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***Decision-Making as  
Symbolic Space.***

***Understanding Urban  
Practice with Bourdieu.***

## **Abstract**

The article contributes to the debate on rationalism in urban planning and design by addressing the methodological challenges of analysing social and psychological dimensions of communication within spatial transformation, focusing on decision-making. Conceptualizing decision-making as symbolic space, it aims at shifting the enquiry from the operational to the causal level.

Although the crucial role of socio-psychological aspects in the process of spatial transformation is widely acknowledged, their mutual correspondence often receives relatively scant attention from planning scholars, prioritizing the social over the psychological, leaving the latter a blind spot.

Neo Bourdieusian interpretation of spatial trialectic is used to approach decision-making in urban practice as a pivotal 'crossroads', where non-material phenomena are moulded to effect changes in physical space, and where professionals act as an influential group of expertise.

The paper attempts to deconstruct the enigmatic layer of decision-making and to propose analytical tools that are suitable to relate the intangible—motivations, values, beliefs, and perceptions of spatial professional decision-makers—with their social manifestations in urban practice and their footprint in physical space.

Spatial trialectic is an innovative interpretation, which has recently emerged within the sociological discourse, of Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit of habitus, field, and capital. It embraces the mutual correspondence of symbolic space, social space, and physical space, emphasizing the causal role of symbolic space.

Integrating symbolic space as manifesting in urban decision-making into the analysis of socio-spatial processes offers a plausible strategy for research of socio-psychological interplay and opens methodological access

to the psychology of communication within spatial transformations.

## **Keywords**

Bourdieu; decision-making; symbolic space; urban practice; spatial transformations.

## Introduction

In their recent book *How Big Things Get Done: The Surprising Factors That Determine the Fate of Every Project*, from Home Renovations to Space Exploration and Everything in Between, Bent Flyvbjerg and Dan Gardner (2023) analyse a database of over 16,000 projects and uncover a massive imbalance in project management's ability to deliver on time and on budget, with a failure rate of 99.5%. They conclude that "psychology and power drive projects at all scales, from skyscrapers to kitchen renovations" (Flyvbjerg & Gardner, 2023 p. xii).

For readers familiar with planning literature, the debate on power will come as no surprise. The issue of power has been central to discussions on rationality in planning since WWII, particularly in the debates between proponents of "rational" or "comprehensive" planning (RCPM) and those advocating for incremental, advocacy, radical, and especially collaborative or participatory planning, largely informed by communicative planning theory (CPT).

The debates on power highlighted the necessity of addressing the psychological dimension in communication during spatial transformations. Several urban planning scholars have contributed to this research by applying various philosophical, sociological, and psychological concepts, as well as methodologies and theories from psychology (Baum, 2012; Gunder, 2011; Gunder & Hillier, 2016; Hoch, 2006; Porter et al., 2012; Schön, 1983). However, the interrelationship between the social and the psychological remains receiving relatively scant attention due to the tacit nature of the psychological and its challenging analytical accessibility for those researching urban planning and design processes. This phenomenon often leads to a state of "inattentive blindness" (Drew, Vö & Wolfe, 2013) within planning scholarship, relegating the exploration of the socio-psychological dimension to the periphery of urban discourse and research agendas.

The article contributes to the debate on rationalism in urban planning and design by addressing the methodological challenges of analysing social and psychological dimensions of communication within spatial transformation, focusing on decision-making. Conceptualizing decision-making as a symbolic space, it aims at shifting the enquiry from the operational to the causal level.

An attempt is made to deconstruct the enigmatic layer of decision-making and to propose analytical tools that are suitable to relate the intangible—motivations, values, beliefs, and perceptions of spatial professional decision-makers—with their social manifestations in urban practice and their footprint in physical space.

The article is structured as follows. The first section sketches major lines of debates on rationalism in urban planning discourse. The second situates decision-making as a critical component of spatial practice, using the Bhaskarian framework of three societal domains (Bhaskar, 2013) utilised in the third section. The next section is devoted to the Bourdieusian concept of spatial trialectic and symbolic space within it. The fourth section highlights spatial professionals as an influential group of expertise and defines the field of spatial transformations. The conclusions interpret decision-making as a symbolic space and briefly introduce potential future discussions.

### 1. Debate on Rationalism in urban planning

Discussions on rationalism have been central to urban planning scholarship since WWII and culminated in debates on rationality in planning. John Friedmann (1987) identifies the 'rationality theme' as omnipresent, leading to the dilemma of 'whether and to what extent planning is or can be rational.' Planning theory distinguished multiple planning types (Holden, 1998), including the SITAR model (Hudson, Galloway & Kaufman, 1979), which covers main approaches, each with its own steady set of strategies, in planning

practice since the 1960s. The model includes five types of planning, with the synoptic model considered the dominant 'rational' planning approach. However, incremental planning (Lindblom, 1979), transactive planning (Friedmann, 1973), advocacy planning (Davidoff, 1965), and radical planning (Grabow & Heskin, 1973) are critical of the rationalism of synoptic planning and are viewed as more inclusive and socially responsible alternatives.

