Strategic (spatial) planning reexamined

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Abstract. In the 1990s a strategic approach to the organization of space at different levels of scale became more prevalent. Increasingly, it is being assumed that the solutions to complex problems depend on the ability to combine the creation of strategic visions with short-term actions. The creation of strategic visions implies the design of shared futures, and the development and promotion of common assets. Moreover, all of this requires accountability within a time and budgetary framework and the creation of awareness for the systems of power. Delivering on these new demands implies the development of an adapted strategic planning capacity and a shift in planning style in which the stakeholders are becoming more actively involved in the planning process on the basis of a joint definition of the action situation and of the sharing of interests, aims, and relevant knowledge. In this paper I aim to provide building blocks for such an 'alternative' strategic (spatial) planning approach. It is based on two different sources. The first source is critical planning literature and strategic thinking in business, which will be used to broaden the scope of the concept. The second source consists of European strategic planning practices.

Introduction: revival of strategic planning
In the 1960s and 1970s strategic spatial planning in a number of Western countries evolved towards a system of comprehensive planning at different administrative levels. In the 1980s we witnessed a retreat from strategic planning, fuelled not only by the neoconservative disdain for planning, but also by postmodernist skepticism, both of which tend to view progress as something which, if it happens, cannot be planned (Healey, 1997a). Instead the focus of urban and regional planning practices was on projects (Motte, 1994; Secchi, 1986), especially for the revival of rundown parts of cities and regions, and on land-use regulations.

The growing complexity, an increasing concern about rapid and apparently random development (Breheny, 1991), the problems of fragmentation, the dramatic increase in interest (at all scales, from local to global) in environmental issues (Breheny, 1991), the growing strength of the environmental movement, a reemphasis on the need for long-term thinking (Friedmann, 2004; Newman and Thornley, 1996) and the aim to return to a more realistic and effective method all served to expand the agenda. In response, more strategic approaches, frameworks, and perspectives for cities, city-regions, and regions had again become fashionable in Europe by the end of the millennium (Albrechts, 1999; Albrechts et al, 2003; CEC, 1997; Healey et al, 1997; Pascual and Esteve, 1997; Pugliese and Spaziante, 2003; Salet and Faludi, 2000). As there is no 'one best or one single way' to do strategic planning the purpose of this paper is to add a new dimension in terms of values, approach, and process. It therefore reexamines strategic (spatial) planning by highlighting differences with traditional land-use planning, by using views from strategic thinking in business and shifts in the overall planning approach. This is done by combining theory with practical experience.
Land-use planning

Aims

Land-use planning is basically concerned—in an integrated and qualitative way—with the location, intensity, form, amount, and harmonization of land development required for the various space-using functions: housing, industry, recreation, transport, education, nature, agriculture, cultural activities (see also Chapin, 1965; Cullingworth, 1972). In this way a land-use plan embodies a proposal as to how land should be used—in accordance with a considered policy—as expansion and restructuring proceed in the future.

A classification of EU land-use planning systems

The emergence of land-use planning systems across Europe has some common roots. In many EU member states the first planning legislation was produced in the early 20th century as a response to increasing development pressure and the consequent problems that arose from dense and disorganized development. Cultural, institutional, and legal differences, but also the specificity of the purposes for which formal spatial planning systems were originally introduced, produced a wide variety of planning systems and traditions in the EU. The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies (CEC, 1997) draws a line between strategic planning at the regional or national level and land-use planning at the level of the municipality and the functional urban region. Recent practice (Albrechts et al., 2001; 2003; Healey et al., 1997; Pascual and Esteve, 1997; Pugliese and Spaziante, 2003; Salet and Faludi, 2000), however, illustrates that a lot of strategic planning is going on at the level of the city and the urban agglomeration.

Land-use planning at EU level clearly focuses on the municipality or functional urban region (mainly Greece, France, Italy, and Sweden) with framework (master plan) instruments and on specific areas within the municipality with regulatory instruments. In Belgium land-use zoning also exists for subregions. The framework plans cover at least the whole of the area of the local authority and set out the broad land-use and infrastructure patterns across the area through zoning or land-allocation maps. The regulatory plan covers the whole or part of the local authority’s area and indicates detailed site-specific zonings for building, land use and infrastructure.

