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PLANNERS' IDEALS AND REALITIES: NORMATIVE BEHAVIOUR AND CONFORMORALITY

Qingyuan Guo[1]

Abstract

People often make presumptions about planners – rational, altruistic, self-interested, bureaucratic, and so on. However, what is a realist portrait of planning practitioners? What normative dispositions do they tend to adopt, why do they adopt them, and how they behave based on them? To shed light on these questions, this study explores the normative behaviour of planning practitioners. A meta-ethnography was conducted focusing on 19 empirical studies relevant to the normative behaviour of English local authority planners from 1978 to 2022. The paper's synthesis of the same revealed prominent normative frameworks within the planning community across different social-temporal contexts. The findings highlight consistent normative features among planners: a deep internalisation of a moderately progressive professional ideal and a strong identification with the planning profession. These results indicate a widespread phenomenon of conformorality within the planning profession, with planners frequently facing challenges when it comes to adhering to two sets of norms: the bureaucratic, and the professional. The study also discusses different mechanisms that contribute to the achievement and maintenance of planners' conformorality, including compliance, identification, and internalisation.

Keywords

conformorality, planning practice, professional values, careers, meta-ethnography

1 Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics and Political Science, Cheng Kin Ku Building, Houghton St, London WC2A 2AE, United Kingdom. E-Mail: q.guo11@lse.ac.uk

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8447-067X

1. Introduction

Planning professionals have been frequently criticised for their normative dispositions by both academics and politicians. Planners are sometimes described as ideological (Harvey, 1985) and are seen to contribute to the spatial dimension of capital accumulation, and to generate social-spatial inequality and exploitation. Planners are sometimes accused of being engaged in a corporatist bargain with the state to gain monopoly power over land use control, and in exchange, provide technical justification for the state's political action (Reade, 1987). Planners are also sometimes described as self-interested actors within the bureaucratic system, who have gradually evolved into a protectionist 'planning class' that intervenes in society inefficiently and undemocratically (Evans, 1993; Banham, 1969). However, few of these claims pertaining to planners' dispositions are supported by empirical investigations of planning practitioners.

Interestingly, even within the planning discipline itself, research focused on the normative behaviour of planning practitioners is scarce, though there have been several intellectual efforts that have emphasised the need to study planners. This trend can be traced back to Faludi's (1973) emphasis that only with empirical understating of planners can we properly understand planning, and thereafter to scholars such as Healey (1992), Forester (1989) and Hoch (1994). However, these more theoretical contributions have not stimulated many empirical investigations on planning practitioners. Regarding the limited number of studies,[1] it appears that their relationship is fragmented, and a coherent stream has yet to be formed. Despite all studying planners, few of the studies have built on the empirical findings of others.

Informed by this research gap, this paper conducts a meta-ethnography of existing empirical studies relevant to the value, normative judgements and induced actions of planners working in local authorities across England. Meta-ethnography, as a method of meta-synthesis, was developed by Nobilt and Hare (1988), and enables the generation of new interpretations based on existing qualitative works.

Beyond mapping planners' normative dispositions and induced behaviour, the outcome of this meta-ethnography study reveals the existence of a persistent tension between planners' professional ideals and their bureaucratic roles. This paper also signals the existence of the phenomenon of conformorality within the profession. Conformorality, according to Lisciandra et al. (2013), is the act of adjustment of one's behaviour to align with the responses and norms of others. Furthermore, potential mechanisms that might contribute to the achievement and maintenance of conformorality are revealed; including compliance, identification, and internalisation.

The structure of this paper is as follows: first, this paper introduces the evolving working context of English local authority planners since the 1970s. Subsequently, the research methodology employed in this study is noted. Thereafter, the paper discusses the results of meta-ethnography, and in so doing highlights common themes and significant findings identified across the sample studies. Finally, the paper engages in a focused discussion on how these findings illuminate the phenomena of 'conformorality' within the planning profession, and possibly, within planning academia as well.

2. The changing context of planning work in England: A brief review

To situate this paper, this section briefly introduces the changing working conditions of English local authority planners since the 1970s. A major impact of British planning's institutional transition since the 1970s on planners has been the continuous reduction of planners' discretionary space. Despite the prevalent impression that the post-war consensus in favour of planning was only suddenly ruptured when Thatcher came into power in 1979

1 Encouragingly, interest in studying planners is increasing. In the UK, 'Working in the Public Interest', a major investigation of planning practitioners was conducted in 2018. In 2024, the journal Planning Practice & Research also published a special issue (Volume 39, Issue 2) focused on normative behaviour of planners in the theme of 'Planning's value, planners' values'.

