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SPECIAL ISSUE: EXPLORING CONFORMORALITY IN PLANNING DEBATES: PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS

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EDITORIAL: EXPLORING CONFORMORALITY IN PLANNING DEBATES

Stefano Cozzolino[1], Anita De Franco[2]

This themed issue on "conformorality" is inspired by the work of Chiara Lisciandra, Marie Postma-Nilsenová, and Matteo Colombo (2013), which explores the tendency of individuals within a particular group or community to align with certain ideologies and values. The term "conformorality", which combines the concepts of "conformity", "conformism", and "morality", was first introduced into planning debates by Claudia Basta, the former coordinator of the AESOP Thematic Group on Ethics, Values, and Planning, in her thought-provoking presentation entitled "Unequal, thus Unjust?". This presentation was delivered at a research seminar entitled "The Just City in Practice: Operationalising a Broad and Varied Concept," which was held on August 21, 2020 in The Hague after the long period of social distancing that had been enforced due to COVID-19 restrictions. In Basta's presentation, conformorality represented the widespread sentiment that exists between planning scholars that economic inequality equates to injustice; she discussed the limitations of this uncritical attitude.

Inspired by this reflection, at the end of 2022, the AESOP Thematic Group on Ethics, Values, and Planning decided to take up the challenge of conformorality with a conference titled "Breaking Through 'Conformorality' in Urban and Regional Studies." The event occurred in Dortmund at the ILS-Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development on September 14-15, 2023. It featured twelve presentations, and included the keynote talks "Conformorality: Some Consequences for Science and Society" by Matteo Colombo, and "On Academic Conformorality, and Why It Threatens Academic Freedom" by Claudia Basta. Other presenters included Stefano Moroni, Francesco Curci, Daniele Chiffi, Paulina Budryté, Mark Scherner, Raffael Beier, Brett Allen Slack, Anita De Franco, Nana Serwaa Antwi, Henry Endemann, and Lena Unger. Each scholar embarked on the challenging but stimulating task of discussing how conformorality impacts specific research topics and discourses. The conference had a predominantly experimental and exploratory character, and generated lively discussions as well as a strong desire to continue the debate via a dedicated special issue project that would be open to contributions from both senior and young scholars.

The special issue assumes that conformorality has significant implications for planning theory and practice. For example, planning practitioners are often subject to various forms of pressure, including their technical knowledge, administrative mandates, political biases, and social-local demands. Recent discussions, such as those by Hanna Mattila (2002), Angelique Chettiparamb (2016), Simin Davoudi, Daniel Galland, and Dominic Stead (2020), Stefano Moroni (2020), and Claudia Basta (2023), have highlighted these pressures. Similarly, planning scholars frequently propose ideas and solutions to urban issues that are influenced by widespread value-based arguments and moral pressure from the planning community.

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In this special issue, the authors have framed the topic of conformorality in planning debates in an exploratory manner, and through so doing raised new questions and reflections.

In "Norms and the City", Matteo Colombo and Chiara Lisciandra explore three ways (exemplifying, affording, and constituting) in which the intentional/designed geometry and shape of urban spaces might relate to and generate conformorality in society by exerting a degree of influence on people's behaviour. The primary assumption is that a designed city form exemplifies ideals of moral order which are, in turn, internalised by its inhabitants. As the authors stress, this is a topic that scholars in different disciplines have largely overlooked.

In "To Plan or Not to Plan", Anita De Franco provokes planners by rediscovering an old text by Rayner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall, and Cedric Price titled "Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom" (1969). At a time when there is a strong proliferation of plans, the author reflects on the idea of the non-plan, why this idea has never been taken seriously, and question the value that this concept may have today.

In "Deal-Making Cities in Latin America: Why Should We Pay Less Attention to Master Plans?" Paulo Nascimento Neto, Clovis Ultramari, and Mario Prokopiuk explore how and to what extent moral prejudice plays a role in large urban intervention projects. They investigate the case of Vila Leopoldina in São Paulo through the lens of different interest groups: the inhabitants of informal settlements, the future inhabitants of new 'luxury' residences, developers, and the public municipality. The authors observe the tensions that exist between different moral perspectives and what this entails for public planners.

In "Planners' Ideals and Realities: Normative Behavior and Conformorality", Qingyuan Guo investigates the normative behaviour of English local authority planning practitioners through a meta-ethnography analysis of 19 empirical studies from 1978 to 2022. The findings suggest that planners identify with two sets of norms: planners as professionals, and planners as bureaucrats, as well as the frictions that exist between the two. The author suggests three ways in which planners, within their communities, maintain a degree of conformorality: compliance, identification, and internalisation.

In "The Conformorality of Residential Displacement Debates", Brett Allen Slack argues that existent scholarly discourse on urban residential displacement can be an interesting example of conformorality, with this phenomenon often assumed to be inherently unjust. In this work, the author invites readers to reflect on often-overlooked aspects, such as the possible motives of displacers and certain ineffective yet widespread planning solutions. In doing so, Slack challenges scholars and practitioners to consider multiple points of view to engage less ideologically with this complex topic.

In "Conformorality and the Economic Urbanism of Jane Jacobs", Sanford Ikeda highlights the reasons why most economic scholars have overlooked Jane Jacobs' contributions to the understanding of cities and their economics, as well as why many of her urbanist supporters barely consider her crucial contributions to economics. The author argues that conformorality in both disciplines may partially explain this oversight. This contribution shows that conformorality can not only hamper thematic debates but also limit the accurate understanding of the thoughts of well-known authors.

Overall, this special issue which, as already emphasised, has an experimental and explorative character, contributes to a more systematic introduction of conformorality within planning discourses. Clearly, there is still a long way to go. We are likely far from a real awareness of the impact of conformorality and its implications within the planning community. However, an attempt had to be made, and the authors of this special issue, whom we thank wholeheartedly, have tackled the challenge and opened new avenues for future scholars to contribute to the debate. As Matteo Colombo and Chiara Lisciandra point out in their contribution to this special issue, conformorality can also play a positive role in disseminating certain knowledge and good practices. Nevertheless, after months of discussion, we concluded that it is only by stepping out of the "conform zone" that we can aspire to new ideas, foster innovation, and overcome certain ideological and biased barriers that can hamper planning-scholarly debates and research.

