMA in this chapter, we will hence concentrate on the political implications of Lindblom's incrementalism.² Whereas incremental analysis is a method for dealing with the professional problems of public management, PMA is a method for the political processes of public government. Incremental analysis serves political decision-making processes by formulating marginal policy alternatives on which to decide. In PMA, each new decision is adapted to the status quo of the former decisions (Lindblom 1965, pp. 10). But the analysis also necessitates politics, because incrementally derived knowledge cannot be given a value-free status. Such knowledge is based on partial information, and it necessarily prioritizes certain value considerations over others. Pluralistic politics between various interest groups is therefore needed to fill the knowledge gaps that still remain after the public administrator's analysis and to bring alternative values on the agenda. Lindblom conceives of the political process as a game where each interest group acts as a *watchdog* for its values. Each decision-maker is allowed to concentrate on a deliberately narrow problem definition—especially on questions that are important for the interest group one represents—because comprehensive knowledge is beyond one's reach anyway. Participation by many decision-makers is therefore needed to guarantee that the essential interests are given adequate attention (Lindblom 1965, pp. 146, 151, 156). As the values are conflicting and not all needs can be satisfied, the interest groups are assumed to be mutually antagonistic. It is left to the process of groups negotiating, bargaining and competing in the political arena to reach decisions between conflicting demands. An ideal solution, according to Lindblom, would be a *Pareto optimum*³: a solution which is to the advantage of some and a loss to none (Lindblom 1965, p. 210).

In PMA, decisions are arrived at according to the power relations between the interest groups (Friedmann 1987, pp. 331–32). Access to the decision-making process is not evenly distributed between the interested partisans, and the process opens up more readily to those who are organized and influential. As Lindblom's critics reveal, in the context of incrementalism, PMA has an inherent tendency towards *corporatism*.

Incrementalism is, by definition, conservative. It builds on the existing policy by adding only small increments onto it and by making small changes *at the margin*. This means that it also builds on the existing power relations. Therefore, incremental decisions tend to mirror the values of those already in power: the status quo (Etzioni 1967, p. 387; Cates 1979, p. 528; Sager 1994, p. 160; Möttönen 1997, p. 178). In PMA, the partisans are powerfully motivated by self-interest and also recognize this self-interest in each other. Therefore, according to Lindblom, they try to search for everyone's advantage or for no one's disadvantage (Lindblom 1965, p. 210). But who are *everyone* but those who are already included as partisans? Self-interest also means *no interest* in bringing in new partisans to the decision-making process (Mäntysalo 2000, p. 60).⁴

Lindblom's PMA has also been attacked for its communicative narrowness by the so-called communicative planning theorists. Lindblom's theory does not attempt a generation of a public realm, as the search for mutual understanding between the interest groups is not considered necessary or even possible. For Lindblom, it is not relevant whether or not you share, in general terms, the values of your counterpart, as long as you are able to strike a bargain with him/her on a concrete planning decision. What matters is whether your counterpart agrees with a concrete proposal, not *why* she/he agrees. From the perspective of Habermasian communicative rationality, this approach to planning communication is clearly unsatisfactory.

Tore Sager has proposed a concept of *dialogical incrementalism* as a response to the criticisms of corporatism and narrowness of dialogue placed on PMA. Put simply, Sager's dialogical incrementalism replaces PMA with Habermasian communicatively rational dialogue—while retaining incrementalism in analysis, i.e. acknowledging boundedness of analysis and the necessity of step-by-step procedure in the face of uncertainty (Sager 1994, 1997).⁵

But have we truly acknowledged the challenges to mutual comprehension of planning issues when adopting the Habermasian ideal of planning communication? Is mutual understanding a realistic goal or should we instead direct our attention to concrete case-specific opportunities for a planning solution as a satisfactory bargain for each stakeholder involved?