(Kavanagh and Morris, 1989), Allmendinger (2003) suggests that the decline of planning's power has been a more enduring process. Whilst not reflected by changes in formal institutions, Healey and Underwood's (1978) research on London's boroughs shows that the recession of the property market in the early 1970s reduced the demand for land management, and that planning was frequently marginalised within the boroughs. Meanwhile, tighter control was imposed on local authorities' expenditure after 1975; limiting their planning capacity (Ward, 1994).

Central government control over local government's expenditure was further intensified during the Thatcher era (1979-1990) (Davies, 1998). The introduction of Urban Development Corporations and Simplified Planning Zones undermined the planning power of many local authorities (Tallon, 2009). Moreover, there were proposals for abolishing planning control, and the rhetoric of the 'death of planning' was prevalent (Allmendinger, 1997). However, despite these reforms and proposals, the daily work of local authority planners faced smaller changes than many would have expected (Brindley et al.,1989).

The 1990s saw a consolidation of the planning regime that was marked by several pieces of legislation (Sheppard et al., 2017). However, this strengthening was subverted by a series of other changes which caused local authority planners to be increasingly influenced by the bureaucratic system reform guided by New Public Management (NPM). A particular reform was the introduction of the Citizen's Charter, which adopted managerial practices within government departments where services could not be marketized (Campbell and Marshall, 1998). The influence of the reform was manifested in a cultural change in local governments which saw a change from emphasising 'public goods' to efficiency and delivery (Clifford, 2012). During this process, planners found that their discretionary space was increasingly squeezed by performance targets (Campbell and Marshall, 1998).

During the New Labour (1997-2010) period, the planning approach shifted from 'land use planning' to 'spatial planning' (Inch, 2012) in response to central government's ambition to promote a 'culture change' towards greater innovation and creativity in the planning community (Shaw, 2006). However, at the same time, the agenda of government 'modernisation' intensified NPM reform (Lord and Hincks, 2010). This was reflected by, for example, the introduction of 'Best Value' indicator (Allmendinger et al., 2003). As Clifford (2016) points out, planners during this period were increasingly restrained by 'tick-box exercises'.

The 2010s was an era of austerity. The central government department responsible for planning (Department for Communities and Local Government) had its budget halved in around 2015 (Sturzaker and Nurse, 2020). Previously, in 2010, local planning authorities experienced a drastic cut in (net-)expenditure of approximately 40% on average (Kenny, 2019). The immediate consequences of this for local authority planners was a significant reduction in the number of planning staff and a significant increase in workload (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012). The decreased capacity of government promoted a higher demand for private expertise. Although many local authorities showed reluctance to outsource planning functions (Slade, et al., 2019), there has been a significant development in the private planning sector since that time (Inch et al., 2022) with planners in general receiving higher salaries, and facing fewer constraints compared to the public sector (Gunn and Vigar, 2012).

3. Methodology: a meta-ethnographic inquiry into planners' normative behaviour

This research was undertaken in two stages: 1. A systematic search of relevant academic literature; 2. evidence synthesis applying meta-ethnography. Meta-ethnography is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, and was originally developed by Noblit and Hare (1998) to synthesise ethnographic research. It has subsequently been adapted to synthesise qualitative evidence in general. It focuses on comparing and synthesising the findings of multiple qualitative studies while not damaging each study's contextual information excessively. It aims to generate 'interpretations of interpretations of interpretations' (Noblit and Hare, 1998:35).

The first stage, systematic search, was conducted in July 2022, and the search involved four databases: Web of Science, Scopus, IBSS, PAIS and Dissertation & Theses (ProQuest). The search terms were identified and refined from a two-round reference tracking of Campbell's (2012) seminal review. The keywords relevant to norms were finalised to include: "ideal", "culture", "ideology", "identity", "ethic" and "professionalism"[2].

The search produced 756 papers which were screened following the sequence of titles, abstracts, and main bodies according to a set of criteria (see Table One).

Subsequently, the search identified 19 papers, which included 15 sets of data in total. These studies cover the period from the early 1970s to the late 2010s, but not the 1990s. These studies include a wide range of participants from, for example, junior to senior planners and planners from authorities in various regions. The studies include both random and non-random sampling. However, none of the studies focused specifically on female planners or planners from minority groups. Table 2 presents the details of these papers. The sample size listed in the fourth column refers to the number of planners who work in local authorities, not the total sample in the corresponding paper.

The second stage of the research was meta-ethnographic synthesis. During this process, the paper by Healey and Underwood (1978) was set as the index paper because it was the earliest published and most conceptually rich paper. Each paper was coded with a number for further reference (see Table 2). During reading, NVivo was applied to extract second-order constructs that related to planner's values, judgements, or induced actions. In addition, the relationship between these targeted second-order constructs was documented. Every planner possessed multiple identities simultaneously, including professional, individual, civil servant, and others, and the value of each identity differed (Campbell and Marshall, 2000). This research did not distinguish between those identities when extracting second-order constructs primarily because it was difficult to isolate professional value (Stryker and Burke, 2000).

