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### 3. Lukes and Power: three dimensions and three criticisms

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#### Abstract

The chapter presents Stephen Lukes's influential theory of power, as outlined in his book *Power – A Radical View* (1974) and its extended revision (2005), and reviews critical debates around it. The uses of Lukes's theory in planning research are discussed, as well as insights to be drawn in the field from both the theory and its criticisms.

In his approach to power, Lukes draws on the behaviourist tradition, building especially on the work of Dahl, and Bachrach and Baratz, while discussing critically their limitations and expanding on their work. Through this dialogue Lukes develops his three-dimensional theory of power. The criticisms of his theory concentrate especially on the objectivism of his concept of 'real interests', actor orientation neglecting structural power, and the narrowness of viewing power as domination. To gain a broader view of power, complementary approaches are needed. As such an approach, Bateson's theory of power and especially his concept of 'double bind' are discussed.

#### Keywords

Conflict, decision-making, domination, double bind, planning, pluralism

#### <a> Introduction

Steven Lukes (born 1941) is a British political and social theorist, whose "radical view of power", presented in a small book in 1974, has been highly influential among political scientists. However, towards the turn of the century his theory of power received remarkable criticism, too, with the rise of postmodernist and Foucauldian ideas of power. Thus, his notion of 'real interests', focus on agency, and approach to power as domination were challenged by a relativist view of interests, and emphasis on the structural and productive sides of power. In 2005, Lukes revisited his theory with an expanded edition of his book, defended it especially against the popular Foucauldian view, but made some crucial corrections to it, too. While a new generation of Lukes's followers emerged, much of the criticism was maintained. In this chapter, I will present Lukes's three-dimensional view of power, first as he originally formulated it (1974), and then the revisions he made to it (2005). Then I will discuss the main criticisms to it. Before concluding remarks, I will shortly review the applications of Lukes's theory of power in planning research, and make some initial suggestions for resolving the limitations and dilemmas in his theory.

#### <a> Lukes's three-dimensional theory of power

Lukes's concept of power emphasizes analytical clarity, empirical applicability and critical normativity. For Lukes, power is exercised when *an actor 'A' affects another actor 'B' in a manner that is contrary to the latter's interests*. According to him, this basic definition is workable in

research,” (...) that is, empirically useful in that hypotheses can be framed in terms of it that are in principle verifiable and falsifiable (...)” (Lukes, 2005: 14). In addition, Lukes claims that the concept of power is unavoidably *value-dependent*: “(...) both its very definition and any given use of it, once defined, are inextricably tied to a given set of (probably unacknowledged) value-assumptions which predetermine the range of its empirical application (...)” (Lukes, 2005: 30). Therefore, for Lukes, power is an analytical concept, which is at once value-laden, too (Lukes, 2005: 59).

This definition narrows the use of the concept of power crucially. In Lukes’s terms, power is about control, domination and restraint – not about capacity, ability and enablement. Thus, Lukes conceives power as ‘power over’, not as ‘power to’. In his 1974 book *Power: A Radical View*, he argues against Hannah Arendt’s and Talcott Parsons’s ‘power to’ approaches by claiming that their “revisionary persuasive redefinitions of power” (Lukes, 2005, 34) are not in line with how power is traditionally understood and with the concerns usually associated with power. Thereby, “(...) the conflictual aspect of power - the fact that it is exercised *over* people - disappears altogether from view” (Lukes, 2005: 34). In Lukes’s terminology, the ‘power to’ instances of co-operative activity, where individuals and groups enable each other and gain shared capacities, are identified as instances of ‘influence’, not of ‘power’ (Lukes, 2005: 35).

The main target of Lukes’s criticism, however, is the behaviourist approach to power, held by the so-called pluralists in American political science in the 1960s and early 1970s, fronted by the work of Robert A. Dahl. But instead of dismissing the behaviourist approach as incompatible with his, as in the case of Arendt and Parsons, Lukes is merely criticizing it as a too shallow view of power. In this, he draws on Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, who in their influential article, *The Two Faces of Power* (1962), argue that behind the “face of power” that is directly observable in decision-making behaviour, there is a second, “hidden” face of power. Beyond asking, “who gets to decide”, Bachrach and Baratz ask, who gets to set the agendas in terms of which decisions are made. Controversial interests may thereby be advanced by removing them from the horizons of those opposing them. However, Lukes argues that there is an even “deeper”, third face of power. Beyond manipulating decision agendas and thereby un-addressing the interests of those subjected to such power, power can be exercised by shaping the very wants and desires of those subjected to it. There are then cultural, ideological and institutional influences in place that shape the interests of those worse off in society - resulting in their assent and sometimes even support to the circumstances unfavourable to them, against their “real interests”.

Thus, the ‘radical’ theory of power that Lukes developed in his 1974 book is, in his terms, “three-dimensional” (Lukes, 2005: 15). He perceived the pluralists’ view of power as one-dimensional, and Bachrach and Baratz’s “two-face view” two-dimensional. Through critically reflecting on these two views, Lukes built his own three-dimensional view. Next, I will review Lukes’s account of each view in turn. Then, I will review how Lukes elaborated and corrected his theory in the revised edition of his book, published in 2005.

