

## **Planning the unforeseen: evolving through a rhizomatic process. Evidences from Brazilian planning experience**

Nilton Ricoy Torres

*USP - Universidade De São Paulo*

*nrtorres@usp.br*

This paper develops a cartography of planning by focusing on the contemporary experience of planning in Brazil. It understands planning as a multiple, relational and mixed social process for dealing with the contingencies of a dynamic and complex world. In this view, planning is not limited to the institutionalized activity of formal planners, but it also includes the action of informal networks of agents seeking to promote their own social life. Based on the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (1995, 2010), this paper understands planning as a 'rhizomatic' network of connections that evolves in several directions through the action of different actors, working along (lines of flight) in order to deconstruct (to deterritorialize) old social codes and re-territorialize them as a more democratic, inclusive and just society. This (rhizomatic) kind of planning proceeds through a haphazard process of growth with no hierarchical structure, no central command or control. The paper suggests that in the Brazilian case, emerging experiments with planning as a creative, interactive and fluid process may prove essential for keeping both, the process of social transformation and the ways by which planning is actualized and turned into a democratic, participative and collaborative assemblage. The paper takes as empirical case several formal and informal planning experiences carried out by many agents, acting either inside or outside institutional boundaries.

In an increasingly complex and conflicting world, government (planning included) institutions are often under constant pressure to adjust their decisions and procedures to the new social imperatives. This paper's objective is to identify the main elements interwoven in this process of adjustment and institutional transformation. In order to discuss that, the paper takes the propositions advanced by Deleuze and Guattari (1995), which advocates for a permanently changing and contingent world.

They propose a number of interrelated concepts intended to reveal the pervasiveness of the difference/heterogeneity in relation to the idea of unity and homogeneity. For them the world is but a succession of moving scenarios composed by an ever-increasing diversity of entities. In this ontology, concepts should do something very specific, and the aim of theorizing is not to explain what something is, but what it does. Essentially, it should inform how they might affect what other things (actants) do. With reference to planning, the aim is to understand what a concept does for, and how it affects planning practice.

Along these lines, planning becomes a task for dealing with a fluid and contingent plane and the emphasis is the process by which the change is created and evolves. “There is always the potential for unforeseen lines of flight to emerge” (Hillier, 2013). This means that planning as a social process, should not be led by models, ideal visions or prescriptions, but by a process of experimentation, which requires investigating problems, exploring relations between elements “and being open to what might happen if ....; what differences might emerge” (Hillier, 2013).

According to Hillier (2006), planning should approach the world from the ontology of *becoming*, rather than from that of *being*. While in the latter, the world is made up of objects with transcendental and stable principles, the former approaches the world from the ontology of becoming. That ontology contends that real objects are in a perpetual process of becoming something else and that the real world is a continual unfolding of events that do not necessarily move toward a specific end or final destiny. Planning working with ‘the world of becoming’ does not search for stability, certainty or fixed patterns, but manages to cope with and seeks unpredictable futures and moves by improvisation and creativeness, seeking to identify trends or scenarios from “disparate flows, energies, events, entities and spaces in more or less temporary alignments” (Hillier 2007). Planning according to Hillier (2007) “have had a pervasive commitment to an ontology of being which privileges end-states and outcomes, rather than an ontology of becoming which emphasizes movement, process and emergence.” Planning that privileges processes and movements deals with a continually emerging world in a fluid course of becoming.

This paper explores those ideas in the first part of the text by analyzing the main concepts that comprise their ontology. The second part evaluates the implication of their approach for planning practice. It discusses several experiments of planning as a free, collaborative and rhizomatic process as extracted from diverse contexts of the Brazilian experience with participatory planning. The aim is to set the basis for understanding planning not as an idealized activity of plan making, but as a democratic, relational and often unforeseen process for dealing with a complex and fast changing world.