At the turn of the century, heavily polarized theoretical debates emerged between proponents of the rational comprehensive planning model (RCPM) and the communicative planning theory (CPT) that was theoretically articulated in the 1980s. These theories highlighted opposing approaches in planning. The first, RCPM, is affiliated with the scientific decision model, predictability, and the predominance of spatial characteristics (Yiftachel, 1989). The second, CPT, argued for the recognition of planning activity as being embedded in day-to-day social relations and the usefulness of a collaborative approach (Healey, 1992; Innes, 1996). This dichotomy contrasts those focused on the technical and operational aspects of planning ('being right') with those viewing planning as a moral and political endeavour ('doing good') (Hoch, 1984). The persistence of rationalism in planning practice, despite its intensive critique, was acknowledged, with the psychological reassurances it provides practitioners being named as one of the reasons (Lawrence, 2000).

CPT, which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a challenge to 'unsettled assumptions about what planning is, how it works, and how it ought to be done' (Innes & Booher, 2015: 3), formed a strong opposition to the rational approach and largely became mentally equated with the notion of consensus. By reorienting planning towards an interactive understanding of planning activity, it made theoretical use of the theory of communicative rationality and communicative action by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1987) to create common ground for involved

stakeholders (Innes & Booher, 2015). Simplifying the relationship between the theoretical reflections of scholars within CPT and Habermas's theory of communicative action, opponents of CPT extrapolated critiques of Habermas's work onto the writings of CPT scholars (Innes & Booher, 2015). However, the 'collaborative planners' themselves argued that the practices they analyzed 'were not about searching for a truth in the Habermasian sense, but about finding practical solutions to shared problems in the ways Dewey advocated' (Innes & Booher, 2015 p.6). CPT scholars were criticized for planners' inability to take a stand in the face of societal structures of domination (Fainstein, 2000), for their limited ability to engage with 'the inevitable question of power' (Hillier, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998).

This critique has recently received special attention within discussions on consensus and conflict. An assumption is that collaboration and consensus-building serve to temper episodes of conflict through superficial communication and carefully staged dialogue may paper over conflict rather than acknowledge and confront it, failing to allow for the agonism necessary for legitimate decision-making (Gunder, 2003; Kühn, 2021). The democratic character of communicative planning is questioned, as there is suspicion that 'choreographed' citizen engagement may guide urban planning or design processes toward outcomes predetermined by powerful actors (Allmendinger & Houghton, 2012; Metzger, 2017). Concerns are raised that circumscribed citizen engagement may serve to temper episodes of conflict through superficial communication and carefully staged dialogue, thereby undermining critical discourse (Gualini, 2015; Metzger et al., 2014). The scepticism surrounding the collaborative approach is often tied to discussions on the role of planning practitioners. A recent interpretation of the ideological dynamics in planning situates professionals as practical ideologists, contesting the image of planners as specialists focused on pragmatically

addressing day-to-day challenges (Metzger, 2021).

These discussions reconnect with the debates on rationalism, the role of professionals and the tacit dominance of the psychological in decision-making.

## **2. Decision-making in urban practice and three domains of society**

Decision-making, as a critical component pervasive across all stages and levels of spatial practice, commands significant attention in urban discourse. While a substantial body of literature on urban decision-making covers diverse topics such as governance, policy, public participation, and sustainability, much of it focuses on tangible, measurable dimensions at the operational level. This predominant focus often involves scrutinizing patterns, techniques, behaviors, and outcomes of decision-making, addressing questions of 'who is doing what to whom' (Flyvbjerg, 2004 p.302).

Within spatial change, decision-making represents the time-space where non-material phenomena are shaped to bring about changes in physical space. The analysis of spatial transformations thus lies, albeit simplified, within the realm of intangible driving forces of human actions, juxtaposed with the tangible, countable, and observable phenomena of physical space.

Amidst the prevailing emphasis on operational aspects, there is growing theoretical interest in a deeper understanding of the 'why' behind decisions. Over the past century, influential urban planners have made significant contributions to this discourse, now considered classics in urban scholarship. The inexhaustive list includes Kevin Lynch (1995), Paul Davidoff (1965), Charles Lindblom (1979), Donald Schön (2017), which explored the perceptual aspects of urban form and decision-making, advocated for increased citizen participation in decision-making, highlighted the

importance of incremental decision-making and 'muddling through' in public policy and planning and emphasized reflection and problem-solving among urban planning professionals. Others, like John Forester (1993), Judith Innes (1996), Patsy Healey (2023), and Leonie Sandercock (2004), advanced the common understanding of collective and community decision-making through collaborative planning and communicative action.

