Planning in the public domain entails responding to and shaping anticipated social and resource needs in the uncertain future. Knowledge, resources, and authority are fragmented and dispersed, so planning decisions require interaction among multiple actors. Thus, planning is essentially joint decision making, which is in turn inherently transactional (negotiated). Negotiation language has already become embedded in the planning literature, but the contributions of negotiation scholars have yet to command the conceptual and analytic attention they deserve. This article calls for renewed exploration of the potential contributions of negotiation theory and practice to our understanding of planning situations and to the design of decision processes that yield implementable results. We begin by proposing a conceptual link between negotiation and planning and then illustrate the usefulness of this linkage by mapping three key negotiation concepts into the planning process.

In the course of establishing a professional field, theorists and practitioners sought to develop a prescriptive model and to identify specialized skills for planners (Healey 1996; Taylor 1998). The resulting so-called rational planning model entailed a sequence of steps to organize information and decision making. A concurrent theme emerged, not only in planning but also in related fields such as policy analysis: that of an expert analyst single-handedly defining problems, selecting “scientific” information, and unilaterally developing optimal solutions. Although this approach factored in information about the general public and specific stakeholding groups and public agencies, planners were expected to conduct studies and address their reports only toward informing formal decision makers. Not surprisingly, planners’ familiar lament was the inevitable distortion of their recommendations by the politics of the public arena and the lack of implementation of plans.

This model of planning and policy making failed to incorporate the reality of the public domain, in which decisions are made through a political process and implementation is contingent on the consent, commitment, and actions of many. Recognizing this reality, some planners and practitioners have moved in time from the model labeled “rational” to one labeled “collaborative” (Forester 1989, 1999; Frank and Elliott 2002; Healey 1996, 1998, 2003; Innes 1996; Innes and Booher 2004). Hoch (2007) summarized the pragmatic virtues of communicative action theory that incorporates explicitly collaborative and negotiated exchanges among stakeholders. Although “collaborative” connotes a cooperative stance that “communicative” does not, we use “collaborative” in this article to refer to all planning endeavors that involve

Planning has evolved over time from an emphasis on the collaborative, rather than the rational, model. Collaborative processes are likely to become increasingly prevalent in planning as the devolution of government tasks to the private sector and the concurrent call for increased public participation around the world continue. This article addresses the utility and advantages of applying negotiation theory and practice lessons to “open the black box” and examine the dynamics of collaborative interactions. Without an analytical frame informed by negotiations, practicing planners may miss opportunities for improving planning decisions and for enhancing the odds of implementation. In an attempt to revisit the conceptual tools from the negotiation field, which can enhance collaborative planning research and practice, the authors focus on three key topics: interests, mutual gains, and information. The discus-

### Abstract

Planning has evolved over time from an emphasis on the collaborative, rather than the rational, model. Collaborative processes are likely to become increasingly prevalent in planning as the devolution of government tasks to the private sector and the concurrent call for increased public participation around the world continue. This article addresses the utility and advantages of applying negotiation theory and practice lessons to “open the black box” and examine the dynamics of collaborative interactions. Without an analytical frame informed by negotiations, practicing planners may miss opportunities for improving planning decisions and for enhancing the odds of implementation. In an attempt to revisit the conceptual tools from the negotiation field, which can enhance collaborative planning research and practice, the authors focus on three key topics: interests, mutual gains, and information. The discus-

### Keywords:
- negotiation theory
- planning
- information
- interests
- mutual gains
- incentives

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multiple actors intentionally working together toward a collectively determined end.

The collaborative and the unilateral planning models are both rational in their quest to use information to identify current and future needs and to devise responses within the limits of available resources. We propose that the rational and collaborative models are not mutually exclusive. Steps prescribed by the rational model, such as collection and analysis of information, alternatives generation, and evaluation, remain part of the collaborative process. However, the collaborative perspective recognizes the stakeholders’ differences, interdependence, and need for resources, skills, and careful process design to craft joint decisions with good prospects for implementation. This puts negotiation, essential to joint decision making, at the core of collaborative planning.

Viewing negotiation as integral to the planning process generates the need to understand and incorporate it explicitly into planning theory, research, education, and practice. Without an analytical frame informed by negotiations that incorporates explicitly the political process as the decision locus, rather than viewing it as merely distorting noise, practicing planners may miss opportunities for improving planning decisions and for enhancing the odds of implementation. In planning education, we do our students a disservice by failing to equip them with skills essential to practice and by preparing them not for the reality of joint decision making but for the nonexistent “lonely wise planner making perfect decisions only to see them derailed by politics” model. Researchers run the risk of missing important attributes of collaborative processes, inaccurately assessing collaborative efforts, or spending precious time rediscovering what has become common knowledge in other, related fields.