The second step was to translate the second-order constructs across samples. In this stage, the concepts/themes covered in multiple samples were identified and their meanings were documented for comparison. To perform the translation, the reading process followed an iterative procedure with the socio-political contexts of the samples also being considered during the translation process.

The final stage of meta-ethnography was translation synthesis, which identifies the relationship between samples. In Noblit and Hare's (1998) formula, there are three major forms of synthesis; reciprocal, where the meaning of a concept/theme is similar across samples; refutational, where the meaning is contested; and 'line of argument', which 'might be possible to offer a fuller account of phenomena by arranging the studies' metaphors in some order that allows us to construct an argument about what the set of ethnographies say' (Thorne, et al., 2004:1349). This research emphasises the first and second forms of synthesis.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1. It is related to planning policy-making or development management 2. Its sample includes planners working in English authorities, and 2a. Planners is treated as an independent sample group that can be distinguished from others. 2b. The study involves 'direct' study of planners through interviews, focus groups, questioners or observations. 3. It is conducted based on the presumption that shared value systems do exist among planners to some extent, regardless of whether the findings support their existence.	1. It is an analysis of a single or few 'star planners'. 2. It is about planners' aesthetic judgment[3].

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

2 As an example, the search codes for Scopus were designed as follows:
TITLE-ABS-KEY(planner*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(ideal* OR culture* OR ideolog* OR identit* OR ethic* OR professionalism) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(england OR london OR britain

3 This criterion was established retrospectively because these studies turned out to be inadequately covered by the search strategy and tended to be distinct from the remaining studies identified. This exclusion criterion does not imply that this research does not regard aesthetics as a normative judgement.

Selected literature	Methods employed	Sample of the study
Healey and Underwood (1978). Professional Ideals and Planning Practice: A Report on Research into Planners' Ideas in Practice in London Borough Planning Departments'	survey	all London boroughs
	participant- observation (>6 months each)	two London boroughs
Lavery (1987). *The education and socialisation of professionals: a study of British town planners in the 1980s*	survey	49 planners
Clifford (2012). 'Planning in an age of customers: British local authority practitioners, identity and reactions to public sector reform'	survey	612 planners
	interview	53 planners
Clifford (2013). 'Rendering reform: Local authority planners and perceptions of public participation in Great Britain'	survey	612 planners
	interview	53 planners
Clifford (2016). 'Clock-watching and box-ticking': British local authority planners, professionalism and performance targets'	survey	612 planners
	interview	53 planners
Clifford (2022). British local authority planners, planning reform and everyday practices within the state	survey	612 planners
	interview (updated)	53 planners + 24 planners in updated interviews
Inch (2009). *The new planning and the new planner: modernisation, culture change and the regulation of professional identities in English local planning*	interview	20 planners
Inch (2010). 'Culture Change as Identity Regulation: The Micro-Politics of Producing Spatial Planners in England',	interview (updated)	20 planners + 10 planners in updated interviews
Dobson, M. (2019). *Neoliberal business as usual or paradigm shift? planning under austerity localism*	interview	40 planners
Gunn and Hillier (2014). 'When Uncertainty is Interpreted as Risk: An Analysis of Tensions Relating to Spatial Planning Reform in England'	interview	20 planners
Murtagh et al. (2019a). 'Do Town Planners in England feel a professional responsibility for a climate-resilient built environment?'	interview	18 planners
Murtagh et al. (2019b). 'Identities as Enabling Conditions of Sustainability Practices in Urban Planning: A Critical Realist Exploration with Planners in England'		
Nelson and Neil (2021). 'Early Career Planners in a Neo-liberal Age: Experience of Working in the South East of England'	interview	17 planners
Schoneboom and Slade (2020). 'Question your teaspoons: Tea-drinking, coping and commercialisation across three planning organisations'	participant-observation (>40 days each)	Two local authorities
Slade et al. (2022). 'We need to put what we do in my dad's language, in pounds, shillings and pence': Commercialisation and the reshaping of public-sector planning in England'	interview	15 planners
	participant-observation	one local authority
Porter and Demeritt (2012). 'Flood-risk management, mapping, and planning: the institutional politics of decision support in England'	interview	21 planners
Vigar (2012). 'Planning and professionalism: Knowledge, judgement and expertise in English planning'	interview	6 planners
Beebeejaun (2012). 'Including the Excluded? Changing the Understandings of Ethnicity in Contemporary English Planning'	interview	?
Hirani (2008). *Planning and multiculturalism: A paradigm shift*	interview	10 planners

Table 2: sample papers[4]. The time of data collection refers to when the paper's research was conducted.