To improve analytical clarity in the context of decision-making, this article employs the conceptual framework of society derived from critical realism. This framework distinguishes between three societal domains – the real, the actual, and the empirical (Bhaskar, 2013). The real domain represents the hidden and analytically inaccessible realm of generative mechanisms, such as motivations, values, beliefs, attitudes, as well as potentialities, powers, and unrealized events. In contrast, the actual domain encompasses observable and measurable events and facts, while the empirical domain reflects the sensemaking and experiences derived from these events (Boje, 2018; Holt-Jensen, 2018)( Figure 1). According to Bhaskar, the real domain not only includes the actual and the empirical but also encompasses things and events that exist or occur outside human perception or experience (Bhaskar, 2010 pp. 1-2; Boje, 2018). Consequently, the real domain exhibits two primary characteristics: it is both intangible and all-encompassing.

The act of announcing a decision occurs at the actual domain, representing a visible outcome of generative powers operating within the real domain. These powers are often obscured and challenging to apprehend in the moment, making them less accessible for quantitative analysis. Events occurring at the actual domain, particularly those manifested in physical space, are more readily subject to quantitative analysis, offering seemingly plausible and rational explanations for causal relationships. As a result, the actual domain tends to attract greater academic attention, with researchers and funding

bodies focusing primarily on the actual and empirical domains. This focus centers on methods, models, approaches, and outcomes of decision-making, while often overlooking the deeper, more concealed dynamics within the real domain, where the very act of the plan's conception occurs through decision-making. Understanding this process requires an analytical toolkit capable of uncovering the interrelations between the real domain, the sociality of the actual domain, and the physicality of the empirical domain.

### 3. Symbolic space within a trialectic of spaces for urban practice

The Neo-Bourdieusian concept of the trialectic of space offers an innovative interpretation within the sociological discourse of Bourdieu's theoretical framework of habitus, field, and capital, further developed by Loïc Wacquant. By revisiting Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977) and his early works, Wacquant

conceptualizes a trialectic of interconnected and interdependent spaces: physical, social, and symbolic, all of which are encoded within Bourdieu's works (Wacquant, 2022). According to Wacquant, these three spaces are continuously interrelated and omnipresent within one another.

Physical space is defined as the three-dimensional material expanse where agents and institutions are situated and carry out their activities.

The tangible nature of physical space offers material opportunities for the embodiment of mental constructs. For instance, it transforms the visions of powerful actors into architectural realities and reflects social divisions through spatial formations, such as delineating distinct neighborhoods or creating gated communities. While physical space is predominantly apprehended through senses and emotions, it is less