All the EU member states, except the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, use detailed planning instruments (regulatory zoning instruments, building control instruments, and implementation instruments) which play a determining role in guiding the location of development and physical infrastructure, and the form and size development takes.

The framework plans and the regulatory plans are mostly legally binding documents—with implied legal certainty and rigidity—once approved (the major exception is the United Kingdom); they are generally of no fixed duration and can be replaced only by new plans. This often relates to the extent to which a system is binding or discretionary (see CEC, 1997). In a binding system the relationship between policy and control is expected to be determined through a binding detailed land-use plan. Effects are compared with intentions like a blueprint for a house. This is the ‘conformance view’ (Barrett and Fudge, 1981). In a discretionary system each decision is subject to administrative and political discretion, with the plan providing general guidance. This relates to the ‘performance view’ (see Mastop and Faludi, 1997). The United Kingdom is the primary example of a discretionary system. Whereas in the binding system the focus is on legal certainty there is a notable absence of certainty in the discretionary system.
Local governments are generally responsible for the production of these plans and for most EU countries (Greece is an exception) the responsibility for approval is also delegated to this level. Sometimes the local plans have to be formally approved by another tier (regional or central) of government.

Consultation with other tiers of government, administrations, and official agencies are everywhere an essential part of the daily routine in plan making. There is also a general commitment to consultation with the public (in the broadest sense). The method and depth of public involvement vary considerably. The Scandinavian countries have a long-standing tradition, for others it remains very formal and restricted (Greece, Italy, Portugal).

Criticism of land-use planning
Traditional land-use planning, as more passive, pragmatic, and localized planning, aims at controlling land use through a zoning system. Land-use regulation, which in Europe has been typically plan led (Davies et al, 1989), helps to steer developments in a certain direction. Indeed, building permits are granted (or refused) if a project or development proposal is in line (or not) with the approved land-use plan and regulations. In this way the land-use plan ensures that undesirable developments do not occur but it is not able to ensure that desirable developments actually take place where and when they are needed. Cullingworth (1993) contrasts this European tradition with US local zoning systems, which are driven by concern for the specification of land rights rather than for managing the location of development (see also Healey, 1997b). The approach to planning via a single policy field (that is, spatial planning) met fierce opposition from other and usually more powerful policy fields. Although land-use plans had formal status and served as official guidelines for implementation, when it came down to the actual implementation, other policy fields—which, because of their budgetary and technical resources, were needed for the implementation—were easily able to sabotage the spatial plans if they wanted (Kreukels, 2000; Scharpf and Schnabel, 1978). Moreover, it became increasingly clear that a number of different planning concepts—such as the coherent, convenient, and compact city long advocated by planners—cannot be achieved solely through physical hard planning (see Hart, 1976).

A major emphasis on the legally binding nature of most EU land-use plans provides legal certainty but makes the plans far more rigid and inflexible and less responsive to changing circumstances. The mainly comprehensive nature of land-use plans is at odds with increasingly limited resources. Moreover, most land-use plans have a predominant focus on ‘physical’ aspects, providing ‘physical’ solutions to social or economic problems. In this way they often abstract from real historically determinate parameters of human activity and gratuitously assume the existence of transcendent operational norms. Coproduction of plans with the major stakeholders and the involvement of ‘weak’ groups in the land-use planning process are (with the exception of some experiences such as in Finland) nonexistent. The whole apparatus of adverse bargaining, negotiation, compromise, and deadlock, which normally surrounds the planning process, must be questioned.

In all EU systems there is evidence (CEC, 1997) to suggest that systems should become more open and less prescriptive in determining precise land uses in favor of a more flexible system to respond more quickly and adequately to changing social and economic circumstances and to the agenda of government reorganization.
Strategy and strategic planning in the literature
There are no single universally definitions for strategy and strategic planning. Various authors and practitioners use the term differently. In my selective reading of the literature I look for building blocks to broaden the perspective.