It bears noting that negotiation-based collaborative processes do not typically aim for structural change (although they do not preclude it in the long run) but rather for implementable solutions within existing or jointly modified frameworks. Therefore, collaborative processes may not be desirable avenues for those whose goal is fundamental societal or institutional change.

Having argued that negotiation lies at the heart of joint decision processes such as planning, and that the collaborative planning model comes closest to acknowledging it, we present next as examples three key topics and associated negotiation findings: interests, mutual gains, and information. We chose these concepts because they can serve as effective analytical tools when evaluating collaborative processes and are useful for practicing planners and educators for sharpening their actions and behaviors in planning and implementation. These concepts will be illustrated using short vignettes taken from case research and practice (Kaufman and Snape 1997; http://www.luscherfarm.org; Van der Voo 2006; Gasol and Shmueli 2001; Shmueli and Ben Gal 2004).

**Interests**

*A person usually has two reasons for doing something: a good reason and the real reason.*

—Thomas Carlyle

Planners are charged with crafting plans or recommending actions that solve current problems while laying the groundwork for a better future. This requires creative approaches for generating alternatives and convincing others of their reasonableness and feasibility. What kinds of arguments persuade? In the rational planning and policy model, an industry has evolved and prospered around developing methods, such as cost-benefit analysis and risk assessment, that address the technical rationality of options. Negotiation theory offers concepts that address the political rationality of decisions.

Negotiation scholars stress the importance of interests in joint decisions, contrasting them with positions (Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991; Lax and Sebenius 1986). Positions are the demands that parties make, or their preferred action to address a particular problem. Interests are the concerns that motivate proponents to advocate specific solutions, the “why” behind positions. These positions represent solutions that satisfy proponents’ underlying interests. Typically, parties hold firmly to their positions, which they present as the only acceptable solution. As Carlyle’s above quote suggests, positions often mask underlying concerns.

The negotiation literature holds that positions are a poor foundation on which to build a successful resolution of differences. Negotiation scholars have noted the diverse nature of interests that may include substantive concerns about tangible, measurable gains and losses as well as concerns about relationships, respect, informal authority, and a sense of control (Fisher and Shapiro 2005). Interests may also include concerns about legal or political precedent, the protection of rights and of formal authority. Although a position “bundles” a proponent’s underlying interests and may address them well, it is often merely one among many options that may satisfy. It is important to note that this position may be unacceptable to other parties who are key to decision implementation. Arguing over competing positions can also impede the search for collectively better alternatives.

Besides conflating multiple concerns, a focus on positions rather than interests may fail altogether to address a stakeholder’s primary interest. An Israeli example (Shmueli and Ben Gal 2004) illustrates this point. There, the city of Beer Sheba’s local and district authorities and nongovernmental organizations were locked in a fifteen-year struggle against a governmental plan to site a national landfill in its vicinity. While environmental damages and quality of life were the stated basis for the
opposition, the facilitators uncovered an intense desire to put the interests of the country’s southern peripheral areas on the national agenda, rooted in feelings of geographic inequality regarding distribution of resources. This revelation enabled stakeholders to focus on the issues fueling the dispute and extend the discussion to addressing Southern Israel’s needs (largely unrelated to the landfill) while finding agreement on the immediate problem, the landfill’s size, duration of operation, and reduction in tipping fees.

Uncovering underlying interests is a critical step in efforts to generate alternatives acceptable to the various parties, and research on collaborative practices must take this into account in assessing the success or failure of planning processes and outcomes. Yet planners often fail to differentiate between interests and positions (construed as specific solutions some stakeholders advocate). In fact, in some planning processes, planners tend to identify stakeholders by the different positions they take or the demands they make publicly. Worse yet, when planners ask the public or the decision maker to choose among alternatives, in negotiation terms, they commit the error of proposing positions instead of seeking to address interests. Moreover, while asking for feedback on the relative merits of one alternative compared to another may reveal information about interests, it does so late in the game. Negotiation theory offers guidance for the kinds of questions planners might ask and the kinds of information they should seek early on.

Positions may change during a negotiation, and in fact, they often must to arrive at an agreement. This focus on interest analysis does not imply, however, that interests themselves are fixed in time. On the contrary, negotiators’ understanding of their own interests may evolve as they acquire and exchange information. This notion is further discussed in the Information section.