In short, as the contributions to this special issue suggest, we believe that conformorality significantly impacts planning debates and can have various consequences in practice. Although this remains an open hypothesis, we wonder the extent to which conformorality may disadvantage (or benefit) the careers of planning scholars who are less (or more) prone to certain mainstream and unquestioned values and ideas. At the moment, this remains an open and highly stimulating unanswered question.

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NORMS AND THE CITY

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Abstract

Conformity is the tendency to modify one's behaviour to match the behaviour of others. Lisciandra et al. (2013) introduced the concept of *conformorality* to refer to the susceptibility of moral judgements to conformity. While it is often suggested that conformorality is generally bad, recent interdisciplinary work indicates that conformorality can also promote epistemically and morally positive outcomes under certain conditions. In the literature, little attention has been paid to the geometry of urban spaces. Here we combine results from the philosophy and psychology of conformity with general insights from urban studies to distinguish three ways in which the geometry of urban spaces might relate to conformorality, namely: urban spaces can exemplify, afford, or constitute conformorality. This paper's analysis contributes a more nuanced understanding of the different faces of conformorality, as well as their bearing on urban planning and city living.

Keywords

Conformity, Conformorality, Social norms, Urban spaces, Utopias, Affordances, Hostile architecture

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1. Introduction

Conformity is the tendency of changing one's behaviour, emotions, or ideas to align with the responses of others. It is a widespread social phenomenon governed by increasingly well-understood biological, psychological, social, and environmental causal factors (see, amongst others, Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004; Bicchieri, 2005; Sripada and Stich, 2006; Morgan and Laland 2012; Brennan et al. 2013; Colombo, 2014; Lisciandra, 2023). Everyday examples of conformity with relatively unimportant consequences include fashions and dress codes (Workman and Freeburg, 2000), clapping and standing ovations (Muldoon et al., 2014), queuing, and tipping (Colombo, Stankevicius, and Seriès 2014; Elster, 2009). But conformity can also have more dramatic effects - for instance, on the spread of (mis)information, (un)healthy behaviour, and criminality (Krause et al., 2021).

Examining whether certain types of normative judgements are less prone to conformity than others, Lisciandra, Postma-Nilsenová, and Colombo (2013) introduced the concept of *conformorality* to refer to the human tendency to conform to other people's moral judgements. Lisciandra et al. (2013) defined moral judgements as those normative judgements that concern behaviours such as killing, stealing, cheating, and exploiting, whose seriousness is not conditional on specific times and places, the authority of an individual, and what other people do. Probing the scope and robustness of conformorality through two experiments, Lisciandra and collaborators found that all normative judgements, including moral judgements, are subject to some degree of conformity, and so especially in situations with a high degree of social presence.

This finding might be taken to indicate that conformorality always leads to unreliable or false moral judgements (Chituc and Sinnott-Armstrong, 2020). After all, while conformity is an important strategy for social learning - that is, for learning based on the observation of, or interaction with other individuals (Kendal et al., 2018) - moral conformity is often characterised in terms of "sheep or herd mentality", suggesting that moral judgements and behaviours that are formed because of others' influence are devoid of value (see, for example Kant, 1758/1959, p. 404).

Conformorality might be taken to have negative epistemic consequences too, as it might trigger informational cascades, such as epistemic bubbles and echo chambers (Nguyen, 2020), which foreground information that gets shared by a majority of people regardless of its limited epistemic value. Such informational cascades can result in increased intellectual arrogance, and misplaced trust in gurus and influencers who lack genuine (moral) expertise (Sperber, 2010).

The blanket conclusion that conformorality is epistemically and morally bad is, however, too blunt. The improvement of knowledge and moral progress require some degree of autonomy, as well as some degree of conformity (for a review of the beneficial effects of conformity, see Doris and Nichols, 2012). Recent literature indicates that whether, and how quickly, conformity can limit (or boost) knowledge depends on several factors, such as: who can communicate or interact with whom, who has social influence on whom, and how demographically or psychologically diverse a community is (see, amongst others, Weatherall and O'Connor, 2021; Fazelpour and Steel, 2022).

Similar insights about the multifarious roles of conformorality can be gained from theoretical and philosophical work on the city focused on the geometry of urban spaces. Cities, and the built environment more generally, have many geometric features which can afford specific behaviours or thoughts to their dwellers, such as physically constraining who can interact with whom, as well as with regards to when, where, and for what purpose. Such affordances and physical constraints can, in turn, promote or limit conformorality, and thus, the well-being and thriving of the members of different social groups.

Urban planners and philosophers have long thought about how to design good cities (Lynch, 1981; Batty and Longley, 1994). They have sometimes suggested that promoting conformorality can reinforce the wellness of society, while the shape, size, and other geometrical features of a city might reflect adherence to a specific social or political order. Intriguing as they are, these suggestions have not received significant attention in contemporary debates concerning the intersection of philosophy and urban studies.

Here, we contribute to filling this gap by distinguishing three ways in which the geometry of a city and conformorality might relate to each other, namely: urban geometry can *exemplify*, *afford*, or *constitute* conformorality. After illustrating these three types of relationships, and working out some of their moral and epistemic consequences, we conclude that conformorality has both positive and negative facets that play out differently in different environments and with different dwellers. Urban planners, especially those engaged in concrete policy making, should be sensitive to different shades of conformorality, and their subtle but complex relationships with the geometry of urban spaces.

2. Exemplifying conformorality

Cities can *exemplify* conformorality by embodying some desired moral, as well as social and political order. In this sense, cities themselves exemplify compliance with normative principles by being designed in a way that reflects such principles. This is the first relation between conformorality and urban geometry that we want to discuss. This relation focuses, at the highest level of generality and at multiple spatial and temporal scales, on the causal vector going from a political ideal to concrete urban planning to dwellers' moral behaviour. The key idea is that "cities have made and remade themselves in the image of political philosophies" (Hall 1998, p.6), often with the ideal aim of shaping and reshaping dwellers' moral agency to align with those philosophies.

Based on different views of what a morally ordered polity should be like, city plans can take different geometrical forms - for example, a grid, a circle, a star, or an irregular form. In turn, the form of a city exemplifying the ideal moral order can motivate dwellers to internalise certain norms, which may further sustain and reinforce the desired political philosophy.