Historical roots
The word ‘strategy’ originated within a military context. Webster’s dictionary (Webster, 1970, page 867) defines strategy as ‘strategia’, “science and art of employing the political, the economic, psychological and military forces of a nation or group of nations to afford the maximum support to adopted policies in peace or war”. The current paper is not about the military sense of strategy.

According to Kaufman and Jacobs (1987), strategic planning originated in the 1950s in the private sector. Its roots were tied to the need for rapidly changing and growing corporations to plan effectively for and manage their futures when the future itself seemed to be increasingly uncertain (that is, strategic planning carried out by an organization for its own activities). In the early 1970s, government leaders in the USA became increasingly interested in strategic planning as a result of wrenching changes—oil crisis, demographic shifts, changing values, volatile economy, etc—(Eadie, 1983; cited in Bryson and Roering, 1988, page 995). In the early 1980s, a series of articles in the USA called on state and local governments to use the strategic planning approach developed in the corporate world (Kaufman and Jacobs, 1987).

For Mastop (1998), the first traces of strategic spatial planning in northwestern Europe date back to the 1920s and 1930s. He links strategic spatial planning closely to the idea of the modern nation-state. Strategic planning is used here to direct the activities of others (different authorities, different sectors, private actors). The differences in origin and tradition between US and European traditions reflect the historical ‘statist’ traditions of many postwar European states, which are linked to a battery of welfare state policies (Batley and Stoker, 1991; Esping-Anderson, 1990; cited by Healey, 1997a).

Looking for building blocks in business and planning literature
There is a large amount of literature in the USA about the use of strategy and strategic planning in business and nonprofit organizations and a growing literature in Europe about strategic planning. Mintzberg et al (1998) conclude their historical survey of strategy making by emphasizing the fact that it should be concerned with process [for Healey (1997a) it is clearly a social process, and for Kunzmann (2000) it is public sector led] and content, statics and dynamics, constraint and inspiration, the cognitive and the collective, the planned and the learned, and the economic and the political. Quinn (1980) cites a few studies that have suggested some initial criteria for evaluating a strategy: clarity, motivational impact, internal consistency, compatibility with the environment, appropriateness in light of the resources available, degree of risk, the extent to which it matches the often contradictory personal values of key figures, time horizon, flexibility, workability, focus on key concepts, and thrust and committed leadership (see also Poister and Streib, 1999). Others (Bryson, 1995; Bryson and Roering, 1988; Poister and Streib, 1999) stress the need to gather the key (internal and external) stakeholders (preferably key decisionmakers), the importance of external trends and forces, the active involvement of senior level managers, to construct a longer term vision (Kunzmann, 2000; Mintzberg, 1994; Mintzberg et al, 1998), the need to focus on implementation, to build commitment to plans (see also Albrechts, 1995; Granados Cabezas, 1995; Van den Broeck, 1996), and to be politically realistic. Faludi and Korthals Altes (1994) and Faludi and Van der Valk (1994, page 3) make a distinction between project plans and strategic plans (table 1). They define project planning as the opposite
of strategic planning. Strategic plans are defined as frameworks for action. They need to be analyzed for their performance in helping with subsequent decisions. Project plans are blueprint plans and form an unambiguous guide to action. For Granados Cabezas (1995) strategic planning anticipates new tendencies, discontinuities, and surprises; it concentrates on openings and ways of taking advantage of new opportunities.

