



Property rights in planning theory: A critical review

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between planning and property rights is foundational to how land is governed, accessed and contested, but its treatment across major planning theories remains uneven and fragmented. This paper critically reviews how property rights are conceptualised across ten influential planning paradigms, highlighting the assumptions and inconsistencies that shape this engagement. Drawing on insights from legal theory, institutional economics and critical geography, it approaches property as a socially embedded and institutionally mediated arrangement of entitlements, obligations and exclusions. Five analytical lenses structure the comparison: the conceptualisation of property; ownership and the public-private boundary; the roles of key actors; power and spatial justice; and planning's transformation of property rights through regulatory and institutional intervention. The analysis shows that engagement with property varies according to the explanatory, prescriptive and critical purposes of different theories. Marxist, Coasian and neoliberal planning foreground property as a structuring institution, whereas rational, incremental and collaborative approaches often address it through technical, procedural or governance concerns without consistently examining its distribution or legitimacy. These orientations shape how planning is understood as a mode of governance, particularly in relation to land commodification, state authority and socio-spatial inequality. The paper concludes that more explicit integration of property's institutional and distributive dimensions would strengthen planning theory's capacity to address ownership, justice and institutional transformation.

1. Introduction

The relationship between planning and property rights is intricate, deeply intertwined, and mutually constitutive. Far from being separate domains, planning and property rights constantly influence and redefine each other, both in theory and practice (Guelton et al., 2026; Alexander, 2001; Needham, 2006; Gerber & Rissman, 2012). On one side, planning has a strong impact on how property rights are arranged (Needham, 2006). One of the main aims of planning can be seen as the clarification and institutionalisation of property rights (Alterman, 2010). Through land use plans and policy instruments such as zoning, planning seeks to define, allocate, and sometimes redistribute rights over land to individuals, groups, or communities (Hengstermann & Hartmann, 2018). These actions affect not only who can access land but also for what purposes and under what conditions. In doing so, planning not only mediates existing entitlements but also participates in the continual production and transformation of property itself, altering what rights

exist, how they are exercised, and to whom they accrue.

Planning, in this sense, functions as a governance framework that defines how land and property should be used, developed, and managed. The allocation and distribution of property rights through planning are often influenced by a complex mix of historical legacies, economic rationales, normative conceptions of justice, and dominant political ideologies (Campbell, 2016; Davy, 2012). For instance, planning may reflect liberal principles by protecting individual ownership and market-driven land development (Guelton et al., 2026), or it may embody collectivist ideals by encouraging communal rights or public stewardship (Rodela et al., 2025). The resulting arrangements of property rights, especially those to use, develop, exclude, and transfer, are key in determining land values, investment motives, and development paths (Davy, 2024; Hengstermann & Götze, 2023). As such, planning institutions operate as key sites where property norms, expectations, and obligations are negotiated and stabilised, shaping socio-spatial development in profound and lasting ways.

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Economists associated with New Institutional Economics, most notably Nobel laureate Ronald Coase (1937, 1960), have long emphasised the centrality of clearly defined property rights in facilitating efficient market outcomes. Coase's theorem suggests that, in a world where rights are well-defined and enforceable, planning or public intervention would be largely unnecessary. Yet, in practice, property rights are often incomplete, overlapping, or contested, especially in complex urban settings, which justifies planning as a means of correcting market failures by clarifying entitlements and responsibilities (Webster & Lai, 2003; Shahab et al., 2017). Therefore, new institutionalist scholars have positioned planning not as an obstacle to markets but as an enabling mechanism that structures them by institutionalising property relations (Ploegmakers & van der Krabben, 2012; Gerber, 2016; Havel, 2020). From this perspective, planning is itself a form of institutional engineering: it specifies the boundaries of rights, allocates development capacity, and shapes the incentives facing both public and private actors.

On the other hand, the nature and structure of property rights regimes significantly influence how planning itself is conceived and operationalised. Property rights form the legal and normative foundation upon which planning decisions are made and implemented (Alterman, 2010). Whether rights are held privately, communally, or through hybrid arrangements has a profound impact on land governance systems, the authority of planning institutions, and the societal legitimacy of spatial interventions. Legal traditions, in particular, play a pivotal role in shaping planning cultures (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2015). Some scholars investigated the extent to which law and legal processes have influenced planning systems and land policy (Nadin & Stead, 2008; Berisha et al., 2020; Davies, 1994; Newman & Thornley, 1996). Comparative scholarship has shown how legal frameworks, such as English common law versus continental civil law, generate divergent planning systems. Booth (2016) provides an example, tracing the distinctiveness of British spatial planning to its foundations in common law, which contrasts with the more codified and technocratic planning culture of France, rooted in the Napoleonic legal tradition. Thus, planning systems both reflect and reproduce the property relations that underpin their legal and ideological foundations.

These insights underscore that property rights are not static legal constructs or neutral economic instruments, but dynamic socio-spatial arrangements through which resources are accessed, controlled, and contested (Needham, 2012). A substantial and diverse body of legal and planning scholarship has shown that property rights reflect power relations, institutional norms, and historical trajectories, and that property and planning are mutually constitutive (Fawaz & Moutaz, 2017; Fawaz, 2017; Thorpe, 2020, 2022; Dorries, 2022; Bouwer & Gimson, 2022). Yet these insights have not been consistently integrated across the major planning paradigms examined here. The gap addressed is therefore not an absence of property-planning scholarship, but the uneven and often implicit treatment of property within canonical planning theory and the lack of systematic comparison across its principal strands.

This paper aims to address this gap by conducting a critical review of how key theoretical traditions in planning have addressed, or failed to address, property rights considerations, focusing specifically on planning theories developed within institutional contexts where private property forms the dominant legal foundation. It examines a range of classic and influential works across 10 major strands of planning theory, including rational planning, incremental planning, advocacy planning, collaborative planning, strategic planning, neoliberal planning, Marxist planning, agonistic planning, Coasian planning, and transformative planning. The paper assesses: (a) how each theory engages with property rights; (b) the roles assigned to key actors, including planners, landowners, developers, and communities; (c) the normative assumptions concerning ownership and the public-private boundary; (d) the extent to which each paradigm addresses the relationship between property rights, power, and spatial justice; and (e) how planning practices actively transform property regimes through regulatory, administrative,

and institutional interventions.

Rather than merely identifying whether property rights are acknowledged within these paradigms, the analysis examines how the epistemological and normative foundations of each planning theory shape the interpretation, prioritisation, and transformation of property rights within planning practice. In doing so, the paper reveals the uneven and often implicit treatment of property rights across different strands of planning theory. Some paradigms treat property rights as fixed legal constraints, while others engage more explicitly with their political, distributive, or institutional dimensions. Yet few offer a sustained account of how planning practices are mediated by property rights, how legal arrangements shape the planner's authority, or how normative commitments to equity, participation, or sustainability intersect with foundational questions of land ownership and control.

The paper is structured as follows. It begins with a brief overview of property theory, followed by an examination of 10 major planning paradigms, emphasising their origins, evolution, and core arguments. The paper then assesses how each paradigm engages with property rights, utilising the previously mentioned analytical framework. This is succeeded by a comparative discussion, highlighting key patterns of engagement and omission. The paper concludes by proposing a research agenda that positions property rights as a core concern for planning theory, vital for understanding the material, legal, and institutional foundations of spatial governance.

2. Overview of property theory

Property theory comprises an interdisciplinary body of scholarship examining the legal, economic, political, and institutional dimensions of relationships to resources. It draws on legal theory, economics, political theory, and human geography to understand how access to and control over land, housing, and natural resources are distributed, exercised, and contested (Hohfeld, 1913; Slaev & Shahab, 2026). This body of work conceives of property not merely as a tangible object or parcel of land (Badenhorst, 2023), but as a social and legal relationship, manifested through a bundle of entitlements that are recognised, enforced, and often contested within specific institutional and historical contexts (Macpherson, 1999; Alexander, 1992a; Gray & Gray, 2009; Bromley, 1991). At its core, property theory is concerned with who is entitled to do what with which resources, under what conditions, and with what consequences for others and for society at large. It therefore provides a conceptual language for analysing how different actors assert, negotiate, or challenge claims over land, and how these claims are authorised or constrained by institutional arrangements.

A foundational insight of this tradition is that property is not a singular, absolute entitlement, but comprises a constellation of distinct yet interrelated rights. Following the influential analysis by Honoré and Guest (1961), property includes rights such as possession, use, management, income derivation, capital transfer, exclusion, and residual claims. These rights may be disaggregated, shared among different parties, limited by regulation, or shaped by social norms. This 'bundle of rights' perspective breaks with the classical liberal notion of full and exclusive dominion (Hohfeld, 1913), and instead foregrounds the institutional and relational nature of ownership (Schlager & Ostrom, 1992; Sikor et al., 2017; Bromley, 1991; Merrill & Smith, 2001). It also facilitates greater analytical clarity in understanding hybrid or non-Western tenure systems, where use, access, and control are distributed among households, communities, or the state in complex ways (Meinzen-Dick & Mwangi, 2009). By decomposing ownership into constituent elements, the approach enables planners and scholars to identify which specific rights are affected by regulation, and how these changes alter the incentives and capacities of different actors.

A further implication of the bundle-of-rights approach is that property rights are never exercised in isolation but within wider legal and institutional frameworks. Private ownership is qualified by overlapping claims and obligations arising from planning, environmental, and other

laws (Layard, 2025). Rights to exclude may, for example, be curtailed by public rights of way, while the ability to develop is commonly conditional on regulatory approval. Property should therefore be understood not as a self-contained governance arrangement, but as a set of legal and social relations whose content is shaped through interactions among owners, users, public authorities, and wider communities (Alexander, 2001; Davy, 2012; Ellickson, 1993; Thorpe, 2022). These external rules and norms define the scope of ownership and mediate relationships between private claims and public interests (Rose, 2019).

Within some strands of new institutional economics, clearly specified property rights are regarded as important to market coordination (Derkacz & Shahab, 2020). Coase (1960) argued that, under the hypothetical conditions of zero transaction costs and clearly defined rights, private bargaining could internalise externalities irrespective of the initial allocation of rights. This argument has informed efficiency-based approaches to property, although its interpretation and policy implications remain contested. Other institutional economists, including North (1990) and Williamson (2000), emphasise how bounded rationality, information asymmetries, and enforcement problems complicate market exchange. In urban contexts, rights are often incomplete, uncertain, or overlapping (Hardin, 1994), creating potential roles for public institutions in coordinating claims, addressing externalities, and reducing transaction costs (Webster & Lai, 2003; Alexander, 2005; Hou et al., 2020). From these perspectives, planning can structure markets by shaping the boundaries, content, and enforceability of rights.

Beyond efficiency concerns, legal and planning scholars, alongside anthropologists and critical geographers, have highlighted the cultural and symbolic dimensions of property. Ownership is frequently bound up with identity, belonging, community recognition, and agency, including through everyday practices in urban space (Hann, 1998; Blomley, 2013; Thorpe, 2018, 2020). This perspective is particularly relevant to Indigenous land claims and postcolonial property reforms, where legal frameworks confront alternative ontologies of land and resource use (Bhandar, 2018; Dorries, 2022). These perspectives show that property operates not only as an allocative device but also as an institution of legitimacy and social ordering, helping to explain why land conflicts may persist even when formal rights appear clearly defined.

Legal and political theorists have added critical perspectives to this functionalist account by examining the historical, ideological, and distributive foundations of property regimes. Singer (2000) and Waldron (1990) argue that property is not a natural or pre-political institution, but one that is constituted through law, continuously reshaped by courts, statutes, and political struggle. From this viewpoint, property rights are seen as vehicles of power; they entrench advantage, structure spatial exclusion, and confer differential access to institutional resources. Blomley (2004, 2007), drawing on legal geography, extends this argument by demonstrating how property functions as a technology of spatial governance, mediating relationships among the state, citizens, and capital. His work, alongside that of Moore (1973) and Roy (2005), has been influential in illuminating how property regimes naturalise specific political-economic orders while rendering alternative claims illegible. These critical perspectives foreground the political nature of property and underscore that ownership structures reflect, and reproduce, broader relations of inequality.

This critical turn has inspired growing interest in how property rights shape and are shaped by planning. Land-use regulation, zoning, and development control do not simply intervene in pre-existing property arrangements; they actively produce, modify, and institutionalise property claims (Jacobs and Paulsen, 2009). Planning therefore legitimises some rights while constraining others, with implications for distributive justice, housing access, and environmental governance. Alongside research on the commodification and financialisation of land (Weber, 2002; Christophers, 2016; Savini & Aalbers, 2016), recent work on commoning conceptualises property as continually produced through collective practices that can generate alternative forms of resource governance while remaining shaped by power, inclusion, and exclusion

(Nightingale, 2019; Bollier, 2020). Together, these perspectives show that property is dynamically reshaped through regulation, markets, and collective practice.

Recent property scholarship emphasises that property theory is not monolithic but encompasses institutionalist, relational, critical, feminist, Indigenous, and socio-legal perspectives (Thorpe, 2020; Graham et al., 2022; Bevan, 2024). For planners, this plurality presents both a challenge and an opportunity: it complicates the theorisation of ownership within spatial governance while providing multiple ways to analyse how property connects law, economy, culture, power, and more-than-human relations. These perspectives also provide a stronger foundation for understanding how planning instruments, including zoning overlays, development agreements, and land value capture mechanisms, recalibrate particular rights and obligations within broader property relations.

Taken together, this substantial body of legal and planning scholarship demonstrates that the significance of property for planning, urban governance, and socio-spatial outcomes has been substantively theorised (Fawaz & Moutmaz, 2017; Thorpe, 2020, 2022; Bouwer & Gimson, 2022; Dorries, 2022; Layard, 2025). The gap addressed here is therefore not an absence of theorisation, but the uneven integration of these insights across the canonical planning paradigms reviewed. This paper builds on that scholarship by comparing how those paradigms conceptualise property, authority, power, justice, and planning's role in reshaping rights.

3. Overview of key planning theories

At its simplest, planning is the deliberate coordination of spatial development over time. It involves organising interdependent decisions about land use, infrastructure, investment and the built environment while mediating among public, private and collective actors. Planning is therefore neither exclusively modern nor confined to the state: governments, landowners, financiers, developers and communities undertake it in different forms. Planning theories seek to explain, guide or critique aspects of this activity, including how decisions are coordinated, who exercises authority, whose interests prevail, and how land and property relations are shaped (Faludi, 2013; Healey, 2006; Alexander, 2016).