Many illustrations of how the specific geometric features of a city can exemplify conformorality show up in utopias (Meyerson, 1961; Słodczyk, 2016; Baldacchino, 2018). For example, in the fourth century BC, Plato provided us with detailed descriptions of various utopian cities, including Kallipolis described in *The Republic*, Atlantis in the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, and Magnesia in the *Laws*. While the city of Atlantis is circular in shape with a concentric design built around three island rings, Kallipolis and Magnesia are politically ideal cities that have a rectilinear form with a regular grid pattern (Golding, 1975). Kallipolis and Magnesia are ideally just, self-sufficient, city-states, designed to enhance their dwellers' happiness and virtue. They were socially and physically structured to reflect a harmonic order geared towards the attainment of the good. Their parts, like the parts of the soul in distinct parts of one's body, were arranged in fitting relationships to each other and to the whole. Kallipolis included three social classes: a large working class of farmers and craftspeople, an educated military class, and an elite of philosophers ruling the city. In contrast, Magnesia, included four classes based on the wealth of each of its 5,040 households. Unlike Kallipolis, Magnesia allowed for private property, and political power was a less extreme blend of democratic and authoritarian elements.

Geometrical form is meant to embody and sustain the political and social order of the city. Kallipolis and Magnesia had grid-like geometries designed to prevent social change, and enable the internalisation and enforcement of strict norms regulating many aspects of people's lives. For instance, by constraining the size of the city, geometrical features may impose limitations on the size of a population, as well as on the population density of its different parts. Similarly, physical boundaries can identify the types of occupation that are carried out by different classes of people. Social change should be avoided, as it would generate a misalignment between dwellers' internalised norms and the social structure of the ideally just polity. In cities exemplifying a higher moral order, dwellers would at the same time experience conformorality as the tendency to jointly align to such higher order. This would be perceived as a pleasant kind of virtuous behaviour, which would produce happiness and social justice.

Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) also provides us with a detailed account of a grid-shaped collection of fifty-four cities on an island, each having six thousand residents. All cities in Utopia have the same spatial layout. Each city is standardised, divided into uniform, square neighbourhoods with identical, three-storied buildings made of bricks with common gardens. As in Kallipolis and Magnesia, strict norms govern all aspects of people's lives, from what they can wear and eat, to how long they can sleep and work. Similar to Kallipolis and Magnesia, geometrical forms in Utopia exemplify compliance with normative ideals which, in turn, seek to enhance people's happiness.

In these and other utopias, straight lines and the grid concretely exemplify a rational order. In Le Corbusier's (1924/1947, p. 28) words, the grid and the straight line constitute the "man's way" in contrast to the "pack-donkey's way". The straight line represents dwellers' dominance of their feelings through reason. The pack donkey's way, the curve, is "ruinous, difficult and dangerous; it is a paralysing thing."

The built space described in utopias would contribute to establishing and spreading unambiguous expectations about what specific people should or should not do in specific contexts; and it would also stimulate the alignment between private acceptance of social norms and public compliance. As a result, conformorality would not be motivated by a desire to be liked by others or avoid punishment. Instead, the motivation to conform would be adherence to the social, political, and economic order that geometrical features are meant to foster.

In urban exemplifications of conformorality, the geometry of the city is set from the top-down. Some individual or group with relevant epistemic, moral, or political authority imposes on the rest of the community a unified plan for how to structure urban spaces in line with a general view of good society. The motivation for this type of planning is that the way the environment is built is not only a reflection of aesthetic or functional criteria but is also directly informed by the intention to shape people's morals via their use and experience of the geometries of their surroundings.

This species of conformorality dovetails with totalitarian polity. It will likely have negative epistemic consequences too, as it favours the emergence of *epistemic bubbles* and *echo chambers*, which consist of informational networks from which outside voices are purposely excluded or mistrusted (Nguyen, 2020). The advancement of knowledge requires conformity, as we are dependent on each other in every domain of knowledge; but it also requires some degree of autonomy, as well as a degree of diversity with regards to outlooks and opinions. If the degree of diversity of citizens' opinions on both moral and non-moral issues is very limited, and if citizens' opinions, - particularly their moral opinions - are dependent on the opinions of a small number of other people in their community, then conformorality may bring about widespread ignorance in places such as Kallipolis, Magnesia, and Utopia.

It will take anti-conformist mavericks to lay bare ways of social living foreclosed by the urban spaces embodying conformorality. Over time, the strength of the motivational power of urban spaces embodying conformorality will weaken, as an increasing number of dwellers conform to the ideal social order solely because of fear of punishment. As a result, private acceptance and public conformity will lessen.

Perhaps sensitive to the negative epistemic consequences of a totalitarian polity embodying conformorality, Tommaso Campanella (1602/1990) describes a utopian city with seven concentric walls that are painted with images and inscriptions of an encyclopaedia of universal knowledge from which its dwellers may learn; thereby avoiding a state of ignorance.

Written in 1602, Campanella's *City of the Sun* represents an urban instantiation of the perfect order of the cosmos. Founded on a hill, this city is arranged along seven concentric walls which represent seven planets, with the city accessible via four gates, each one facing a differing compass direction, that led to four streets that provided communication between the seven rings. The circular plan represents the relationship between centralised power and the cosmos, even though, and similar to other utopias, the city of the Sun has a salient communist organisation with many norms that govern most aspects of social living, including education and demographic dynamics.

In summary, at the most general scale, the geometry of a city can exemplify conformorality to some higher normative ideal. Cities exemplifying conformorality are often associated with totalitarian societies, where dwellers' descriptive and normative expectations, as well as their private and public behaviour, are perfectly aligned, but in which epistemic bubbles and echo chambers are also likely to emerge.

3. Affording conformorality

Cities can *afford* conformorality to some specific norm in specific contexts. This is the second relationship between conformorality and urban geometry that we want to discuss. In urban affordances of conformorality, the relationship between the geometrical form of a city and conformity is focused, at local temporal and spatial scales, on the causal vector from the specific, perceptible, and geometric features of a given socio-material environment to dwellers' conformity to a specific norm based on their perceptions of those features in the environment.