Towards a workable normative viewpoint on strategic planning

Reflecting on the challenges spatial planning is facing and relying on the experience accumulated from business, planning practice, and a study of the planning literature leads us to the following viewpoint on the ‘what’ of strategic spatial planning: strategic spatial planning is a public-sector-led (Kunzmann, 2000) sociospatial (see Healey, 1997a for the emphasis on the social) process through which a vision, actions, and means for implementation are produced that shape and frame what a place is and may become. A combination of characteristics related to the ‘how’ of strategic planning gives a specific coloring to the concept. A first characteristic is that strategic planning has to focus on a limited number of strategic key issue areas (Bryson and Roering, 1988; Poister and Streib, 1999; Quinn, 1980); it has to take a critical view of the environment in terms of determining strengths and weaknesses in the context of opportunities and threats (Kaufman and Jacobs, 1987); it studies the external trends, forces (Poister and Streib, 1999) and resources available (Quinn, 1980); it identifies and gathers major stakeholders (public and private) (Bryson and Roering, 1988; Granados Cabezas, 1995); it allows for a broad (multilevel governance) and diverse (public, economic, civil society) involvement during the planning process; it develops a (realistic) long-term vision or perspective and strategies (Healey, 1997a; 1997b; Kunzmann, 2000; see also Mintzberg, 1994) at different levels (Albrechts et al, 2003; Quinn, 1980), taking into account the power structures (Albrechts, 2003a; Poister and Streib, 1999; Sager, 1994), uncertainties (Friend and Hickling, 1987; Quinn, 1980) and competing values; it designs plan-making structures and develops content (Mintzberg et al, 1998) images, and decision frameworks (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994) for influencing and managing spatial change (Healey, 1997b); it is about building new ideas (Mintzberg et al, 1998) and processes that can carry them forward (Mintzberg, 2002), thus generating ways of understanding, ways of building agreements, and ways of organizing and mobilizing for the purpose of exerting influence in different arenas (Healey, 1997a); and finally it (both in the short and the long term) is focused on decisions (Bryson, 1995), actions (Faludi and Korthals Altes, 1994; Mintzberg, 1994), results (Poister and Streib, 1999), and implementation (Bryson, 1995; Bryson and Roering, 1988), and incorporates monitoring, feedback, and revision.

This may seem to some people (see Mintzberg, 1994) too broad a view of strategic planning. However, the many experiences documented in the planning literature (Albrechts et al, 2001; 2003; Healey et al, 1997; Pascual and Esteve, 1997; Pugliese and Spaziante, 2003) back up this broader view. This view also implies that strategic (spatial) planning is not a single concept, procedure, or tool. In fact, it is a set of

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Table 1. Project plans and strategic plans (source: Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994, page 3).
concepts, procedures, and tools that must be tailored carefully to whatever situation is at hand if desirable outcomes are to be achieved (Bryson and Roering, 1996). Strategic planning is as much about process, institutional design, and mobilization as about the development of substantive theories. Content is related to the strategic issues selected in the process. In Europe the environmental agenda is linked in part to the environmental movement’s emphasis on sustainable resource use and in part to citizen movements concerned with the quality of life in specific places (see Hall and Pfeiffer, 2000) and the appreciation of their diversity (Healey, 1997a). ‘Sustainable development’ has become a widely used concept expressing the potential for creating a positive-sum strategy combining economic, environmental, and social objectives in their spatial manifestation. In this way it supersedes the mere focus on land use. The ‘place focus’ in turn is linked to a political–cultural momentum to reassert the importance of regional or local identity and image in the face of European ‘integration’ and globalization.

The term ‘spatial’ brings into focus the ‘where of things’, whether static or dynamic; the creation and management of special ‘places’ and sites; the interrelations between different activities in an area, and significant intersections and nodes within an area which are physically colocated (see also Healey, 2004). The focus on the spatial relations

![Diagram](diagram.png)

**Figure 1.** From traditional land-use planning to strategic planning.
of territories allows for a more effective way of integrating different agendas (economic, environmental, cultural, and social policy agendas) as these agendas impact on localities and of translating territorial development into specific investment programmes and regulatory practices (Albrechts et al, 2003; see also Wilkinson and Appelbee, 1999). Strategic frameworks and visions for territorial development, with an emphasis on place qualities and the spatial impacts and integration of investments, complement and provide a context for specific development projects. They also carry a potential for a ‘rescaling’ of issue agendas down from the national or state level and up from the municipal level. This search for new scales of policy articulation and new policy concepts is also linked to attempts to widen the range of actors involved in policy processes, with new alliances, stakeholder partnerships, and consultative processes (Albrechts et al, 2001; 2003; Healey et al, 1997). A territorial focus also provides a promising basis for encouraging levels of government to work together (multilevel governance) and in partnership with actors in diverse positions in the economy and civil society (Albrechts, 1999; Fürst, 2001; Kunzmann, 2001a).