### **<b> One-dimensional view**

In explaining the one-dimensional view to power, Lukes draws mainly on the work of Dahl. He basically agrees with Dahl’s concept of power: “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (Lukes, 2005: 16). So, the exercise of power is observable, when A gets B to act against its own interests. But how should the exercise of power be observed, and how should the actors’ interests be understood?

Dahl and other pluralists focused in their observations on behaviours in actual situations of political decision-making, such as city council meetings. The actors having power were identified as those who had succeeded to initiate proposals that had finally been adopted, or had vetoed proposals by other actors, when the actors had had conflicting interests. The actors having a largest share of successes were observed to be the most powerful.

Further, the pluralists understood interests as policy preferences. A conflict of interests is thereby understood as a conflict of policy preferences that are revealed in concrete decision-making situations. As Lukes notes, the pluralists were against the possibility that interests might be less articulate and observable in the behavior of the participants in decision-making, not to mention the possibility that they might be unaware of their own interests (Lukes, 2005: 19).

Lukes's conclusion of the one-dimensional view of power is that it "(...) involves a focus on behaviour in the making of decisions on issues over which there is an observable conflict of (subjective) interests, seen as express policy preferences, revealed by political participation" (Lukes, 2005: 19).

### **<b> Two-dimensional view**

As mentioned above, Bachrach and Baratz are critical of the one-dimensional view. Firstly, it "(...) takes no account of the fact that power may be, and often is, exercised by confining the scope of decision-making to relatively 'safe' issues. Secondly, it "(...) provides no *objective* criteria for distinguishing between 'important' and 'unimportant' issues arising in the political arena." (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962: 948.) Bachrach and Baratz are against the idea that a sound concept of power could be built on the assumption that power would be fully embodied and reflected in the actions involved in the making of concrete decisions (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962: 948). In the view of Bachrach and Baratz,

(...) power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A. To the extent that A succeeds in doing this, B is prevented, for all practical purposes, from bringing to the fore any issues that might in their resolution be seriously detrimental to A's set of preferences? (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962: 948.)

A may exercise power by participating in decision issues in the public domain (one-dimensional view), but also by working to keep certain issues from entering the public domain in the first place (two-dimensional view). When most successful, the latter is non-identifiable in the public processes of political decision-making.

To illustrate this, Lukes draws on Matthew Crenson's comparative study of policy-making in two neighbouring cities in Indiana, USA, that applied Bachrach and Baratz's approach. In the post-WWII decades, both cities had similar populations and suffered from similar levels of air pollution, but one of them, East Chicago, had adopted a policy to clear its air already in 1949, whereas for the other, Gary, it took 13 years longer to adopt a similar policy. Crenson seeks an explanation for the delay in Gary from the fact that the prosperity of the city was dependent on one company, US Steel, that had a strong party organization. In turn, when East Chicago adopted its air pollution control policy, there were a number of steel companies without a strong party organization. With convincing documentation, Crenson builds a case of US Steel having had prevented the air pollution issue from even being raised in Gary. To achieve this, no concrete action in the political arena had been

necessary for US Steel; its mere reputation as a powerful actor had been sufficient to inhibit critical voices on the local air quality. (Lukes, 2005: 45.)

Bachrach and Baratz call this *nondecision-making*: limiting decision-making "(...) to relatively non-controversial matters, by influencing community values and political procedures and rituals (...)" (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962: 949). They draw on E.E. Schattschneider's concept of '*mobilization of bias*': "All forms of political organization have a bias in favour of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others, because organization is the mobilization of bias. Some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out." (Schattschneider 1960: 71.) Bachrach and Baratz conclude: "(...) to the extent that a person or group - consciously or unconsciously - creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts, that person or group has power" (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962: 949).

Hence, from this two-dimensional viewpoint, both decision-making between alternative choices and nondecision-making of preventing controversial issues from entering the decision-making arena, are to be included in the analysis of power in politics and policy-making. Regarding the analysis of nondecision-making, it is crucial for Bachrach and Baratz that the analysis is able to identify those potential issues that are prevented from becoming actualized.

Lukes, however, criticizes this view of power as being limited to the presumption of an actual, identifiable conflict of interests, whether overt or covert. Despite expanding critically the approach to power from that of the pluralists, Bachrach and Baratz's approach still shares with them the idea of connecting power to conflict. Moreover, Lukes claims that Bachrach and Baratz, too, view interests as policy preferences that are consciously articulated and observable. (Lukes, 2005: 23- 24.) Lukes, in turn, argues that there is an even "deeper" dimension of power that prevents the "real interests" of those subjected to it from being articulated as policy preferences, and thereby prevents the identification of a conflict between preferences. "(...) the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place" (Lukes, 2005: 27).

### **<b> Three-dimensional view**

Lukes further criticizes Bachrach and Baratz for following the pluralists' Weberian approach in adopting a view of power that is methodologically too individualist. In Lukes's view, the 'actor' in question may be an organization (a group, a party, a corporation, a government, etc.), and hence no particular individuals exercising power may be identified. How, then, do these organizations exercise power? According to Lukes, there is more to it than decisions and choices made by individuals within these organizations. In explaining this, he returns to Schattschneider's idea of mobilization of bias. As exercise of power, the mobilization of bias ought to be understood as embodied in the constitution and purpose of the organization or system given. There is thus power that results from organizational or systemic effects, which cannot be attributed to individuals making decisions within these organizations or systems. (Lukes, 2005: 26.) "Decisions are choices consciously and intentionally made by individuals between alternatives, whereas the bias of the system can be mobilized, recreated and reinforced in ways that are neither consciously chosen nor the intended result of particular individuals' choices" (Lukes, 2005: 25).