The communicative planning theorists themselves have been hovering around this question. For example, Patsy Healey (1992) is doubtful of the possibility of achieving truly shared understanding in multicultural communicative planning. Participants may share a concern but arrive at it through different cultural, societal and personal experiences. According to Patsy Healey, they belong to different *systems* of meaning that will remain nearer or further from each other in relation to access to each other's languages. Planning communication should thus focus on reaching an achievable level of mutual understanding for the purposes at hand while retaining awareness of that which is *not* understood (Healey 1992, p. 154). What may unify people from diverse backgrounds is that they share a physical place in which they live and work and they often share a concern for the development of this place, despite having different *moral orders* (Healey 1997, p. 124). In more recent planning theoretical contributions, Lindblomian bargaining and compromising have been reintroduced among the *normatively acceptable* policy tools in planning, depending

on the difficulty of the planning problem. According to Jean Hillier (2002), bargaining *is* a legitimate way of resolving political conflicts that would otherwise remain unresolved (Hillier 2002, p. 255). But she adds, ‘It should, however, be a strategy of last resort rather than first resort, not a principle of least effort’ (Hillier 2002, p. 255). In Hillier’s view, the planners should accept the possible inaccessibility of consensus and embrace the pluralism of negotiation approaches and tactics (Hillier 2002, p. 269). Judith E. Innes and David E. Booher also include bargaining as one possible form of planning communication in their theory of collaborative rationality in planning, which they formulate in their new book (Innes and Booher 2010, pp. 37, 116).

John Forester has argued that in most difficult conflict situations, we may indeed end up with searching mutually for planning agreement in the sense of PMA—and even transform this into a positive process by focusing on concrete planning solutions and their benefits (Forester 2006). Forester has dedicated his last book to dispute resolution, to the treatment of apparently irresolvable conflicts, stating that more and more planning is about managing contentious interdependence (Forester 2009). His in-depth analysis of the behaviours of expert mediators in managing contentious disputes assumes as a point of departure the interdependent and partisan nature of the positions of the various stakeholders. It is this awareness and the capacity to assess different positions that allow mediators to act strategically in order to construct agreeable decisions.

Tore Sager, in turn, has in his recent work been looking for a resolution between the ideals of communicative planning and the realities of neoliberalism, by identifying common denominators between the two, in terms of the ideology of New Public Service (Sager 2009).

Now, does this development indicate that we have lost the coherence of normative communicative planning theory and compromised its key principles? Is it now the political difficulty of the planning task at hand that becomes decisive, whether we should attempt a deliberative search for consensus and the public realm or (neo)liberalist bargaining and compromising between pre-politically defined interests? Can we settle with such a conclusion?

Galison’s concept of *trading zone* (Galison 1997, 1999, 2010) offers new insights into this debate. While the concept has been well established in the field of sociological studies of science and technology, its applicability in the realms of environmental planning and policy-making has been gaining increasing interest (Gustafsson 2009; Gorman 2008, 2010). The trading zone concept challenges especially two assumptions that have become commonplace in the planning theoretical debate around PMA: *firstly*, that trading between interests would not necessitate mutual dialogue and generation of a realm of shared understandings and, *secondly*, that approaching planning communication as trading between interests would mean adopting the political ideology of (neo)liberalism. In the following, we will elaborate these assumptions and then review them critically with the help of the idea of a trading zone. In the concluding section, we will discuss the relevance of reintroducing PMA in the trading zone context for the development of planning theory—especially the emerging theory of agonistic planning. But let us begin with a brief introduction to Galison’s concept of trading zone.

1.2 Trading Zone

Galison has studied interactions between different groups of scientists, especially theorists, experimentalists and instrumentalists in particle physics, conceiving each group as a subculture of its own. What had puzzled Galison was their ability to generate conditions for coordinated mutual interaction despite the limited ability of each group to comprehend each other's conceptions, methodologies and aims. In his study of practical research cooperation between theorists, experimentalists and instrumentalists in given contexts, he noticed that certain practico-linguistic settings had been generated to the exchange of knowledge and services between these different *meaning systems* of particle physics. Galison identified local infrastructures of shared concepts and instruments that had enabled such exchange. These infrastructures and concepts functioned as *exchange languages* for the mutual *out-talk* between members of different subcultures, where highly elaborate and complicated issues could be transformed into *thin descriptions* for the purposes of exchanging information. He called such settings *trading zones* (Galison 2010, forthcoming).