Planning theory encompasses diverse intellectual traditions, with no clearly defined or generally accepted canon. We focus on ten paradigms that feature prominently in leading planning theory texts and have substantially influenced the discipline: rational, incremental, advocacy, collaborative, strategic, neoliberal, Marxist, agonistic, Coasian and transformative planning (Alexander, 1992b; Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 2002b; Beauregard, 2020; Fainstein & DeFilippis, 2016; Faludi, 1973; Gunder et al., 2018; Levin-Keitel & Behrend, 2023; Taylor, 1998). Their selection necessarily involves interpretive judgement.

These paradigms are neither mutually exclusive nor all theories of the same kind. Rational and incremental planning primarily model how decisions are made; advocacy, collaborative, strategic, agonistic and transformative planning prescribe or evaluate how planning should be practised; Marxist theory critically explains conflicts over land, capital and class power; neoliberal perspectives interpret or promote market-oriented governance; and Coasian approaches diagnose coordination problems and explore institutional alternatives to conventional regulation. These functions overlap, but they influence whether property rights are treated as fixed inputs, resources to be coordinated, sources of structural power or institutions to be redesigned.

The order of presentation broadly reflects the historical emergence of these traditions but does not imply that one replaced another. Rational, incremental, advocacy and Marxist planning came to prominence through post-war debates from the 1950s to the 1970s. Neoliberal, collaborative and, later, agonistic approaches reflect subsequent shifts in political economy, governance and participation. Strategic and Coasian approaches have earlier intellectual roots but recur across periods as

approaches to coordination and institutional design, while transformative planning is a more recent response to systemic environmental and social challenges. These traditions consequently coexist and recombine across contemporary planning fields.

Accordingly, this is a conceptual rather than systematic review. It examines how each tradition engages, or does not engage, with property rights and what this reveals about its treatment of ownership, access and land governance. The following subsections locate each tradition within its historical context while identifying the planning activities and contemporary domains it continues to explain, guide or critique.

3.1. Overview of rational planning

Rational planning initially emerged in its rational-comprehensive, technocratic or synoptic form during the post-war period. Influenced by decision theory, public administration, systems analysis and operations research, it conceived planning as a structured process of defining goals, generating alternatives, evaluating their likely consequences and selecting the most efficient means of achieving predefined ends (Dyckman, 1961; Davidoff & Reiner, 1962; Black, 1990). Its classical formulation assumed that expert planners could assemble comprehensive information and undertake objective analysis within relatively stable institutional settings. Planning authority was correspondingly hierarchical: experts produced analysis, decision-makers selected among alternatives, and the public was primarily positioned as the beneficiary of planning outcomes (Taylor, 1998; Friedmann, 1998).

This model was criticised for underestimating bounded rationality, value pluralism, uncertainty and unequal power (Lindblom, 1959; Rittel & Webber, 1973). However, rational planning was not simply displaced by these critiques. It has evolved into more data-rich, computational and iterative forms of analytical planning. Contemporary practice employs GIS, planning-support systems, remote sensing, urban sensors, administrative and transactional datasets, and mobile-phone and location-based traces to analyse urban processes and evaluate development scenarios (Batty, 2013; Geertman et al., 2015; Thakuriah et al., 2017).

Artificial intelligence, generative design and performance modelling are extending these capacities by generating and evaluating larger numbers of spatial alternatives. Such methods are used to coordinate transport investment with land use and optimise urban layouts for accessibility, sunlight, energy consumption, heat exposure and other environmental or economic objectives (Sanchez et al., 2023). They are also used to assess development feasibility and model the effects of planning and design on land values (Codocero Rodas et al., 2020; Kim, 2020). Although these applications differ considerably from the post-war rational-comprehensive model, they retain its underlying logic: objectives are specified, alternatives modelled, performance assessed and preferred options selected. These technological advances do not eliminate earlier critiques of rational planning, since model outputs remain dependent on politically selected objectives, datasets, assumptions and evaluative criteria.

Contemporary rational planning therefore combines the core logic of systematic analysis with increasingly sophisticated data, modelling and computational techniques. Although its methods have become more iterative, dynamic and technologically advanced, the underlying orientation remains broadly consistent: problems are defined, objectives specified, alternatives generated and evaluated, and preferred courses of action selected according to explicit criteria. Its continuing influence is particularly evident in fields such as transport planning, infrastructure investment, urban design, development appraisal and environmental modelling. At the same time, longstanding critiques concerning uncertainty, bounded rationality, value pluralism and the political character of apparently technical choices remain relevant to these contemporary forms.

3.2. Overview of incremental planning

Incrementalism should be understood at two related levels: as Lindblom's historically situated model of decision-making and as a broader process through which successive actions cumulatively reshape cities. Lindblom's *The Science of Muddling Through* (1959) responded to post-war rational-comprehensive and systems-oriented planning, which assumed that decision-makers could define goals, assess alternatives and select optimal solutions. By contrast, "successive limited comparisons" recognised that decisions are made with incomplete information, limited time, contested objectives and institutional constraints. Incrementalism therefore foregrounded feasibility, negotiation and learning through adjustment rather than comprehensive optimisation (Lindblom, 1959, 1979).

Beyond this specific theoretical intervention, incrementalism describes a pervasive temporality of urban change. Cities are continually remade through sequences of plans, permissions, infrastructure investments, market decisions, informal occupations and household or community improvements. These actions involve public authorities, landowners, developers, residents and other actors whose decisions respond to, and subsequently alter, one another. Individually modest interventions can consequently accumulate into substantial changes in urban morphology, land use, accessibility and institutional arrangements. Hamdi's (2004) account of "small change" and Caldeira's (2017) analysis of peripheral urbanisation demonstrate how immediate, localised actions can produce large-scale transformations over time.

Incrementalism remains relevant in contexts of uncertainty, complexity and political disagreement. Hartmann's (2012) concept of "clumsy solutions" similarly presents planning as the management of competing expectations through workable adjustments, while contemporary accounts connect incremental learning with democratic governance and adaptive or resilience-oriented planning (Davoudi, 2012; Alexander, 2016; Campbell, 2018). Incremental urban change may be deliberately planned, emerge through successive market and political decisions, or develop through interactions between formal plans and informal practices.

Incrementalism is therefore neither inherently conservative nor necessarily transformative. Because each decision begins from existing institutional and property arrangements, incremental processes may favour continuity and actors with established rights and influence. However, the accumulation of adjustments can also substantially transform land uses, development capacity, tenure, ownership and value. Its effects depend on the direction and sequencing of decisions, the actors involved and the institutional context.

3.3. Overview of advocacy planning

Advocacy planning, alongside equity planning, emerged in the 1960s in response to the claimed neutrality of rational planning and the limited attention given by rational and incremental decision-making models to structural inequality and political representation. Introduced by Paul Davidoff, advocacy planning challenged the notion of the planner as a neutral expert and instead urged planners to adopt openly normative and political positions in support of marginalised communities and interests (Davidoff, 1965). In his foundational essay *Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning*, Davidoff argued that democratic planning should accommodate multiple values and visions rather than produce a single supposedly objective plan.

Advocacy planning redefines the planner as an advocate, an active participant in the democratic process, who works on behalf of disadvantaged populations and challenges the structural inequalities embedded in urban decision-making. This repositioning was especially significant in the context of racial segregation, exclusionary zoning, and urban renewal policies that disproportionately displaced low-income and minority communities in the United States. By foregrounding the experiences of those excluded from the planning mainstream, advocacy

planning exposed how ostensibly neutral planning practices perpetuated racialised and class-based injustices.

Subsequent developments broadened the scope of advocacy planning into activist practices, often connected with grassroots organising, legal mobilisation, and community empowerment. As Sager (2022) has demonstrated in a retrospective evaluation, advocacy planning inspired new forms of participatory planning, although its confrontational aspect was frequently softened or institutionalised in later versions, particularly within planning aid and professionalised participation mechanisms (Parker & Street, 2017). This institutionalisation, while expanding access to participation, also risked diluting advocacy's radical edge by aligning it more closely with state-sanctioned processes and professional norms.

The legacy of advocacy planning has also been closely tied to broader debates on social justice in planning. Scholars such as Fainstein (2014) argue that advocacy laid important groundwork for the 'just city' paradigm, which foregrounds equity and inclusion as central planning goals. Similarly, Forester (1999) shows how planners can use communication and mediation skills to empower disadvantaged groups and counter exclusionary practices, expanding the role of advocacy beyond legalistic or confrontational strategies. More recently, the principles of advocacy have re-emerged in contexts of climate justice, housing rights, and struggles against gentrification, where planners and activists collaborate to resist displacement and promote equitable urban futures (Angotti, 2011; Mirafitab, 2009). These developments underscore that advocacy planning remains not only a historical paradigm but also a continuing orientation toward planning as an explicitly political and ethical practice.

3.4. Overview of collaborative planning

Collaborative planning, as used here to include a variety of deliberative and communicative approaches, emerged in the 1990s as part of a wider shift in planning theory towards deliberative democracy, participatory governance, and post-positivist epistemologies. Building on Habermasian ideas of communicative rationality (Habermas, 1985), scholars such as Patsy Healey (1997, 2003) and Judith Innes (1995, 2004) argued that planning should not be seen primarily as a technical or instrumental activity, but as a process of dialogue, mutual learning, and consensus-building among diverse stakeholders. The communicative turn in planning repositions planners from being expert problem-solvers to facilitators of inclusive discourse, responsible for creating the conditions for meaningful participation, trust, and shared understanding (Shahab et al., 2021).

This perspective reflects a strong normative commitment to procedural justice and equity, aiming to democratise planning processes and empower voices that have traditionally been marginalised or excluded. Collaborative planning, while closely aligned with communicative ideals, often places greater emphasis on governance structures and institutional design, focusing on how actors with divergent interests can cooperate across sectors and scales to produce joint outcomes (Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 2002a; Healey, 2020). Both strands share an interest in planning as a situated, negotiated, and context-dependent practice, rather than a top-down imposition of technical expertise.

Despite its normative appeal, communicative and collaborative planning has been criticised for underestimating the role of power, conflict, and structural inequality. Scholars such as Huxley & Yiftachel (2000), and later Purcell (2009), argue that emphasising consensus can conceal persistent asymmetries in influence and access, and that communicative practices alone cannot address deeply rooted distributive injustices. Furthermore, the focus on process rather than substance has, at times, resulted in limited engagement with material conditions and institutional frameworks, such as property regimes, that influence urban governance.

Subsequent scholarship has sought to refine collaborative planning

by integrating concerns about power, conflict, and materiality. Forester (2017) stresses that effective collaboration requires planners to recognise and negotiate power imbalances rather than assume a level playing field. Healey (2012) similarly reflects on the challenges of embedding communicative practices within institutional contexts dominated by market logics and legalistic procedures. In parallel, collaborative approaches have been linked to concepts of network governance and resilience, highlighting how dialogue and trust-building can support adaptive capacity in uncertain environments (Innes & Booher, 2010; Davoudi, 2012). These contributions suggest that while collaborative planning may not eliminate structural inequities, it can foster incremental improvements in deliberative quality and inter-institutional coordination, offering pragmatic avenues for democratising planning practice (Innes and Booher, 2004).

3.5. Overview of strategic planning

Strategic planning emerged in the 1990s as a response to the perceived limitations of both technocratic and deliberative planning paradigms, particularly within the context of changing political economies, decentralisation, and the increasing influence of neoliberal governance. Inspired by corporate strategy and political science, strategic planning shifted planning thought towards a focus on vision-building, prioritisation, institutional capacity, and the coordination of actions across multiple actors and scales (Albrechts, 2004; Healey, 2009). Rather than aiming to comprehensively regulate land use or mediate consensus among stakeholders, strategic planning concentrates on framing long-term goals, identifying leverage points, and aligning planning processes with broader governance arrangements and development agendas. Its methods emphasise selective intervention, focusing on a limited number of catalytic projects or spatial priorities expected to generate broader impacts, rather than offering comprehensive regulatory coverage.

A defining feature of strategic planning is its focus on relational and context-aware decision-making. It aims to be adaptive and sensitive to the environment, seeking to 'mobilise' actors around shared objectives through strategic visioning, targeted investment, and institutional coordination. This often entails partnerships between public and private sector entities and depends on governance networks rather than hierarchical government structures. Therefore, strategic planning adopts a pragmatic approach, prioritising effectiveness, coordination, and implementation over normative inclusivity or procedural neutrality.

Critics have pointed out that strategic planning, especially in its neoliberal forms, can sideline questions of equity, justice, and democratic accountability (Allmendinger & Houghton, 2012; Davoudi & Madanipour, 2015). Its emphasis on institutional agility and competitiveness may favour elite interests and marginalise communities with limited access to governance networks. Additionally, the focus on flexibility and discretion can undermine the predictability and transparency traditionally linked to statutory planning.

Later contributions have emphasised the hybrid nature of strategic planning, which often blends visionary discourse with pragmatic project delivery. For example, Albrechts (2010) and Balducci et al. (2011) highlight how strategic spatial frameworks can act as 'selective stories' that mobilise political will and resources around flagship projects, while leaving other issues less visible. Strategic planning is also closely tied to notions of spatial imaginaries and place-branding, where long-term visions are used to attract investment and shape collective identity (Healey, 2006; Metzger, 2013). These dynamics reveal both the strengths and vulnerabilities of the paradigm: while it enables alignment of diverse actors and resources, it can also produce selective silences that privilege growth-oriented agendas over redistributive concerns. Consequently, contemporary debates continue to ask whether strategic planning can reconcile its managerial pragmatism with commitments to inclusivity and justice.

3.6. Overview of neoliberal planning

Neoliberal planning describes a set of policy orientations and institutional practices that have transformed planning theory and practice since the late 1970s, aligning with broader shifts towards market-oriented governance, deregulation, and state retrenchment. As David Harvey (2005) argues, the rise of neoliberalism, particularly during the political leadership of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States, marked a decisive ideological turn that redefined the role of the state, emphasising market discipline, private property rights, and the entrepreneurial individual. In this context, planning was reconceptualised not as a remedy for market failure but as a facilitator of market logics within urban governance. The paradigm is linked to the rise of entrepreneurial urbanism, privatisation, competitive city strategies, and the valorisation of land as a commodity to be leveraged for economic growth (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

Neoliberal planning emphasises efficiency, attracting investment, and minimal public involvement. Planning is increasingly used as a tool to promote development through mechanisms such as incentive zoning, development agreements, and fast-track approvals. The planner's role is often recast as that of a facilitator or broker, working to align public objectives with private sector interests, rather than serving as a neutral technician or democratic intermediary. This redefinition of the planner's role reflects a broader shift in urban governance, from regulation and redistribution to promotion and facilitation (Hall & Hubbard, 1996; Hackworth, 2008).