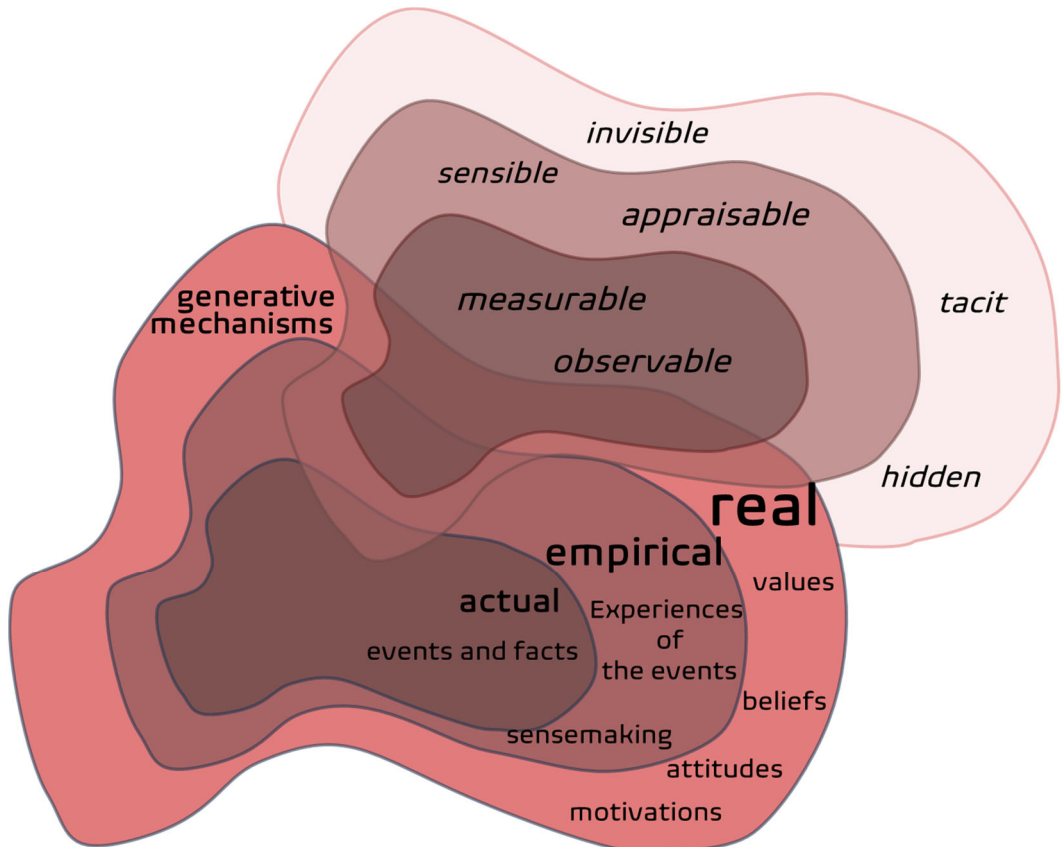


Figure 1. Correlation of three societal domains with their perceived visibility. Landscape diagram created by the author.

cognitively processed, yet it plays a crucial role in the accumulation of social and symbolic meanings. The ineffable and unquestioned nature of physical space is rooted in its non-verbal expression (Lawson, 2007).

In the practice of spatial transformations, physical space holds a central role, serving both as the subject of planning inquiry and the object of activities undertaken by the involved actors. The alteration of physical space becomes the implicit outcome of their efforts. However, unlike other participants such as politicians, lawyers, or real estate developers, spatial practitioners focus primarily on imagining spatial changes, where they must navigate the interactions between various forms of capital and their unequal distributions since physical space ultimately acts as the material expression of social space.

*Social space* encompasses the multidimensional distribution of agents across objective positions defined by the allocation of diverse forms of capital, a term Bourdieu uses to denote sources of power: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1984). This allocation follows three primary axes: the total volume of capital across its relevant forms, the composition of capital focusing on the relative influence of economic and cultural capital, and an axis tracking changes over time in both capital volume and composition. The owners of large amounts of capital that form the dominant social groups fall into two categories. The first category includes individuals with a large amount of economic capital and a small amount of cultural capital. The second category mirrors the first: it includes individuals with a large amount of cultural capital and a small amount of economic capital. Between these groups (called "businessmen" and "intellectuals") there can also be a struggle, at the intersection of different fields and capitals. Bourdieu calls this place of intersection and struggle the field of power.

According to Wacquant, social space serves as the "mother category" from which the field emerges. A field represents an autonomous social space shaped by specific forces. Bourdieu introduces the concept of "force", which unifies various elements around an object, forming an autonomous social field. The force determines the relational dynamics among agents in social space, characterizing them as relations of difference and power (Wacquant, 2001). The relational dynamics within the social field are tied to the distribution of capital, where each agent's social position is defined in relation to the sources of force, shaping their goals and perceived benefits. The force, defined by the value that agents ascribe to it, is referred to by Bourdieu as 'illusio.' This notion describes the belief that certain social activities and material goods are important and worthy of investment. Therefore "worth" is another important notion in the Bourdieusian conceptual system of practice.

The clash of planning approaches and perceptions of urban planning and design—whether seen as inclusive social practices or, conversely, as predominantly technocratic and aesthetically exclusive activities—illustrates the complex interaction of different forces, values, and beliefs within the realm of spatial transformation. It raises the question of whether this realm functions as an autonomous social field with its own living community, which defines central forces and ascribes values, or if it is a 'field of power' where various fields and capitals intersect. This, in turn, invites consideration of specific forms of symbolic power by which a community of practice enacts a shared sense of purpose within a field, a *collusio* (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 145), creating a symbolic space where this power is exercised, influencing both the physical and social dimensions of spatial transformation.

*Symbolic space*, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), refers to the cognitive topography through which individuals categorise and classify the empirical world. These cognitive

categories, functioning as mental grids, consist of interdependent dualities such as masculine/feminine, high/low, right/left, active/passive, and public/private (Wacquant, 2022), which shape how people think, feel, and act. These categories are deeply embedded within the body and form part of an individual's habitus, carrying both individual and collective histories. The collective experience is inscribed within institutions, where individuals gain authority as part of a social entity and derive influence from major symbolic institutions such as the state, religion, science, politics, and law. These categories are further reinforced by everyday life, socialization practices, ceremonies, and rites, all of which reflect the power dynamics and struggles for classification within society. Symbolic space thus is constitutive of habitus as a set of cognitive and motivational structures and dispositions.