The capacity of strategic spatial planning systems to deliver the desired outcome is dependent not only on the system itself, but also on the conditions underlying it (see also Mintzberg, 1994). These conditions—including public and professional attitudes towards spatial planning (in terms of planning content and process) and the political will on the part of the institutions involved in setting the process in motion (Granados Cabezas, 1995)—affect the ability of planning systems to implement the chosen strategies. The steps required to deliver and to implement the desired spatial outcome vary according to the underlying structure.

This normative viewpoint produces a quite different picture from traditional land-use planning in terms of plans (strategic plans), type of planning (providing a framework), and governance type (negotiated form of governance). Its rationale is to frame the activities of stakeholders to help achieve shared concerns about spatial changes (see figure 1).

**Principles and points of departure for change**

The efforts underway in many parts of Europe to produce strategies for cities, city-regions, and regions (Albrechts et al, 2001; 2003; Healey et al, 1997; Pascual and Esteve, 1997; Pugliese and Spaziante, 2003; Salet and Faludi, 2000) reorient spatial planning in the direction of a more strategic type of planning. Often these efforts involve the construction of new institutional arenas within structures of government, which are themselves changing. Their motivations are varied, but the objectives have typically been to articulate a more coherent spatial logic for land-use regulation, for resource protection, for action orientation, for a more open type of governance, for introducing sustainability, and for investments in regeneration and infrastructure.

Just as in general planning, there are different traditions of strategic planning. I therefore exemplify some principles of my ‘new dimension’ of strategic planning in terms of values, approach, and process.

**Values and visioning**

To keep planning from becoming more concerned with how to plan rather than with the content of planning, substantive rationality (Mannheim) or value rationality (Weber) are (re)introduced (De Jouvenel, 1964; Ozbekhan, 1969). This is needed to counteract the pure instrumental rationality that encourages an analysis of trends and extrapolates them in order to arrive at conceptions of social and economic futures. Speaking of values (for instance, spatial quality and subsidiarity) is a way of describing the sort of place we want to live in, or think we should live in. The values and the
images of what a society wants to achieve are defined in the planning process. Values and images are not generated in isolation but are—within a specific context—created and given meaning. They are validated by traditions of belief and practice, and are reviewed, reconstructed, and invented through collective experience (see Ozbekhan, 1969; but also Elchardus et al, 2000, page 24; Foucault, 1980, page 11). The introduction of value rationality is thus a clear reaction against a future that extrapolates the past and maintains the status quo. It means that time flows from the ‘invented’ future, which challenges conventional wisdom, toward and into the experienced present. This means inventing a world that would not otherwise be (Mintzberg et al, 1998; Ozbekhan, 1969).

In this way strategic planning ‘creates’ a vision for a future environment, but all decisions are made in the present. This means that over time the strategic planning process must stay abreast of changes in order to make the best decisions it can at any given point. It must manage, as well as plan, strategically. This ‘created future’ has to be placed within a specific context (economic, social, political, and power), place, time, and scale with regard to specific issues and a particular combination of actors. It provides the setting for the process but also takes form, undergoes changes in the process. All this must be rooted in an understanding of the past.

