

Insurgent Planning as Social Reform: Invented Spaces and the Right to the City

Introduction

Planning is not the neutral administration of land use. It is a field in which dominant interests are reproduced or contested, and whose city gets built is often settled before any plan is notified. I argue for insurgent planning as social reform, and I write as a planner whose task is to enable the counter-hegemonic capacity of marginalised communities rather than direct it. Extending Friedmann's (1987) social mobilisation tradition, insurgent planning reframes the work as contestation from the margins and names a structural exclusion that collaborative and communicative planning cannot resolve (Miraftab, 2009). That capacity is not automatically progressive, a limit I answer rather than evade.

Theoretical Foundation

Insurgent planning is not a break with planning theory but an extension of an older current. Friedmann (1987) maps four traditions; the fourth, social mobilisation, locates planning in transformation from below and takes the standpoint of those whom development displaces. Miraftab (2009) sharpens this spatially. Invited spaces are the participatory channels created and legitimised by the state and donors; invented spaces are the collective actions through which the poor confront authority directly and challenge the status quo (pp. 38–39). The two are mutually constituted, and insurgent practice is counter-hegemonic, transgressive, and imaginative (p. 32).

Advocacy must be separated from insurgency. Davidoff (1965) established that planning is never value-free and that planners should plead plural plans before decision-makers, but that pleading occurs within the democratic-institutional process, the very invited space Miraftab argues co-opts dissent. Advocacy is the most progressive form of invited-space planning; insurgent planning moves past it. Gramsci's (1971) war of position supplies the mechanism; Laclau and Mouffe (1985) add that hegemony has no single location, so it can be contested at many points at once. Space is produced and political (Lefebvre, 1991), not the inert extension the Ihumātao rezoning presumed.

Critical Analysis

If invited spaces pacify, reform depends on invented ones. Institutional participation absorbs and neutralises dissent (Miraftab, 2009, p. 41), which consultation around Ihumātao did (Elers & Dutta, 2019). After the 2014 designation of land beside the Ōtuataua Stonefields as Special Housing Area 62, the block passed to Fletcher Residential for 480 houses (Radio New Zealand, 2020). The submissions were made. They did not move the outcome. What moved it was the occupation Save Our Unique Landscape began in 2016, sustained past the July 2019 eviction and Kīngitanga

intervention. In December 2020 the Crown bought the land back for NZ\$29.9 million (Radio New Zealand, 2020). The invented space achieved what the invited space could not.

The strongest objection is Habermas's: legitimate change must come through inclusive, consensus-seeking deliberation, so an occupation that bypasses procedure is illegitimate (Habermas, 1984). Flyvbjerg (1998) answers it empirically. The Aalborg plan was rational and democratic on paper, yet dissolved under organised interest; rationality in practice is subordinate to power. The ideal speech situation assumes a level field that structural asymmetry denies. Invented spaces respond to deliberation's capture; they are not a refusal to deliberate.

The harder objection is the course's own: invented spaces are not automatically progressive, and informal politics can be captured by criminal or despotic interests serving the status quo (Miraftab, 2009, p. 43). I concede this: it defines the planner's role, not a defeat. Gramsci (1971) holds that spontaneous movements need direction, not domination: they must be educated and purged so they are neither dissipated nor captured (pp. 280–283). The planner does not lead the insurgency, which would reinstate the expert, nor treat all grassroots action as just. My task is to use knowledge of where the cracks lie for the marginalised rather than capital, and to judge which mobilisations advance the right to the city (Bahmanteymouri & Mohammadzadeh, 2019). I read whenua as relational, not zonable extension, an obligation the Manukau inquiry recognised (Waitangi Tribunal, 1985) before that process erased it.

Bastion Point confirms durable reform. The 506-day occupation of 1977 to 1978 (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, n.d.) forced open the Waitangi Tribunal route; the Ōrākei claim returned land, won a NZ\$3 million settlement, and led to the Ōrākei Act 1991 (Waitangi Tribunal, 1987). Invented action prised open a new invited space.

Closing

As a planner and policymaker, my role is to widen and protect invented space, not to occupy it. That means ceding authority to ahi kā and to communities organising from the margins, and treating planning expertise as a resource for counter-hegemonic capacity rather than a licence to lead. Reform of this kind is enabled from below; it is not delivered from above. The only question is whose cracks the planner chooses to find.

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