According to Lukes, the bias of the system is sustained by deeper influences than by the mere choices made by individuals. Crucially, it is sustained "(...) by the socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, and practices of institutions, which may indeed be manifested by individuals' inaction. A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do,

but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants.” (Lukes, 2005: 27.) Ultimately such shaping of wants is part of processes of socialization.

Lukes argues that his three-dimensional view of power “(...) allows for consideration of the many ways in which potential issues are kept out of politics, whether through the operation of social forces and institutional practices or through individuals’ decisions” (Lukes, 2005, 28). This may be realized, and most effectively so, without any conflict of interests in place. According to Lukes, there is always a potentiality for a conflict to actualize, but that may never happen. “What one may have here is a latent conflict which consists in a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the *real interests* of those they exclude” (Lukes, 2005, 28). This notion of ‘real interests’ rests on Lukes’s position that “(...) people’s wants may themselves be a product of a system which works against their interests, and, in such cases, relates the latter to what they would want and prefer, were they able to make the choice” (Lukes, 2005: 38).

The difficulty is how can the researcher identify these real interests, if they are not identified by the actors themselves? This is a question to which Lukes gives considerable thought, bearing in mind his ambition of developing an analytically and empirically applicable theory of power. According to Lukes, the identification of real interests would ultimately have to rest on hypotheses, but such research designs are needed that would enable testing these hypotheses empirically (Lukes, 2005: 28-29). “It is not impossible to adduce evidence - which must, by nature of the case, be indirect - to support the claim that an apparent case of consensus is not genuine but imposed” (Lukes, 2005: 49).

When studying what it is that the exercise of power prevents people from doing, and even from thinking, Lukes suggests that researchers should examine how people in subordinate positions react to perceived opportunities when they occur in societal hierarchies (Lukes, 2005: 50). Evidence can be presented of relevant counterfactuals that are implicit under the domination of three-dimensional power: “One can take steps to find out what it is that people would have done otherwise” (Lukes, 2005: 52). But Lukes admits that such evidence cannot be conclusive, and justifying the relevant counterfactual may sometimes be extraordinarily difficult (Lukes, 2005: 49). Although the comparative case research approach of Brenson, discussed above, was more akin to studying two-dimensional power, Lukes sees it as an example of how three-dimensional power, too, could be examined. Providing a comparative lense to the air cleanup policy development of East Chicago enabled the identification of what had been suppressed in Gary. (Lukes, 2005: 48-49.)

An equal difficulty concerns the other end of the three-dimensional power relationship. How can evidence be found that a certain actor exercises three-dimensional power, when such an exercise may 1) be more about inaction than observable action, when it may 2) be unconscious, and when it may 3) be organizational or systemic? (Lukes, 2005: 52.) Lukes tackles each point in turn:

1. Inaction does not mean that we have a non-event with no features. If, in a given situation, an actor fails to make a certain choice, the consequences of this failure may become evident to the researcher, if s/he has hypothesized what the consequences could have been, had the actor made that choice. When hypothesized further, this inaction may be found to have led to further inaction, such as the non-appearance of a political issue, which would have emerged if an alternative course of action would have taken place. For Lukes, a case in point is the “causal nexus” between the inaction of US Steel and the public silence over air pollution in Gary. (Lukes, 2005: 53.)

2. How can one exercise power if one is doing it unconsciously? According to Lukes, there are many ways of being unconscious of what one is doing, but from the point of view of power analysis, the most problematic way is being unconscious of the consequences of one’s action. “Can A properly be

said to exercise power over B where knowledge of the effects of A upon B is just not available to A?" (Lukes, 2005: 53). Lukes's answer depends on whether A can be expected to have had the means to find out the potential consequences of its action beforehand. For example, had gathering further data and making further tests been ignored, when a drug company had brought a new drug to the market that was later on found to have dangerous side effects? If so, this would be a case of the drug company's power over the public. However, such an analysis needs to be critically aware of the trap of unfair hindsight wisdom, as in making posterior judgments on what culturally determined limits to cognitive innovation there had been in a certain historical situation. (Lukes, 2005: 53-54.)

3. The difficulty with organizations or systems exercising three-dimensional power is how to tell the difference between exercise of power and structural determination (Lukes, 2005: 54). This links to the age-old debate in sociology and political science between voluntarism and determinism, or agency and structure. In any organization or social system, the relationships between voluntary action and structural determination are complex. For Lukes, to speak about power is to speak about *human agency*: the choices that humans individually or collectively make or miss in their social contexts, and the constraints imposed and opportunities afforded by these contexts. "In speaking thus, one assumes that, although the agents operate within structurally determined limits, they none the less have a certain relative autonomy and could have acted differently" (Lukes, 2005: 57). To the degree there is room for agency, there is room for power - and "(...) within a system characterized by total structural determinism, there would be no place for power" (Lukes, 2005: 57).