Inclusive and accountable

Just as there are many traditions and collectivities, so also there are many images of what communities want to achieve (see Weeks, 1993). The opportunities for implementing these images are not equal. Some individuals and groups have more resources and power, which allow them to pursue their images. To give power to the range of images in a planning process requires a capacity to listen, not just for the expression of material interest, but also for what people care about, including the rage felt by many who have grown up in a world of prejudice and exclusion, of being the outsider, ‘the other’ (Forester, 1989; Healey, 1997b). At the core of this process is a democratic struggle for inclusiveness in democratic procedures, for transparency in government transactions, for accountability of the state and planners to the citizens they work for, for the right of citizens to be heard and to have a creative input in matters affecting their interests and concerns at different scale levels, and for reducing or eliminating unequal power structures between social groups and classes (see also Friedmann and Douglas, 1998). Forester (1989) and Albrechts (1999) stress in this respect that the planners are not only instrumental, and their implicit responsibility can no longer simply be to ‘be efficient’, to function smoothly as neutral means to given (and presumably well-defined) ends. Planners must be more than navigators who keep their ship on course. They must be deeply involved in formulating that course (Forester, 1989) and they must become an active force in providing direction for change by using the power available to them to anticipate and to counter the efforts of interests that threaten to make a mockery of the democratic planning process by misusing their power.

Open dialogue, accountability, collaboration, and consensus building have become key concepts. An open dialogue may have advantages as new people, new alliances, new networks, and new ideas are brought together, and as new arenas (see Bryson and Crosby, 1992) are provided in which strategy articulation takes place. The institutional capacity of a place or community is built up by means of these arenas, taking into account the very unequal balances of power. Moreover, these arenas may enable processes and may provide some initial form of a social basis reflecting plurality and diversity (see Sandercock, 1998). Developments toward more direct forms of democracy and the focus on debate, public involvement, and accountability—even with the best intentions—contain the danger of making democratic public involvement more and
more dependent on knowledge and skills that only the more highly educated possess (see Benveniste, 1989, page 67). These developments may contribute to the conversion of socioeconomic inequality into political inequality. Research on public involvement in a local referendum (Elchardus et al, 2000) illustrates that the more highly educated were twelve times overrepresented. Therefore empowerment (see Friedmann, 1992) is needed for ordinary citizens and deprived groups to overcome the structural elements of unequal access to and distribution of resources, and to overcome inequalities in social position, class, skills, status, gender, and financial means.

**Emerging alternative process**

**Macrostructure**

The alternative strategic (spatial) planning I propose moves away from the idea of government as the mobilizer of the public sector and the provider of solutions to problems, towards an idea of governance as the capacity to substantiate the search for creative and territorially differentiated solutions to problems or challenges and for a more desirable future situation through the mobilization of a plurality of actors with different and even competing interests, goals and strategies (see also Balducci and Fareri, 1999). This implies a degree of selectivity (means are limited) and the mutual dependency of actors, which means that problems cannot be solved and challenges cannot be met by just one actor. They require the prospect of a win–win situation and the involvement of actors on an equal basis.

Delivering on the principles discussed implies the development of a different strategic planning capacity (see figure 2) that has the ability, in an open and creative way, to construct alternative futures and to respond to the growing complexity, to new demands on traditional representative democracy, and to prevailing power structures.

Strategic planning is centered on the elaboration of a mutually beneficial dialectic between top-down structural developments and bottom-up local uniqueness. Indeed, a mere top-down and centrally organized approach runs the danger of overshooting the local, historically evolved, and accumulated knowledge and qualification potential, whereas a one-dimensional emphasis on a bottom-up approach tends to deny—or at least to underestimate—the importance of linking local traditions with structural macrotendencies (Albrechts and Swyngedouw, 1989). Strategic planning is selective and oriented to issues that really matter. As it is impossible to do everything that needs to be done, ‘strategic’ implies that some decisions and actions are considered

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**Figure 2.** Possible macrostructure for the overall strategic planning process.
more important than others and that much of the process lies in making the tough
decisions about what is most important for the purpose of producing fair, structural
responses to problems, challenges, aspirations, and diversity. Strategic planning relates
to implementation. Things must get done! This is seen as the pattern of purposes,
policy statements, plans, programs, actions (short, medium, and long term), decisions,
and resource allocation that defines what a policy is in practice, what it does, and why
it does it—from the points of view of various affected publics (Bryson and Crosby,
1992, page 296). This stresses the need to find effective connections between political
authorities and implementation actors (officers, individual citizens, community organi-
zations, private corporations, and public departments (see Albrechts, 2003b; Hillier,
2002). Strategic spatial planning is not just a contingent response to wider forces, but
is also an active force in enabling change. This strategic planning cannot be theorized
as though its approaches and practices were neutral with respect to class, gender, age,
race, and ethnicity (Albrechts, 2002; Sandercock, 1998).