Affordances consist in possibilities for action offered to us by the environment, particularly by certain objects, shapes, surfaces, colours, distances, and other agents (Gibson, 1979; see also Chemero, 2003; Rietveld and Kiverstein, 2014). In habitually conforming to the possibilities for action that the spaces we inhabit afford us, conformorality is experienced as a habit that smoothly fits individuals' perceptions of the surrounding space, along with its shapes, surfaces, volumes, and other geometric features. When we resist salient affordances to conformorality, acting is instead experienced as tension; a deviation from a certain form of social living, a breakdown of one's *umwelt* (see Feiten, 2020 on the concept of umwelt).

Illustrations of how specific geometric features of a city can afford conformorality appear in several policy interventions that can locally shape dwellers' behaviour, by changing their descriptive expectations about what others do in a specific situation, or their normative expectations about what others expect them to do in a given situation. These local policy interventions are generally top-down, voluntaristic attempts to alter some geometric feature of a given space to afford conformity with a specific social norm, and are often unbeknown to dwellers of that space. Geometric affordances of conformorality can also emerge from the bottom-up, from unplanned, unintentional, and extended, micro-behaviours and interactions among dwellers in specific situations, such as when many walkers follow the same path to the point where it becomes a trail or a route.

Consider driving. This is a complex behaviour that is extremely common in contemporary urban spaces. It is also a behaviour that causes thousands of deaths and injuries every year, as drivers tend to overestimate their driving abilities, while often being insensitive to the fines and other punishments that may be imposed for their breaching of road rules. Driving is also a behaviour that can be influenced by subtle geometric affordances.

Thaler and Sunstein (2008) describe an intervention aimed at changing drivers' behaviour in Chicago's Lake Shore Drive. This road includes a series of dangerous S curves that have caused several accidents. At the beginning of this series of curves, drivers encounter a sign warning them of the speed limit, but they generally do not pay attention to it. In 2006, urban planners intervened to increase the likelihood of drivers slowing down on this road by painting a series of white, evenly spaced lines perpendicular to the travelling cars, which would progressively narrow as drivers approached the sharpest points of the curves. The change in these geometrical features give drivers the illusion that their speed has increased, which nudges them to slow down. In other words, it triggers normative expectations signalling that others believe that they are exceeding speed limits. In Thaler and Sunstein's words, "we find that those lines are speaking to us, gently urging us to touch the brake before the apex of the curve. We have been nudged" (Thaler and Sustein, 2008, p.39).

Another example of geometric features in the environment affording conformorality comes from India. Thulin et al. (2022) aimed at decreasing unhealthy, open defecation practices in two towns by instilling expectations in those towns' inhabitants that most other people in their community wanted to, or had already started, using toilets. Because other people's behaviour, especially when it comes to toilet use, is not always observable, the researchers tried to instil relevant social expectations by changing the visibility of toilet users in a neighbourhood. In so doing, they focused on spatial proximity, rather than family ties, to afford conformorality with sanitary norms of toilet use. By decreasing the distance between available toilet facilities in the neighbourhood, and having toilets visible to neighbours, dwellers became convinced that toilet conformorality was widespread, and that others in their vicinity were likely to conform and to think that other neighbours should follow the same sanitary norms.

These subtle interventions might be thought of as limiting dwellers' agency and autonomy, since they often bypass people's capacity for rational deliberation, and afford certain behaviours without people's awareness of their purposes and effects (e.g., Gigerenzer, 2015; Hertwig and Grüne-Yanoff, 2017). Such a conclusion is too hasty. After all, affordances are well-visible: one can see painted lines on a road; and outdoor toilets need not be hidden either. If they are hidden and cannot be perceived, they would not afford any expectation or behaviour. Dwellers might not be aware of why certain geometric features of a space have been altered; and the decisions and thoughts afforded by those features might be quick and unconscious rather than slow and reflective. But it would be wrong to then conclude that affording conformorality must be manipulative (Sunstein 2018), or that it must have detrimental moral or epistemic consequences. Whether and how the conformorality afforded by specific geometric features of an urban space is good or bad very much depends on the specific normative behaviour that it motivates.

In summary, at local spatial and temporal scales, specific geometric features of specific urban spaces such as shape, volume, size, and distance to other places and objects, can afford conformorality to specific norms. Affording conformorality might usher in nudges that preserve freedom of choice, and may also steer dwellers, often unconsciously, towards conformity to norms deemed desirable by policy makers (see Sunstein and Thaler, 2003).

4. Constituting conformorality

Cities can *constitute* conformorality to "norms of normality" by sculpting and policing dwellers' moral agency. This is the third and final relationship between conformorality and urban geometry that we focus on in this paper. In this constitutive relationship, the relevant causal vector goes from human ability to exercise moral agency within and upon the urban space, to specific ways of intervening on the geometric features of that space. This, in turn, impacts human ability to exercising moral agency within and upon urban spaces. It follows, that the geometry of urban spaces can jointly affect the dwellers' (and others) sense of identity, as well as their ability to flourish.

Humans make distinctive and extensive use of tools and artefacts to design and modify the spaces where they dwell, learn, and interact (Sterelny, 2007). Tool use and environmental modifications change the modes and levels of human agency, make functional potential malleable, and determine regardless of (ab)normality in body shape, the range of opportunities available to individuals. "The present unequal distribution of opportunities among people with varying biological traits can only appear to be fixed by nature if we ignore the fact that all human beings use tools and live in built environments, and that the design of tools and environments is an outcome of human choices" (Amudson, 2000, p.47).

Kukla (2021) examines several, real-life illustrations of co-constitutive relationships between norms and urban geometry, including case studies about gentrification in Washington DC and repurposed urban spaces in Berlin and Johannesburg. Kukla emphasises various dimensions that influence who can access, use, control, and modify a given urban space, including wealth, age, and sex.

Another dimension that clearly influences the accessibility, usability, and control of urban spaces, as well as possibilities for agency within them as well as perceptual experiences of them, is the body, and its fit with the geometric features of the urban spaces in which people dwell. Based on the shape of individual bodies, their size, and weight, people can be sensitive to different geometric features of a space, which can constrain, facilitate, or restructure their capacities for movement, perception, reasoning and so forth; thereby simultaneously sculpting embodied identities and possibilities to conform to specific social norms.

Most obviously, geometric features determined by stairs, corners, and distances, will make certain spaces hostile to, say, wheelchair users, and people with limited mobility; seats with a certain geometric design can be hostile to large people, or people who are deaf and need to see one another to communicate, whilst those suffering from sensory processing disorders can find geometrically disordered spaces hard to navigate and unsuitable for social interactions.