(...) to identify a given process as an 'exercise of power', rather than as a case of structural determination, is to assume that it is in the exerciser's or exercisers' power to act differently. In the case of a collective exercise of power, or the part of a group, or institution, etc., this is to imply that the members of the group or institution could have combined or organized to act differently. (Lukes, 2005: 57.)

Following Lukes, as power is about human agency, it is also about *responsibility*: "(...) an attribution of power is at the same time an attribution of (partial or total) responsibility for certain consequences" (Lukes, 2005: 58). Thus, an actor that exercises power through its action or inaction is to be held responsible for the consequences thereby brought.

As we will see later on in this chapter, the notions above that Lukes attaches to his three-dimensional view of power – the postulation of real interests and the attribution of power to human agency – have been subjects of notable criticism. In the 2005 revision of his book he responds to his critics and refines his theory further. His response, however, did not silence his critics, and the refinements he made to his theory aroused some further criticism.

### **<b> Lukes's theory revised**

The revised edition of *Power: A Radical View* (2005) included the original book as its first chapter, and two new chapters, making the book three times longer than the original 50-page book. In the new chapters Lukes comments on the newer research discourses on power, especially around Michel Foucault, responds to commentaries on his work, and makes some refinements to his own theory of power.

Most crucially, Lukes redefines his concept of power, announcing that the theory he had previously developed is not, after all, about power *per se*, which he now sees as a broader concept. Instead of 'power', he now speaks of 'domination', arguing that his three-dimensional view is concerned with

“securing of compliance to domination” (Lukes, 2005: 109). In turn, his notion of power as a broader category now receives attributes in the sense of ‘power to’: “Power is a capacity not the exercise of that capacity (it may never be, and never need to be, exercised); and you can be powerful by satisfying and advancing others’ interests: (the original book’s) topic, power as domination, is only one species of power” (Lukes, 2005: 12).

With such narrowing down of the focus of his theory, as dealing with how the powerful secure the compliance of those they dominate, Lukes largely maintains its argumentation, although he acknowledges its view of power relations as too simplistic. Power relations are more complex than binary relations (A and B) between actors, each possessing unitary interests. The relations between actors are usually more multiple, and the actors’ own interests are also multiple, differentiated and conflicting. (Lukes, 2005: 12-13, 64.)

In defending his concept of real interests as necessary for identifying domination, Lukes turns to Baruch Spinoza. People are free when enabled to live according to their ‘dictates of nature’, and domination is about rendering them less free, “(...) by restricting their capabilities for truly human functioning” (Lukes, 2005: 118). Lukes suggests that the human ‘dictates of nature’ have an objective, transcultural basis, relying further on the ‘capabilities approach’ by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. The idea is that there are certain functions that characterize life as distinctively human, so that their absence means also the absence of human life. Furthermore, human beings are self-directed, shaping their lives in mutual cooperation and reciprocity. The assumption is that there are certain human capabilities that are central to any human life across cultures. While humans have all sorts of pursuits, these central capabilities are not instrumental to them but have value in themselves in making life human. (Lukes, 2005: 117-118.)

For Lukes, the concept of ‘interests’ refers to what is important in people’s lives (Lukes, 2005: 80). Interests may be conceived as necessary conditions of human welfare. “Here I have in mind what political philosophers variously call ‘primary goods’ (Rawls) or ‘resources’ (Dworkin) that satisfy basic needs’ (...) or else endow people with ‘basic human capabilities’ (Sen) or ‘central capabilities’ (Nussbaum)” (Lukes, 2005: 81). They include “(...) such basic items as health, adequate nourishment, bodily integrity, shelter, personal security, an unpolluted environment, and so on” (Lukes, 2005: 82). Which of these basic welfare interests are to be treated as generally valid human interests, and which are to be seen as specific to particular regions of culture? Rather than answering to this question, Lukes points to the importance of approaching welfare interests in this manner, which leads to treating them as objective instead of preference-dependent: “(...) conditions that damage your health are against your interests, in this sense, whatever your preferences, and even if you actively seek to promote them.” (Lukes, 2005: 82.)

For Lukes, real interests thus understood provide an external objective standpoint for identifying domination and its consequences. If domination is about constraining actors’ real interests, to the extent of inducing ‘false’ and ‘distorted’ ideas of what their real interests are, an objective standpoint is needed to tell the ‘false interests’ apart from the ‘true interests’. (Lukes, 2005: 121.)

At the core of human real interests is to be self-directed, to be able to make independent judgments and live accordingly - and this is what domination restricts. This notion is also the main source of Lukes’s criticism to Foucault. In Lukes’s reading, Foucault sees no escape from domination. By imposing regimes of truth, domination prevails everywhere in Foucault’s world, and there is no state available to humans for more self-directed living. (Lukes, 2005: 123.) With such a Nietzschean rhetoric, Foucault undermines “the model of the rational, autonomous moral agent”, in Lukes’s view (Lukes, 2005: 92). “If Foucault is right, then we must abandon ‘the emancipatory ideal of a society in



which individuals are free from the negative effects of power' and the conventional view that power can be based on the rational consent of its subjects" (Lukes, 2005: 92).