All of these factors, of course, have an impact on the role, the position, and the
skills of strategic planners. Strategic planners have on several occasions acted as
catalysts (Albrechts, 1999; Mintzberg, 1994), as counterweights, and as initiators of
change (Albrechts, 1999; Krumholz, 1982). They mobilize and build alliances. They
present real political opportunities, learning from action not only what works but
also what matters. They substantiate change and refuse to function smoothly as neutral
means to given and presumably well-defined ends.

Strategic planning does not flow smoothly from one phase to the next. It is a
dynamic and creative process. New points of view and facts that come to light today
might very well alter certain decisions made yesterday.

Four-track approach
The four-track approach is based on interrelating four types of rationality: value
rationality (the design of alternative futures), communicative rationality (involving a
growing number of actors—private and public—in the process), instrumental ration-
ality (looking for the best way to solve the problems and achieve the desired future), and
strategic rationality (a clear and explicit strategy for dealing with power relationships)
(see Albrechts, 2003a).

The four tracks (Albrechts et al, 1999; see also Van den Broeck, 1987; 2001) can be
seen as working tracks: one for the vision, a second for the short-term and long-term
actions, a third for the involvement of the key actors, and finally a fourth track for a
more permanent process (mainly at the local level) involving the broader public in
major decisions (see figure 3). The proposed tracks may not be viewed in a purely linear
way. The context forms the setting of the planning process but also takes form and
undergoes changes in the process (see Dyrberg, 1997). In the first track the emphasis
is on the long-term vision. The vision is constructed (communicative rationality) in
relation to the social values (value rationality) to which a particular environment is
historically committed (see Ozbekhan, 1969). The creation of a vision is a conscious and
purposive action to represent values and meanings for the future. Power is at the heart
of these values and meanings (strategic rationality). To avoid pure utopian thinking, the
views of social critics such as Harvey, Friedmann, and Krumholz have been integrated
into the first track.

In track 2 the focus is on creating trust by solving problems through actions on a
very short term. It concerns acting in such a way as to make the future conform to the
vision constructed in track 1 and to tackle problems in view of this vision. In this track
the four types of rationality interrelate.
As spatial planning has almost no potential for concretizing strategies, so track 3 involves relevant actors needed for their substantive contribution, their procedural competences, and the role they might play in acceptance, in getting basic support and in providing legitimacy. The technical skills and the power to allocate sufficient means to implement proposed actions are both usually spread over a number of diverse sectors, actors and departments. Integration in its three dimensions—substantive, organizational, and instrumental (legal, budget)—is at stake here.

The fourth track is about an inclusive and more permanent empowerment process (Forester, 1989; Friedmann, 1992) involving citizens in major decisions. In this process, citizens learn about one another and about different points of view, and they come to reflect on their own points of view. In this way a store of mutual understanding can be built up, a sort of 'social and intellectual capital' (see Innes, 1996; but see also the more critical view of Mayer, 2003).

The end product consists of an analysis of the main processes shaping our environment, a dynamic, integrated, and indicative long-term vision (frame), a plan for short-term and long-term actions, a budget, and a strategy for implementation. By introducing value rationality, this approach transcends mere contingency planning (for contingency planning see Alexander, 1988; Sager, 1994). The output of the process constitutes a consensus or (partial) disagreement between the key actors. For the implementation, credible commitments to action engagement (commitment package) are needed where planners, citizens, the private sector, and different levels of governance enter moral, administrative, and financial agreements to realize these actions (on the social contract/collective spatial agreement see also Albrechts, 1995; Granados Cabezas, 1995; Van den Broeck, 1996).