As Susan Wendell's (1996, p.40) reminds us: "We have built spaces around the idea that 'normal' bodies can lift things, move quickly, and be available any time for 'production.'" Spatial geometries that are fit for "normal" bodies will sustain and enforce conformorality to certain norms fit for "normal" people, who in turn reinforce those spatial geometries as "normal" geometries for urban spaces. Wendell explains that the network of geometric features in urban spaces that invisibly enforce conformorality to norms for "normally" bodied people, for instance the pace with which they move in specific urban spaces, is often taken for granted; but this network of geometric features can have significant consequences that impact on individuals' identities and social relationships.

A possibly less vivid, but equally socially significant way in which the geometry of urban spaces constitutes conformorality to "normality norms" is *hostile architecture*, where the built environment purposefully restricts possibilities for action, particularly for members of certain social groups, such as homeless people (e.g., Rosenberger, 2020).

Hostile architecture can be as subtle as not providing a place to sit, or a table on which to dine or play in public spaces such as parks and squares, and as obvious as metal bars dividing public benches so as to prevent dwellers lying on them, or spikes placed on ledges and doorways to deter seating, standing, or sleeping. These are all features of several public, urban spaces that restrict public access and usability for people with certain bodies as well as those from certain social classes. The space itself, with its geometry, can then be hostile, inhospitable, hard. But this spatial hostility does not target everybody equally; it instead makes certain people unwelcome and excluded from public dwelling and social interaction by virtue of their "ab-normal" body or social class.

While hostile architecture is sometimes intended to maintain order and curb unwanted behaviour such as loitering and sleeping, it also constitutes conformorality to norms of normality that exclude certain urban dwellers such as homeless people from active participation in the polity. This, in turn, impacts their moral agency and limits social encounters with the abnormal as well as the creative usage of public spaces.

In summary, specific geometric features of specific urban spaces such as stairs, curves, sizes, distances, can enter a looping, co-constitutive relationship that will literally sculpt the agency of certain city dwellers. Different geometric features of different urban spaces can be hostile to certain targets, and may afford opportunities only to normally functioning individuals. The web of concrete geometric features disciplining agency is often invisible; but it is also potent, and it can have significant social, political, and even psychological consequences on dwellers with different capabilities and opportunities. It can promote or block their flourishing.

5. Conclusion: Conformorality and urban studies

Conformity is a complex strategy for social learning with several known biases and causal determinants, which might bring about both good and bad epistemic and moral outcomes. Despite a lot of interdisciplinary work on conformity, and particularly on conformity to moral norms, or *conformorality*, little attention has been paid to how the geometric features of urban spaces may relate to conformity. In this paper, we have focused on this issue, and clarified three distinct relationships between a city and conformorality, namely: urban spaces can *exemplify, afford*, and *constitute* conformorality through their geometric features. We have pointed out various epistemic and moral aspects of these relationships, and have suggested that it makes little sense to suggest that conformorality is generally bad. The advancement of knowledge and virtuous behaviour require not only autonomy, but also some degree of conformity; we are dependent on each other in virtually every theoretical and practical domain. This is evident in academic debates too. Researchers in urban studies debating such notions as *resilience, adaptation, sustainability, commodification, segregation, gentrification, Disneyfication, diversity, inclusion, peripherality, post-growth, post-coloniality, post-workerism,* and so on, are themselves susceptible to conformorality. To limit the possible negative effects of conformity in academic research, it is important to systematically investigate the dynamics of conformorality. This is another reason why urban planners, especially those involved in concrete policy making might find collaboration with experts on norms helpful to foster further understanding as to how the geometric features of the built environment may influence dwellers' conformity to specific norms. Awareness of this influence might, in turn, reshape and constrain those very academic debates that should ideally inform the design and geometry of urban spaces.

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TO PLAN OR NOT TO PLAN? IS THIS THE QUESTION?

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Abstract

Few articles within planning debates have generated both indignation and fascination like the *Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom*. The idea of the *Non-Plan* is to embrace a more experimental approach to spatial planning by observing what would happen if people were free to choose how to transform their living environments. As this paper shows, practitioners and scholars have perceived the utility and applicability of the *Non-Plan* proposals in somewhat ambiguous ways. In their iconoclastic essay, Rayner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall and Cedric Price criticise traditional planning schemes while revealing the different ideologies involved in – and enacted by – the quest for designed orders. Current levels of interest and momentum surrounding the proliferation of 'plans for societies' in contemporary discourses make the idea of *Non-Plan* still fascinating and worth considering. The reactions that the *Non-Plan* have sparked may be a warning for mavericks of past, present and future generations.

Keywords

non-plan; freedom; conformism; physical design; planning

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1. Introduction: The provocation of *Non-Plan*

It is customary to think that, in order to achieve successful results, it is necessary to have a *plan*. What is harder to grasp is that planning can at times be unnecessary, or even undesirable. This issue has been addressed most boldly in urban studies by Rayner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall and Cedric Price in their provocative article *Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom* (Banham et al., 1969). The central purpose of *Non-Plan* is to invite to reconsider the many (mis)uses of planning. Banham et al. (1969) noted that the desirability of plans (and comprehensive plans in particular) in society was increasingly unquestioned, in both technical and political terms. The authors were sceptical about the ability to effectively discern between the benefits of having a *plan* and those that are instead independent of it. How can we be sure that having a plan is the best of the available alternatives? Is the ever-expanding application of plans in society making any difference or improvement?

For the authors, the merits of planning too often escape the rigorous scrutiny to which all applied sciences should be subject. Moreover, they believe that the 'benefits' of planning are *imposed* on (rather than actually *chosen* by) its users. The authors criticise the fact that the cultural elite mainly examines plans and projects in terms of what they are *intended* to do, rather than what they *actually* do – 'only the users continue to worry about that' (Barker, 1999, p.96). Given this, they ask:

> 'Why not have the courage, where practical, to let people shape their own environment? […] What would happen if there were no plan? What would people prefer to do if their choice were untrammelled? Would matters be any better, or any worse, or much the same?' (Banham et al., 1969, p.435-436).