Lukes is much more sympathetic to Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory and its rootedness in ethnographic studies of social practices. Lukes views especially Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence' as similar to his own idea of domination in the third dimension - in how agents' dispositions in stratified social spaces become embodied and 'naturalized' in their 'habitus', in processes of socialization and cultural production of knowledge (Lukes, 2005: 141). Similarly to Lukes's own idea of domination being most successful when exercised unconsciously, Bourdieu's symbolic violence is conducted unconsciously by "strategies of distinction", which Bourdieu saw as the best of strategies, as they are not recognized as strategies at all (Bourdieu, 1987: 31). What remains unclear, however, is the degree of determination of this unreflective socialization and enculturation, and where, when and how cracks can be opened for actors' 'discursive' learning and self-transformation (Lukes, 2005: 143).

### **<a> Three criticisms**

There are three main criticisms to Lukes's theory of power. The first one concerns his concept of real interests, and the related assumption of an objective standpoint for the analyst. The critics ask, is the analyst thereby taking a superior position, assuming to know better what people's interests are than they themselves. A further critical question follows as to whether the researcher is thereby mixing analysis and normative critique.

The second criticism concerns Lukes's view of power as being exercised by human agents who should be assigned responsibility for the consequences of their exercise of power. While Lukes acknowledges the limitations of human agency within organizations and systems, the critics ask, whether he undermines the role of structural power, and whether focusing on actors' responsibilities obscures appropriate structural analysis.

The third criticism concerns Lukes's redefinition of power that he made in the revised edition of his book. Here, the critical debate concerns the plausibility of Lukes's distinction between 'power over' and 'power to', and the very foundations of his approach to power.

In this section, I will review all these main criticisms by drawing on Lukes's commentaries, as well as on later work by Lukes himself.

### **<b> Real interests: analysis or critique?**

As discussed above, the very idea of power in the third dimension requires that the analyst assumes an external standpoint, a position for separating people's real interests from those preferences that they are led to support (Lukes, 2005: 146). According to Colin Hay, Lukes thereby turns the analyst into a "(...) supreme arbiter of the genuine interest of the 'victim'" (Hay, 1997: 47). In his criticism to Lukes's original book, Hay notices that with his concept of real interests Lukes thus "(...) resurrects the spectre of false consciousness which many had thought exorcised from contemporary social and political theory" (Hay, 1997: 47). Lukes openly acknowledges this in the revised edition of his book:

'False consciousness' is an expression that carries a heavy weight of unwelcome historical baggage. But that weight can be removed if one understands it to refer, not to the arrogant assertion of a privileged access to truths presumed unavailable to

others, but rather to a cognitive power of considerable significance and scope: namely, the power to mislead. (Lukes, 2005: 149.)

In a later article, Lukes (2011) further defends the plausibility of the Marxist concept of false consciousness (see next chapter), and the critical approach implied in it. As an example of false consciousness, he mentions the “illusion of free markets”, referring to Bernard Harcourt’s work. Harcourt has traced the origins of perceiving market processes as ‘natural’ and government interventions as ‘artificial’ to Physiocrats in the eighteenth century. It involves the “illusion” that market transactions, if left undisturbed, would achieve equilibrium – an illusion, which matured in the nineteenth and twentieth century into a doctrine of the inherent efficiency of the markets. Such “naturalization” of markets is a powerful notion against normative judgments on the stark wealth distribution effects that are brought by them. Further, it masks the legal coercion involved, in providing the necessary legal and regulatory frameworks for the supposedly free markets to operate. Lukes, 2011: 25.)

In Lukes’s view, an analyst allowing him/herself to make such critical reflections on false consciousness, or on the inhibition of one’s real interests, does not entail assuming any epistemic privilege. The aim, after all, is “(...) to specify the various sources of these failures of reasoning and understanding and to ascertain to what extent they are irremediable and to what extent rectifiable.” (Lukes, 2011: 28) Such a normative task could not be undertaken, if the analyst would take a Foucault-inspired position of perceiving each thought construct as belonging to equally valid “regimes of truth”, determined by power (Lukes, 2011: 19).

However, Lukes’s approach makes it difficult to tell the difference between analysis and normative critique. This is another point of Hay’s criticism, as he argues that for Lukes already the identification of a power relationship is, in effect, to engage in critique (Hay, 1997: 48). “Within such a schema power is not so much an analytical category as a critical category” (Hay, 1997: 49). In Hay’s view, Lukes is close to confusing analysis and critique, as sometimes Lukes is aware of the value-laden nature of the concept of power, and thereby the unavoidability of being evaluative when identifying domination; but then in turn he also argues for developing an empirical basis for the identification of real interests, thereby emphasizing the approach to power as an analytical concept (Hay, 2011: 49).

Hay argues that conflating the identification of power and the critique of its exercise leads to perceiving power as “(...) a purely pejorative concept by definitival fiat” (Hay, 1997: 49). Power thus defined cannot be legitimately and responsibly exercised. “The essence of power is negative, the purpose of critique to expose power relations as a potential means to their elimination” (Hay, 1997: 49). Lukes responds to this criticism in his 2005 revision by broadening his concept of power to include legitimate and capability-building forms of power, while reframing the subject of his earlier theory to be merely about “one species” of power, that is, domination.