Figure 3. Four-track approach with tentative integration of different concepts of rationality.
To make formal decisionmaking and implementation more responsive to the context and to the agreements reached during the plan-making process, the four-track approach invites politicians, citizens, sector experts, and the arenas in which they meet to be active from start to finish in the entire process, including the agenda setting, the design of plans, the political ratification, and the practical implementation (see also Flyvbjerg, 2002). In this way, the arenas are used not as locations devoid of power, but rather as vehicles that acknowledge and account for the working of power and for the passionate commitment of planners and other actors who care deeply about the issues at hand (Flyvbjerg, 2002).

The proposed four-track approach cannot change the power relations, but I am confident (see also Forester, 1989; Healey, 1997b; Innes, 1994; Sager, 1994) that empowerment, as developed in track 4, supports wider, collective efforts to change such relations.

Preconditions
All of this requires a clear view of the mandates and responsibilities of all actors. Key actors who take part in the discussions bring the consensus or disagreement before the formal institutions (city council, parliament) and before sectoral departments and private institutions or agents in charge of implementation. This may stimulate a fair communication of the discussions that took place in the plan-making process, and a refined articulation of meaning, visions, and policy ideas constructed during the process (see also Bryson and Crosby, 1992).

At the start of the process, the relevant actors must become conscious of the unequal distribution of power in all stages of the planning process. This means that the strategic rationality of actors (individual, group, institutional, corporate) who calculate the feasibility of realizing their interests as opposed to the interests of their opponents must interrelate with the communicative rationality. A process solely dominated by experts and powerful actors must be avoided. This approach implies a minimal willingness to tackle the problems through interactive policy processes that allow others to have a say in their own policy domain. It also implies a willingness to accept decisions made through a network organization, including decisions that may depart from a generic policy. This is proving to be a very critical issue for traditional actors. This ‘alternative’ strategic planning demands a decisionmaking style in which the stakeholders become more actively involved in solving policy problems on the basis of a joint definition of the actual situation and of the sharing of interests, aims, and relevant knowledge. Active involvement, open dialogue, accountability, collaboration, and consensus building become key terms in most of the planning discourse. This implies collaboration on equal terms in all phases of the strategic planning process. ‘Building trust’ becomes a buzz phrase.

Epilogue
The ‘alternative’ strategic planning presented in this paper is conceived as a democratic, open, selective, and dynamic process. It produces a vision to frame problems, challenges, and short-term actions within a revised democratic tradition. A dissection of the process reveals the key elements that underlie this strategic planning: it involves content and process, statics and dynamics, constraints and aspiration, the cognitive and the collective, the planned and the learned, the socioeconomic and the political, the public and the private, the vision and the action, the local and the global, legitimacy and a revised democratic tradition, values and facts, selectivity and integrativity, equality and power, long term and short term.
I have applied the ‘lenses’ of a reflective practitioner and of the (strategic) planning literature in an effort to broaden the concept and provide an alternative to address the challenges of our postmodern world in a constructive and progressive way. Strategic planning case studies (Albrechts, 1999; Albrechts et al, 2003; Healey et al, 1997; Pasqual and Esteve, 1997; Pugliese and Spaziante, 2003) illustrate innovative practices. Schön (1984) sees a need to inquire into the epistemology of practice, to make sense of what has been learned in action in relation to a wider context, and to test the depth and comprehensiveness of these practices. This would help efforts to evaluate and make sense of these practices in relation to a wider (theoretical) context. Abstract conceptualization and generalization of the accumulated knowledge of learning in action may help theorists to see some of what can be learned from practice. Strategic planners, on the other hand, can be inspired and guided by new emerging theories. The critical question of the leverage that these strategic spatial planning exercises will achieve over time must be raised. Do they have the persuasive power to shift territorial development trajectories or, as some argue (Kunzmann, 2001a; 2001b; 2001c), are they little more than a cosmetic veil to hide the growing disparities evolving within Europe? The European experiences (Albrechts et al, 2001; 2003; CEC, 1999; Healey et al, 1997; Pasqual and Esteve, 1997; Pugliese and Spaziante, 2003) provide a fertile laboratory for advancing the understanding of the nature and potential of strategic spatial frameworks and strategies for 21st-century conditions.

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