Note that, arguing to allow people to decide on local transformations is largely invoked by participatory planning theorists, who rarely cite *Non-Plan* – and for understandable reasons. Banham et al. (1969, p.436) openly mocked 'participation' as an example of typical planning jargon. While planners regard participation instrumentally, as a way to let people contribute to new information in rational-comprehensive plans, non-planners conceive participation more substantially: as a means by which to let new information emerge spontaneously. As underscored by Paul Barker (2000, pp.5-6):

> '*Non-Plan* was essentially a very humble idea: that it is very difficult to decide what is best for other people.'

Although

> '*Non-Plan* produced a mixture of deep outrage and stunned silence. [...] all the architects, conservationists and socialists I knew were highly offended by it.'

Whilst some decades ago *Non-Plan* was considered a 'must read' in urban studies (Singh and Pandit, 1988), today the article is relatively unknown and has gradually disappeared from planning manuals and textbooks.[1] Here, one can assume that the relevance of *Non-Plan* has diminished over time; however, a less 'diplomatic' explanation is that there is something about the idea of non-planning that the planning community, as such, cannot but be against. Accepting this relatively straightforward conclusion confirms the 'unquestionability' of planning that the authors denounced, and corroborates the idea of the transformation of spatial planning from a branch of science to a sort of dogma. Perhaps the explanation for the same lies in the broader social phenomena of conformism – or rather, *conformorality* (Lisciandra et al., 2013). Planners do not sit comfortably with the definition of (once called) 'town-and-country planning' by the non-planner Peter Hall (1963: 20):

> 'Planning [is] building a physical environment, in terms of housing and shops and factories and offices and railways and roads and parks and pubs and libraries, which is better to live in and work in than the alternative which would have grown up without a plan'.

This quotation, perhaps more popular in the recent past (Sadler, 1997), may give rise to either goosebumps or

1 For example, in the popular book Town and Country Planning in the UK, the original article of the Non-Plan can be found cited until the 14th edition (Cullingworth & Nadin, 2006) but not in the 15th edition (Cullingworth et al., 2015, p.13).

mischievous smiles depending on the reader. The ironic touch of the sentence is clear: there is an overflowing application of planning, once only interested in general design principles, is now also entering into the minutiae of everyday life activities.

Perhaps the 'liberated spirits' of the mid 20th century saw this trend as something unjustified and frustrating; and what about today? The same manuals that set aside *Non-Plan* are the ones that include other essential works by Peter Hall, such as *Great Planning Disasters* (1980) in their 'further readings' sections. What happened? Have emerging practices and planning models made certain criticisms less pertinent or advantageous for the community? Is there evidence to suggest that the principles advocated in the *Non-Plan* article are being actively disregarded in urban planning practice? What lessons can be gleaned from the historical reception of the original article?

Reflecting on these questions, this paper conducts a critical historical literature review mainly on scholarly materials that directly reference the original publication of the *Non-Plan*.[2] As for the structure of the article, first the political and historical debate around *Non-Plan* is introduced. Subsequently, the focus is on the technical and cultural elements encompassed by *Non-Plan*. Thereafter, further discussions deal with the parts of the original idea that remain little understood but are still worth exploring. Final remarks conclude the work.

Before probing the main discussion, it is necessary to remind readers that *Non-Plan* has a very unorthodox and witty language style. At first glance, this aspect may prevent *Non-Plan* from being framed as a proper scholarly essay, although the originality of certain arguments suggests the opposite. For those believing in the 'honourable tradition of Dissent' (Barker, 1999, p.95), reading *Non-Plan* is undoubtedly a valid source of inspiration.

2. The historical and political context of *Non-Plan*

Non-Plan was published during a period of great social and intellectual turmoil. The article embraces many claims of the European post-war society, and draws attention to the benefits of loosening specific social control systems.[3] To a certain extent, *Non-Plan* anticipated many arguments that would inflame planning debates in the following decades such as: the defence of bottom-up urban processes (also brought forward by authors like Richard Sennett and Henri Lefebvre); attention to commercial facilities and emerging technologies; and the complex relationships that exist between ordinary people, spaces, and everyday objects (as later evidenced by Steven Izenour, Denise Scott Brown, Robert Venturi and Bruno Latour). There are also some similarities between *Non-Plan* and complexity theories as treated by Jane Jacobs (1961).[4] Nevertheless, as soon as it came out, *Non-Plan* was belittled by fellow intellectuals. As professor P. R. Heywood (1969, p.251) argued in the *Town Planning Review*:

> 'There is already evidence of an acute interest among academic planners that be a prelude to the development of a new fashion as influential in its own way as "Master Planning" and "Comprehensive Planning" were in theirs. It is my contention that this ground swell in favour of "Permissive Planning" owns more to its proponents' felicity of expression, and breadth of thinking, than to any accuracy in their analysis of the nature of planning, or the likely impact of technological change.'

2 The literature analysis focused on academic works directly citing the original article by Banham et al. (1969), for a total of 366 works in Google Scholar and 109 Scopus-indexed publications (by February 2024).

3 For an overview of the debate, see Landau (1985), Hill (2003), Sadler (1997, 1998, 2013), Franks (2000), Borş and Dascălu (2013), Hillier (2017).

4 However, note that Banham et al. (1969) distance themselves from certain Jacobsian debate: 'The irony is that the planners themselves constantly talk – since the appearance of Jane Jacob's Death and Life of Great American Cities – about the need to restore spontaneity and vitality to urban life. They never seem to draw the obvious conclusion – that the monuments of our century that have spontaneity and vitality are found not in the old cities but in the American West.' (Banham et al., 1969, p. 443).

Six months after the publication of *Non-Plan* (March 1969), the editors of the magazine Architectural Review published an article titled 'ManPlan [sic]' (September 1969) to oppose the non-plan idea directly. As Erdem Erten (2008, pp.279-280) writes:

> 'Instead of "*Non-Plan*" they wanted "man to plan". […] While "*Non-Plan*" applauded the freedom of choice that consumer culture brought forward, "Manplan" was highly sceptical of it. As "*Non-Plan*" was enthusiastic about decentralisation and dispersal, "Manplan" argued that the whole 20th-century planning experience was a proof of its failure.'