Galison stresses the *locality* of a trading zone. It is a specific site in a specific time—partly symbolic and partly spatial—in which local coordination between theory and action takes place (Galison 1999, p. 138). '[I]n the trading zone [...] there are knots, local and dense sets of connections that can be identified with partially autonomous clusters of actions and beliefs' (Galison 1999, p. 146).

Galison looked for theoretical support from the anthropological linguists who had studied languages in border zones. He found extensive accounts of the historical and structural development of *exchange languages*—highly specific linguistic structures to facilitate inter-linguistic communication between two or more pre-existing linguistic cultures. In colonized societies, artificial *pidgin* languages have been generated between the very different parent languages of the immigrants and the indigenous people, as localized linguistic practices of trade—some of which may have later *naturalized* into full-blown languages, *creoles* (Galison 1997, pp. 673–674). Galison saw an analogy to the hybrid arenas of research collaboration which interconnect different realms of science—such as biochemistry that, from the first coordinative attempts to join biology to chemistry, has slowly evolved into a language that borrows from both but is subservient to neither (Galison 2010, forthcoming). Thereby, he conceived the trading zones of scientific-technological interaction as locally developed language practices for trading ideas and services—as a sort of Wittgensteinian contextual language games (Galison 2010, forthcoming).

In a very recent paper, Galison applies his concept to the realm of planning too—namely, multi-actor water management planning (Galison 2010, forthcoming). He draws an example from the work of Boyd Fuller who has studied water use disputes in California and Florida:

Fuller began with conflict. The stakeholders in recent debates over the Everglades were more than diverse—federal and state regulators, tribal groups, environmentalists, and agricultural interests “exploded” in some of their early attempts to interact. Their values were irreconcilable, their desires cut skew to each other. Fuller goes on to show that these actors neither subscribed to a common world view about the meaning and significance of wetland

water supplies nor threw up their hands in despair at the clash of values. Instead, he showed how, without abandoning their own deep-set values, the groups were able to establish terms of negotiation around a *delimited* set of water management recommendations (Galison 2010, forthcoming).

The connections to Lindblom's partisan mutual adjustment are quite evident. Galison's focus on local coordination in the face of *global differences* is very similar to Lindblom's focus on adjustments *on the margin* in the PMA process, not bringing overarching goals to the table. Disagreement on the latter could destroy opportunities for situated agreement on the next few incremental steps, concerning concrete and immediate planning problems. What if we reinterpreted Lindblomian partisan mutual adjustment in terms of creating a local trading zone between the stakeholders representing different cultures of meaning and value?

1.3 Narrow Trading Between Interests: A Hindrance to Dialogue or a Result of Dialogue?

In his theory of partisan mutual adjustment, Lindblom sees the partial, incomplete, partisan behaviour of individuals as the main source of rationality for the society as a whole: it is through the open process of bargaining and mutual adjustment that all the relevant facets of a problem are explored and negative consequences of incomplete analysis are dealt with.

For Sager, this conception presents a too narrow view of planning communication. It provides a method of settling disputes without having to attempt dialogue (which Sager, following Habermas, defines as *undominated communication*). Mutual agreement on planning decisions is not necessary; instead, PMA provides a method to guarantee that decisions are made *despite* the lack of agreement. It encourages bargaining and compromising between interests without, however, ensuring a fair fight between them (Sager 1994, pp. 7, 14, 20, 73). Sager's description of such a process is *collective opportunism* (Sager 1994, p. 180; see also Forester 1993, p. 87).

Lindblom's partisans do not bother to find out each other's motives and reasonings but only seek agreement on the disputed planning issue at hand. The partisans do not ask *why* their counterpart is ready to strike a bargain when mutual agreement is found (Lindblom 1965, pp. 207–208). Planning negotiation is approached from the perspective of economic trading: why someone *agrees on a political offer* is hardly more relevant than why someone buys a commodity on the market. What matters is what one may benefit from the transaction. By focusing on the possibilities of the concrete planning task, acknowledging the limits in sharing basic values and information between the stakeholders, PMA bears resemblance to the trading zone approach.