◆ Mutual Gains

_We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them._

—Albert Einstein

One myth about collaborative decision-making processes is that they are inherently preferable to unilateral decision making and therefore are worth forsaking some outcome advantages. However, all collaborations are not equal. An agreement to work together can be reached for a number of reasons, not least of which may be intimidation of the powerless by the powerful, a perception of lack of other choices, or a dispirited lack of motivation to pursue other options. (While a slave may “agree” to serve as a slave, few among us would claim that a slave-master relationship represents what we intend by the term collaboration.) Another commonly understood basis for working together is caring for the other parties, whether rooted in parental, interpersonal, or communal relationships. This attitude implies a mutually accepted, reciprocal relationship between the parties.

While long-term working relationships do exist in the public sector, questions have been raised about whether parties do or should collaborate because of relationship issues (Amy 1987, 1990). In other words, how do and how should parties weigh substantive against relationship benefits of agreements in public decision making? This question is particularly pertinent to planning and policy decisions whose consequences can extend in space and linger in time far beyond any relationships among parties directly involved.

A negotiation concept that helps assess substantive benefits from collaboration is the “Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement” (BATNA) (Fisher and Ury 1981). Negotiators are advised to conduct an analysis of BATNA to assess the expected advantage of negotiations (or collaboration) relative to other means of achieving objectives. If a party believes it can achieve its desired outcomes without working with others, then collaboration may not be desirable. Conversely, poor alternatives create strong incentives to collaborate. Thus, a researcher or planner may use an analysis of each party’s BATNA as a yardstick to measure the value of a collaboration. Understanding parties’ perceptions of their BATNAs also may help practicing planners to attract parties to join and remain in a collaborative process.

While BATNA analysis is one tool for examining the benefits of a collaborative process and what sustains it, BATNA is fundamentally an analysis of perceptions and expected values (Raiffa 1982; Susskind and Cruikshank 1987). The negotiation concept of mutual gains suggests a second, substantive basis for analyzing collaborations, one that is grounded in an examination of the objects of the negotiation rather than the more elusive relationships or perceptions, eliminating some thorny research methodology issues such as perception bias, privacy, and confidentiality.

Generating mutual gains is a direct contrast to the classic split-the-difference approach to settling disagreements. Mutual gains analysis requires a consideration of interests rather than positions (as noted above) and seeks to develop options that honor the priorities of each party. Collaborative processes that successfully generate mutual gains create benefits for all parties and provide a substantive explanation for why participants choose to sustain a collaborative effort.

A planning experience in a suburb near Portland, Oregon, illustrates mutual gains analysis. In the early 1990s, the city of Lake Oswego acquired a 100-acre farm parcel outside city boundaries (http://www.lusherfarm.org; Van der Voo 2006). After passage of a $3 million bond measure and a six-year participatory process, the city developed a master plan for all-purpose sports fields on a portion of this land. Before ground could be broken, resource inventory permits had expired and needed to be redone, and voter approval to annex the ten-acre plot had to be won. During this several-year interim, residents began to use half of this site as an off-leash dog park, and the city leased some land to a community.
Information

'Tis with our judgments as our watches: none go just alike, yet each believes his own.
—Alexander Pope

If you torture data sufficiently, it will confess to almost anything.
—Fred Menger

I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn’t learn something from him.
—Galileo Galilei

Information is the foundation for sound, implementable planning decisions. Information is also the currency of negotiations. Yet as the first two quotations above convey, information can be selectively perceived and strategically manipulated. It is often limited and incomplete, misunderstood, contradictory, and further distorted through communication. Moreover, although planners may aspire to achieve expert status, we know that Galileo (see above) had it right: relevant information comes in many forms from many sources, and when dealing with uncertainty as is inherent in planning activities, ignoring or discounting information can have serious costs (Andrews 2002; Corburn 2005; Fischer 2000).

Planners need information to understand the physical and social reality they are trying to affect, the substantive issues at stake, the direct stakeholders’ interests, and relationships among actors whose actions matter. Information can also reduce some of the uncertainty regarding outcomes and their intended (and unintended) impacts. Generally then, in terms of information, more is more. However, costs attached to obtaining and processing data to produce usable information set constraints. Information also has a strategic edge; the definition of the problem at hand is shaped through the identification of information considered relevant by the planners and others involved. In addition, our cognitive ability to handle information is limited and declines rapidly with complexity, which makes us prone to judgmental biases (Bazerman 1986; Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982) that hold the seed of predictable decision failure (Dörner 1996). Therefore, like everyone else, planners generally operate with less information than they would prefer, tend to handle information less than perfectly, and are unable to eliminate all the uncertainty regarding what happens next with respect to outcomes and their short- and long-term consequences, others’ moves, or states of the world that affect us.