4 The arrangement of the papers was influenced by the time of data collection and the confidence of the data. Papers that had a smaller relevant sample size and less in-depth analysis were placed later in the sequence.

4. Findings: Tension between professional ideal and bureaucratic roles

This meta-ethnography study maps the normative dispositions and induced behaviours of planners in English local authorities from the 1970s to the 2010s, and highlights the existence of a consistent tension between planners' professional ideals and their bureaucratic roles.

The detailed outcome of the meta-ethnography study is presented in an extended table. The tables comprise information on themes developed from second-order constructs; second-order constructs, both in the form of themes and concepts; a summary definition of second-order constructs; and papers that include the corresponding second-order construct's definitions.

To illustrate the basic rationale, Table 3 showcases a theme developed from second-order constructs (first column) with its constituting elements. The second column consists of the second-order constructs that emerged from the sample papers. The first column, 'Themes developed from second-order constructs', is a further generalisation of the second-order constructs in the second column. In the case of Table 3, this further generalisation was simply based on a single second-order construct 'Planners' motivation for actions', whereas in other themes the further generalisation was based on up to three second-order constructs. The third column consists of different definitions of the same second-order construct that emerged in different papers, or in the same paper. For example, the meaning of planners' motivation for actions (second column) could be 'fulfil or defend their professional ideal', 'improve job satisfaction', or others, depending on different planners interviewed and different studies conducted. For this article's lucidity, the extended table is not included here[5].

Theme developed from second-order constructs	**Second-order constructs: Themes/Concepts**	**Summary definition (translation) of second-order constructs**	**Papers that include the second-order constructs**
Primal Motivation	Planners' motivation for actions	Fulfil or defend their professional ideals	1;2;4;5;6;7;8;9;11;12;13
		Improve job satisfaction	1;2;5;12
		Increase their status and influence within the authority	1;2;5;9
		Solve problems	2;5;13

Table 3: The theme of primal motivation

The remainder of this section incorporates two goals. Firstly, it reports the key findings of the meta-ethnography study. Secondly, it conducts further synthesis, including refutational and 'line of argument' synthesis. While the former focuses on rationalising the paradoxical meanings of the second-order constructs, the latter examines the relationship between different second-order constructs and different meanings of second-order constructs. The reporting of the results follows the seven themes developed from the second-order constructs (Table 4). To highlight, themes developed from second-order constructs with their constituting parts are all single quoted.

Themes developed from second-order constructs	1	Primal Motivations
	2	Professional Ideals
	3	Planners as Bureaucrats
	4	Implications of professional ideals on planners
	5	Mismatch between Ideals and Reality
	6	Feeling for not being an Ideal Planner
	7	Reactions

Table 4: Themes developed from second-order constructs

5 The table is available upon request or via this link: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/9ja48ryfh2y4aflvjnylh/Meta-ethnography-result-edited.pdf?rlkey=ic16bu9ryz1443qjgkqm70lpb&st=ied52a1p&dl=0

The first theme, 'primal motivation', is about what motivates planners to act within their discretionary action space. Echoing Larson (1977), the perception of planners as altruist subjects is unreasonably ideal. Instead, planners' actions may be motivated by their own interests, within relevant definitions including: 'improve job satisfaction'; 'increase status and influence'; 'solve problems'. However, the most recurrent definition for 'planners' motivation for action' is that planners wish to 'fulfil/defend their professional ideal'. While such fulfilments may also involve corporeal enjoyment, 'fulfil/defend their professional ideal' should not be interpreted as a typical self-interested motivation. This is because the subject, which refers to planners in this context, driven by this motivation, has essentially transformed its personal enjoyment into the enjoyment that ought to be experienced by a social construct, that is, the planner. No study in the sample reports pecuniary motives. The reason for this could be that the public sector tends to pay less, and planners with strong pecuniary interest may enter the private sector instead.

The second theme, 'professional ideals', is about how planners perceive their professional ideals, including the second-order constructs of 'planners' perceptions of what planning is', 'planners' perceptions of what they should do' and what 'planning/planner is not like'. Regarding 'planners' perceptions of what planning is', the synthesis suggests that planners tend to appreciate planning as 'a professional activity' that 'promotes the public interest' and 'requires comprehensive consideration'. The synthesis also shows that similar ideals of both the just school (Fainstein, 2010) and the communicative school (Healey, 1997) in planning theory studies are recognised by planning practitioners[6]. However, planners' pursuit of justice, which emerged in the 1970s, seems to have been established long before their pursuit of democratic processes, which only emerged in the 2000s.

Regarding the second-order construct 'planners' perceptions of what they should do', many planners think they should 'promote a good environment and high-quality designs'. These objectives are expected to be achieved by enabling planners to 'make decisions autonomously' and by 'coordinat[ing] the activities of all stakeholders'. Planners' intentions to 'promote growth' was mentioned in one study only, implying a low acceptance of pro-growth attitudes amongst planning practitioners.