In a more recent work (Lindblom 1990), Lindblom illustrates the mechanism of PMA through the concept of *probing*. Each actor, pursuing his/her own preferences, facing a problem or an opportunity, probes, through the interaction, his/her way of defining the situation, the possible actions to cope with it and the acceptable solutions. And it is through the process of probing that partisan mutual adjustment happens.

Again, Lindblom's conception of a probing process is very close to Galison's description of what happens within a given trading zone. The problem of progress in society is to let the probing process develop as freely as possible, to avoid *impaired probing* which has become the result of the professionalization of social inquiry (Lindblom 1990, p. 59).

However, it seems that neither Lindblom, nor his critics, have been able to fully appreciate the practico-linguistic challenges involved in attempting to create local conditions for meaningful bargaining and compromising between the *subcultures* of interest groups—a trading zone of planning, where each party involved would have the capacity to sufficiently grasp the meaning of issues and solution proposals to be traded. Following Galison, the conditions of meaningful bargaining and compromising between the different *linguistic communities* of stakeholders are *already a result of a long-standing dialogue* between these communities to generate a local exchange language of planning between them in their strife. Are you really able to strike a bargain on a planning proposal before you have a sufficiently shared conception of what the planning proposal and its contents are about as objects of bargaining?

Lindblomian bargaining and compromising, in order to be successful, would entail the generation of the language of planning as a trading zone, where the different planning experts, politicians, developers, citizens and other stakeholders have sufficient means of comprehending what is at stake and what to agree or disagree about. Without a shared platform for exchanging knowledge, experiences, assertions and proposals on a planning issue, there is no sense in agreeing or disagreeing, since you could not be certain how your counterpart understands the meaning of the agreement/disagreement. You may agree with your counterpart, only to become amazed at the latter's violation of what you thought was agreed while the counterpart firmly denies any violation!

A planning proposal mediated through the trading zone would bear, at a *deeper* level, different meanings to culturally different stakeholders but also, at the *surface* level, sufficiently shared meanings between them, so that each would have sufficient certainty what commitments, division of tasks, sharing of risks, rules of implementation, changes to everyday living, etc. are being disagreed/agreed about.

According to Galison (2010), the concept of trading zone is closely related to the concept of *boundary object*. The term has been coined by Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer to depict entities which allow the use and exchange of information between different communities despite the fact that these communities do not share the same systems of meaning, values or strategies:

[B]oundary objects are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. [...] They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation (Star and Griesemer 1989, p. 393).

In Galison's view, however, the concept of boundary object is more limited as it, instead of the trading zone concept, addresses the mere syntax, not the fullness of exchange languages (Galison 1999).⁶ In this sense, we could say that a boundary object is a specific device which facilitates the exchange in a trading zone.

When bargaining and compromising in planning is approached as a trading zone, the narrowness of such planning communication receives a new meaning. Instead of being condemned for trivializing planning communication into a trade between interests, it becomes appreciated as a result of long-standing mutual communication and interaction between different groups in their effort to generate a mutual exchange language, an opportunity of translation, where interests in relation to concrete planning proposals can be expressed in a form that is *narrow enough* to enable meaningful trading between them. Narrow trading between interests would thus be viewed as a result of dialogue, rather than a hindrance to it.