Negotiation research and practice have illuminated several information-related issues directly relevant to planning decisions. Direct parties bring to negotiations information derived from diverse perceptions, shared or divergent frames, and various

supportive agriculture group. Intending to appease the field supporters and the dog park users, the city’s consultants presented a plan providing one sports field, reducing the dog park from 5 acres down to fewer than 1.5 acres but including in the plan the prospect of expanding the dog park onto the farmland. The sports field supporters mourned the loss of warm-up spaces for their athletes, while dog park users deplored the loss of the wide-open space they had enjoyed and were skeptical about the promise of future expansion. Community supportive agriculture members were dumbfounded by the lack of consideration of the organic farm.

Had the consultants taken a mutual gains approach, they might have inquired into what the dog park, sports field supporters, and community supportive agriculture members cared most deeply about. In fact, dog park supporters proposed a site plan that would have saved the organic farmland and provided additional dog park space on a noncontiguous site that was easily accessible by existing roads and connected by a walking path. This, a mutual gains design, would have satisfied all three groups instead of fueling conflict.

Negotiations pose challenges of their own, such as process design and information dilemmas. And while win-win (joint gains) outcomes are possible, lose-lose outcomes often threaten participatory planning and planning negotiations (Lax and Sebenius 1986; Susskind and Ozawa 1984; Susskind and Field 1996). Planners must expect practice to diverge from theory. Mutual gains may not always be maximized. Solutions jointly agreed on may fall short of what could be achieved theoretically in a specific situation, whether due to lack of civic capacity (Elliott and Kaufman 2003; Shmueli 2005), communication challenges, or outright poor judgment. Impacts of negotiated agreements on unrepresented or unrepresentable groups in a community may be overlooked. And undesirable long-term or spillover effects of joint-gains agreements on the larger-than-direct-stakeholder community, whether regional, national, or global, may be overlooked or purposely ignored (as when local stakeholders jointly agree to use natural resources in ways contrary to the national interest). The potential for collaborative processes to fall short of their promise is real. Planners and researchers need to ask questions likely to uncover the wider implications of specific collaborative processes. Nevertheless, agreements (or plans) containing mutual gains are more likely to be implemented than unilaterally devised plans or compromise deals. Analyses of collaborative decisions that fail to offer sufficient detail for uncovering the mutual gains potential fall short of informing us of what really happened, the robustness of the decisions, and the prospects for implementation.
levels of formal learning, experience, expertise, and input from technicians, planners, interveners, and other parties. They develop their own information base about decision situations. As with planners and participants in planning processes, negotiators’ limited ability to process complex information is hampered further by their level of trust in sources, difficulty of access (both in terms of costs and content), and the time necessary for learning and understanding technical details related to issues, consequences, models, and projections. Frames that parties develop during their interactions act as filters, leading them to weigh the value of information by the credibility they attribute to the sources (Elliott and Kaufman 2003). As in complex negotiations, in planning, no one party has a perfect handle on relevant information. Parties must depend on each other to jointly generate the necessary understanding for producing sound and implementable plans and agreements.

In the face of individual and collective limitations to the exchange and processing of information, communication plays a critical role in enhancing the likelihood of producing wise joint decisions that are implemented. The strategic aspect of communication comes into play as negotiating parties select what information to disclose to others, when, and how. On one hand, information disclosure about interests, perceived alternatives, and tradeoffs opens a party to exploitation by others. On the other hand, in the absence of such information, it becomes less likely that a mutually acceptable option will be crafted or that mutual gains will be found. Lax and Sebenius (1986) called this quandary the “negotiators’ dilemma,” akin to the “prisoners’ dilemma.” Predictably, in the absence of information about interests, parties argue in terms of their respective positions, considerably reducing the likelihood of finding an implementable solution, while sharing information carries its own risks. The Beer Sheva landfill case illustrates well this point. Disclosing interests from the outset might well have led to vague promises for the future but also immediate loss of the leverage obtained by opposing the landfill. On the other hand, it took fifteen years to eventually uncover and address the underlying interests that helped resolve this conflict.