The definitions under the second-order construct 'planners' perception of what planning is' and 'planners' perception of what they should do' show that planners' professional ideals form a complex structure:

First, planners have a tendency to act altruistically. Combining definitions under 'planners' perceptions of what planning is' and 'planners' perceptions of what they should do' with the definition 'Fulfil or defend their professional ideals' under the second-order construct 'Planners' motivations for actions' could lead to the following interpretation: because some planners alienate themselves into planners as social constructs, they obtain pleasure from altruistic behaviours because, in their minds, planners ought to enjoy being altruistic.

Secondly, some definitions of 'planners' perceptions of what planning is' and 'planners' perceptions of what they should do' hint that planners may be motivated by the power they can seize as planners. Specifically, planners need to be in very powerful positions to be able to achieve planning as 'a professional activity'; an activity that needs 'comprehensive consideration'; 'a visionary activity'; 'a powerful activity responsible for general coordination'; or 'make autonomous decision'; 'coordinate activity'; 'control and maintain order'. For example, only powerful departments or figures can 'coordinate' other departments. Such prestigious positions presumed by the ideals might explain planners' willingness to pursue them. The synchronisation between self-interests and professional ideals provides a potential explanation for the high internalisation of ideals amongst planners.

Thirdly, definitions under 'planners' perceptions of what planning is' and 'planners' perceptions of what they should do' are mostly predominated by vague expressions. Some expressions are even paradoxical in a literal

6 Relevant definitions include: 'for justice (fairness)'; 'a democratic process'.

sense. For example, planners can hardly 'make decisions autonomously' if planning is a genuine 'democratic process'. The fact that these paradoxical propositions are frequently identified within the same paper (or even by the same participant studied) implies that they are not necessarily caused by different contexts. Furthermore, planners are often ambiguous about their ideals since only a few studies have found that planners can clearly articulate the vague concepts themselves. However, as Clifford (2012:567) suggests, 'it is too easy just to dismiss outright a sense of working for the 'greater good' as empty rhetoric when it appears to hold very real value to planners at coalface'. The fact that the seemingly vague expressions frequently recur across studies implies that they do have certain implications. While planners may be obscure with regards to the definition of planning and their roles as planners, they are definite regarding what 'planning/planner is not like'. In planners' everyday practices, the vague expressions often manifest through a form of negation. This phenomenon echoes the ideology theories of Laclau and Mouffe (2014). Figure 1 illustrates two dialogues that exemplify the phenomenon. The dimension of such negation is synchronic, diachronic, and multi-scale. Specifically, planners are often seen as distinct from 'the public', 'the councillors and other departments in local authority', 'the central government', and 'planning in the past'. Furthermore, such a negation has evolved into a group discipline that defines people eligible for becoming 'genuine' planners through identifying 'deviating' peers. Interestingly, 'deviating' peers may be imaginary constructs since none of the sample studies reports the presence of 'deviating' peers following the definition 'senior members who do not want to promote planning's independence'; 'peers who support planning as a bureaucratic function'; 'peers who do not recognise planning'. Meanwhile, all the 'peers in the private industry' interviewed in the sample studies, who were identified as 'deviating peers' by many, rejected the accusations from their public peers. Although the failure to find 'deviating' peers may have occurred because 'deviating' peers are reluctant to report their true thoughts, such a reluctance indicates the power of this group's discipline.