Here, however, dialogue would receive a somewhat different meaning from the Habermasian *undominated communication* that Sager refers to. The approach to dialogue is actually broader. We draw on Bohm and Peat's definition of dialogue as 'the free flow of meaning between communicating parties' (Bohm and Peat 1992, p. 245). Bohm and Peat emphasize the creative nature of dialogue as a process of revealing and then melting together the rigid constructions of implicit cultural knowledge. They make a distinction between *dialogue* and *discussion* as the two basic forms of discourse (Bohm and Peat 1992, p. 245). Senge elaborates this distinction by claiming that in discussion different views are presented and defended, whereas in dialogue different views are presented as a means towards discovering a new view (Senge 1994, p. 247). He argues that discourses in the form of discussion may provide useful analyses of problem situations. In dialogue, complex issues are explored, but in a discussion decisions are made. Planning as communication in a trading zone would necessitate such mutual exploration, to create conditions of sufficient comprehension for each party and thus enable the forming of opinions and negotiating of decisions. Innes and Booher conceive creative planning dialogue as a situation-specific process of generating *shared heuristics* and a *boundary community* (Innes and Booher 2010, pp. 38–40, 116). Following Bohm and Peat, they consider dialogue as a process of transforming conflicting and confusing views into something rational and meaningful. But the achievement of shared heuristics and meanings through dialogue does not necessarily mean agreement (*ibid.*, 119–121). *Dialogue* can be seen as necessary for arriving at *conditions of discussion* in the sense of meaningful bargaining. Habermasian communicative rationality, on the other hand, rather focuses on these *conditions of discussion* while bypassing the generative and creative aspects of dialogue needed in probing with complex planning problems (Mäntysalo 2002, p. 424; see also Innes and Booher 2010, pp. 111, 119).

1.4 The Political Ideology of Exchange

In game theory a *rational* actor is frequently defined as one who seeks to maximize his/her own utility without regard to the utilities of others. This definition is often combined with the general liberalist assumption that such rational actors together constitute an *invisible hand*. It is thus assumed that (in a perfect market system) the pursuit of self-interest by individual actors leads to optimal conditions for all (Pareto optimum).

In the broad liberalist tradition of political theories, it is commonplace to conceive politics as games between interests that have been *privatized* by interest groups that do not seek to share their understandings. Politics is seen as *foreign politics*, without a common foundation in the public realm (see Palonen 1989, 19). This conception coincides with the classical liberalist view of human beings, with the assumption that human individuals exist apart or independently of their social relationships (see Bernstein 1986, p. 269). A political game of this kind does not differ much from the economic game. Politics is treated as the continuation of market relations by other means (Friedmann 1987). According to Lindblom, political democracy has been unable to exist except when coupled with the liberal economy (Lindblom 1977, p. 116). They both share a common origin in liberalism, and western democracies were established to win and protect market liberties (Lindblom 1977, pp. 162–64).⁷

The absence of the public realm can also be discerned in Lindblom's PMA, evidenced in the notion of interest groups as *watchdogs* for their values. Hannah Arendt's view of political action is drastically different from the liberalist position. This becomes evident when we compare Arendt's use of the concept of *interest* to the liberalist understanding of the term. Whereas the latter uses the concept to separate actors and groups from each other, Arendt finds that interests are there to join people together: 'These interests constitute, in the word's most literal significance, something which inter-est, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together' (Arendt 1958, p. 182).

Arendt's political philosophy, along with Habermas' theory of communicative action,⁸ forms a cornerstone of the deliberative theory of democracy, underlining the ancient Greek idea of the *polis* as shared political space, antithetical to the liberalist view of politics as games between preformed and privatized interests. Accordingly, the communicative planning theorists' critique on Lindblom's PMA reflects their rejection of the political ideology of (neo)liberalism and their shift to deliberative democracy, following Habermas.

Will the trading zone approach to PMA thus mean recourse to (neo)liberalism in planning theory? Not necessarily.

Again, through his readings on anthropological linguistics, Galison acknowledges the multiplicity of exchange relationships and meanings attached to them. Besides market relations and profit-making, the exchange of goods and money may bear symbolic meanings of fostering mutual respect, commitment and reciprocity, even holiness. For Galison, the trading zone means exchange in such a broader and open-ended sense, avoiding narrow definitions of exchange relationships in terms of market rationality and (neo)liberalist politics (Galison 2010, forthcoming):

At root the relevant aspect of exchange is this: what an object means to me when I give it to you may very well not be what you, as the recipient, understand that object to connote. What matters is coordination—not a full-fledged agreement about signification. I hand you a crystal, you hand me a flute. All we need to know in that moment is that we agree to exchange—not the structure of the crystal or flute, not their origin, meaning, uses, or provenance. *Nothing* in this swap requires a reference explicitly or for that matter implicitly to money as a commensurable entity, to a universal instrument of value, or to a universal logic. It is the possibility of this relative superficiality—the possibility of a *thin description*

that interests me in the trading zone. Thin—insofar we do not need to refer to some universal currency of rationality or value. And thin in a second sense—we can by-pass the presupposition that there is any agreement among the people exchanging things about the full signification (thick description) of the objects exchanged (Galison 2010, forthcoming).