The symbolic classifications that guide urbanites, Bourdieu defines as 'the objectivity of the second order' (Bourdieu, 1980a as cited in Wacquant, 2022). Wacquant suggests that mapping the city through these cognitive grids helps track components of symbolic space, such as social order and coherence, as well as potential change and transformation when

new categories emerge, and old ones are challenged.

The application of the concept of symbolic space to urban analysis at the city scale provides a clearer explanation of events and phenomena within the actual domain and enhances the understanding of sensemaking in the empirical domain of society. In turn, when applied to decision-making, it offers a lens for examining the real domain of motivations, beliefs, and values, uncovering their causal dynamics.

The relative autonomy of symbolic space develops through the emergence and consolidation of cultural production fields such as religion, art, science, law, journalism, and politics. Within these fields, symbolic forms of power are created by specialists according to internal criteria (Bourdieu, 1994b as cited in Wacquant, 2022).

If the concepts of force and worth capture the 'anatomy' of social space, the notions of *illusio/collusio*, *doxa*, and *hysteresis* describe the dynamics of its continuous formation, adjustment of internal criteria, and the generation of symbolic forms of power. *Doxa*, as a set of fundamental beliefs, justifies practical sense and becomes apparent only when agents engage within familiar social fields. It transforms into a form of power within

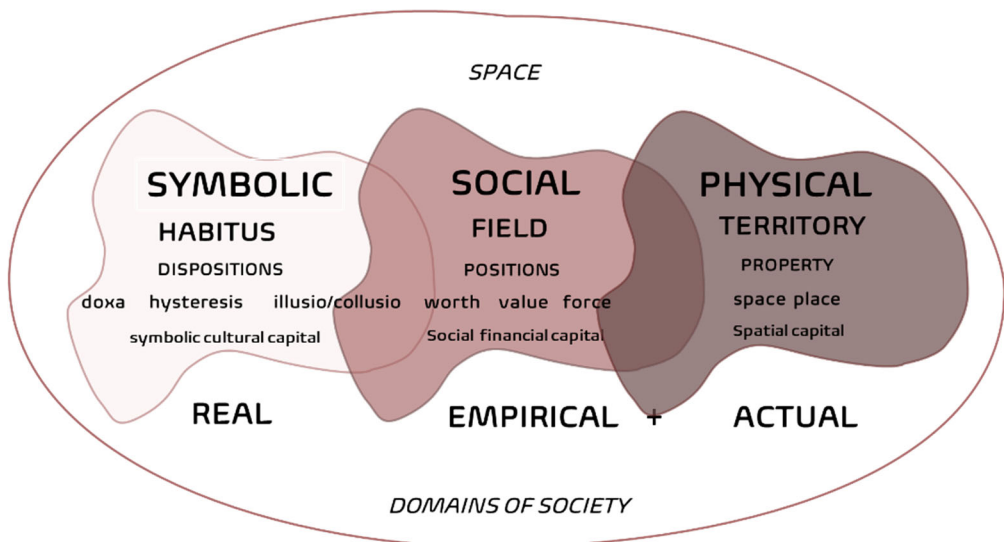


Figure 2. Trialectic space and societal domains. Diagram created by the author.

established formal and semi-formal institutions (Bourdieu, 2000).

Doxa ensures the stability of any field, as social structures produce and reproduce themselves through the practices and perceptions of agents, thereby shaping their habitus. Illusio serves as a bridge between habitus and field, mutually reinforcing and amplifying the prevailing power of doxa (Gutman, 2023). Together, illusio and doxa function as forces that continuously regenerate symbolic space.

Doxa also steers hysteresis—an asynchrony between habitus and field in which agents continue to reproduce old social relations even after these relations have changed or the agents have shifted their positions within them (Bourdieu, 2000). The gap between the slowly evolving normative framework, embedded in collective mindsets and traditional rituals, and the rapidly changing urban practices amid current uncertainty illustrates hysteresis within the realm of spatial transformations.

Hysteresis highlights the process of habitus change, making “visible” the clashing values and reattributing worth within each specific spatial transformation.

Figure 2 graphically summarizes the theoretical tools of the Bourdieusian trialectic space and illustrates their correlations with the Bhaskarian domains of society.

#### **4. Spatial design professional disciplines in the Field of spatial transformations (FoST)**

The dynamic landscape of professions within spatial transformations reflects the increasing complexity of urban life. Modern challenges—such as climate change, rapid urbanisation, social inequality, the encroachment of augmented reality on authentic engagement with the physical world, and the decline of face-to-face interactions and outdoor activities—are just a few among many.

Today, a significant shift is occurring as humans increasingly delegate social ordering to technology, diminishing the perceived role of physical space while activities migrate to digital networks and AI-generated realities. These transformations not only diversify professional responsibilities but also place considerable pressure on spatial practitioners, prompting them to deepen their understanding of their role and significance in driving and managing change (Grubbauer, M., et al., 2024).