Some praised the *ManPlan* as a courageous manifesto, whereas others saw *Non-Plan* as a 'Trojan horse' (Allison, 1996).[5] Consider Lincoln Allison's (1971, pp.440-441) observation:

> 'Peter Hall and others […] use many of the familiar arguments of laissez-faire. Imposing 'good taste' through planning is merely a restrictive snobbery, they claim, for many of the most admired features of our environment have come into being as the accidental consequence of some obscure private whim. There are shades of pushpin and poetry here - the quantity of pleasure being equal, fun palaces are as good as forests. Professor Hall, certainly, operates on almost biological concept of pleasure. […] So it would perhaps be too pompous to bring the whole weight of mixed economy objections to bear. But one objection to the market mechanism is clear and special to the case. […] Environmental changes are often irreversible: a landscape once destroyed cannot be re-created. The chances of producing a counter-productive result by exposure to the market forces would therefore seem to be enormous.'

See also Dirk Schubert (2018, p.16):

> 'Current approaches understand planning by non-planning to be the flexibilisation of the planning system. But, non-planning destroys natural resources, as experience has shown in many third-world cities with a lack of planning. We must argue against the neo-liberal polemic of non-planning. The consequences of non-planning can be foreseen more easily and more reliably. We live in a world of globalisation and acceleration, so how not whether to plan must become the perspective.'

At this point, it is necessary to remark that *Non-Plan* never suggests repealing planning as a whole, but only certain overwhelming effects of top-down prescriptions for city design (Loukaithou-Sideris and Mukhija, 2018, p.86).[6] In the original words of the authors:

> 'Simply to demand an end to planning, all planning, would be sentimentalism; it would deny the very basis of economic life in the second half of 20th century. [T]he economies of all advanced industrial countries are planned, whether they call themselves capitalist or communist. […] But what we are arguing that the word planning itself is misused; that it has also been used for the imposition of certain physical arrangements based on value judgements or prejudices; and that it should be scrapped' (Banham et al., 1969, p.442).

As already mentioned, many scholars also shared arguments for loosening certain orthodox planning procedures (Cullingworth, 1993; Allison, 1996; Allmendinger, 2001). However, what distinguished Banham et al. (1969) from the others was their denouncing of spatial planning practice as colluding against the wills of ordinary citizens (Kaminer, 2018, p.38). Perhaps for this reason, Allison (1971, p.448) believed that *Non-Plan* was essentially a form of 'Environmental Trotskyism'.

Ironically, and despite being written by left-to-center authors publishing in a left-leaning magazine (Franks, 2000;

5 As of today, finding Non-plan appreciators in the architectural design culture has been easier than in spatial planning. For the architectural side, see Hill (2003), Frazer (2005), Erten (2008), Stickells (2011), Hagan (2012), Fontenot (2015, 2021), Pak (2016), Walker (2015), and Kelly (2022). In urban studies, see in particular McLoughlin & Webster (1970), Sorensen and Day (1981), Moroni (2010, 2023), Smith (2011), Kornberger (2012), Scott et al. (2013), Mukhija (2015), Pacchi (2018).

6 As also remarked by Robynson & Lloyd (1986), Hebbert (1992), Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones (2000), Gallent & Carmona (2003). See also, by contrast, Williams (2005) and Filip (2022).

Moran, 2005), *Non-Plan* was soon interpreted as a plea for 'hyper-capitalistic models', 'unfettered individualism', and (as oxymoronic as this may this sound) serving 'liberalisation lobbies' (Lloyd, 1985, p.45; Sager, 1999, p.99; Cullingworth, 1993; Allmendinger, 2001). Three main reasons may explain this form of criticism of *Non-Plan*.

First, *Non-Plan* resembles the planning policies adopted from the early 1980s onwards, namely the 'Enterprise Zones' (EZs) initially proposed by Peter Hall (1977), but quite far from the original *Non-Plan* idea. Notably, in EZs the role of planners was far from marginal:

> 'Pure non-plan (no tax, no subsidy, no rules) was never contemplated under the 1980 Act. [The EZs] and the Development Corporation were devices for channelling large-scale public investment' (Hebbert, 1992, p.124).

Second, scholars intended to reject the very idea of *Non-Plan* for purely ideological reasons, seeing the article as the prelude to the 'neoliberal approach' in planning. Typically, it is suggested that neoliberalism resembles both the minimalist view of the State (an idea endorsed by the classical liberal tradition) and the maximalist view of the authoritarian strand (an idea endorsed by illiberal traditions). Fully aware of how antithetical these views may be, many scholars keep the contradictions in tension to emphasise the somewhat 'chimerical' nature of advanced capitalistic systems (Thornley, 1991, p.45). However, as Anderson notes (1990, p.480), the practical applications of *Non-Plan*/EZs were more a 'retreat from liberalism'. And he adds:

> 'Although a "new right flagship", the initial idea of enterprise zones came not from traditional "right-wing" political or economic theorists and politicians, but from erstwhile social democratic supporters of the postwar "mixed economy" consensus who became dissatisfied with it in the late 1960s. […] It seems likely that the genuinely *laissez fa*re elements in the early EZ proposals were beaten back more by the scheme's friends than by its enemies.' (Anderson, 1990, pp.480-482).

See also Taylor (1981, p.437):

> '[T]he point may be made that opposition to the original proposals was not just a matter of engrained collectivism, but, for example in the case of the local authorities, of very real fears that a free-for-all in the EZs would result in irreparable damage to the economy and the environment of surrounding areas.'

Third, *Non-Plan* has been erroneously considered to be a sort of 'postmodern' essay within urban planning debates, but the ideas in the article do not possess cultural affinity or continuity of thoughts with postmodernist convictions. Actually, *Non-Plan* does not romanticise any idea of the chaos, inner conflicts and contradictions that exist in society and spatial planning practices. Rather, Banham and colleagues argued that planning authorities should be more consistent with regards to the claims and proofs of their power over communities. In this sense, the authors winked at anarchic thought without fully endorsing it.[7]

As remarked by Paul Barker (1999, p.108): 'Docklands' role as a postmodern playground' came only later and all the authors repeatedly returned to directly and indirectly defend the original intents of *Non-Plan* (Banham, 1969; Price, 1969; Hall, 1977, 1981, 1988; Barker, 2009).

In sum, it seems that the *Non-Plan* article has been hastily absorbed by a debate that has been neither neutral nor exhaustive.[8] It is striking how one of the clearest points of the matter has been overlooked: the original idea of the *Non-Plan* was obviously not to pave the way for top-down strategies but rather to *stimulate bottom-up processes*.