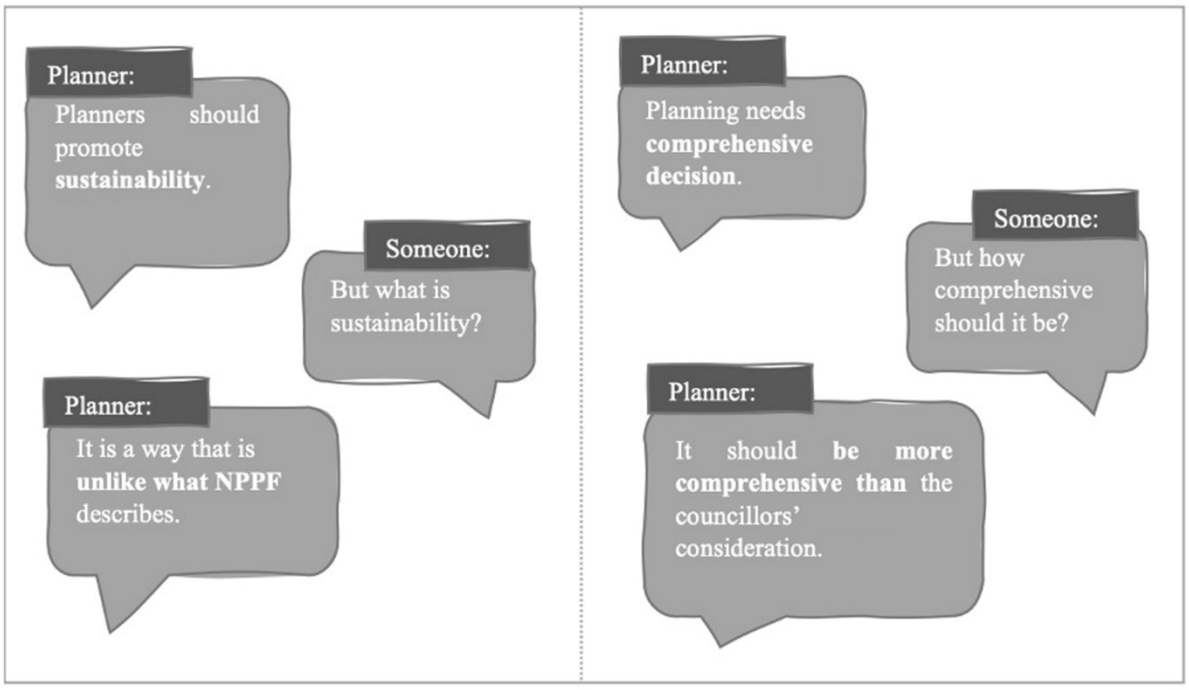

Figure 1: Illustrative dialogue (author's own).

The third theme, 'planners as bureaucrats', is about planners' experience of being employees at local authorities. Planners continuously find 'planning section/department in local authorities are less influential because they are constrained' across time. However, the synthesis suggests that the perceived 'constraint', which forbids planners from being influential, changes during different periods of time. Multiple samples conducted before the 2000s indicated that the planning department was at the margin of local authorities, being constrained by 'the councillors'; 'the chief executive'; 'The housing/property section, the corporate planning section, the departments of the Town Clerk, the Treasurer, and the Chief Education Officer'. However, this finding was less advocated by later studies. Instead, in studies conducted after the 2000s, the 'central government', 'reduced

budgets and staff cuts' and 'planning inspectorate' were the identified dominant factors that constrained local authority planners. The transformation arose mainly because of the introduction of the NPM reforms, which constrained local authority planners' discretionary space, whilst also being utilized by planners to combat other departments and councillors within local authorities.

The synthesis also shows that planners across the samples and periods of time found their position as bureaucrats to be 'restrictive'. Many planners further specified themselves as being involved in 'a hierarchical environment'. Since the 2000s, the feeling of 'stress' has become a prevalent description. The transition was driven by the introduction of a target-based working style under the NPM reforms as well as the central government's ambivalent and ever-changing attitudes toward planning reform.

Regarding the fourth theme, 'implications of professional ideals on planners', the synthesis suggests that professional ideals are highly internalised within the planner community. Samples across time show that planners have a certain 'faith/commitment in planning'. Such a commitment may be demonstrated by planners' action of recognising themselves as possessing 'a collective identity, or their tendency to 'share similar opinions on certain topics'. This high internalisation of professional ideals may be attributed to three factors: first, the publication bias, perhaps studies of ideals are more likely to be published if they find a high internalisation of ideals; second, the synchronisation between primal motivations and professional ideals; and third, the evolution of group discipline.

The fifth theme, 'mismatch between ideals and reality', revealed a persistent phenomenon – planners seem to encounter a mismatch between their professional ideals and their positions as employees at local authorities. This is exemplified in the response of a participant in a sample paper by Inch (2009): 'I sometimes wonder, in a purist's sense, whether planners are professionals or whether actually we're bureaucrats.' The mismatch was identified in studies across periods of time and regions, and was experienced by both early-career and senior planners. As discussed in the second and third theme, 'professional ideals' and 'planners as bureaucrats' though achieving planners' professional ideals requires their planning department to have strong powers, the reality is that planners often have little influence and can hardly make decisions autonomously. Furthermore, the scope of statutory obligations that planners are required to complete tends to be far more minor than what planners expect to accomplish. In fact, planners' daily work is often significantly occupied by administrative work and performance targets that are outside planners' professional ideals; causing them stress.

The sixth theme is 'feeling for not being an ideal planners'. As discussed in the first theme, 'primal motivation', planners driven by a desire to 'fulfil or defend their professional ideals' have transformed their personal enjoyment into the enjoyment that ought to be experienced by planners as social constructs. However, the fifth theme, 'mismatch between ideals and reality', indicates that reality imposes a decisive barrier that impedes planners from approaching such enjoyment. Meanwhile, the fourth theme, 'implications of professional ideals on planners', suggests that planning ideals have a high degree of internalisation. These two factors jointly induce planners to suffer 'frustration' or even 'anger' in more aggressive cases.