However, Clare Heyward (2007) and Keith Dowding (2006) argue that the actual problem of Lukes’s theorizing is not the conflation of analysis and normative critique. Heyward claims: “If we are to move towards a complete analysis of all political issues, we must accept the normative aspects of any theoretical framework and its most central political concepts, including the conception of power” (Heyward, 2007: 54). Dowding agrees: “Lukes, just like anyone else, can analyse and evaluate the situation of others. To suggest that people are always the best judge of their own interests and have privileged moral status over their own preferences is to deny any sort of normative social analysis.” (Dowding, 2006: 137.)

The problem, they both argue, is Lukes's focus on agency at the expense of structure, especially in the original version of his theory. Neglecting structural power leads to deeming all those who gain at the expense of others as dominant, and viewing everyone who loses as being dominated by someone (Dowding, 2006: 137). Peter Morriss speaks of "paranoid fallacy"; of assuming that if people lack power, this must be a result of them being dominated by someone – a criticism which Lukes acknowledges in his revised edition (Lukes, 2005: 68). Dowding appropriately asks: "Must the dominant need to know what they are doing or can their privilege be a by-product of forces they do not understand?" (Dowding, 2006: 137).

Dowding suggests an alternative approach, pointing towards structural power analysis. He proposes breaking down values to the component parts of *beliefs* and *desires*. In Dowding's view, domination is about beliefs contradicting desires. People have certain desires, but they may have been socialized or indoctrinated into holding certain beliefs that work against these desires, or lead astray from them. (Dowding, 2006: 139.)

Given someone's desires, their false beliefs may lead them to act in ways which do not further those desires. (...) So we have two ways of explaining objective interests, one based on false belief, and one based upon the (contingent) structure of the situation someone faces. However, Lukes wants a further notion of objective interest than those suggested here. He not only wants to look at the situation of people and their beliefs: he also wants to criticise their desires. (Dowding, 2006: 138.)

The "illusion of free markets", discussed above, could be approached as a deep-seated cultural belief that, at least to a degree, brings undesirable outcomes, when exceedingly applied in various realms of society - such as real estate markets, the freedom of which is conditioned by various structural factors, irrespective of whether the public sector intervenes in them or not (see next section). But is there anyone to be held responsible for these undesirable outcomes?

### **<b> Actors or structures?**

Lukes associates power with responsibility. It means that power concerns human agency, either individual or collective (Hayward & Lukes, 2008: 5-6). According to Lukes, power is exercised by agents, albeit within the constraints of their structural circumstances. Understanding social life thus requires approaching it "(...) as an interplay of power and structure, a web of possibilities for agents, whose nature is both active and structured, to make choices and pursue strategies within given limits, which in consequence expand and contract over time" (Lukes, 2005: 68-69).

Lukes claims that depending on the structural constraints and their complexity at play, the powerful agents' responsibility may be *moral* but often also *political*. We can place the *moral* blame on discriminatory landlords and corrupt planning officials – but, at different levels of governance, we place *political* responsibility on planners, decision-makers and other key actors who, individually or jointly, we perceive to have a capacity to make a difference in the face of societal problems, but who fail to do so. (Lukes, 2005: 67.) "(...) we can and often do hold agents responsible for consequences they neither intend nor positively intervene to bring about" (Hayward & Lukes, 2008: 7).

In an article constructed in the form of dialogue, Lukes and Clarissa Hayward discuss the example of the poor and racially oppressed that are prevented access to decent and affordable housing. Lukes claims: "Insofar as this problem is due to the action or inaction of identifiable individuals or groups or institutions, that, by acting otherwise, could have made a difference, then it makes sense to see

the latter as powerful because responsible” (Hayward & Lukes, 2008: 7). Yet, he admits that often it is very difficult and sometimes even impossible to trace where particular contributions and responsibilities lie (Hayward & Lukes, 2008: 7).

Hayward, in turn, reminds that neither deindustrialization, nor the flight of well-to-do whites from the older American cities to suburbs, was an intentional coordinated process. The combined effects on those ‘left behind’ were not caused by some ‘bad men’, but structural forces. (Hayward & Lukes, 2008: 9-10.) Hayward argues that “(...) if the aim is not to wag a moralizing finger, but to criticize and inform efforts to change relations of power and domination, then it is necessary to examine the structural constraints that help shape those relations” (Hayward & Lukes, 2008: 10-11). Such a structural examination of power leads one to address, not only moral, but also political responsibility.

Morriss, in turn, argues that evaluative critique of societal structures is qualitatively very different from distributing responsibility to agents, even if it were of political nature. It demands a distinction between *being powerless* and *being dominated*, which Lukes blurs, in Morriss’ view (Morriss, 2006: 130). While indeed there are people who lack power because of being dominated by identifiable actors, there are also people who are powerless *without* being dominated, but because of structural incapacitation. If this powerlessness is to be viewed as injustice, then the focus should be on how to change the social set-up reproducing such powerlessness. This does not require identifying certain agents that could be assigned with responsibility:

Many Marxists used to argue that capitalism is unjust *even though* (or, perhaps, *particularly because*) no blame could attach to any individuals; that was thought to be precisely why the whole system had to be swept away. That position may (or may not) have been factually inaccurate, but it was certainly not logically incoherent. Hence, we do need to keep social evaluation separate from individual responsibility; it is a fault of Lukes’ analysis that such a gap seems impossible within it. (Morriss, 2006: 130.)