Sociological scholarship on professions highlights their profound impact on social structures, signalling the advent of professional society. While the characteristics of professions differ across social and economic contexts, they are broadly defined as knowledge-based groups (Nelson & Bobbins, 2017). Research suggests that a significant part of professional practice involves tasks of persuasion. Therefore, beyond delineating the functions and attributes of professions, it is essential to explore their motivations, outlooks, and roles in processes of change (Noordegraaf & Schinkel, 2011).

The role of spatial design professional disciplines and their representatives in the process of spatial transformations has been central to debates within the three main spatial design disciplines—urban planning, architecture, and landscape architecture—since their inception. The global socio-economic shifts and technological revolutions of the 21st century, along with the decline and diversification of traditional professions and the emergence of new ones, create two counterforces within the field of professional spatial design disciplines.

One, centripetal, is driven by meta-disciplinary approaches and interconnected digital design media tendency towards professions’ convergence and dissolving of the disciplinary borders as a result, another is centrifugal impulses of professional specialisation and fragmentation prevalent

since the 1950s and following inexhaustible efforts to control the sub-disciplinary borders, e.g. by licensure of professional practice and education (Kullmann, 2016).

Converging meta-disciplinary approaches encompass the collaborative turn (Healey, 2022; Innes, 2016) and a clear shift towards interdisciplinarity (Nelson & Bobbins, 2017), as well as global challenges such as increased environmental and social risks, the rise of information technologies and AI-driven imaginaries, and the growing demand for and threats to democracy and public participation (Metzger, 2017; Steinitz, 2020). Diverging factors revolve around concerns regarding the integrity of institutional identities and the irretrievable loss of intellectual autonomy (Kullmann, 2016), leading to constraints in project management and a reduced capacity to effectively contribute to the quality of the urban environment and societal well-being. This situation can result in hidden miscommunications or open confrontations between urban professionals, shifting the focus from common goals to sectoral interests.

However, all spatial design professionals—whether they are staunch proponents of RCPM or passionate followers of CPT, advocates of interdisciplinary collaboration or defenders of disciplinary boundaries—share two common aspects. First, they develop their professional expertise around physical space and recognize its centrality to their practice. Second, despite differences in focus, their specific discourses increasingly value physical space as a common good. Thus, physical space can be seen as a unifying force for spatial design professionals, who centre their social-professional interactions around this shared attribute.

Consequently, today we can speak of the field of spatial transformations (FoST), where the dynamics revolve around shared values that professional social groups within FoST offer to their members through educational and practical building activities. The unique combination of heterogeneity

and turbulence is the key characteristic that distinguishes FoST from other fields.

The heterogeneity enforced by FoST's ability to deflect the central forces of the aforementioned four constituting fields—the economic, artistic, bureaucratic, and political—substitutes these forces with physical space as its central focus. This substitution shifts the inertia of physical space to a particular force, attributing value (worth) to it. The relative immateriality of financial capital becomes solid materiality when territory is turned into property; building regulations and plans materialize as urban patterns; and political decisions are transformed into urban infrastructures of all scales.

Inertia of physical space lies in the material constraints it imposes, the opportunities it offers for location, position, and movement, and the capital, labor, and time required to transform it (Wacquant, 2022). Within a time-space, created by inertia, competing old and emerging values produce hysteresis, which reattributes worth within each specific spatial transformation. This process often occurs automatically and, as a result, remains inattentive in the background. Worth fluctuations range from precisely recorded property values to the invisible shifts in attitudes, motivations, perceptions, and deeper cognitive-emotional flows during spatial transformations.

Meta-disciplinary approaches, such as the increasing call for interdisciplinarity, collaboration, and participation, for finding a 'common ground,' generating collusio, are signalling the formation of FoST as an autonomous social field with physical space as a specific force and the common good as a shared worth.

Urban practice, operating within FoST, can be viewed as assemblages of diverse communities of practice, which in interdependent interactional settings communicate socio-spatial values, defining worth and seeking collusio in order to reach specific goals offered by the field.

Turbulence, another characteristic of FoST, largely depends on the inertia of physical space, turning FoST in arenas of struggle. The turbulence affects all levels of societal domains in the field.

The actual level of visible events and facts may include the normative framework of spatial transformations, institutions and organizations managing spatial change, and projects and plans as instruments of this change. Much has been written and debated about the speed of policy-making, which often delays sociocultural shifts caused by global environmental and technological challenges, issues of horizontal versus vertical urban governance, instrumental aspects like the benefits of land use versus spatial planning, and the increasing managerial ethos of urban development projects.