The seventh theme is 'reactions'. The negative feelings discussed in the sixth theme, 'feeling for not being an ideal planners', trigger planners to react. These reactions relate to planners' discretionary actions rather than their statutory obligations. The most recurrent reaction was 'adaptation', which is not transgressive. Adaptation may manifest as a form of 'bureaucratic entrepreneurship', where planners try to mitigate the constraints imposed on them or utilise them to align with their primal motivations. The sample paper by Clifford (2022) discusses an occurrence when local authority planners explore alternative and less formal ways to keep control of a conversion from office to residential use when central government proposed a permitted development right that allowed conversions to be carried out without planning permission. This gives an example of mitigation. The sample paper by Clifford (2016) shows an example of utilisation in which planners were frustrated by the constraint imposed by the NPM target-based reform, but used the need to achieve targets as an excuse to persuade their local authorities to give them the capacity to make autonomous decisions and the status that other traditionally strong departments possessed. Self-interest and motivation to fulfil/defend professional ideals were entangled in this process because planners try to sustain or increase

their status, whilst also reacting according to their ideals. The motivation to fulfil/defend professional ideals is also evident in another way of 'adaptation', that is, 'planners accept the imposed constraints but do not believe these constraints are reasonable'. For example, in the face of a reform that promoted local authorities to be more customer-oriented, planners acted against this culture change by keeping business as usual while adopting the term 'customers', as in the sample paper by Clifford (2012). In this case, though planners' reactions may have been unhelpful or even adverse in promoting their status, planners' ideals were defended.

A potential explanation for the prevalence of adaptation is that the internalisation of professional ideals makes planners insist on pursuing the ideals while many key elements of the ideals, such as working for the public interest, are closely linked with being employees in the public sector. The sample papers by Nelson and Neil (2021) and Vigar (2012) show that planners think that they cannot be 'real' planners if they step into the private sector. Given this condition, adaptation is an acceptable reaction when planners face the antinomy of the belief that ideal planners should work in the public sector and the inability to become ideal planners in the public sector. Meanwhile, planners who were less determined with regard to professional ideals may be able to choose to adapt because the punishment that they would receive from resistance is greater than the benefits, which is to experience the enjoyment that planners as social constructs ought to earn.

'Resistance', compared to 'adaptation' was a less recurrent reaction and left less room for planners to modify their ideas. Resistance is usually driven by 'anger' rather than 'frustration'. Consequently, it occurs more frequently among planners with the highest internalisation of professional ideals and is usually manifested in aggressive or transgressive ways. These planners choose to pursue their professional ideals, despite their realisation of the risks of facing social sanctions and the possibility of failing to fulfil their ideals. Resistance and agony are sometimes expressed by planners through 'resigning' or 'deceiving'. Planners may also 'persuade other actors to accept their ideals'.

Although the fourth theme, 'implications of professional ideals on the planners', shows a high degree of internalisation, professional ideals are not static and may be 'modified by the constraints and pressure' imposed by the bureaucratic position of planning. The synthesis shows that distinct professional ideals share different levels of vulnerability in the face of reforms. For example, the ideal that planning is a powerful coordinating mechanism is relatively vulnerable against exogenous pressure. In contrast, the belief that planning serves the public and is a professional activity that requires autonomous space is more resilient. Furthermore, the synthesis finds that planners are more willing to accept some exogenous values than some other values. For example, despite the emotional aversion that planners convey, there is wider acceptance of target-based reform among planners, as revealed in the sample papers by Clifford (2016; 2022), Dobson (2019), and Slade et al. (2022). In contrast, planners frequently disobey local authorities' shifts toward a customer-oriented culture, as reflected in the sample papers by Clifford (2012), Inch (2010), and Slade et al. (2022).

5. Discussion: normative behaviour and conformorality

The outcomes of this meta-ethnographic study suggest that conformorality is a prevalent and enduring phenomenon within the planning profession. This is justified by the emergence of clear signs of convergence with regards to moral dispositions between local authority planners towards a moderately progressive moral disposition; evidenced by the similar structures and features of planners' ideals. The rationale is simple, without the phenomenon of conformorality, the enduring similarities of planners' dispositions to a relatively broad scale would be hard to explain. In contrast to prevalent social psychological research on conformorality (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004) which tends to examine its influence upon simple behaviours in experimental settings, this research examined planners in diverse practical contexts. It reveals that, despite a commonality in ideals among planners, the ways in which these ideals are interpreted and translated into actions exhibit significant differences.

