

**THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

**TO**

**URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING**

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**Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Science**  
**Graduate School of the Environment, Macquarie University**  
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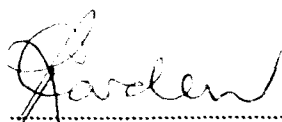


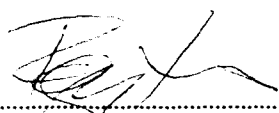
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This thesis represents a major part of the prescribed program of study.

**CONTENTS**

<b>PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	iv
<b>SYNOPSIS</b>	vi
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	1
1.1 Purpose	1
1.2 Methodology	1
1.3 Findings	4
1.4 Conclusion	5
<b>2. "BEING" IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING THEORY</b>	7
2.1 "Being" in environmental theory	9
2.2 "Being" in planning theory	19
2.3 Changes in assumptions about "being"	26
<b>3. "KNOWING" IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING THEORY</b>	29
3.1 "Knowing" in environmental theory	33
3.2 "Knowing" in planning theory	50
3.3 Changes in assumptions about "knowing"	57
<b>4. "ACTING" IN PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL THEORY</b>	61
4.1 "Acting" in urban form theory	64
4.2 "Acting" in planning control theory	72
4.3 "Acting" in environmental control theory	79
4.4 Changes in assumptions about "acting"	88
<b>5. PHILOSOPHY IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING THEORY</b>	92
5.1 Changes in environmental and planning theory over time	92
5.2 Being, knowing and acting over time	94
<b>6. CONCLUSION</b>	98
6.1 Findings and conclusions	98
6.2 Comments on methodology	100
6.3 Comments on purpose	101
<b>7. BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	102

**TABLES**

TABLE 1:	Nature in environmental theory over time
TABLE 2:	Society (Western) in planning theory over time
TABLE 3:	Uncertainty in environmental decision theory over time
TABLE 4:	Rationality in planning decision theory over time
TABLE 5:	Determinism in urban form theory over time
TABLE 6:	Determinism in planning control theory over time
TABLE 7:	Control in environmental instrument theory over time
TABLE 8:	Environmental and planning Theories over time.

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis aims to contribute in a small way to the development of more ecologically sustainable cities. It is based on an assumption that both the environmental and planning policies of urban regions will play important roles in achieving this goal even though many other forces will influence the environmental (and economic and social) outcomes in cities. Research on other influences such as economic policy has had to be left to more appropriately qualified observers of the city. The focus of this work on environmental planning *theory* rather than practice means that it also leaves the hard work of evaluating the effectiveness of environmental planning policies "on the ground" to others. So what does this thesis contribute?

To use an analogy, achieving more sustainable urban development can be viewed as a journey for which both environmental planning theory and practice are needed to reach the ultimate destination. If only environmental planning *theory* is used for the journey, then the result can be likened to trying to get somewhere without any means of *transport*. If only environmental planning *practice* is available for the journey, the result can be compared to trying to reach a destination without the help of a *map or compass*. This thesis develops a "map" of environmental and planning theories from the last one hundred years and provides a "compass" which shows in which direction environmental planning theory has been going during that period of time.

The thesis incorporates information on a large number of environmental and planning theories organised in a way to show how they sit in relation to one another. The theories are organised into seven separate (but often intersecting) narratives based on their subject matter. Like a map, the thesis has had to omit the detailed information which would make an overview impossible or incomprehensible. Also like a map, its preparation does not deny the validity or usefulness of some other types of ~~syntheses~~ <sup>analyses</sup> of related information. This thesis ends up constructing a map which shows the philosophical relationships between environmental planning theories.

The thesis also includes information organised to show the direction environmental planning theory has come from and where it is likely to go if it stays on course. Hence, the narratives in the thesis are *histories*. Like a compass, the histories have to omit the details of the twists, turns, branches and dead-ends on the many paths between two points on the map or the overall sense of direction would be lost. This thesis provides a highly

simplified version of change over time in environmental planning theory without denying that the process of change itself is much more complex.

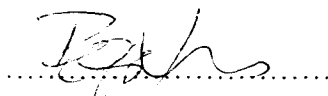
By drawing on the ideas of planning, environmental studies, history, geography and philosophy to contribute to urban environmental policy development, this thesis takes the risk of satisfying scholars in none of these fields. The risk has been taken in the hope that efforts to improve understanding between these disciplines can be of value in solving the complex problems communities face on the journey towards ecological sustainability.

I wish to acknowledge the continual assistance and encouragement I have received from my current supervisor, Richard Cardew, and my previous supervisor, Prof. Alistair Gilmour, both of the Graduate School of the Environment, Macquarie University.

I also wish to acknowledge the moral support provided by my partner, David Roser.

**Declaration**

I declare that the material contained in this thesis, except where duly acknowledged, is my own and that this work has not been submitted for a degree at any other university or institution.

  
.....  
Peggy James, March 1997

## SYNOPSIS

This thesis documents and examines seven histories of environmental and planning thought over the last century, drawing on Yiftachel's (1989) classification of planning theories. It provides evidence that environmental and planning theory over time is moving:

- away from the understanding of nature as an object;
- away from the notion of a unitary public interest in planning theory;
- toward an increasing recognition of uncertainty in environmental decisionmaking;
- away from instrumental rationality in planning decisionmaking;
- away from hard determinism in urban design *and* planning control theory;
- away from direct pollution controls in environmental policy theory.

This thesis argues that these changes can be understood in the context of broader philosophical shifts around the issues of being, knowing and acting, involving a re-evaluation of the relationships between:

- subject and object;
- value and fact;
- cause and effect.

It suggests that the changes indicate a shift away from philosophical rationalism in policy theory over time. The thesis concludes that neither the extremes of rationalism or relativism provide a sound theoretical foundation for environmental planning. It suggests that future theoretical development is likely to come from the interaction of theoretical approaches influenced by non-Western cultures, and innovations produced by local cultures adapting existing theories to meet their specific needs.