Critics argue that neoliberal planning diminishes the public purpose of planning by placing social and environmental goals below market imperatives. It often sustains existing inequalities by favouring actors with market power, such as developers, landowners, and institutional investors, while marginalising communities with fewer resources or less political influence. Additionally, the removal of redistributive concerns and the weakening of legal frameworks have raised fears about the decline of accountability, transparency, and the protection of long-term public interests in urban development. What results is a form of post-political planning, where debate is replaced by consensus around competitiveness, and where alternative visions of urban futures are systematically sidelined (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012; Purcell, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2009).

Neoliberal planning does not appear consistently across different contexts. Its institutional form is shaped by local governance structures, legal traditions, and socio-political factors. While some cities have adopted neoliberal principles through explicit reform agendas, others have integrated them more gradually, creating hybrid planning systems that blend market-focused tools with remnants of social planning (Baeten & Tasan-Kok, 2012; Pinson & Morel Journel, 2016).

3.7. Overview of Marxist planning

Marxist planning embodies a significant tradition within planning theory that aims to reveal the structural dynamics of capitalism as they appear in the production and regulation of urban space. Based on historical materialism, this paradigm regards planning not as a neutral or purely technical activity, but as an inherently political process shaped by class relations, capital accumulation, and state power. Marxist approaches gained popularity in the 1970s and 1980s as a response to the shortcomings of both technocratic and reformist models in addressing increasing urban inequality and the systemic contradictions of capitalist development (Castells, 1977; Harvey, 1973; Saunders, 2003). Its emergence also reflected increasing dissatisfaction with planning's inability to address structural injustices that were becoming more visible amid deindustrialisation, welfare state retrenchment, and global economic restructuring.

A key contribution of Marxist planning theory is its analysis of how urban space is created under capitalism, not merely as a site for

economic activity but as a means of reproducing the conditions necessary for accumulation. Marxist scholars contend that planning serves to resolve the spatial contradictions of capital (Lefebvre, 1974; Harvey, 1985, 2002): promoting investment in the built environment, managing crises of overaccumulation, and displacing marginalised populations through processes like gentrification, redevelopment, and land speculation. The distinction between use value and exchange value remains central to this critique, emphasising how planning decisions often prioritise the profitability of land over its social utility (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Smith, 2005). This framing exposes how urban development patterns are shaped less by public interest goals than by imperatives to sustain capital circulation, a condition that positions planning as an arbiter of spatial inequality rather than a mechanism for its mitigation.

Instead of viewing the state as a neutral actor, Marxist theorists highlight its role in maintaining capitalist social relations through planning interventions. The state, from this perspective, selectively regulates land markets, orchestrates infrastructure investment, and enforces spatial order to ensure conditions for capital accumulation while suppressing social dissent (Jessop, 2002; Brenner, 2004). This view contrasts with neoliberal approaches that emphasise consensus and procedural fairness, instead perceiving planning institutions as tools for reproducing capitalist ideology and strengthening class power.

Marxist planning envisions alternative urban futures based on collective ownership, democratic control of spatial resources, and the subordination of market forces to social needs. While such visions remain marginal in mainstream planning practice, Marxist critiques have had a lasting influence on scholarship concerning housing commodification, neoliberal urbanism, and the political economy of land (Purcell, 2002; Lees, Slater & Wylie, 2008). Although it lacks formal institutional expression, Marxist planning continues to be a vital theoretical framework for analysing the structural forces that shape urban development.

3.8. Overview of agonistic planning

Agonistic planning refers to a reflective strand of planning theory that highlights the impossibility of reaching universal consensus or stable normative foundations within pluralistic societies. This approach opposes the prescriptive aims of earlier models, such as rational, communicative, and neoliberal planning, by emphasising uncertainty, fragmentation, and conflict as essential aspects of planning practice. Often influenced by post-structuralist and post-foundational political theory, agonistic planning recognises that planners operate in environments shaped by incommensurable values, contested meanings, and shifting power dynamics (Hillier, 2002; Allmendinger, 2017; Gunder & Hillier, 2016). In doing so, it challenges one of the core assumptions of mainstream planning theory, that planning problems can ultimately be resolved through better information, dialogue, or institutional design, arguing instead that conflict is endemic to democratic societies and cannot be eradicated.

This paradigm aligns conceptually with agonistic political theory, especially the work of Chantal Mouffe (2013), who differentiates between antagonism, the struggle between enemies, and agonism, the struggle between adversaries who share a common commitment to democratic principles. In planning theory, this distinction has inspired scholars to reconsider the planner's role, not as a consensus-builder, but as a facilitator of legitimate, structured disagreement. Agonistic approaches thus reject the depoliticised ideal of communicative rationality, arguing that efforts to resolve deep-seated conflicts through dialogue alone may mask power asymmetries and suppress dissent (Pöger, 2004; Kühn, 2021; Legacy, 2017). Rather than seeing consensus as a sign of successful planning, agonistic approaches treat unresolved tensions as indicators of democratic vitality, revealing whose interests are centred, whose claims are marginalised, and what forms of power remain obscured.

Agonistic planning approaches view conflict as both inevitable and

potentially constructive. Instead of seeing conflict as a disruption to be managed or resolved, they regard it as a creative force that can challenge dominant discourses and create space for alternative claims and counter-hegemonic practices. According to Kühn (2021), this view encourages planners to establish arenas for confrontation, make power visible, and recognise dissent as a legitimate expression of democratic pluralism. In this model, the planner becomes a strategic actor who helps institutionalise dissent without trying to neutralise it.

Critics observe that it often lacks clear guidance on how agonistic principles can be applied in institutional practice. The role of the planner remains ambiguously defined, being variously seen as an organiser of public contestation, a broker of conflicting interests, or a curator of open-ended deliberative spaces (Pløger, 2018; Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010; Metzger, 2011). Furthermore, the assumption that all conflict can be rendered productive through institutional means risks ignoring situations where antagonisms are deeply rooted or shaped by persistent inequalities.

3.9. Overview of Coasian planning

Coasian planning refers to a distinctive strand of thought grounded in the economic theory of Ronald Coase, particularly as articulated in his seminal work *The Problem of Social Cost* (1960). In this paper, the term ‘Coasian planning’ is used as shorthand for a set of Coasian approaches to planning that apply the logic of transaction costs, bargaining, and property-rights allocation to land-use governance, rather than implying the existence of a fully developed planning theory in the traditional sense. At its core, this approach holds that, under conditions of clearly defined and enforceable property rights and low transaction costs, parties affected by externalities can negotiate efficient outcomes through voluntary exchange, regardless of the initial allocation of rights. In practice, however, such idealised conditions rarely hold in planning contexts, where transaction costs, institutional constraints, and power asymmetries are significant, and where planning itself plays a key role in defining and allocating land-use rights within the broader property-rights framework. In the planning context, this shifts the role of regulation: instead of correcting market failures through state-led intervention (as in the Pigouvian tradition), planning is re-envisioned as enabling negotiated coordination among stakeholders with potentially conflicting property-based interests (Slaev & Shahab, 2026; Lai, 1997; Alexander, 1992a; Webster, 1998).

Coasian planning is closely linked to the rise of neo-institutional economic approaches in planning theory (Lai, 2005; Shahab, 2021), which emphasise the significance of institutional arrangements in shaping urban outcomes. Instead of prescribing specific land use results, Coasian planning concentrates on clarifying, allocating, and enforcing property rights to help actors resolve disputes and internalise externalities using market-compatible instruments. These include transferable development rights, tradable permits, compensation mechanisms, and land readjustment schemes (Shahab et al., 2018; Hou et al., 2020; Falco et al., 2024), which are sometimes interpreted through a Coasian lens as enabling bargaining between rights-holders to address land-use externalities, although their practical effectiveness depends strongly on institutional design and transaction costs. Planning institutions are therefore responsible for reducing transaction costs, correcting information asymmetries, and enhancing the tradability and security of rights (Clinch et al., 2008; Shahab & Viallon, 2019).

In the literature, the appeal of Coasian planning is often associated with its potential to enhance allocative efficiency, institutional flexibility and stakeholder bargaining without relying on prescriptive regulation (Slaev & Shahab, 2026). It reflects broader shifts towards governance models based on coordination and negotiation while aligning with market-based logics in contemporary planning discourse. Lai & Lorne (2006) and Lai et al. (2016) also argue that Coasian principles can guide planning for sustainable development by creating win-win solutions through turning externalities into tradable assets.

Nonetheless, the paradigm has sparked extensive debate. Critics point out that its assumptions, especially regarding transaction costs, rationality, and power balance, rarely apply in real-world planning contexts (Shahab & Viallon, 2021; Clinch et al., 2008). While the theory assumes all parties can negotiate freely, urban land markets are often characterised by entrenched inequalities, institutional rigidities, and legal complexities. Moreover, the Coasian focus on efficiency tends to ignore distributive concerns and understate the socio-political aspects of property rights, which are historically dependent and frequently contested (Lai, 1997; Webster, 1998).

As several scholars note, negotiation assumes a level of bargaining parity that seldom exists: vulnerable communities may lack the resources, knowledge, or institutional access necessary to assert their interests effectively. As a result, Coasian planning may unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities or legitimise exclusionary arrangements under the pretence of neutral market coordination. Consequently, Coasian approaches to planning draw attention to the institutional role of property rights in coordinating land-use decisions, while also highlighting the practical limits of bargaining-based governance in complex and unequal planning contexts.

3.10. Overview of transformative planning

Transformative planning describes a broad and evolving range of approaches that aim to shift planning towards fundamental change, long-term sustainability, and deep social-ecological transformation. Although the term is not always used with strict theoretical accuracy, it has gained increasing recognition in response to escalating global crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss, socio-economic inequality, and democratic decline that challenge the effectiveness of incremental, procedural, or market-oriented planning paradigms (Wheeler, 2016; Albrechts et al., 2020; Bruno et al., 2023). What unites these approaches is a shared concern with the need for planning not just to manage current conditions, but to promote systemic change that is socially just and ecologically resilient (Friedmann, 1987; Davoudi, 2012; Golubchikov et al., 2026). This reflects a growing consensus that the scale and urgency of contemporary crises require rethinking planning’s institutional purpose, moving beyond optimisation of existing systems toward more transformative visions of collective futures.

The roots of transformative planning can be traced back to earlier radical and advocacy traditions, particularly those advocating participatory, redistributive, and emancipatory forms of planning (Linnenluecke et al., 2017; Sandercock & Bridgman, 1999; Friedmann, 1992). However, recent developments increasingly incorporate insights from resilience theory, systems thinking, and adaptive governance. This approach highlights the capacity of planning systems to respond to uncertainty, complexity, and nonlinear change. Resilience-oriented planning challenges the idea of predictability that underpins rational models and instead promotes flexible, iterative, and reflexive interventions that can adapt to dynamic socio-ecological conditions (Davoudi et al., 2013; Wilkinson, 2012).

In this context, transformative planning involves more than just altering plan content; it also includes reconfiguring institutional structures, power relations, and normative frameworks through which planning functions. It emphasises principles such as long-term visioning, transdisciplinary knowledge integration, co-production, and innovation. Planning becomes a forward-looking and learning-focused activity aimed at enhancing the capacities of communities and institutions to deal with deep uncertainty and contested futures. Consequently, it often overlaps with adaptive planning, which stresses incremental adjustments and institutional learning, but extends further by aiming for deeper shifts in values, systems, and practices (Abern, 2011).

Transformative planning remains more aspirational than institutionalised. While elements of it are evident in fields such as climate adaptation, transition governance, and environmental justice, its realisation often faces significant barriers, including institutional inertia,

entrenched power structures, and short-term political cycles. Moreover, critics warn that without a critical awareness of structural inequalities and the political economy of urban development, the language of ‘transformation’ risks being co-opted into technocratic or depoliticised agendas (Swyngedouw, 2009; Kelly et al., 2020; Cassarino et al., 2021).

4. Property rights in planning theory: patterns of engagement and omission

Having outlined these theoretical traditions, this section examines how their differing explanatory, prescriptive and critical purposes shape their treatment of property rights. A theory concerned with decision-making procedures may treat ownership as an external condition, whereas a political-economic critique or institutional theory may place property at the centre of its analysis. The comparison uses five recurring lenses: (a) engagement with property rights; (b) the roles assigned to different actors; (c) assumptions about ownership and the public–private boundary; (d) relationships among property rights, power and spatial justice; and (e) transformations of property through planning practice. Together, these lenses show not only whether property rights are recognised, but also why each tradition treats them as fixed constraints, negotiable resources, sources of power or institutions open to transformation.

4.1. Property rights in rational planning

4.1.1. engagement with property rights

Engagement with property rights differs between classical and contemporary forms of rational planning. Classical rational-comprehensive planning commonly treated ownership and development rights as fixed institutional conditions within which alternatives were evaluated. Black’s (1990) account of the Chicago Area Transportation Study illustrates how land ownership was incorporated into data collection and forecasting without examining how property regimes shaped the definition of problems or distribution of outcomes. Similarly, Dyckman (1961) largely approached legal and institutional arrangements as parameters rather than objects of transformation. Contemporary analytical planning often makes property more visible. Parcel boundaries, ownership, development capacity, transaction data and land values may be explicitly incorporated into spatial, financial and performance models (Geertman et al., 2015; Codosero Rodas et al., 2020). Nevertheless, analytical visibility is not equivalent to normative scrutiny. Property rights are frequently operationalised as variables to be measured, forecast or optimised rather than examined as historically contingent institutions whose allocation and legitimacy are open to debate.

