PLANNING AND POLITICS

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Politics is a process by which groups of people make collective decisions.
Generally applied to civil governments, but is central to all human group interactions, including corporations, academic and religious institutions, and even large/extended families.
Politics

- Consists of “social relations,” the use of “authority or power,” the “regulation” of political units, and the “tactics” used to formulate and apply policy.
- That is, how and why policy is made and carried out.
Planning is a political process

“..planning . . . can significantly affect the lives of large numbers of people, and since different individuals and groups may hold different views about how the environment should be planned, based on different values and interests, it is therefore also a political activity.” (Nigel Taylor)
You don’t have to be a politician to be political!
Political Flavors

- **ANARCHISM**  
  Advocates the abolition of organized authority.

- **POPULISM**  
  Doing what it believes most people would (or should!) want it to do.

- **LIBERTARIANISM**  
  Freedom, particularly from any unnecessary restraints imposed by governmental authority.

- **CAPITALISM**  
  Those better off have more opportunities.

- **CONSERVATISM**  
  Supports the status quo and advocates change only in moderation.
More flavors . . .

- **LIBERALISM**
  Originally: freedom from church & state authority; reduction of the power of royalty & aristocracy; freedom of the press; religious toleration, self-determination for nations. 
  Contemporary: a diluted variant of populism where governments are seen as serving the people.

- **DEMOCRACY**
  Power is retained and exercised directly or indirectly by the people.

- **THE REPUBLIC**
  Political power is explicitly granted with consent of the people and ruled according to law.
Politics—the condensed version

1. **AUTHORITATIVE SYSTEMS:** A group or an individual takes on the problem-solving process while others agree to abide by its decisions.

2. **COMPETITIVE SYSTEMS:** Members of these systems usually experience win-lose outcomes.

3. **COLLABORATIVE SYSTEMS:** Many stakeholders amongst whom power is dispersed.
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Which one do we experience?
The Problem Continuum

1. **Simple problems** — issues with consensus & solution/s.

2. **Complex/Compound problems** — adds conflict to ‘simple’; may agree on the problem, but no consensus on how to address & implement solutions.

3. **Wicked problems** —
**Wicked Problems** (Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber):

1. Undefined, poorly defined or variously defined;
2. Lack of agreement about the nature & causes of the problem;
3. Lack of obvious solutions/no agreement on solutions;
4. Wicked problems are complex problems that change when you apply a solution;
5. No agreement on criteria for determining when a solution is achieved (success);
6. Many and unfathomable links to other problems;
7. High level of conflict among multiple stakeholders;
8. Multiple systems or commitments that exceed social protocols & that override our ability to cooperate;
9. Temporal scales that may extend beyond socio-political capacities or authority.
Politics and Problems

Simple  Complex  Wicked
Problems and more problems

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Prescriptive Solutions
Problems and more problems

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Separation of power and knowledge—“traditional”
Why planners avoid the political arena

Planner ambivalence/ignorance about the role of political power is characterized by or based on perceptions of:

1. **Vulnerability** of individual planners, or the planning department or agency.
2. **Lack of institutional authority/lack of clout.**
3. That **failures are better documented than successes.**
4. That planning projects are often very **controversial.**
Why planners fail to work with the political content of their work

1. **Ignorance** of the political system;
2. **Lack of knowledge/education** of ways to work with/within this system;
3. Feel overwhelmed (**despair**);
4. Reject the idea that they are subject to/part of a political decision making process (**denial**).
3 types of planners (Howe and Kaufman)

1. **Politicals** — thrive in the political arena

2. **Technicals** — technology/data/analysis/science will provide the **only** solution.

3. **Hybrids** — those comfortable with both roles, *as appropriate.*
But. . .

- This political nature is slowly becoming recognized and even accepted, but. . .
- “acceptance is one thing, acting upon that acceptance is quite another.”
Sharing of power and knowledge—“Contemporary”

Intellectual Views

Experts’ Considerations

Political Decisions

PUBLICS

Societal Decision Making
Separation of power and knowledge—“traditional”

Societal Decision Making

Intellectual Views

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Societal Decision Making
“. . stop thinking of the political system as a dysfunctional external disturbance—something that keeps us from being effective . . .

. . identify and employ planning strategies that are integrated with, and make creative use of, that political system.” (Brooks)