Due to the complex nature of practical settings, this research cannot precisely isolate the mechanism which enables the achievement of conformorality. However, three mechanisms were identified within the research, but each can be better explained after introducing Kalman's categorisation. According to Kalman (1958), there are three kinds of conformorality; compliance, characterised by outward conformorality to norms for specific reasons without private agreement; identification, involving alignment based on a sense of connection or relationship; and thirdly, internalisation, where one thoroughly incorporates the norms, which results in alignment in both public and private spheres. The identified three mechanisms achieving planners' conformorality are: planners show compliance with bureaucratic settings or new policy requirements facing direct power, increased stress, and target setting; planners conform to professional ideals to avoid being identified as improper planners, (a process motivated by their emotional attachment with the planning community); and thirdly, planners conform to the professional ideal because of their desire to maintain the self-consistency of their identity as planners. It is crucial to note that the latter two mechanisms act as sustaining factors and explain why planners continue to conform to their professional ideals. Based on evidence relating to planners' primal motivations alongside their frequently strong identification with their professional group and deep internalisation of professional ideals, this research speculates that planners' conformorality to professional ideals likely stems from the enjoyment gained from aligning with professional ideals. This alignment not only fulfils their aspirations to be altruistic but also support their desire to be powerful and independent.

Moreover, the study reveals that planners do not conform to norms from a single group; rather, due to their dual roles as professionals within bureaucratic systems, they often find themselves navigating between two distinct sets of norms: the professional and the bureaucratic. When conforming, these two sets of norms are not practically feasible, and strong negative emotions may be triggered; especially when a set of norms is conformed through compliance, while the other set of norms is conformed through internalisation.

However, it is important to stress that this interpretation is not singular. In fact, there are two possible scenarios that could explain the research synthesis which suggests, in turn, that there is widespread conformorality among planners to a moderately progressive ideal. The first scenario is straightforward: planners do conform to such an ideal. The second scenario requires deeper reflection: the researchers responsible for those sample papers may themselves be aligned with such a progressive ideal or hold the belief that planners ought to embody this progressive stance, and thus they might systematically interpret planners as more progressive than they may actually be, or they may employ nuanced methodological designs that overstate planners' true commitment to such ideals. The former scenario suggests the phenomenon of conformorality is revealed in the community of planners, while the latter scenario suggests the conformorality is revealed in the planning academia. Although there is no evidence suggesting the latter scenario, there are several factors that could potentially contribute to it: first, the sample size of the synthesis is small; second, there are close connections among many of the authors; third, the majority of the research has been conducted by scholars affiliated with planning or geography departments in the UK. These facts are not surprising, but the potential risk of biased studies and interpretation could be greatly mitigated if planners, as a research target, had been also studied by scholars of sociology or public administration. Similarly, because of the limitation of the sample collected, the result of this research should be interpreted as a heuristic rather than a definitive one.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper mapped the normative dispositions and induced behaviour of planners working in local authorities in England through synthesising relevant qualitative studies written since the 1970s. Despite the limitations posed by the sample size and the uneven distribution of samples in each period of time, this paper reveals the existence of consistent tension between planners' professional ideals and their bureaucratic roles, which often triggers planners' negative emotions and reactive behaviours. A clear convergence on professional ideals across different samples and time periods signals the widespread existence of the phenomena of conformorality within the profession. However, the exact mechanism by which conformorality is achieved and maintained remains beyond the reach of this meta-synthesis work. Instead, through heuristic abduction, this research identified potential mechanisms - compliance, identification, and internalisation – that could contribute to the phenomenon of widespread conformorality. The findings illuminate potential

directions for future research regarding the normative disposition of planners, and also, the need for further research on the mechanisms that contribute to the conformorality within the profession. Finally, this research demonstrates that the normative dispositions of planning professionals do have consequences that can potentially influence planning outcomes. This further underscores the importance of future studies on planners' normative disposition to extend beyond their form and cause, and the need for the same to also focus on their material consequences.

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Appendix: Searching Strategies and Codes

WoS Core Collection:

ALL=(planner AND (ideal* OR culture* OR ideolog* OR identit* OR ethic* OR professionalism) AND (england OR london OR britain))*

Scoups:

TITLE-ABS-KEY(planner) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(ideal* OR culture* OR ideolog* OR identit* OR ethic* OR professionalism) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(england OR london OR britain)*

IBSS:

noft(planner) AND noft(identit* OR ideal* OR ideolog* OR identit* OR ethic* OR professionalism) AND (england OR london OR britain)*

PAIS Index:

noft(planner) AND noft(identit* OR ideal* OR ideolog* OR identit* OR ethic* OR professionalism) AND (england OR london OR britain)*

ProQuest Dissertation & Theses:

noft(planner) AND noft(identit* OR ideal* OR ideolog* OR identit* OR ethic* OR professionalism) AND (england OR london OR britain)*