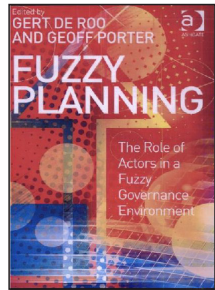


## Fuzzy Planning: The Role of Actors in a Fuzzy Governance Environment

Gert De Roo and Geoff Porter.  
Ashgate, Burlington, VT, 2007.

Review by Daniel Andre Tulkens



Speaking personally, my short and lively academic career has exposed many planning concepts which appear fraught with uncertainty, paradox, and perpetual semantic conjecture. It is the uncertain nature of planning which the book addresses, with particular regard to doctrines of 'sustainability' and 'compact city' which are widely accepted yet lacking in clarity. The 'fuzzy' nature of contemporary planning tends to result in implementation impotence, and dually serves as an agent of conflict.

In this situation the end result of planning may be minimal or counter productive. The authors of *Fuzzy Planning* propose a method of 'actor-consulting', which is based on assessment and analysis of actor motives, perceptions and contributions, in order to address the differences in understanding of concepts such as 'sustainability' and leading to the ability to differentiate between the reality and the rhetoric of planning scenarios. The ultimate aim of an actor-consulting decision-making model is to address the subjective nature of fuzzy notions and concepts in planning, to create a common understanding among actors, and to unravel underlying mechanisms that determine actor behaviour.

The authors posit that the 'actor-orientated' approach moves beyond the concepts of participation strategies, collaborative planning and communicative action, by providing information on actors' motivation, perception and behaviour. This premise is founded upon the notion that the actions of actors are determined by their own beliefs, desires and capabilities, and the institutional setting in which they act. In this sense actor-consulting strategies serve as a means to tackle actor-related fuzziness in planning. The premise of an actor-consulting model focuses on identifying political actors and establishing their 'desired contributions', 'present contributions' and 'potential contributions' to any given environmental issue. In doing so, policy and plan makers are able to clarify the obligatory level of involvement of each acting group and allow these groups to conceptualise their own environmental goals which exposes how fuzzy planning enigmas such as 'sustainable development' can be achieved.

Among the numerous case studies entailed in *Fuzzy Planning*, those based on the Dutch Province of Drenthe prove the most illuminating in order to illustrate the value of the actor-consulting mode. One such planning issue was creating policy in Drenthe for the reconstruction of post-war neighbourhoods to reverse the trends of decreasing occupancy in urban regions, where the

quality of housing was failing to match expectations. The results of the research show that the actor-consulting methodology was successful in uncovering thoughts, opinions, and expectations about sustainable development in a scenario typified by actor uncertainty. This method also identified shared meanings, identified barriers to sustainable development and gained consensus on opportunities and obligations for action. While the exercise does not clearly define what sustainable development is, it does however illustrate how identifying motives, desires and expectations realistically manifest in action.

In summary, the book is refreshing in its acceptance of the uncertain and equivocal nature of planning. Through acknowledging the existing semantic discord which saturates planning rhetoric the authors admirably embrace fuzzy theories and illustrate how the actor-consulting model is able to find a place alongside existing communicative doctrines. It also offers a more realistic insight to actor motive, and levels of contribution. It is this aspect of the actor-consulting model which appeals to me personally as communicative-deliberative models can be reduced to mere lip-service; where they can identify issues but are unable to expose the likelihood of actors to engage through the implementation steps. At the very least the actor-consulting model attempts to identify what is to be expected of actors at various stages of the policy making cycle which adds a sense of certainty to what will always be a 'fuzzy' planning discipline.

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