Morriss argues that Lukes’s difficulties in locating power in the agency-structure interrelationship follow from his insistence to work with the ‘power-over’ approach. The structural dimension falls out of its grasp: ‘structural power’ appears paradoxical, or structures have to be assigned responsibility for exercising power over people. But, in Morriss’ view, this dilemma fades away when the approach is shifted to ‘power to’, and when evaluation of social structures is relieved from the burden of attributing responsibility: “(...) for there is no difficulty in saying that structures limit the ends that people can obtain (and should, for that reason, be altered).” (Morriss, 2006: 130.)

### **<b> Power over or power to?**

In Morriss’ view, the essence of power is ‘power to’: the ability to effect outcomes – not the ability to affect others (Morriss, 2006: 126). In his revised book, Lukes admits this: “(...) a better definition of power in social life than that offered (in the original book) is in terms of agents’ abilities to bring about significant effects (...)” (Lukes, 2005: 65). A local government, for example, exercises power over people in making decisions on zoning plans; yet it does so not for the purpose of dominating people, but more likely for the purpose of attaining certain outcomes (such as well functioning and sustainable built environment, management of estimated population growth, fair treatment of land-owners’ property rights, attractiveness and competitiveness of the municipality for investors and developers, etc.). The local government’s ‘power over’ is thereby exercised as a means for achieving

certain ends ('power to'). The intention is not to dominate the constituents of the local government subjected to its authority, but to empower them. Unlike domination, such form of power over can be seen as legitimate authority.

What Lukes ended up doing in his revision was that he reframed his theory to concern only a sub-set of power: 'power over'. Actually not even that, since by rearticulating his theory as one about "securing of compliance to domination", his concern was only on a sub-set of 'power over' - bypassing the type of 'power over' that is exercised as instrumental to 'power to'. (Morriss, 2006: 131.) Such as legitimate authority of public planning and decision-making. Thereby Lukes's 'domination' misses what he himself understood power to be about fundamentally: the ability to bring about significant effects – not about securing compliance. Hence Morriss concludes: "He can separate his concept of domination altogether from that of power, and retain intact the three-dimensional view – although it will not, of course, now be a three-dimensional view of *power*" (Morriss, 2006: 134).

### **<a> Lukes and power in planning research: a way forward?**

Besides political science, Lukes has been influential in planning research, too, although - similarly to political science - his impact has been overshadowed by that of Foucault. Most probably, it is through John Forester's influential work on *planning in the face of power* (Forester, 1982; 1989) that Lukes has been introduced to the community of planning researchers. Forester applied Lukes's theory in elaborating the difference between structural and voluntary misinformation in planning. Regarding the latter, he distinguished different types of misinformation available for planners in their interactions with stakeholders, by using Jürgen Habermas's criteria of validity of claims in communication (managing comprehension, trust, consent or knowledge). (Forester, 1989: 27-47.)

However, only a few planning researchers have used Lukes's three-dimensional view explicitly, in analysing power in planning. These include Mhairi Aitken's (2010) case study of how public participation on a planning proposal for wind power development in Scotland was managed; and John Sturzaker's (2010) case study of how power was exercised by rural elites in the English countryside, to prevent new housing development. Additionally, Lukes's approach has been used in combination with other approaches. With Mark Shucksmith, Sturzaker added the perspective of Bourdieu's 'symbolic violence', in studying further how the rural elites in England, by their discursive uses of 'sustainability', warded off new housing (Sturzaker & Shucksmith, 2011). In turn, Raine Mäntysalo and Inger-Lise Saglie combined Lukes's three dimensions of power and Fritz Scharpf's types of political legitimacy, in investigating how power was exercised in different dimensions to legitimize preliminary partnership arrangements in urban housing planning in Norway and Finland. With Kaisa Schmidt-Thomé, Mäntysalo associated Lukes's theory of power with Gregory Bateson's theories of power and learning, coming up with an analytical framework where Lukes's three dimensions of power are combined with Bateson's three levels of learning (Schmidt-Thomé & Mäntysalo, 2014). With a case study of public resistance and empowerment against a massive development project in the Stuttgart railway station area in Germany, Schmidt-Thomé and Mäntysalo sought to reveal the value of Bateson's theoretical work in complementing Lukes's limited view of power.