4.1.2. the roles of different actors in relation to rights

Classical rational planning assigned authority principally to expert planners and policy-makers, while treating landowners, developers and communities as actors whose behaviour was to be predicted or influenced. Contemporary analytical planning involves a wider configuration of public agencies, private consultants, developers, landowners and data specialists. These actors contribute data, financial parameters, objectives and constraints to the modelling process. This wider involvement does not necessarily equalise influence. Landowners and developers may shape assumptions about feasibility and market behaviour, while communities may be represented through aggregated datasets rather than directly involved in defining objectives. Planners and technical experts therefore retain considerable power by determining which property interests are incorporated, how they are represented and which outcomes are prioritised.

4.1.3. normative assumptions about ownership and the public–private boundary

Both classical and contemporary rational planning generally accept

private ownership alongside a regulatory role for the state. The classical model tended to regard this arrangement as a stable division of functions: public authorities planned and regulated, while private owners and developers implemented development. Contemporary analytical planning more explicitly models the interdependence among ownership, regulation, infrastructure investment and development feasibility. The public–private boundary is consequently treated less as a fixed division than as an arrangement to be coordinated. Models may evaluate how public infrastructure, land-use designations and density allowances affect private investment and land values. However, they usually begin from the existing allocation of ownership and rarely question its legitimacy. Private rights may therefore be actively coordinated and modified without their underlying distribution being critically examined.

4.1.4. the relationship between property rights, power, and spatial justice

Rational planning’s claim to objectivity can obscure how analytical choices distribute benefits and burdens. Contemporary models may explicitly represent ownership and land value, but their outputs remain shaped by selected objectives, datasets, classifications and valuation assumptions. Optimising aggregate land value, housing output, accessibility or environmental performance does not determine how the resulting gains and losses should be distributed. Data-driven and AI-assisted approaches may also privilege formally recorded ownership and market transactions while underrepresenting informal, customary or collective claims. Property-based power is therefore not necessarily absent from analytical planning; it may instead be embedded within model inputs and performance criteria. Analytical rigour can improve transparency, but it cannot resolve the normative questions underlying property allocation and spatial justice (Davidoff & Reiner, 1962; Sanchez et al., 2023).

4.1.5. transformations of property through planning practice

Rational planning can deliberately reshape the content and value of property rights. Zoning, density allocation, land-use designation, infrastructure alignment, land assembly and urban design modify what may be developed, where activities may occur and how benefits and burdens are distributed. Contemporary analytical models can estimate these effects and compare alternative configurations according to their implications for development capacity, feasibility and land value. Such interventions do more than adjust property indirectly. Upzoning, for example, creates additional development capacity and associated value that may subsequently be captured for public purposes (Kim, 2020). Infrastructure and urban design similarly alter accessibility, development potential and the relative value of public and private land. Rational planning therefore participates actively in producing and redistributing particular elements of property rights. Its limitation is not necessarily a failure to recognise these effects, but a tendency to frame them as questions of performance, feasibility or value creation rather than as normative choices about entitlement, legitimacy and distribution (Davy, 2012).

4.2. Property rights in incremental planning

4.2.1. engagement with property rights

Incremental planning engages with property rights as both institutional starting conditions and evolving outcomes. In Lindblom’s decision-making model (1959, 1979), existing legal and ownership arrangements help define what is politically and administratively feasible and are seldom examined as independent objects of reform. At each decision point, incrementalism may therefore appear highly respectful of established rights. However, the broader process of incremental urban change is more dynamic. Successive permissions, infrastructure investments, market transactions, informal practices and regularisation measures can cumulatively modify land use, development capacity, access, tenure and value. Caldeira’s (2017) account of peripheral urbanisation demonstrates how interactions among residents, state

institutions and markets progressively transform both urban space and the legal recognition of property claims. Property rights are therefore not simply external constraints on incremental planning; they are also continually reproduced and reconfigured through it.

4.2.2. *the roles of different actors in relation to rights*

Incremental urban change involves a shifting configuration of public authorities, planners, landowners, developers, residents, informal occupiers, community organisations and infrastructure providers. Planners may act as brokers or coordinators, but they are only one group within a sequence of interdependent decisions. Actors with formally recognised rights, financial resources and institutional access frequently exercise greater influence over what changes are considered feasible. However, residents and informal claimants may also secure recognition through mobilisation, negotiation and repeated engagement with state institutions. Incremental processes can therefore reinforce the position of established rights-holders or gradually open pathways towards regularisation, collective ownership and other forms of tenure. Which outcome occurs depends on the actors involved, their relative bargaining power and the institutional sequence through which decisions are made (Hamdi, 2004; Caldeira, 2017).

4.2.3. *normative assumptions about ownership and the public–private boundary*

Incremental planning generally begins within existing ownership arrangements, but it does not necessarily leave them unchanged. Repeated subdivision, land assembly, regularisation, transfer, redevelopment and conversion into cooperative or condominium forms can progressively redraw boundaries among public, private and collective rights. In informal settlements, for example, infrastructure provision and legal recognition may convert occupation into individual or collective tenure; elsewhere, redevelopment may transfer land and development opportunities towards private or corporate ownership. Incrementalism offers no single normative preference among these outcomes. Its institutional flexibility may support recognition and tenure security, but it may also facilitate commodification, displacement or privatisation. The evolution of the public–private boundary therefore depends on the direction of successive decisions and the political and legal context in which they occur (Caldeira, 2017; Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010).

4.2.4. *the relationship between property rights, power, and spatial justice*

Incremental planning distributes power through the sequencing and accumulation of decisions. Established owners, developers and public authorities often possess the recognised rights, resources and institutional access needed to influence what is considered feasible. Successive adjustments may therefore compound existing advantages and gradually produce exclusion, displacement or unequal increases in land value, even when no individual decision explicitly seeks these outcomes. However, incremental processes can also enable residents and informal occupiers to strengthen their claims through collective organisation, infrastructure provision, negotiation and progressive legal recognition (Caldeira, 2017). Conversely, state-led redevelopment may use successive interventions to transfer property and development opportunities towards more powerful actors (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010). The spatial-justice implications of incrementalism consequently depend on whose claims are recognised, who can influence each decision, and how benefits and burdens accumulate over time.

4.2.5. *transformations of property through planning practice*

Incremental planning can transform property through the cumulative effects of land-use permissions, infrastructure investment, acquisition, redevelopment, market transactions and tenure regularisation. Although each intervention may operate within existing legal arrangements, their sequencing can alter development rights, ownership patterns, accessibility and land values substantially. The London 2012 Olympics, for example, was a major planned intervention embedded

within a longer history of incremental land-use and infrastructure decisions; its land assembly and legacy development created, transferred and revalued public and private property interests (Davis & Thornley, 2010). In peripheral and informal urbanisation, repeated occupation, construction, service provision and legal recognition can similarly transform insecure claims into individual, cooperative or collective tenure arrangements (Caldeira, 2017). Incrementalism may therefore be highly respectful of existing rights at each decision point while remaining institutionally transformative over time. Property change occurs not only through explicit reform but also through the accumulation of individually limited decisions.

4.3. *Property rights in advocacy planning*

4.3.1. *engagement with property rights*

Although advocacy planning primarily focuses on equity and inclusion, its engagement with property rights is often indirect and lacks detailed theoretical development. Davidoff's (1965) foundational call for plural planning highlighted political participation and the representation of marginalised interests, especially in response to urban renewal programmes that displaced low-income and racialised communities. However, his analysis concentrated more on procedural exclusion from planning than on the institutional foundations of property regimes that support such exclusion. Property is mainly regarded as a site of unjust outcomes, like eviction or displacement, rather than as a system of rights that shapes power. Parker & Street (2017) similarly emphasise the difficulties faced by community advocacy initiatives such as Planning Aid England in navigating formal planning systems without directly engaging with the legal structure of property. Therefore, while advocacy planning critiques the distributive impacts of land use decisions, it seldom addresses the ownership configurations or property norms that produce them.

4.3.2. *the roles of different actors in relation to rights*

Advocacy planning redefines the planner's role as a partisan actor who represents disempowered communities in struggles over urban space. In this view, the planner does not merely mediate between interests but actively contest dominant claims, often including those based on property ownership. As Davidoff (1965: 193) argues, planners should "represent and plead the plans of many interest groups," thereby challenging the assumed neutrality of planning institutions. However, this advocacy usually aims to amplify voices rather than fundamentally restructure rights. Sager (2022) notes that advocacy planners often operate within legal frameworks that favour landowners and developers, leaving their clients dependent on discretionary mechanisms or moral appeals. Consequently, the imbalance between those with formal property rights and those without (such as renters, informal residents, or environmental claimants) is recognised in practice but seldom examined in terms of rights-based hierarchies.

4.3.3. *normative assumptions about ownership and the public–private boundary*

The advocacy tradition questions the fairness of current ownership patterns but does not provide a comprehensive normative critique of private or public property. While it aims to rebalance access to planning processes and outcomes, it generally accepts the broader framework of ownership, focusing on procedural fairness and distributive justice within existing systems. Parker & Street (2017) describe how advocacy efforts in England have struggled to resist the narrowing of participatory spaces under neoliberalism, with property rights often functioning as legal and institutional barriers to what advocacy can achieve. Sager (2022) similarly finds that most advocacy efforts do not challenge private ownership directly but instead seek to secure better procedural representation and compensatory measures for the disadvantaged. Public or collective ownership is occasionally proposed as an alternative, but it is not central to the paradigm's theoretical commitments.

4.3.4. *the relationship between property rights, power, and spatial justice*

Advocacy planning is closely linked to spatial justice but often regards property rights as obstacles rather than as elements that shape power relations. Davidoff's (1965) critique of unitary planning underscores how planning processes tend to reinforce the interests of the powerful by excluding alternative voices. However, the ways in which property rights themselves confer power and privilege, through zoning, tenure security, or access to legal redress, are mostly taken for granted rather than critically examined. Parker & Street (2017) contend that advocacy efforts frequently encounter systemic barriers due to their marginal position relative to established property interests, a view supported by Sager (2022), who notes that confrontational advocacy remains uncommon and often limited by institutional settings. Consequently, the planning model remains normatively committed to redistribution and empowerment but lacks the necessary conceptual tools to analyse or challenge the property regimes that sustain spatial inequality.

4.3.5. *transformations of property through planning practice*

Advocacy planning reshapes property rights primarily by challenging the impacts of existing regimes rather than altering their underlying structures. Its interventions tend to amplify the claims of marginalised groups, whether through community planning, participation in hearings, or alternative proposals, yet such efforts rarely translate into formal changes to ownership or entitlements. Planning practice may influence how rights are exercised, for example by contesting displacement or pushing for more inclusive development conditions, but it seldom reforms the legal configuration of rights itself. As Davidoff (1965) emphasised, the paradigm seeks pluralism within the planning process rather than institutional transformation of property, resulting in a focus on representational justice rather than structural change.

4.4. *Property rights in collaborative planning*

4.4.1. *engagement with property rights*

Collaborative planning theory seldom considers property rights as a central issue. While Healey (1992; 2003) highlights the importance of institutional context in shaping planning outcomes, she tends to view land ownership and property regimes as part of the background framework within which discussion takes place, rather than as actively contested or reshaped through planning. The focus is on communicative practices and shared meaning-making among stakeholders, rather than the legal and institutional bases of access, control, and entitlement. Consequently, although the paradigm aims for inclusion and equity, it largely overlooks the structural role that property rights play in defining who is recognised as a legitimate stakeholder and what claims are open for negotiation. This orientation reflects the theoretical foundations of collaborative planning, which draw on Habermas's concept of communicative rationality and prioritise the quality of deliberative processes over the institutional structures within which those processes occur. Within this framework, property rights tend to appear as one set of claims articulated in dialogue rather than as foundational institutions that shape the distribution of power in planning.

4.4.2. *the roles of different actors in relation to rights*

Collaborative planning involves a wide range of actors, including public agencies, private developers, communities, and civil society organisations, as participants in deliberative processes. However, it often underestimates the asymmetries in power that stem from differing access to property and legal authority. As Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger (1998) argue, the ideal of consensus in collaborative planning conceals the fact that actors with formal property rights (such as landowners or institutional investors) frequently enter negotiations with legally protected claims that others (like renters or informal residents) do not have. Booher & Innes (2002) attempt to reconceptualise power within planning as "network power," highlighting interdependence and co-creation. Nonetheless, their account offers limited insight into how existing

property regimes influence participation and restrict outcomes. Therefore, this paradigm presents an excessively optimistic view of deliberative parity among actors whose legal standing and material power are highly unequal.

4.4.3. *normative assumptions about ownership and the public-private boundary*

Collaborative planning often reproduces liberal-democratic assumptions about the legitimacy of both public regulation and private ownership. It recognises the need to coordinate public and private interests but does not aim to fundamentally alter the normative foundations of property relations. As Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones (2002b) and Brand & Gaffikin (2007) observe, the paradigm frequently assumes that inclusive deliberation can be reconciled with existing neoliberal pressures and fragmented governance, without challenging the systemic privileging of market-based actors. Property is regarded as one interest among many, rather than as a core institution that sets the terms of engagement. As a result, the public-private boundary is approached pragmatically as a site for collaborative negotiation, rather than as a political and legal construct open to normative critique.

4.4.4. *the relationship between property rights, power, and spatial justice*

Although collaborative planning aims for more inclusive and equitable processes, its focus on power remains often procedural rather than structural (Thorpe, 2017b). Healey (1992) advocates for planning as "debate in the public realm," but her approach concentrates on the discursive aspects of participation rather than the material inequalities embedded in property regimes. Critics contend that this ideal of communicative rationality underestimates how formal property rights shape exclusion and sustain socio-spatial inequality (Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007). The assumption that all actors can participate equally ignores how legal entitlements and institutional influence reinforce dominant positions. Therefore, while collaborative planning provides a procedural framework, it lacks the conceptual tools to examine how property rights serve as mechanisms of spatial stratification and institutionalised power.

4.4.5. *transformations of property through planning practice*

Collaborative planning can modify the operational dimensions of property rights through negotiated agreements, shared visions, and stakeholder compacts, yet these changes typically remain within the parameters of existing ownership structures. Interactive processes may influence how rights are interpreted in specific contexts, for example by shaping conditions attached to development consents, but the paradigm does not seek to reconfigure entitlements at their legal or institutional core. The emphasis on consensus reduces the likelihood of challenging entrenched property interests, meaning that planning practice under this model tends to refine rather than transform the property regime. As Healey (2003) notes, collaborative processes foster communicative innovation more readily than institutional reform.