As Galison resigns from (neo)liberal reductivism, he is not looking for deliberative consensus, either: '*Trade* focuses on coordinated, local actions, enabled by the *thinness* of interpretation rather than the thickness of consensus' (Galison 2010, forthcoming). What is needed is 'consensus in a restricted zone, a zone where coordination is good enough' (Galison 2010, forthcoming).

Galison's ideas resonate interestingly with the political theory of *agonism*, gaining interest among planning theorists too (Hillier 2002; Pløger 2004; Bäcklund and Mäntysalo 2009; Innes and Booher 2010). Agonism is introduced by Chantal Mouffe (2000) who argues that the tension between liberalist and deliberative logics is not a dilemma to be resolved in favour of either ideology. Instead she claims that this tension is indeed a basic characteristic of western democracy. There is continuous political strife between one logic relying on individual rights and the legal state and the other on equal citizenship in the public realm. This makes politics *paradoxical*, not rational activity. For Mouffe, there is no transcendental rationality beyond the realm of political struggles. Mouffe's agonistic model of democracy is about handling the tensions between the two alternative rationalities in practical political activity, acknowledging both of them as equally legitimate approaches to democratic conduct.

For Mouffe, agonism means willingness to generate, in a constructive fashion, democratic decisions which may be partly consensual but which, furthermore, respectfully acknowledge differences that remain unresolved. In agonistic democracy, the counterpart is seen as a legitimate adversary, whose views a given party may not find agreeable but whose right to present and defend those views it does not question either (Mouffe 2000, p. 102). According to Mouffe, embracing agonism would require active search for such vehicles of expressing opinions that would allow one to present passionate views without being construed as an enemy. Passionate political action is not to be dismissed in order to enable consensus but rather mobilized to serve democracy (Mouffe 2000, p. 103). This view of democracy paves the way to a culture of planning more tolerant to the coexistence of and conflicts between different meaning systems. In agonistic planning, the stakeholders may agree on certain issues and respectfully agree to disagree on others (Hillier 2002, pp. 254–255).

Would the trading zone approach provide a vehicle for accomplishing agonism in practice—with its dismissal of overarching rationalities of exchange and its focus on local coordination between different meaning systems? In a trading zone, locally coordinated interaction would be possible *despite* differences in ideologies and rationalities. In reference to Mouffe's agonism, the title of Galison's new paper is more than appropriate: 'Trading with the enemy' (Galison 2010, forthcoming).

When Hillier acknowledges the possible inaccessibility of consensus in planning and encourages the planners to embrace the pluralism of negotiation approaches and tactics, even Lindblom's PMA (Hillier 2002, p. 269), she has agonistic planning

in mind. The trading zone approach is a way to reintroduce PMA in the toolkit of planning communication in a theoretically coherent fashion—if we relax the ideological debate between (neo)liberalism and deliberative democracy and shift instead to agonistic democracy. Agonistic planning theory indeed embraces this debate, but, on the other hand, it needs practical tools for transforming the debate to locally coordinated interaction. In this, the trading zone approach may prove to be useful.

However, the question remains, how can we guarantee fair and legitimate decision-making in such *agonistic trading*? Who would have the legitimacy to decide in an unresolved conflict between interests that themselves are acknowledged as legitimate? As noted above, Lindblom's PMA does not ensure a fair fight between the stakeholders. Thomas L. Harper and Stanley M. Stein (2006) would resolve this problem by establishing overarching procedural norms for planning communication based on John Rawls' theory of political liberalism. This would complement nicely Lindblom's own liberalist ideas and his concern on the procedure, instead of content, as the source of agreement: 'We sometimes endorse the use of a process for reaching a decision without endorsing the resulting decision itself. On the other hand, for some choices we have no basis of criticism or endorsement other than that the choice is a product of an accepted process' (Lindblom 1965, p. 240).