The empirical level of professional experience is reflected in the debates surrounding the efficacy of RCPM and CPT, as well as the broader role of spatial design specialists in urban change, addressing issues of domination and power. These discussions also delve into the ethical dilemma of whether to be "advocates of the voiceless" or "servants of power." Finally, the real level amalgamates the often-contrasting values of the four constituting fields of FoST: maximisation of profit in financial, absolutisation of law in bureaucratic, creative imagination in artistic, and power as self-worth in political spheres (Figure 3). This amalgamation occurs during the decision-making process, which is often highly sectoral and closed, particularly at higher hierarchical scales, where political decisions are transmitted through normative channels to design professionals and the final users of the space.

The turbulence is driven by two conflicting factors: the overarching common goal of transforming a physical space on one hand, and the inherent conflicting values of representatives from the constituting fields

on the other. This situation mirrors transdisciplinary impulses: the first is centripetal, seeking to find common ground and create a collusion within the field; the second is centrifugal, where collusion transforms into an individual's personal sense of purpose (Threadgold, 2018), as they invest themselves by appropriating the values of the groups to which they belong. This transformation is also significant for professional groups, where individuals share a collective social identity.

The process contributes to professional fragmentation and specialization, fostering the creation of relatively homogeneous subfields within architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning, each with its own practical sense, values, and beliefs. Each subfield develops its own doxa. The central question in each decision-making event during spatial interventions is whether the specific way of reshaping a particular space is worth pursuing. These events become arenas where spatial design specialists, bureaucrats, politicians, and economists debate the appropriate instruments. Debates over the best route for high-speed trains or motorways in large infrastructure projects, the choice between participatory or comprehensive approaches to planning, and similar discussions, all serve as examples of argumentation based on different values.

Three spatial design disciplines, whose daily practice is to reimagine artistically and to align socially physical space - spatial planners, architects and landscape architects, constitute the habitual group of FoST, having it, unlike the other professional groups involved, their only "home".

Notwithstanding the fact that the ideal central worth of these professional social groups is a physical space as a common good, differently articulated by different professional groups, there is a specific set of values for each of them.

The differentiation of values is defined by the tendency to control disciplinary borders, influenced by economic factors, identity, and the type of spatial structures

professionals work with. Simplifying reality, architects are responsible for building substance and structure, landscape architects work with open spaces and green and blue structures, while planners encompass all structures, including social aspects on a larger scale.

Following historical fragmentation, each subdiscipline seeks to develop its discourse. Architectural discourse is rich in speculation about the aesthetics of architecture as a substantial quality (Scruton, 2021). Aesthetics dominate architectural thinking, resulting in the "ideology of the artistic genius," which is a fundamental axiom of architectural thought (Stevens, 2002, p.8). Well-known memes like "starchitects," the "Bilbao effect," and "wow factor architecture" are examples of this.

Other voices critique modern architecture as "a hollowed-out profession with architects seemingly less vital than ever" and highlight the "hideous consequences of industry fragmentation and mismanagement," contrasting it with the historically heterogeneous nature of the profession (Jolliffe & Crosby, 2023). Evidence suggests that modern architectural practice is increasingly oriented toward promoting environmental quality, yet it faces challenges posed by normative and legislative frameworks that often conflict with architectural thinking, artistic

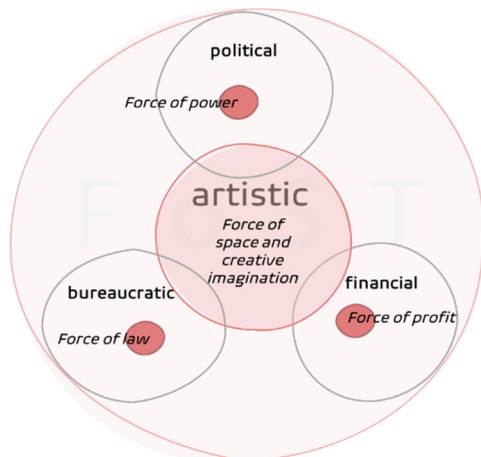
approaches, professional dialogue, and community culture (Mikelsone, 2019).

Landscape architects grapple with the fragmentation and loss of disciplinary boundaries in theory and practice, alongside challenges such as the absence of a cohesive design discourse stemming from the field's diverse origins, and inherent ambiguities associated with landscapes and the term 'landscape architecture' (Kullmann, 2016; Newman et al., 2024; Raxworthy, 2023). The landscape serves as both the object and medium of landscape architectural practice (Steinitz, 2020-), continually subject to change and growth (Brian Hackett in Raxworthy, 2023). Similarly, to architects, there is a societal shift towards valuing ecology and sustainability (Baird & Szczygiel, 2007). Landscape architects place a strong emphasis on collaboration, working with architects at smaller scales, urban designers at mid-scales, geographers at larger scales, engineers across all scales, as well as layers of professionals including bankers and government officials, without compromising their professional identity (Steinitz, 2020).