Negotiation scholars and practitioners have identified a number of methods for handling information to address complexity and uncertainty. A jointly constructed information base through a technique called “joint fact finding,” which includes joint data collection and analysis, may be less prone to the judgmental biases and other problems that afflict individual thinking and allay concerns about “advocacy science,” or the strategic manipulation of information (Bacow and Wheeler 1984; Ehrmann and Stinson 1999; McCready, Gamman, and Brooks 2001; Ozawa 1991). This approach may take longer for all parties to see the value in specific pieces of information and develop a shared vocabulary than if planners or experts delivered a prepackaged data set. However, the time spent on this effort is likely to pay off down the line as less time is spent in disputing the “facts.”

To produce a ranking of environmental threats for the Northeast Ohio region, a diverse stakeholder group including residents, environmentalists, businesspeople, local officials, and various scientists spent almost two years jointly constructing the information base for its decision (Kaufman and Snape 1997). Beyond typical data collection, the process entailed trust building among people whose walks of life seldom intersect or who espouse very different positions on environmental issues. Participants educated themselves on issues and agreed on procedures for joint evaluation of technical information. They developed a shared language. The process did not eliminate differences but made them transparent and enabled participants to debate them. Reaching consensus on a ranking of the region’s environmental risks took one afternoon, but it could not have happened earlier than after two years of joint fact finding (Kaufman and Snape 1997).

In the course of the joint production of information, screening from the universe of possibly relevant facts can be achieved by asking participants at the initial stages what kinds of information they need to have to feel confident in the ensuing decision making. This simple question can help narrow the data-gathering effort without creating suspicions of hidden agendas or inadvertently omitting information that some participants deem pertinent.

Finally, through the coproduction of information, methodological uncertainties can be addressed by a collective discussion and selection of necessary assumptions, such as delineating time frames, boundaries, and even definitions for data collection (Ozawa 1991). Such forthrightness about uncertainty creates a natural foundation for reconvening if assumptions turn out to be incorrect or if future conditions diverge from expectations. Here, the link to adaptive management approaches is clear (Lee 1994; Ozawa 2005). Since planning is about a largely unpredictable future, adopting collaboration methods such as those developed in the negotiation field may be quite valuable for planners.

 Conclusion

Our discussion aims to underscore that planning is joint decision making and planners can benefit from wisdom developed in the field of negotiations. While efforts to build theory around planning practice are invaluable contributions, we tend to forget that we stand on the shoulders of giants. Negotiation theory has informed the practice we are studying. Negotiation theory has informed the practice we are encouraging our students to pursue. In these pages, we have initiated what we hope will be a continuing discussion of the relevance of negotiation theory to planning by focusing on the value of three negotiation concepts. Other useful concepts include the identification of criteria to guide the selection of alternatives, analysis of negotiation power, principles of communication, and issues of representation and accountability. With the extensive devolution of public welfare tasks to local government and the private sector, and the concurrent call for increased public participation around the world, collaborative processes are likely to become increasingly prevalent in planning. It is critical to “open the black box” and unpack the dynamics of collaborative interactions. Exposure to and training in skillfully applying negotiation concepts can enhance the abilities of planners to participate in and lead
effective and efficient collaborative processes. Negotiation concepts can help sharpen analysis and understanding of what works, what doesn’t, and why.

◆ Notes

1 From our perspective, a planner’s role entails recognizing and responding to the various needs and interests of the involved constituencies and paying attention to process. However, by dint of their mandate to represent public interests, planners do have a stake in the outcome. Interacting with stakeholders demands from planners interver skills. The resulting complex role planners often play, worthy of discussion, is beyond the scope of this article. However, in what follows, we will assume the planner’s complex role of minding stakeholders’ interests, public interests, and process.

2 Better in the sense that they are acceptable to other parties and therefore more likely to be implemented, allowing the system to move away from the unsatisfactory status quo.

3 The information dilemma is further described and discussed in the next section.

4 One example is Alaska, where local sentiment tends to favor drilling for oil in the National Wildlife Refuge for obvious economic benefits, while national environmental interests oppose drilling in this ecologically unique area.

5 See Bardach (2005) for a useful distinction between data, information, and evidence.

6 Judgmental biases are demonstrable and predictable errors of judgment stemming from our recourse to mental heuristics or shortcuts when challenged in our ability to process information.

7 Interveners have no direct stake in a conflict but focus on process.

8 In the prisoners’ dilemma, the individually rational choice to rat on the other prisoner yields a longer prison sentence for both than the decidedly risky choice of remaining silent, which requires trust and care for the other, both in short supply among the prisoners.

◆ References