The trading zone concept, however, encourages us to relax the search for transcendental principles and values as a basis for fair trading, and it resigns from prior commitments to political liberalism or any other political ideology. The principles of legitimate communication and decision-making would have to emerge in the trading zone itself. Rules of fair conduct, too, would emerge as trading zone tools in localized intercultural communication. The emerging linguistic practice would necessarily include its own ethics of fair interaction, as thematized by the zone of interaction. As Galison notes in his example above of water use disputes in California and Florida, '[W]ithout abandoning their own deep-set values, the groups were able to establish terms of negotiation around a *delimited* set of water management recommendations' (Galison 2010, forthcoming).

1.5 Conclusion: Reintroducing Partisan Mutual Adjustment to Planning Theory in the Context of Agonism and Trading Zones

In this chapter, we have examined the critical approach of communicative planning theorists to Lindblom's partisan mutual adjustment (PMA) and yet their more recent (at least partial) acknowledgement of PMA among the possible methods of planning negotiation, in the face of politically difficult and complex planning problems. The faltering revival of PMA coincides with the advent of agonistic planning theory. The theory resigns from any transcendental rationality as a royal road to consensus and, instead, focuses on the development of political capacities for addressing conflicting demands and adversaries respectfully. The trading zone approach may provide a crucial supplement to agonistic planning theory, in the latter's search for

practical applications. With its focus on the frameworks of exchange between different meaning systems, enabling locally coordinated interaction, the trading zone approach may offer new tools for the development of local planning practices—as *exchange languages* through which *thin descriptions* of planning ideas, proposals and opinions can be transmitted between groups. This is how Galison himself conceives the trading zone approach—as a set of tools rather than a full-fledged theory of its own (Galison 2010, forthcoming).

The *physical* object area of planning itself would be a crucial element of such a trading zone of planning—a place joining the various stakeholders as an object to which each holds a stake, as described by Healey (1997).⁹ In such situated contexts, what becomes acknowledged and shaped as relevant and valuable knowledge is its embeddedness in the practical, local and case-specific issues at hand, not the *universality* of knowledge (Leino 2008; see also Nowotny et al. 2004, pp. 131–142). In Galison's words, physical space should be conceived as a laboratory where different *subcultures* must interact to develop shared conceptual and *physical* instruments in order to give shape to a project. Physical space is something in common to different social worlds and can be regarded as an objective basis for the construction of a trading zone.

Agonistic planning and the generation of a local trading zone of planning both require long-standing cooperation between different groups and stakeholders, in the effort to establish both the conditions of political tolerance and respect between the adversaries and the practical-conceptual tools and rules for their mutual *out-talk* on planning issues. There has to be both political will (agonism) and practical capacity (trading zone) for coordinating the uneasy coexistence of groups in a locality—and achieving this takes time. In this context, politically respectful and conceptually comprehensible bargaining and compromising would not appear as qualitatively poor communication but rather as an achievement of restless and creative dialogue, mutual sense-making and institutional capacity building. In this regard, agonistic trading would absorb many ideals presented in communicative planning theory. On the other hand, it would also apply Lindblom's realism—the idea of coordinating and reaching agreement between interests on concrete planning proposals without expecting mutuality of values and understandings.

The practical implications of adopting this position seem to us quite relevant. The participatory approach which has been inspired by communicative planning theory has shown many weaknesses linked in general to the difficulty of penetrating the formal decision-making processes. This is due to the fact that in looking for broad consensus on objectives and proposals, there is not enough attention to the creation of a trading zone where citizens, politicians, planners and other stakeholders can really reach partial agreements.

However, there are important questions yet unanswered in the trading zone approach when searching for practical implications to planning and policy-making. As Galison acknowledges, we need a more systematic understanding about *why* the resolution to some disputes can be aided through the formation of delimited trading zones, while other such attempts fail. This would require practice-orientated and developmental research (Galison 2010, forthcoming). The tendency towards

corporatism and uneven power relations is a challenge to planning as agonistic trading too. To meet this challenge, the exchange language of agonistic trading should be conceived as an organic, open-ended and continuously inclusive system of planning communication and interaction—and, moreover, as a system capable of developing self-reflexive boundary rules for judging mutually the legitimacy of the agreements and decisions made.