4.5. *Property rights in strategic planning*

4.5.1. *engagement with property rights*

Strategic planning explicitly engages with issues of land and development potential, but its approach to property rights remains largely functional. Instead of challenging the institutional structure or normative foundations of property regimes, strategic planning tends to see property as a resource to be managed to enhance territorial competitiveness and policy coordination. Albrechts (2004) describes strategic spatial planning as emphasising the shaping of future development trajectories through visioning, integration, and selectivity. While land ownership is recognised as a constraint or opportunity within strategic processes, it is not usually subject to critical reflection. The focus is on aligning spatial strategies with institutional capacities, including property markets, rather than examining how property rights themselves

influence access, value creation, or exclusion.

4.5.2. *the roles of different actors in relation to rights*

Strategic planning involves a wide range of actors, including government agencies, developers, institutional landowners, and infrastructure providers, but it often favours those with access to capital and formal property rights. Mäntysalo et al. (2015) note that strategic planning processes are influenced by “planning rationalities” that reflect dominant coalitions and institutional agendas. In this context, landowners and developers frequently exert significant influence over spatial visions, while communities and non-owners tend to be marginalised unless their interests are politically prominent. Planners may address issues of land assembly, development agreements, or land value capture, but their actions are often limited by existing legal entitlements and ownership structures (Shahab et al., 2020). Therefore, strategic planning recognises the importance of property in implementation, yet rarely challenges the legitimacy or distribution of those rights.

4.5.3. *normative assumptions about ownership and the public–private boundary*

Strategic planning functions within a framework of mixed governance, where public goals are achieved through negotiated agreements with private interests. This suggests an acceptance of private ownership as the main form of landholding, with public authority exercised through incentives, partnerships, and selective regulation. Albrechts (2004) portrays strategic planning as pragmatic and sensitive to context, but this pragmatism often overlooks deeper normative questions regarding land ownership and the distribution of rights. The public–private boundary is managed via flexible arrangements such as public–private partnerships or infrastructure planning, but not regarded as a site of institutional or distributive conflict. Ownership is viewed as a constraint to be managed, not as a system to be reformed.

4.5.4. *the relationship between property rights, power, and spatial justice*

Although strategic planning focuses on long-term goals and spatial coherence, it often overlooks issues of power rooted in property relations. The paradigm tends to prioritise aligning interests over addressing inequality and assumes that growth-driven strategies will generate spillover benefits. However, as Mäntysalo et al. (2015) and Allmendinger et al. (2016) suggest, the strategic use of spatial visions and selective engagement can reinforce existing hierarchies by legitimising the priorities of dominant landowners and institutional actors. Without critically examining how property rights confer power, especially through control over land value, access, and the right to exclude, strategic planning remains limited in its ability to challenge spatial injustice. Its emphasis on outcomes and implementation obscures how property rights fundamentally shape the possibilities of strategic coordination.

4.5.5. *transformations of property through planning practice*

Strategic planning reshapes property rights indirectly by recalibrating the spatial and regulatory conditions through which rights are exercised. Instruments such as growth boundaries, strategic site designations, infrastructure prioritisation, and long-term development frameworks create new patterns of opportunity and constraint, influencing the value, viability, and permissible uses associated with particular parcels of land. These interventions alter expectations and can significantly affect how owners, developers, and public authorities mobilise their rights in practice. Nonetheless, strategic planning rarely challenges the underlying distribution of ownership or the legal architecture that sustains it. Its focus on coordination, vision, and alignment across institutions means that rights are steered or channelled rather than redistributed, reinforcing prevailing property regimes while subtly reshaping their operational effects.

4.6. *Property rights in neoliberal planning*

4.6.1. *engagement with property rights*

Neoliberal planning directly engages with property rights, but in a way that consolidates, expands, and marketises them. Instead of challenging ownership or questioning how land rights are distributed, this paradigm treats property as a flexible economic asset and a crucial tool for capital accumulation. As Brenner & Theodore (2002) and Peck & Tickell (2002) note, the shift to “actually existing neoliberalism” involves reconfiguring urban governance to favour private property regimes, deregulation, and the spreading of market principles across urban spaces. Planning becomes a tool in this process, helping transform land into tradable commodities and supporting legal reforms that improve the security and mobility of property rights. In this context, planning does not aim to fix market failures but to remove institutional barriers that block investment.

4.6.2. *the roles of different actors in relation to rights*

Neoliberal planning places greater emphasis on private property owners, especially developers, real estate investors, and financial institutions, by actively aligning planning decisions with their interests. As Weber (2002) demonstrates in her analysis of Chicago’s redevelopment practices, the state does not withdraw but rather adapts its interventions to support property-driven accumulation, utilising tools such as tax increment financing and flexible zoning. The planner takes on the role of a broker or facilitator, easing the process of development rather than mediating conflicting claims. Within this framework, property rights are primarily valued as tradable economic assets that enable investment and capital circulation, which structurally prioritises actors who control transferable land rights. Meanwhile, those without secure property rights, such as renters, informal residents, or community-based organisations, are structurally disadvantaged, with limited access to legal recourse or influence in planning. Sager (2011) highlights how entrepreneurial planning strategies tend to exclude individuals whose interests do not align with market priorities.

4.6.3. *normative assumptions about ownership and the public–private boundary*

Neoliberal planning is based on a strong normative commitment to private property as the default way to hold land and organise the economy. The boundary between public and private is not just blurry; it is actively shifted to support public–private partnerships, fiscal incentives, and market-friendly governance arrangements. The state’s regulatory role is diminished to that of an enabler, creating “investment-ready” conditions rather than setting normative limits on ownership or use. Vejchodská et al. (2022) show how this approach reshapes land policy towards efficiency and capital value growth, often at the expense of fairness. Gerber (2016) similarly explains how the “managerial turn” in planning aligns spatial interventions with property markets, placing collective claims below fiscal discipline and cost-efficiency.

4.6.4. *the relationship between property rights, power, and spatial justice*

Under neoliberal planning, property rights play a key role in maintaining spatial inequality. As Castells (1977) and later Brenner & Theodore (2002) argue, land ownership structures are not neutral backdrops but active instruments of capital accumulation and social exclusion. Planning mechanisms that expand development rights, lessen regulation, or offer financial incentives tend to strengthen landowners’ power while marginalising those without formal claims (Layard, 2018). Purcell (2009) warns that even participatory or deliberative planning models can be co-opted to justify neoliberal projects, neutralising dissent while keeping ownership hierarchies intact. This results in a form of accumulation by dispossession, where urban space is reshaped to benefit capital flows rather than social needs. Consequently, planning becomes complicit in deepening urban inequality through its uncritical acceptance of commodified land and privatised rights.

4.6.5. transformations of property through planning practice

Neoliberal planning directly restructures property rights to enhance flexibility, tradability, and investment potential. Through deregulation, zoning liberalisation, public–private partnerships, market-based instruments, and the increasing financialisation of urban development, property rights become more mobile, divisible, and exchangeable. These changes frequently convert land and development permissions into assets geared toward speculative value extraction, enabling capital to reorganise urban space with greater speed and fewer regulatory constraints. Planning functions less as a mechanism for public oversight and more as a facilitator of market coordination, redesigning rights to reduce uncertainty and secure favourable conditions for investment. As [Brenner & Theodore \(2002\)](#) argue, neoliberal reforms do not simply operate within established rights frameworks but actively remake them to align urban governance with competitive market logics.

4.7. Property rights in Marxist planning

4.7.1. engagement with property rights

Marxist planning theory provides one of the clearest and most sustained critiques of property rights across the major planning paradigms. Instead of viewing property as merely a legal foundation or neutral entitlement, Marxist perspectives see property rights as social relations embedded in capitalist modes of production and key to reproducing inequality. Building on the foundational work of Marx and further developed by theorists such as [Lefebvre \(1974\)](#), [Castells \(1977\)](#), and [Harvey \(1973, 2001\)](#), Marxist planning criticises the commodification of land and the role of private property in organising space to serve capital accumulation. Property is not just a right to be respected or managed, but a historically contingent institution through which capitalist interests are legitimised and enforced. Urban planning, from this standpoint, is complicit in maintaining these relations by stabilising land markets, facilitating capital investment, and mediating class conflict through spatial arrangements.

4.7.2. the roles of different actors in relation to rights

From a Marxist perspective, landowners, developers, and the capitalist class are not neutral stakeholders but key agents in the reproduction of exploitative spatial relations. Planning institutions, while formally operating in the public interest, are seen as acting in the service of capital, often through the defence or expansion of property rights for the dominant classes. As [Harvey \(1985\)](#) notes, the state plays a central role in legitimising property claims and resolving contradictions in the built environment that arise from the cyclical crises of over-accumulation. In this context, the rights of non-owners, such as tenants, precarious workers, or informal residents, are consistently subordinated to the imperatives of rent extraction and capital valorisation. The planner is not a neutral technician but part of the state apparatus that reproduces capitalist spatial order, including the enforcement of private property regimes.

4.7.3. normative assumptions about ownership and the public–private boundary

Marxist planning theory fundamentally challenges the normative legitimacy of private land ownership. It rejects the liberal conception of property as a personal right and instead sees it as a mechanism for class domination. [Lefebvre's \(1974\)](#) critique of the “right to property” contrasts with his concept of the “right to the city,” which advocates for collective control over urban space based on use value rather than exchange value. The public–private boundary, in this perspective, is not a stable institutional divide but a contested space, where expanding public control is necessary to address the inequalities caused by market-driven land allocation. This critical view opens the door for alternative models of ownership, such as common property, public land banks, or co-operatives, that challenge commodified land relations and prioritise collective needs.

4.7.4. the relationship between property rights, power, and spatial justice

Marxist planning provides a structural view of how property rights act as instruments of power and exclusion. [Castells \(1977\)](#) and [Harvey \(2002\)](#) show how the legal and institutional framework of property not only reflects but actively creates spatial inequality by distributing access, regulating mobility, and shaping opportunities for accumulation. Property rights are therefore not simply economic incentives or legal guarantees, but deeply political constructs that serve to perpetuate class hierarchies through spatial means. The framework emphasises how planning systems are involved in this process, whether through zoning that safeguards elite communities, infrastructure that increases land values, or redevelopment that displaces the working class. For Marxist planners, spatial justice is intertwined with the transformation of property relations, requiring not just procedural changes but a fundamental redistribution of land and power.

4.7.5. transformations of property through planning practice

Marxist planning aspires to fundamentally transform property relations by displacing private ownership in favour of collective, cooperative, or state-led forms of control. In its ideal form, planning serves as a mechanism for de-commodifying land, redistributing entitlements, and reorganising rights to support socially determined needs rather than market exchange. Where such approaches have been applied, they have produced substantial restructuring through expropriation, the socialisation of land, or the creation of communal tenure systems. However, Marxist planning also recognises that planning institutions are embedded within broader capitalist state structures, which often constrain transformative ambitions. As a result, the actual scope of property reform is shaped by class relations, political power, and the state's own alignment with capital, mediating the extent and durability of institutional change.

4.8. Property rights in agonistic planning

4.8.1. engagement with property rights

Agonistic planning does not directly address property rights as a formal legal concept. Instead, it emphasises the instability of fundamental categories and the contested nature of planning knowledge, focusing on disagreement, ambiguity, and the limitations of consensus-driven models. Scholars such as [Pløger \(2004, 2018\)](#), [Metzger \(2017\)](#), and [Kühn \(2021\)](#) utilise agonistic political theory to reconceptualise planning as a continuous site of struggle between conflicting visions of the good, rather than one governed by shared norms or rational agreement. Within this perspective, property rights are not examined as legal institutions *per se* but are seen as part of the contingent discursive order that determines whose claims are legitimised and whose are excluded. The implication is that property rights are inherently political; however, agonistic planning refrains from offering a materialist or institutional critique of how such rights are constructed and enforced.

4.8.2. the roles of different actors in relation to rights

Agonistic planning theory focuses on recognising conflict and the legitimacy of opposing claims but does not offer a framework for analysing the distribution or contestation of formal property rights. Actors are seen as political subjects rather than legal or institutional agents, and their authority to participate in planning processes comes from their capacity to articulate dissent, not from their ownership status. As [Kühn \(2021\)](#) notes, the planner's role shifts from facilitating consensus to designing arenas where disagreement can be expressed and institutionalised. However, the material implications of property ownership, such as legal standing, access to institutions, or economic influence, are largely set aside. In practice, those without property often lack the means to engage in agonistic debate on equal footing, a structural reality that the paradigm does not fully address.

4.8.3. *normative assumptions about ownership and the public–private boundary*

Agonistic planning deliberately avoids prescribing rules, resisting universal standards in favour of negotiations tailored to specific contexts. It does not promote a normative theory of ownership or define a clear stance on the public–private boundary. Instead, it views all institutional arrangements, including those concerning property, as contingent and open to challenge. While this openness fosters opportunities for alternative visions, it also risks delaying critical engagement with deeply rooted systems of ownership and control. As Metzger (2017) argues, the reluctance to make normative claims may enable dominant institutions, such as private property regimes, to remain unchallenged. The paradigm's focus on process and political difference often comes at the expense of substantive reflection on how land and resources should be owned or governed.

4.8.4. *the relationship between property rights, power, and spatial justice*

Agonistic planning explicitly concerns itself with power, but it primarily conceptualises power in discursive and relational terms rather than through institutional structures such as property rights. Drawing on agonistic democratic theory, particularly Mouffe's understanding of politics as a field of enduring conflict between legitimate but incompatible claims, scholars such as Pøger (2004) and Kühn (2021) conceptualise planning as a site of agonistic politics where competing worldviews clash. Within this framework, the emphasis lies on recognising and sustaining plural political contestation rather than on redesigning institutional structures such as property regimes. Consequently, while this paradigm provides a valuable critique of the depoliticising tendencies in mainstream planning theory, it pays relatively limited attention to how property rights shape material access to space, institutionalise exclusion, or create spatial injustice. Without addressing the institutional mechanisms that reinforce spatial hierarchies, including property, agonistic planning risks remaining at the level of symbolic politics rather than engaging with the material foundations of urban inequity.

4.8.5. *transformations of property through planning practice*

Agonistic planning rarely engages in direct transformation of property rights, as its primary concern lies in foregrounding conflict, dissent, and the multiplicity of claims that constitute urban politics. In practice, this orientation often manifests in experimental forums, temporary interventions, or participatory arenas that expose conflicting spatial claims without necessarily resolving them through institutional reform (Thorpe & Stickells, 2026). Because agonistic theory deliberately resists the stabilisation of consensus, property is typically treated as an object of ongoing political contestation rather than as a legal or economic institution requiring systematic restructuring. Consequently, while agonistic practices may reveal the political nature of property and the inequalities embedded within ownership structures, they seldom provide mechanisms for reconfiguring formal entitlements or redistributing property-based power. The foundational distribution of rights therefore tends to remain largely intact, even as the political conflicts surrounding them become more visible.