Despite historical ties between planning and architecture, a significant gap between these professions emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, often marked by mutual antagonism. However, there is a growing tendency to acknowledge and encourage more productive collaboration to enhance the quality of urban environments (Nelson & Bobbins, 2017).

Urban planning, operating at larger scales, is particularly influenced by power relations and control of resources, as well as socio-political dynamics (Moulaert, 2005). These dynamics present key challenges, including navigating conflicting interests among various stakeholders, balancing economic development with social equity, and responding to the complexities of environmental sustainability. Additionally, urban planners must address the tension between short-term political agendas and long-term planning goals, while managing the spatial inequalities that often arise in rapidly growing urban areas.

Figure 3. Composition of the field of spatial transformations. Diagram created by the author



Urban design, as an emerging discipline lacking a clear definition and well-developed professional structure, shares common values with related disciplines. Schurch (1999) argues that while some architects see urban design as an extension of architecture and some planners view it as a branch of urban planning, the significant contributions of landscape architects to urban design are not always fully recognized (Nelson & Bobbins, 2017).

## 5. Conclusions

This article attempts to revisit the debates on rationalism and rationality in urban planning that were prominent at the turn of the century, with the aim of addressing the pressing issue of the psychological dimension in urban planning and design decision-making.

The analysis of these debates leads to the conclusion that, despite the development of more inclusive approaches in urban planning and design, and the widespread political and professional recognition of collaborative practices, the habitus of the rational planning model remains subtly embedded in the day-to-day work of spatial design professionals. This latent presence is reflected in the somewhat diminished debates on rationalism and rationality in urban planning and design, which are now being revitalized through discussions on participation, ideology, power, and democracy.

A plausible explanation for the persistence of the Rational Planning Model (RPM) lies in its idealized attributes: the perceived clarity of its explicit and adaptable procedures, its systematic process, and the clear foundation it provides for justifying decision-making. The well-defined role of the planner as an expert advisor contributes to psychological stability within the profession. However, the growing professional and public attention to the discrepancy between plans and their implementation highlights the non-linear and rationality-resistant nature of these

processes. Recent debates on uneven power distribution have drawn scholarly focus to lines of antagonism, often overlooking the more nuanced and complex nature of decision-making—particularly its socio-psychological dimension—due to the methodological challenges associated with accessing this aspect of urban practice.

The novel interpretation of Bourdieu's framework of habitus, field, and capital—the trialectic of simultaneously interdependent yet autonomous spaces: symbolic, social, and physical—was employed to ascertain analytical tools suitable for examining socio-psychological interactions in the collective settings of planning decision-making.

Key concepts such as *doxa*, *illusio/collusio*, hysteresis, force, and worth were analyzed in greater depth, as they provide critical insights into the mutual interdependence between the constituent elements of the urban—territories, places, actors' interactions, and the mental factors influencing situations or activities.

These concepts serve as theoretical tools or mechanisms that help understand the mutual relationship between symbolic, social, and physical spaces. While the trialectic space (a term often associated with Henri Lefebvre's work (1991) refers to the interaction between perceived space, conceived space, and lived space, force, worth, *doxa*, *illusio/collusio*, and hysteresis are specific theoretical concepts used to analyse and explain the social practices, power relations, and temporal dynamics within spaces.

The conclusion drawn is that symbolic space, shaped by historically and culturally influenced modes of thought and emotion, informs the decisions and actions of both the general public and, more importantly, urban practice professionals, who are omnipresent throughout the decision-making process.

This perspective highlights the distinctive role of urban practice, which seeks spatial transformation by leveraging symbolic forms of capital and power as instrumental tools.

Symbolic capital strengthens the position of spatial design professions within the field of spatial transformations (FoST), which can be viewed as an autonomous social space with emerging disciplinary subfields of planning, architecture, and landscape architecture.

It can be assumed that this position ensures a form of domination in the field—no decision to transform space, even by the highest-ranking politician or financial magnate, can be materialized without it being drawn by a designer or without using the designer as a “tool” for legitimizing the individual action of spatial transformation. On the other hand, this reinforces the ethical vulnerability of design professionals and places additional responsibility on the symbolic forms of power spatial designers wield.

This concept integrates the psychological dimension into the social realm of the actual domain, enabling a nuanced analysis of the typically concealed psychology of decision-making and providing methodological access to psychological dynamics. Such integration allows researchers to address the challenge of engaging with the cognitive and emotional aspects of collective endeavours, such as urban planning and design.

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