Endnotes

1. Lindblom himself has not made a clear distinction between the two and has sometimes even confused them—a remark which he regretfully makes in his retrospective article ‘Still Muddling, not yet through’ (Lindblom 1979, 517). This article provides a systematic effort to clarify that distinction.
2. This means also that in our following discussion on the critiques of incrementalism, we will concentrate on the political and communicative aspects of incrementalism while leaving aside the critiques of incremental analysis, such as the critique of its incapacity to respond to abrupt and large-scale societal and environmental changes—to which it may inadvertently contribute (e.g. Etzioni 1967; Forrester 1969, 1993; Rittel and Webber 1973; Senge 1994; Lindblom 1979; Harper and Stein 2006).
3. ‘A state of affairs A represents a Pareto optimum for a set of people if it is impossible to identify another state of affairs B such that change from A to B would benefit at least one person in the set and injure no one’ (Lindblom 1965, 194).
4. Lindblom himself admits the problem of inequality and corporatism in his retrospective comments on his own theory:

Objections to partisan mutual adjustment, often voiced as objections to pluralism, often begin with the allegation that not all interests are represented by participants in it, nor are participants influential in proportion to the numbers of citizens for whom they act. Who can deny so obvious a point?

[...] A second major objection to partisan mutual adjustment, again expressed ordinarily as an objection to pluralism, is that it is fraudulent. The various participants do not in fact represent the variety of interests and values of the population. Instead they share dominant interests and values, and their relations with each other give the lie of those who claim to find in pluralism a healthy competition of ideas. In the extreme form, critics allege that policy is set by a ruling class with trappings of pluralist diversity. I find it hard to deny a large core of truth in that criticism.

[Partisan mutual adjustment is] not without defects of inequality in participation and disturbing tendencies towards corporatism’. (Lindblom 1979, p. 523. See also Lindblom 1977, p. 228)

5. Thomas L. Harper and Stanley M. Stein have, in turn, developed a dialogical planning approach, which is similar to Sager’s concept of dialogical incrementalism in its reliance on political consensus and incremental analysis (Harper and Stein 2006, p. 128). However, it differs in its approach to planning dialogue from the perspective of neo-pragmatism and in the attempt to integrate Habermasian communicative rationality with John Rawls’ theory of political liberalism.
6. Michael E. Gorman (2008) has elaborated the conceptual difference between the *trading zone* and the *boundary object* by identifying three stages of trading zones, according to their level of collaboration. He associates boundary objects with Stage 2 trading zones that are based on relatively equal trades between groups and individuals around boundary objects. These, however, are not fully mature trading zones, according to Gorman, as there are gaps between the mental models of different participants, such as planners, politicians, developers and residents, that may break down the trading zone. The Stage 3 trading zone would require the generation of a shared

mental model zone, via the establishment of a simplified, yet evolving, exchange language, a creole (Gorman 2008, pp. 91–92). In Galison's words, '[b]oundary objects might be thought of as a kind of a time slice of a trading language where the lexical lists exist [...]' (Galison 2010, forthcoming). In collaboration based on boundary objects, crucial elements of the shared syntax are already there, but the shared semantics are still poorly developed.

7. However, in an article entitled 'Market and Democracy, Obliquely', Lindblom explains his quest saying:

I have been working a long time still with inadequate success—to try to think clearly about the market system and about democracy. One difficulty may be that we—meaning people all over the world—have actually tried the market in many of its possible forms, learning greatly from both its flaws and its merits; but we have not yet tried democracy, only distant approaches to it (Lindblom 1995, p. 684).

8. See Hillier's discussion on similarities and differences in Arendt's and Habermas' political theories (Hillier 2002, pp. 27–33).
9. Shared geographical boundaries are identified by Star and Griesemer (1989) as one type of *boundary object* between different *social worlds*.

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