4.9. *Property rights in Coasian planning*

4.9.1. *engagement with property rights*

Coasian planning centres property rights in its analytical and normative framework. Unlike many planning paradigms that view property as a static backdrop or institutional constraint, Coasian theory explicitly sees property rights as dynamic instruments that organise bargaining, shape incentives, and mediate externalities. Following Coase's (1960) proposition, the paradigm assumes that efficient outcomes can be reached through negotiation between clearly defined rights-holders. In this context, planning institutions are responsible not for steering outcomes, but for ensuring rights are legally secure,

transparently allocated, and sufficiently adaptable to facilitate exchange and compensation (Lai, 2016; Webster & Lai, 2003). In this interpretation, planning is understood as facilitating the institutional conditions under which bargaining between rights-holders can address coordination problems associated with land-use externalities (Slaev & Daskalova, 2020).

4.9.2. *the roles of different actors in relation to rights*

Actors in Coasian planning are understood primarily as rights-holders whose behaviour is shaped by the incentives embedded in property institutions. Landowners, developers, infrastructure providers, and even communities are conceptualised as rational agents capable of negotiating over conflicting land-use interests when rights are clearly specified and enforceable. The planner's role, in this model, is not to impose normative judgments or hierarchical control but to act as an institutional architect, designing legal and procedural frameworks that reduce transaction costs and facilitate mutually beneficial agreements (Lai, 2014; Shahab & Lades, 2024). However, this model assumes a level of bargaining parity that is seldom evident in practice. Critics point out that actors without legal property (e.g., tenants, informal settlers, marginalised groups) are structurally excluded from negotiation, raising concerns about representational bias and procedural justice (Clinch et al., 2008).

4.9.3. *normative assumptions about ownership and the public–private boundary*

Coasian planning is based on a normative commitment to individual property rights and voluntary exchange as the ideal method of resource distribution. The public–private boundary is seen not as a site of contentious debate but as a functional relationship defined by the institutional specification of rights. This approach presumes that many planning goals traditionally achieved through public regulation, such as environmental protection or urban amenities, can be more efficiently managed through contractual arrangements and compensation mechanisms (Slaev, 2023; 2022). Public intervention is justified mainly when transaction costs or legal uncertainties hinder efficient bargaining. Consequently, the paradigm often minimises the redistributive and legitimising roles of planning and seldom examines the equity implications of the public–private divide.

4.9.4. *the relationship between property rights, power, and spatial justice*

While Coasian planning emphasises property rights as institutional tools, it has faced critique for neglecting the power asymmetries and historical contingencies inherent within them. Its focus on efficiency and mutual gains tends to underestimate how property regimes are shaped by past exclusions, unequal access, and entrenched privilege (Webster, 1998; Lai, 1997). By assuming all actors can negotiate equally, the model risks legitimising distributive inequalities as efficient outcomes. In this framework, spatial justice is not pursued as a normative objective but is assumed to arise from effective institutions and low-cost bargaining. This restricts the paradigm's capacity to address structural disadvantages or to view property rights as mechanisms of domination or resistance. Nevertheless, recent research has examined how Coasian tools might be integrated into broader institutional reforms to better address justice claims and democratic accountability (Shahab & Viallon, 2021; Slaev, 2019).

4.9.5. *transformations of property through planning practice*

Coasian planning explicitly transforms property rights by clarifying, reallocating, and redesigning entitlements to facilitate bargaining and reduce transaction costs. It employs tools such as transferable development rights, compensation schemes, bilateral agreements, and bespoke contractual arrangements to redefine the scope, precision, and exchangeability of rights. These mechanisms aim to create a more efficient institutional environment in which rights-holders can negotiate mutually beneficial outcomes, particularly in settings where

conventional regulation is seen as cumbersome or inefficient. However, these reforms tend to privilege actors with greater bargaining power and financial capacity, reinforcing rather than challenging underlying inequalities. The paradigm thus reshapes property through market-oriented institutional engineering, producing more negotiable and tradable rights while leaving distributive justice largely unaddressed.

4.10. Property rights in transformative planning

4.10.1. engagement with property rights

Transformative planning seeks to facilitate profound structural changes in response to crises related to climate, equity, and democratic legitimacy. While it often addresses the impacts of entrenched property systems, such as exclusion, ecological damage, or developmental lock-in, it seldom tackles property rights directly or systematically. Instead, property is generally viewed as part of the wider institutional framework that must adapt or evolve. As [Wilkinson \(2012\)](#) and [Ahern \(2011\)](#) note, planning for resilience and transformation demands governance systems capable of iterative learning, long-term vision, and institutional flexibility. However, although these frameworks implicitly call for a reassessment of access to and control over land and resources, they do not explicitly examine the legal or political structures of property rights. Consequently, transformative planning tends to operate with an implicit or underdeveloped understanding of how property regimes either inhibit or support systemic change.

4.10.2. the roles of different actors in relation to rights

Transformative planning requires empowering communities, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and encouraging institutional innovation, often despite entrenched interests. However, the roles of different actors concerning property rights are rarely examined. Landowners and developers may be recognised as stakeholders in transition processes, but their legal entitlements and institutional influence are seldom questioned. Similarly, marginalised groups, such as tenants, informal residents, or those affected by environmental risks, are often seen as beneficiaries of transformation rather than as actors with rights to assert. As [Brand & Gaffikin \(2007\)](#) point out, unless structural inequalities are explicitly addressed, participatory or collaborative modes of transformation risk perpetuating dominant interests. Without a clearer understanding of how actors' positions are shaped by their connection to property, the paradigm lacks the tools to grasp how institutionalised rights mediate agency and contestation.

4.10.3. normative assumptions about ownership and the public-private boundary

Transformative planning aims to reshape urban systems towards greater justice and sustainability, yet it often overlooks fundamental questions of ownership. Public-private arrangements are frequently presumed to be adaptable through policy innovation or collaborative experimentation, but they are not necessarily questioned at a core level. As [Wheeler \(2016\)](#) and [Davoudi et al. \(2013\)](#) point out, transformative capacity involves changing not only outcomes but also governance logics. However, without addressing the institutional persistence of private property and its influence on shaping urban futures, transformation risks remaining limited to managerial or procedural reforms. The paradigm's normative focus on systems change is evident, but it lacks a clear theory on how ownership structures must shift to foster more inclusive and ecologically sustainable futures.

4.10.4. the relationship between property rights, power, and spatial justice

Transformative planning is normatively committed to equity, resilience, and long-term justice, but its engagement with the power embedded in property rights remains underdeveloped. As [Sharma and Buisson \(2021\)](#) warn, the language of transformation can be depoliticised, enabling the co-option of radical agendas into technocratic planning frameworks. Without addressing how property rights

distribute access, embed privilege, and mediate spatial change, transformative planning may fail to tackle the root causes of injustice. [Davoudi \(2012\)](#) and [Brown \(2014\)](#) emphasise the importance of institutional adaptability, yet overlook how rigidity in property regimes, through legal entrenchment, market logic, or political resistance, can restrict adaptive capacity. To uphold its normative promise, transformative planning must develop a clearer account of how existing property systems sustain spatial injustice and what forms of institutional change are needed to overcome them.

4.10.5. transformations of property through planning practice

Transformative planning seeks to reconfigure property rights as part of broader agendas for social, ecological, and governance reform. It promotes experimentation with alternative ownership arrangements, such as community land trusts, cooperative housing, shared stewardship models, and urban commons, in an effort to create more equitable and sustainable frameworks for land governance. These initiatives illustrate planning's potential to generate hybrid or emergent property forms, yet their institutionalisation remains uneven and context dependent. Scaling such innovations requires legal, administrative, and political capacities that extend beyond the paradigm's normative aspirations. Consequently, while transformative planning articulates an ambitious vision for restructuring property regimes, it often lacks robust mechanisms for embedding these changes within wider statutory and institutional architectures, leaving transformation partial and contingent.

5. Comparative discussion of property rights in planning thought

This section synthesises the findings of the preceding analysis and highlights their broader implications for understanding how different planning paradigms engage with, neglect, or bypass property rights. Across the reviewed planning theories, we observe both convergences and divergences in how property rights are conceptualised, contested, and operationalised within planning thought. To structure this discussion, we revisit the ten planning paradigms through five analytical lenses that guided the previous section: how each engages with property rights, the roles it assigns to different actors, its normative assumptions about ownership and the public-private divide, how it relates property rights to power and spatial justice, and how planning practices actively transform property rights through regulatory and institutional intervention.

Before turning to the detailed analysis, [Table 1](#) summarises how the paradigms engage with property rights. Marxist, Coasian and neoliberal approaches treat property as a foundational institution, although towards different normative ends. Other paradigms engage with it more indirectly: advocacy and collaborative planning primarily address its consequences for participation and access, while classical rational and incremental accounts generally begin from existing rights as institutional conditions. However, contemporary rational methods increasingly model land and property values, and cumulative incremental decisions may substantially reconfigure ownership, tenure and value over time. These differences reflect the distinct explanatory, prescriptive and critical purposes of planning theories rather than a simple divide between paradigms that recognise property and those that neglect it.

Below, we elaborate on this summary through a comparative narrative, highlighting how these theoretical orientations mirror deeper assumptions about planning's institutional function, the legitimacy of property claims, and the planner's role in mediating access to land and spatial resources.

5.1. A spectrum of engagement: From silence to structural critique

Planning theories vary not only in the attention they give to property rights but also in how they conceptualise them: as fixed institutional parameters, variables to be modelled, resources for coordination,

Table 1
Summary of planning paradigms and their engagement with property rights.

Planning paradigm	Theoretical Purpose and Treatment of Property Rights	Assumptions about Ownership & Public–Private Boundary	Roles of Key Actors	Engagement with Power & Spatial Justice	Planning's Role in Reshaping Property Rights
Rational planning	Classical models treat rights as fixed inputs; contemporary models make development rights and land values explicit.	Private ownership is generally retained, while regulation and investment reshape development capacity and value.	Experts lead analysis; agencies, consultants, data specialists, owners and developers shape inputs and objectives.	Distributive choices are embedded in objectives, datasets and valuation assumptions.	Models how zoning, density, infrastructure and design reshape development rights and land values.
Incremental planning	Explains decision-making through successive adjustments; rights are both starting conditions and cumulative outcomes.	Begins from existing arrangements, but repeated changes may redraw public, private and collective rights.	Public authorities, owners, developers, residents and informal claimants interact, although their influence is unequal.	May compound established advantage or progressively strengthen marginalised claims.	Successive permissions, investments, redevelopment and regularisation can reallocate, formalise and revalue rights.
Advocacy planning	Rights addressed through exclusion, displacement and unequal access.	Private ownership critiqued in practice, not in theory.	Planners as advocates for marginalised; landowners dominant.	Strong on equity aims; weak on structural reform of rights.	Amplifies claims; formal rights largely unchanged.
Collaborative planning	Rights primarily treated as stakeholder interests entering negotiation.	Liberal balance of interests; ownership not redefined.	Planners as debate facilitators; all actors equal in theory.	Procedural equity foregrounded; structural power underplayed.	Negotiated tweaks; ownership structures retained.
Strategic planning	Control of land treated as a condition of implementation.	Pragmatic acceptance of existing ownership regimes.	Planners as managers. Dominant actors (landowners, state) drive implementation.	Focus on outcomes; distributive implications marginal.	Uses targeted tools; rights exercised, not redistributed.
Neoliberal planning	Private rights expanded, flexibilised and marketised.	Strong normative preference for private ownership.	Planners as facilitators for capital; others marginalised.	Reinforces market power; spatial justice concerns sidelined.	Expands and flexibilises rights for market actors.
Marxist planning	Property treated as a capitalist social relation and source of class power.	Private ownership rejected; public or collective preferred.	Planners as public representatives. State serves capital; planner implicated in reproduction.	High; critiques class power and land commodification.	Seeks structural overhaul toward collective ownership.
Agonistic planning	Property treated as a disputed political claim, but rarely analysed legally.	Ownership seen as discursive construct (power tool); rarely problematised.	Planners as curators of dissent; rights rarely formalised.	Engages conflict symbolically; lacks material analysis.	Focuses on contestation; formal rights untouched.
Coasian planning	Allocating rights structures bargaining and transaction costs.	Individual rights central; public role limited to facilitation.	Planners as institutional architects; rights-holders as negotiators.	Weak on justice; assumes bargaining parity despite asymmetries.	Clarifies and reallocates rights to enable bargaining.
Transformative planning	Transformation of property relations implied but seldom specified.	Ownership structures under-theorised; assumed malleable.	Planners as fighters. Diverse actors involved; roles tied to governance reform.	Strong normative commitment; underdeveloped account of property regimes.	Aims for systemic shifts; rights transformation unclear.

sources of structural power or objects of transformation. This variation reflects their differing explanatory, prescriptive and critical purposes rather than a simple division between technical and political approaches. Even where property is analytically visible, its distribution and legitimacy may remain unexamined. Treating existing rights as neutral or given can therefore tacitly affirm prevailing ownership arrangements and reproduce socio-spatial inequalities (Jacobs & Paulsen, 2009).

Rational and incremental planning often begin from existing property arrangements, but their engagement is neither identical nor static. Classical rational planning generally treated rights as fixed institutional parameters, whereas contemporary analytical planning explicitly models parcels, development capacity and land values and can assess how plans reshape them. Incremental planning likewise starts from existing entitlements, but successive permissions, infrastructure investments, transactions and regularisation measures may cumulatively transform tenure, ownership and value (Davis & Thornley, 2010; Caldeira, 2017). In both traditions, the limitation is less the absence of property than its framing as technical optimisation or pragmatic adjustment rather than normative redistribution. Nevertheless, zoning, infrastructure and development decisions redistribute use rights, development opportunities and value among owners, users and the public (Davy, 2012).