Indeed, in view of the main criticisms against Lukes's theory, discussed above, Bateson's approach to power, outlined in his theory of alcoholism (Bateson, 1987), offers a promising broader perspective to power. Firstly, the view of 'power over' as a sub-set of 'power to', is understood, in a Batesonian

reading, as a subsystem of the broader ecosystem of 'power to' of human activity. The application of Bateson's view in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, outlined by Yrjö Engeström (1987; Engeström et al., 1999), expands the focus on human activity to historically and culturally evolved 'activity systems' of organizations. In these activity systems, 'power over' is a necessary form of power, in divisions of roles, authority relations and institutional rules applied, being instrumental to their 'power to'. But this 'power over' is inclined to lead to contradictions where this instrumentality is lost, turning to domination that threatens the sustained performance of the activity system. These contradictions may lead to systemic *double binds* – a key concept in Bateson's work, also adopted by Bourdieu (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1995). An alcoholic may be faced with a double bind situation - 'hit the bottom' - upon realizing that his/her repeated attempts of gaining 'power over' the 'bottle' have led him/her to a state of mental and/or physical incapacity, loss of 'power to'. An organization, in turn, may be faced with a double bind situation, when some of the core beliefs that inform its operations cease to reflect its present-day operational contexts, either due to becoming outdated or overly stretching the realm of their applicability. Then a cultural-historical analysis of these core beliefs and their contextual implications is needed, to build critical reflectivity on the repeated mismatches between core beliefs and contemporary contexts in the organizational activity.

In my view, the concept of double bind can be explained by referring to Dowding's idea of values as consisting of beliefs and desires. As discussed above, in Dowding's explanation, unreasonable conditions result when the beliefs generally held determine living and working arrangements in ways that are contradictory to the more profound desires held. When unreasonable beliefs are maintained by domination in an activity system, the more profound ecosystemic desires connected to the sustenance of the activity system are threatened. Take the belief in the infallibility of the free market. Associate this belief with a realm, where markets are dominated at the outset, the goods to be traded are unique and bound to their sites, access to them is unevenly distributed and historically determined, and the very functioning of the market in this realm is dependent on public interventions via *planning*. Generally real estate markets are such structurally constrained realms. Treating them as infallible free markets might threaten their sustenance as market systems (see f.ex. Alexander, 2001; Klostermann, 1985; Moore, 1978; Virtanen, 1991). When this happens, analysing the double bind of the dysfunctional real estate market inappropriately treated as free market requires a cultural-historical analysis of the origins of the belief of the free market and the societal circumstances implied in it – in relation to the rules, arrangements and conditions actually at play in a given real estate market. Hence, a *structural* analysis is needed, to offer the *actors* insights that are necessary for generating more appropriate beliefs, in guiding the performance of real estate markets and taking part in them.

Moreover, postulating an external real interest is not necessary, when the analysis is focused on the subsystem/ecosystem double binds within the studied activity system itself - such as the subsystemic 'free market' belief recurrently contradicting the ecosystemic desire for the sustained functioning of the real estate market. The incapacitating effects of domination, deteriorating the ecosystemic 'power to' of the given activity system, can be analysed by examining the inner contradictions and double binds of the system itself - whether we are interested in the real estate market system or any other activity system.

### **Concluding remarks**

As the critical discussion around Lukes's theory reveals, the theory is rather about domination as exercised in three dimensions, dismissing a broader view of power regarding its capability-building

aspects. While the criticisms on Lukes's theory of power reveal its limitations and shortcomings, there are some important insights to be gained in planning research from both Lukes's theory and its criticisms. Firstly, take Lukes's approach to 'interests', as including "(...) such basic items as health, adequate nourishment, bodily integrity, shelter, personal security, an unpolluted environment, and so on" (Lukes, 2005: 82). With such an understanding of interests, 'real interests' represent for Lukes that of taking an analytical "objective" standpoint for identifying domination and its consequences – rather than assuming the necessity of determining real interests in transcendental terms. The correlation to the concept of 'public interest' in planning is evident. The concept of public interest is controversial, the approaches to it are varying (such as utilitarian, unitary, rights-based and dialogical) with even contradictory derivations, but, nonetheless, the concept is still found necessary in evaluating and legitimizing public planning (e.g. Alexander, 2002; Campbell & Marshall, 2002; Moroni, 2004). When associating Lukes's concept of real interests with the concept of public interest in planning research interested in domination, the implication would be to draw on the standpoint of public interest negatively in the sense of identifying domination that does *not* correspond with the public interest; while the normativity of one's research interest for arriving to this "objective" standpoint would have to be openly revealed.

Secondly, the distinction between domination and legitimate authority is crucial when studying the limitations and resources for the justification of public planners' exercise of 'power over'. Lukes's theory, and Forester's application of it, sensitize planning researchers to planners' varying possibilities for exercising domination over other actors involved in and subjected to planning. But public planners' 'power over', provided to them through their societal and institutional positions and professional expertise, is also unavoidable and indeed societally necessary. In Habermasian terms, it is part of the necessary rationalization of society (Habermas, 1984), which in its appropriate forms is instrumental to communal and societal 'power to'. This would warrant legitimacy of the authority of the public planner.

Thirdly, despite Morriss' claim that focusing on political responsibility might obscure appropriate structural analysis, when reasons for powerlessness of certain groups are structural and not the outcome of certain actors' domination, identification of political responsibility is still necessary *after* the structural analysis has been made. Structures, public institutions and governmental policies, are not immutable, but may be subjected to reforms when revealed to produce unjust and unsatisfactory outcomes. Then it is the political decision-makers, and public planners on whose advice they rely, to be identified as responsible for making and managing such revisions. For *normative* planning research interested in structural power, a sufficient research result may not be the structural analysis as such. There may well be a further motivation of gaining insights on what public planners, having a degree of power and thereby *responsibility* to amend the structures, *can do*, when the structures are found to lead to unjust powerlessness.

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