At the other end are neoliberal, Marxist and Coasian paradigms, which engage explicitly with property rights from markedly different perspectives. Neoliberal approaches privilege private property and deploy planning to facilitate market-led development, land-value growth and investment. Coasian approaches treat the allocation of

rights as an institutional variable affecting externalities, transaction costs and bargaining, examining whether clearer or reallocated rights can support mutually beneficial coordination under particular conditions. Marxist perspectives understand property as a historically specific social relation that reproduces class power and regard its transformation as central to social and spatial justice. Together, these paradigms conceptualise property as a means of commodification, an institutional mechanism for coordination, or a site of domination and potential transformation (Coase, 1960; Harvey, 2002; Blomley, 2004).

Between these positions lie paradigms that recognise property in partial or indirect ways. Advocacy and collaborative planning illuminate exclusion, displacement and unequal participation but generally focus more on decision-making processes than on the legal foundations of ownership. Strategic and transformative planning recognise that control of land affects implementation and institutional change, although the mechanisms through which ownership might be reformed often remain unspecified. Agonistic planning foregrounds contestation over land and territory but provides a less developed account of how formal property rights structure participation and determine whose claims receive institutional recognition. This can abstract conflict from its material basis in land and ownership (Purcell, 2013).

This variation reflects the different purposes served by planning theories rather than a simple distinction between recognition and omission. Decision-making and process-oriented theories commonly operationalise property as part of the context of planning, whereas political-economic and institutional approaches place it closer to the centre of explanation or critique. Across the paradigms reviewed, however, the connection between the socio-legal constitution of

property and routine planning practice remains unevenly developed. Because property is historically produced and politically contested, more explicit engagement with its legal and institutional foundations would strengthen planning theory's capacity to address inequality, exclusion and land-based conflict (Singer, 2000; Bhandar, 2018).

Viewed through a structure–agency lens (Giddens, 1984), these differences concern how far planners and planning institutions are understood as capable of reshaping property relations. Classical rational and incremental planning commonly take existing entitlements as starting conditions, although planning practice modifies them through zoning, infrastructure and development permissions. Contemporary analytical planning makes this agency more visible by modelling how alternative plans affect development capacity and value, while incremental decisions may produce substantial cumulative change. Advocacy, collaborative, strategic and agonistic approaches expand agency through participation, negotiation, coordination or contestation, but often leave the legal distribution of property comparatively under-examined. Transformative planning more clearly anticipates systemic change, although its mechanisms for reforming property remain underdeveloped.

Neoliberal, Coasian and Marxist perspectives make the interaction between structure and agency more explicit, although they do so for different purposes. Neoliberal approaches mobilise planning to facilitate market-oriented development and strengthen commodified property relations. Coasian approaches treat institutional design as a form of agency through which the allocation of rights can be adjusted to address transaction costs and coordination problems. Marxist perspectives foreground the structural power embedded in property while identifying its transformation as necessary for challenging class inequality. These are not mutually exclusive accounts of planning; rather, their different explanatory and normative purposes produce contrasting interpretations of how planning reinforces, coordinates or transforms property relations.

5.2. *Who has rights? The politics of recognition and participation*

A central question in the analysis of planning theory is not only who takes part in planning processes but also who is recognised as having legitimate rights to land and urban space. These rights, whether officially codified or informally claimed, influence access, agency, and impact on planning results. Different paradigms hold varying views on which actors are recognised as rights-holders, how these rights are defined, and what kinds of claims are accepted. As Blomley (2004) notes, the politics of recognition is inseparable from the politics of exclusion, since acknowledging some forms of property inevitably delegitimises others.

Classical rational planning centres expert planners and generally treats landowners and developers as the principal subjects of regulation. Contemporary analytical methods can represent a wider population through increasingly detailed spatial and behavioural data, although analytical visibility does not necessarily confer influence or legal recognition. Incremental planning involves a more dispersed configuration of public authorities, owners, developers, residents, informal occupiers and community organisations. Actors possessing formal rights, resources and institutional access often exert greater influence over what is considered feasible, but repeated negotiation, mobilisation and regularisation may enable initially marginal claims to acquire recognition over time. Both approaches therefore demonstrate the distinction between being considered within planning analysis or negotiation and being institutionally recognised as a rights-holder (Jacobs & Paulsen, 2009; Caldeira, 2017).

Collaborative and strategic planning broaden the actor landscape by including stakeholders, yet they often mirror the formal hierarchy of rights. Participation is seen as a procedural formality rather than a redefinition of entitlement. The legal inequalities that give landowners greater bargaining power, institutional access, and entitlement to

compensation are rarely addressed. This leads to tokenistic inclusion, where the structural conditions affecting voice and influence remain unchanged. As Brand & Gaffikin (2007) argue, without confronting the institutional privileging of property rights, collaborative practices risk reproducing rather than reducing structural inequalities. Advocacy planning, though more aware of structural disadvantage, focuses on representational voice, aiming to include marginalised groups in planning deliberations. However, there is often a gap between participation and entitlement (Thorpe, 2017a). Advocacy might enable communities to voice their claims, but it does not always result in institutional recognition or legal changes. Rights continue to be governed by the existing property regimes.

Both Marxist and Coasian paradigms focus on rights but from different normative perspectives. Marxist theory examines the origins, legitimacy, and distribution of rights, arguing that planning is involved in reproducing capitalist property relations. It emphasises how legal recognition is historically dependent and often based on prior acts of dispossession. This echoes critical legal scholarship, which insists that rights are not pre-political but historically constituted through processes of conquest, enclosure, and state sanction (Singer, 2000; Bhandar, 2018). Coasian planning, by contrast, assumes that rights are given and that effective bargaining relies on their clarity and enforceability. It concentrates on institutional mechanisms for resolving conflicts rather than on the legitimacy or distribution of those rights. Neoliberal planning, however, only recognises claims that align with market value or development potential. It prioritises actors with legal ownership, financial leverage, or strategic assets, often marginalising claims rooted in use, need, or historical presence. This approach treats informal or collective claims as barriers to be regularised, compensated, or displaced (Fawaz, 2023). In this sense, neoliberalism reframes rights in strictly economic terms, subordinating questions of justice to questions of exchange value (Harvey, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Christophers, 2014).

Agonistic planning embraces contestation and dissent but lacks a clear normative framework for deciding which claims should receive institutional support. While it highlights the performative aspect of rights-claiming, it risks turning struggles over land into rhetorical disputes, undervaluing the legal and material importance of exclusion. As Purcell (2013) observes, such approaches may valorise political disagreement but fail to confront how entrenched property regimes set the boundaries of what can be contested in the first place. Transformative planning similarly seeks to expand participation and overhaul governance systems but often lacks a theory of how rights, especially informal, collective, or customary ones, are institutionalised, contested, or transformed.

A more comprehensive engagement with rights in planning theory would require moving beyond the procedural language of inclusion to examine the legal and institutional mechanisms through which claims are recognised, enforced, or denied. This includes analysing how formal recognition is granted, how it is influenced by land law and tenure systems, and how planning processes themselves contribute to the reproduction or transformation of rights hierarchies. Without this deeper engagement, planning runs the risk of treating recognition as symbolic rather than substantive, leaving intact the very property regimes that structure exclusion and inequality (Blomley, 2013; Roy, 2005).

5.3. *Normative assumptions about ownership and the public–private boundary*

At the core of each planning theory paradigm lies an implicit (or explicit) vision of ownership and the suitable boundary between public regulation and private control. These visions are not just technical preferences but are rooted in broader ideological, legal, and political understandings of the role of the state, the market, and the individual in land governance. As Alexander (2001) argues, such assumptions are often hidden but profoundly shape how planning systems conceptualise

legitimacy, responsibility, and the scope of intervention.

Rational, incremental and strategic planning generally operate within legal frameworks that recognise private ownership alongside public regulation. Classical rational and incremental accounts commonly take existing entitlements as their starting conditions, while strategic planning treats ownership and control as important determinants of implementation. Public intervention is generally justified through efficiency, coordination, feasibility or delivery rather than an explicit normative critique of ownership distribution. Nevertheless, successive regulatory decisions, infrastructure investments and development agreements may alter use rights, development capacity, land value and the public–private boundary. The limitation of these paradigms is therefore not that they leave property unchanged, but that they seldom examine such changes as distributive choices or question the legitimacy of prevailing ownership arrangements (Alexander, 2001; Davy, 2012).

Neoliberal and Coasian planning build on these assumptions by more explicitly endorsing private ownership. Neoliberal planning views land primarily as a means for capital investment, arguing that planning should support development by protecting and increasing asset values. Coasian planning, although based on a different intellectual foundation, similarly emphasises the importance of clear and tradable ownership as essential for resolving land-use conflicts through market-based negotiations. In both cases, the role of public authority is minimised or confined to facilitating efficient market transactions. Redistribution, equity, or social needs are rarely seen as legitimate reasons for altering ownership. Christophers (2014) highlights how this alignment between planning and asset-based governance transforms urban land into a financial instrument, with ownership conceived less as stewardship and more as collateral for global capital flows.

In stark contrast, Marxist planning fundamentally challenges these assumptions. It rejects the idea that ownership is neutral and instead views it as a historically constructed system of enclosure and class dominance. Private property is regarded as a key instrument of exploitation, and the public–private divide is understood not as a simple boundary but as a battleground of political struggle. Marxist theory contends that altering spatial outcomes requires confronting and reconfiguring ownership relations themselves. This perspective resonates with Harvey's (2007) notion of 'accumulation by dispossession', where planning institutions are implicated in the ongoing transfer of land and value from public to private hands.

Advocacy planning offers a moral critique of outcomes resulting from unequal ownership but often stops short of examining the fundamental structure of entitlements. Its focus is on amplifying marginalised voices within planning processes rather than questioning who owns what and why. Collaborative, transformative, and agonistic planning, though different in approach, tend to operate within existing legal frameworks. They recognise that property arrangements influence outcomes, but they do not question the legitimacy of those arrangements. Ownership is seen as a parameter to manage rather than a system to challenge. As Healey (1997) points out, these approaches often privilege governance innovation over institutional critique, leaving untouched the deeper property regimes that shape distributive outcomes.

This widespread reluctance to engage with ownership as a normative and institutional domain reflects a broader unease within planning theory. To engage meaningfully with property is to confront the fundamental structures of planning systems, including their complicity in creating inequality. It also prompts difficult questions about the planner's authority and the political mandates needed to pursue redistributive or reparative actions. However, without this engagement, planning theory cannot fully understand how land, wealth, and power are intertwined. In contexts marked by housing commodification, speculative development, and land grabbing, ownership cannot be treated as a neutral baseline; it must be recognised as a central site of struggle over urban futures (Rolnik, 2020; Marcuse and Madden, 2024).

5.4. Property rights, power, and spatial justice

Planning theory has often struggled to explain how property rights create, reinforce or reduce spatial injustice. Classical rational planning commonly claimed technical neutrality and treated the distribution of property as external to its decision-making framework. Contemporary analytical planning may make ownership, development capacity and land value visible, but distributive choices remain embedded in datasets, model objectives and performance criteria. Incremental planning is not technocratic in the same sense. Because it begins from existing institutions and feasible adjustments, it may cumulatively reproduce hierarchies of ownership and access; under other conditions, repeated mobilisation, infrastructure provision and regularisation may strengthen marginalised claims and reconfigure tenure. Neither technical optimisation nor pragmatic adaptation determines who should receive planning-generated benefits or bear its burdens. Claims of neutrality can therefore obscure how statutory rights and planning decisions legitimise structural exclusion (Yiftachel, 1998; Caldeira, 2017).

Collaborative and strategic planning try to tackle pluralism and institutional fragmentation through building consensus and strategic alignment. Yet they often assume a level playing field among stakeholders and seldom confront the unequal power relations within property regimes. Even when participatory processes include a broad spectrum of actors, those with legal property rights usually have more influence, while tenants, informal settlers, or marginalised communities must depend on moral appeals or discretionary concessions. This reflects what Fainstein (2014) terms the 'limits of participation', where procedural fairness cannot substitute for structural redistribution when property regimes lock in unequal bargaining positions. By not examining the legal framework that underpins spatial inequality, these approaches risk reinforcing it rather than challenging it.

Advocacy and Marxist planning offer more explicit approaches to spatial justice. Advocacy planning emphasises procedural inclusion and the redistribution of voice in decision-making, aiming to achieve fairer outcomes within existing systems. However, while it frequently addresses exclusion in planning processes, it does not consistently challenge the fundamental institutional structure of property ownership itself. In contrast, Marxist planning takes a structural perspective, highlighting how property rights serve as legal representations of class power. It sees planning not as an impartial mediator but as a mechanism through which capital sustains spatial advantages via displacement, enclosure, and the commodification of land. Here, justice is understood in distributive and structural terms, aligning with Harvey's (1973) 'social justice in the city' framework, which insists that equitable outcomes require confronting the property regimes through which advantage is institutionalised. From this viewpoint, justice cannot be realised without fundamentally transforming the underlying system of ownership.

Neoliberal and Coasian paradigms prioritise allocative efficiency and market coordination, often assuming that negotiated solutions or incentivised development can produce the best outcomes. However, their instrumental focus on transaction costs and bargaining obscures how initial distributions of property reflect deep-seated inequalities. Both paradigms tend to naturalise the status quo, viewing existing property rights as neutral rather than as products of history. By presuming that clearly defined rights can simply be traded to achieve efficient outcomes, they ignore how those rights were constituted in the first place, often through acts of enclosure, colonisation, or exclusionary zoning.

This historical perspective invites a broader conceptualisation of spatial justice that moves beyond Eurocentric assumptions embedded in many property rights frameworks. Indigenous land justice scholarship, for instance, highlights that land relations may be constituted through obligations of care, collective continuity, and stewardship rather than individualised exclusionary ownership. Wensing's discussion of Indigenous land justice in Australia underscores that coexistence between tenure systems is fundamentally a question of parity and institutional

recognition rather than mere legal integration (Wensing, 2018). Likewise, planning for co-existence approaches emphasise how planning institutions privilege particular rationalities of ownership and territory while marginalising claims grounded in customary and relational understandings of land (Porter and Barry, 2016). These perspectives reinforce that spatial injustice involves not only unequal distribution but also unequal recognition and the exclusion of alternative land relations from planning legitimacy. Related work in ecological jurisprudence and intergenerational civic ethics further supports the argument that property regimes embed normative assumptions about responsibility and obligation, not only entitlements (Pelizzon, 2021; Engle et al., 2022).

These critiques echo political economy accounts that describe property as ‘frozen history’ (Blomley, 2013), sedimenting past injustices into contemporary urban landscapes. For example, when property regimes have been historically shaped by racialised dispossession or gendered exclusions, market-based coordination reproduces those inequities rather than resolving them (Bhandar, 2018; Safransky, 2017). Moreover, both paradigms underestimate the asymmetries of power that condition bargaining processes: while Coasian theory assumes voluntary exchange between equal actors, in practice landowners and developers often wield disproportionate leverage over tenants, informal occupiers, or communities without formal recognition (Webster & Lai, 2003). Neoliberal planning reinforces these asymmetries by valorising ownership as the ultimate measure of legitimacy, disqualifying claims rooted in use, need, or collective rights. As a result, these paradigms offer limited means to address structural disadvantage and may, in practice, entrench the power of dominant actors. In cities marked by speculative development and financialised housing markets, these paradigms risk transforming planning into a facilitator of accumulation rather than a guarantor of equity (Christophers, 2014; Derkacz & Shahab, 2025; Rolnik, 2020).

Agonistic and transformative planning present unique challenges. Agonistic approaches emphasise the inevitability of conflict and the impossibility of consensus but often overlook the material foundations of that conflict, particularly property. Their focus on discourse and contestation tends to sideline questions of who owns, controls, and benefits from land. By abstracting conflict into discourse, these approaches risk ignoring the concrete dispossessions that shape spatial struggles (Purcell, 2013). Transformative planning aims for system change and long-term adaptability but lacks a clear theory of property rights as tools for transformation. Although the paradigm evokes the rhetoric of resilience, justice, and equity, it does not adequately examine how institutionalised property arrangements limit those ambitions.

In summary, across most paradigms, spatial justice remains either narrowly procedural or insufficiently grounded in a theory of property. Where justice is invoked, it is rarely connected to questions of entitlement, legal recognition, or redistributive authority. As Soja (2010) argues, spatial justice is not just about fairness in decision-making but about recognising how spatial structures, including property regimes, mediate access to opportunities and resources. A more comprehensive theorisation of property rights is therefore necessary if planning theory is to move beyond abstract commitments to justice and address the institutional conditions that shape spatial inequality.

5.5. Planning as a Producer of Property

A key insight emerging from the five analytical lenses is that planning’s constitutive relationship with property is unevenly recognised across the paradigms reviewed. Planning does more than operate within existing property regimes: zoning, development permissions, infrastructure investment and procedural rules reshape what different actors may do, where and under what conditions. Property–planning scholarship has theorised this right-making role (Davy, 2012; Dorries, 2022; Thorpe, 2022), but it is not consistently integrated across canonical planning paradigms. The issue is therefore not a general absence of theorisation, but uneven recognition of how planning produces and

reallocates entitlements, obligations, benefits and burdens.

Across the paradigms reviewed, recognition of planning’s constitutive role varies considerably. Classical rational planning generally treats property rights as institutional inputs, whereas contemporary analytical planning models development capacity and land value, making some property-producing effects explicit. Lindblomian incremental theory similarly begins from existing entitlements, but incremental urban change demonstrates how successive zoning decisions, permissions, infrastructure investments, transactions and regularisation measures can create, transfer, formalise and revalue rights. Individual decisions may respect existing arrangements while their cumulative effects transform tenure and ownership structures. The principal limitation of these approaches is therefore not that property remains unchanged, but that changes produced through technical or pragmatic decisions are insufficiently examined as normative choices about entitlement, legitimacy and distribution (Davy, 2012; Davis & Thornley, 2010; Caldeira, 2017).

Advocacy and collaborative planning engage more directly with issues of participation and equity, yet they tend to foreground procedural justice rather than the structural composition of entitlements. While they may challenge exclusionary consequences of property regimes, their efforts typically influence how rights are exercised, through conditions, negotiations, or community benefits, without altering the underlying legal architecture of ownership. Transformative planning, meanwhile, aspires to reshape governance systems and promote more just and sustainable futures, but its treatment of property often remains aspirational. It calls for alternative governance and institutional experiments yet offers limited theoretical grounding for how these alternatives might be embedded within or replace existing property regimes.

Neoliberal, Marxist, and Coasian approaches stand out for treating property rights as central objects of analysis. Neoliberal planning re-engineers property rights to facilitate land markets, investment flows, and entrepreneurial governance. Its deregulatory and market-making reforms generate profound redistributions of entitlements, often converting rights into financial assets. Coasian planning similarly foregrounds property rights but conceptualises them as institutional tools for managing externalities and reducing transaction costs. Through the creation of precise, exchangeable, and negotiable rights, it explicitly treats planning as an institution that designs and calibrates property regimes. Marxist planning, by contrast, situates property rights within a broader critique of capitalist accumulation, emphasising the historical and political dimensions of ownership and calling for systemic change. Yet even here, planning’s everyday administrative practices receive less attention than the structural transformation of ownership that Marxist theory envisions at the scale of the state.

Taken together, these observations reveal a fundamental gap in planning theory: the absence of a systematic account of how planning creates, reshapes, and stabilises property rights through its ordinary operations. Blomley (2016) reminds us that property is not simply a legal status but an ongoing socio-spatial performance enacted across multiple institutions, including planning. Every regulatory decision, zoning map, design guideline, exaction requirement, or development approval functions as a moment in which property is made and remade. These moments modify not only permissible uses but also expectations, market values, risk distributions, and claims to legitimacy. They shape access and exclusion, define obligations and privileges, and reconfigure the spatial distribution of rights and responsibilities. The fact that planning theory often renders these effects invisible undermines its capacity to understand its own role in producing socio-spatial inequality.

Recognising planning as a producer of property has significant implications for comparative planning research. Variations between planning systems, such as the strength of regulatory authority, the use of compulsory purchase, the scope of public landownership, and the deployment of value capture instruments, are not simply administrative differences. They represent distinct ways in which planning institutions participate in shaping property regimes. A system that permits routine

expropriation, for example, enacts a different property-ordering logic than one in which compulsory acquisition is tightly constrained. Likewise, jurisdictions that rely heavily on negotiated agreements or development rights markets actively transform property through contractual mechanisms rather than statutory regulation. Comparisons that take these institutional variations seriously can illuminate why similar planning goals yield divergent spatial outcomes and why certain reforms produce persistent inequalities despite procedural improvements.

Finally, acknowledging planning's constitutive role requires a reorientation of planning theory's normative commitments (Angebauer & Habermann, 2022). If planning produces property, its interventions inevitably redistribute power and resources. Conceiving property as an object that planning helps constitute, rather than as a constraint it must simply accept, allows planners to confront the ethical and political dimensions of their work more directly. A more explicit and critical engagement with property as a socio-legal institution would provide planning theory with a stronger foundation for addressing structural inequality, land conflict, and the governance of urban transformation. It would also open the possibility for planning to imagine and institutionalise alternative property relations capable of supporting more just, democratic, and sustainable futures.

This perspective aligns closely with longstanding legal debates about the relationship between planning and property. While some jurisdictions, most prominently the United States, treat planning primarily as a restriction on pre-existing development rights, others conceptualise planning as the mechanism through which development rights are created in the first place (Needham, 2012; Angebauer & Habermann, 2022). German planning law provides a paradigmatic example of the latter approach: development rights are not viewed as inherent attributes of ownership, but as public-law entitlements conferred through planning decisions (Durner, 2023). As Davy (2012) argues, this distinction is far from merely technical; it reflects fundamentally different understandings of the nature of property and the role of the state in shaping it. Viewing planning as constitutive rather than merely regulatory underscores that decisions about land use, density, and permitted activities are decisions about the very content of property rights and therefore about the distribution of opportunities, burdens, and benefits within society (Needham, 2012).

Recognising these differences reinforces the need for planning theory to address property more explicitly. A theory of planning that overlooks how property is made, remade, and contested through planning risks obscuring one of planning's most significant institutional effects. By contrast, a theory that takes the constitutive dimension of property seriously is better equipped to engage with the normative, political, and distributive stakes inherent in planning practice.

6. Conclusion: repositioning property rights in planning theory

This paper has demonstrated that property rights receive uneven forms of attention across planning theory. Marxist, Coasian and neoliberal approaches place property near the centre of their analysis, although for markedly different explanatory and normative purposes. Other paradigms engage with it less directly: contemporary rational planning models parcels, development capacity and value; incremental processes cumulatively reshape tenure and ownership; and process-oriented approaches encounter property through questions of participation, access and implementation. The principal limitation is therefore not the complete absence of property, but the uneven theorisation of its socio-legal constitution, distribution and legitimacy. This matters because property provides both a context for planning authority and a medium through which land-use decisions redistribute development opportunities, value and control.

A central contribution of this paper is to show how the differing purposes of planning theories shape their treatment of property and the institutional consequences they make visible. When property rights are

treated primarily as technical inputs or background conditions, theories may understate how ownership affects stakeholder recognition, definitions of the public interest and the range of interventions considered feasible. More explicit attention to property reveals how even routine planning actions redistribute development capacity, land value and bargaining power. The gap is therefore not a general failure of planning thought, but an uneven connection between theories of governance and the socio-legal foundations of spatial development. Without that connection, planning theory risks naturalising unequal distributions of land, value and decision-making power and weakening its normative claims concerning justice and democracy.

The analysis also demonstrates that planning is not simply shaped by property regimes but actively shapes them. Rational planning modifies development capacity and value through modelling, zoning, infrastructure provision and development control. Incremental planning produces change through sequences of permissions, investments, transactions, negotiations and regularisation measures whose cumulative effects may transform tenure and ownership. Planning should therefore be understood as a property-making institution that continually recalibrates rights, responsibilities and benefits across space. These effects may entrench existing inequalities or create opportunities for recognition, redistribution and collective control, depending on the actors, objectives and institutional conditions involved.

We contend that a more explicit theorisation of property rights is necessary, not only to better understand how planning functions within and upon systems of ownership, but also to improve the normative and analytical capabilities of planning theory itself. Such a theorisation must regard property not as a static legal fact or market-neutral concept, but as an evolving institution embedded in histories of dispossession, legal codification, and political conflict. It must also address the relational aspects of property, recognising how rights are asserted, denied, negotiated, and redefined through planning practices. This implies treating planning not merely as a regulator of land markets but as a co-producer of property regimes, one whose interventions can either entrench inequalities or open possibilities for redistribution and collective stewardship. Crucially, it also requires attention to the material and procedural mechanisms, planning permissions, regulatory waivers, value capture tools, infrastructure alignments, through which property is dynamically transformed in practice.

This re-conceptualisation also demands greater attention to the institutional variability of property regimes. Different planning systems, whether characterised by strong public landownership, market-based development rights, or informal tenure arrangements, embody distinct property orders that shape planning capacity and outcomes. Comparative planning research must therefore move beyond procedural differences to analyse how planning institutions participate in producing, legitimising, or contesting property relations across diverse legal cultures. Such comparative work can also illuminate how institutional path dependencies and political settlements shape both the stability and the malleability of property regimes, revealing why seemingly similar planning reforms have divergent distributive consequences across contexts.

Future research should develop a more integrated agenda that combines insights from institutional economics, legal theory, political ecology, and critical urban studies. This would involve examining how property regimes and planning institutions interact within diverse legal, cultural, and political contexts, while also interrogating the normative assumptions that sustain dominant models of ownership, entitlement, and governance. Crucially, this research must grapple with contemporary challenges, such as housing commodification, land financialisation, informal urbanisation, and climate adaptation, which expose the limitations of property systems historically designed for stability and exclusion rather than equity and resilience (Rolnik, 2020; Harvey, 2007). These pressures underscore that the future of planning lies not in accommodating inherited property regimes but in reimagining them as institutional arrangements oriented to collective well-being. The

escalating impacts of climate change, for example, will require new forms of land governance, adaptive rights systems, and collective responsibilities that conventional property frameworks are often ill-equipped to support. In this sense, property reform emerges as a core component of climate adaptation and disaster resilience rather than a peripheral legal concern.

A central implication of this agenda is the need to understand planning not merely as a mechanism for mediating conflicts over property, but as a practice that actively constitutes and reshapes property relations through law, regulation, and institutional design. By repositioning property rights as a foundational concern of planning theory, this paper contributes to a more critical understanding of the institutional architectures that underpin spatial development and the distribution of benefits, burdens, and risks. At the same time, advancing theory in this area requires comparative sensitivity. Planning operates across varied legal orders and political economies, from Western liberal democracies to postcolonial and informal contexts, and any critical approach to property in planning must be capable of engaging this plurality rather than reproducing Eurocentric assumptions (Roy, 2005; Bhandar, 2018). It must also remain attentive to the ways different societies conceptualise ownership, obligation, and stewardship, recognising that alternatives to private property are not anomalies but long-established and legitimate systems of land governance.

This concern with plurality also raises a further limitation and future direction emerging from the scope of the present review. While the ten paradigms reviewed in this paper represent widely recognised canonical traditions within planning theory, the selection also reflects a body of scholarship that has been predominantly shaped by Occidental epistemologies and largely anthropocentric assumptions about land, territory, and value. This inevitably constrains the cultural and ontological universality of the conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis. In particular, Indigenous land justice scholarship and planning for co-existence approaches question the implicit primacy of individualised tenure, the conceptual separation of society from nature, and the assumption that planning institutions should primarily arbitrate among human interests. Rather than constituting a marginal supplement, these perspectives engage foundational questions of ownership, responsibility, and justice, and therefore speak directly to the paper's central concern with property rights as institutions that structure power and spatial outcomes. Accordingly, the five analytical windows developed here should be understood not only as a means of comparing established theoretical traditions, but also as a flexible framework that can be extended to plural and relational conceptions of property and planning beyond the dominant canon.

Repositioning property at the heart of planning theory is thus not an abstract intellectual exercise but a political project: it challenges the discipline to confront its complicity in reproducing exclusion and to embrace its potential role in redistributive and transformative change. Future scholarship should, therefore, pursue three directions: first, clarifying the mechanisms through which planning reshapes the 'bundle of rights' in practice; second, investigating how alternative property forms, e.g., commons, customary systems, and cooperative models, can be institutionally supported; and third, exploring how planning institutions can develop the legitimacy to intervene not only in land use but also in the underlying structures of ownership. Only by advancing this agenda can planning theory build the conceptual tools necessary to address the intertwined crises of inequality, housing, and climate change, and to contribute to more just and sustainable urban futures.

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