7 On the proximities between Non-Plan and the ideas of the anarchist author Colin Ward (1973, 1976) see also Barker (1999, 2000) and Hall (1988).

8 As remarked by Barker (1999), and also noted by Sorensen & Day (1981), Taylor (1981), Woodward (2009) and Vaughan et al. (2013). Perhaps what happened at those times in Britain was that scholars were completely absorbed by the critique of the Tatcherite era, which occupied a significant portion of the Western planning debate (see Thornley, 1991; Cullingworth, 1993; Allmendinger, 2001; Moran, 2007); as a consequence, everything was put in the same box. Interestingly, the state-led types of interventions enforced by Thatcher were more likely to be tied with the ideas of the geographer Coleman (1976, 1990), who was closer to the political arena of the time (Green, 2023; see also Rowan Robinson & Lloyd, 1986; Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 2000; Franks, 2000). Note that, although sharing similar arguments of the Non-Plan (i.e. Is planning really necessary?), Coleman never mentioned the article in her works nor did she in her official public debates (Balchin et al., 1976).

3. The technical and cultural challenges of *Non-Plan*

Non-Plan is often depicted as a polemical essay by naive provocateurs 'in their economically liberated twenties' (Franks, 2000, p.35).[9] To give an idea, let us consider some opening passages from the article:

> 'The whole concept of planning (the town-and-country kind at least) has gone cockeyed. What we have today represents a whole cumulation of good intentions. And what those good intentions are worth, we have almost no way of knowing. [P]lanning is the only branch of knowledge purporting to be some kind of science which regards a plan as being *fulfilled* when it is merely *completed*; there's seldom any sort of check on whether the plan actually does what it was meant to do and whether, if it does something different, this is for the better or for the worse.' (Banham et al., 1969, p.435).

Sharpening their provocation, the authors pointed out the 'bizarre talk' employed to build consensus on certain interventions, and suggested that these were merely fashionable ideas. An example of the same was the passing off of spaces of high-rise social housing buildings as 'vertical streets' or the 'dull doctrinarism' of the master planners of the British Garden Cities:

> 'It's worth remembering that the garden in this theory was there specifically for growing food: the acreage was carefully measured out with this fodder ratio in mind. […] The layout made public transport almost impossible; the tin and the frozen pack rapidly outdated the vegetable patch. But then the spread of car ownership outdated the mockery: those roads lived to find a justification; the space around the houses could absorb a garage without too much trouble; and the garden […] became an unexceptionable outdoor room and meeting space for children, away from the lethal pressed steel and rubber hurtling around the streets. […] Now it's nice that a plan should turn out to have reasons for succeeding which the planner himself did not foresee. At every stage in the history of planning, we have cause to be grateful for the quirks of time.' (Banham et al., 1969, p.435).

Moreover, the authors highlighted that the most planned cities have historically been the least democratic and that their accompanying architecture has tended to completely neglect everyday housing and building: 'The whole ethos is doctrinaire; and if something good emerges, it remains a bit of bonus' (Banham et al., 1969, p.436). Given this, they proposed conducting some non-plan 'experiments' in a few suitable zones, where people would be allowed to build what they liked, and they would then observe any emerging patterns. Then, only after some years, experts might evaluate whether the results drastically differed (or not) from other planned areas.

> 'The purpose is to ask: why don't we dare trust the choices that would evolve if we let them? […] Even the first waves of information would be valuable; if the experiments ran for five years, ten years, twenty years, more and more use would emerge. […] But what counts here, for once, is now.' (Banham et al., 1969, p.437).

The central sections of the article illustrated what could happen to three country areas in England (i.e. Lawrence, Constable, Montagu) if they were designated as non-plan 'launchpads' as they call them (Banham et al., 1969, p.436). Here, the authors imagine what kinds of developments would emerge without the planning 'rigmarole', leaving 'all options open', and where no land use pattern 'could be regarded as sacrosanct' (Banham et al., 1969, p.438). They elaborated on several empirical arguments, and in so doing laid bare some crucial pressures of their time. An example of the same was the unprecedented scale of social mobility opportunities, and how these bore new locational demand on territories: in this case, non-plan launchpads would develop hundreds of scattered small villages instead of packing people into pre-designed suburbs or large housing estates, whilst avoiding issues associated with conurbations and congestion (which in their view were all related to public comprehensive planning decisions). Another significant pressure was that ordinary people were increasingly interested in (and capable of) spending resources on leisure activities and entertainment. Here, non-plan

9 Compare also with Hebbert (1992), Frazer (2005), Kühn (2007), Moran (2007), Eisenschmidt (2016), Njoo (2021).

launchpads would turn preservation areas into more 'lived-in systems'. The idea was to open certain socio-spatial enclaves, where non-planning would not destroy 'pretty coaching villages' but stimulate a process of 'backfilling and infilling' the areas to accommodate new services and amenities for a greater variety of users. The authors also suggest 'freedom for local authorities to raise money in ways they see fit (a sales tax, a poll tax, a pony tax); [...] the abandonment of a few other rules, like pub hours' (Banham et al., 1969, p.441). As later admitted by Paul Barker (1999, p.96):

> 'Naturally we chose the rural tracts whose apparent despoliation was guaranteed to cause most offence. We were trying to make our point in the most forceful possible way. The wider polemic would then be written around these three case-studies'.

As has been noted, adverse peer reactions focused on the presumed implications of *Non-Plan*, while neglecting the more profound considerations suggested especially in the final section of the article, the one on 'Spontaneity and Space'. The prevalent (political) interpretation of this last section (and the article as a whole) is that it is essentially a plea for anti-interventionism (see Sadler, 1997; Anderson, 1990). However, an alternative, more neutral interpretation suggests that the spontaneity of social processes was also – and more interestingly – connected to wider epistemological debates on the benefits of dispersed knowledge and widespread creativity.[10] In that section, the authors focused on three phenomena which they considered to be totally new – and which further reinforced their main arguments.

The first was the 'cybernetic' revolution, defined as the unprecedented ability to master vast amounts of information. Banham et al. (1969, p.442) believed that '[t]he practical implications are everywhere very large, but nowhere are they greater than in the area we loosely call planning'. They warned that cities develop regardless of the amount of data available to planners, and that top-down design orders become even less valuable in the face of fast-growing technological advancements.[11]

The second revolution was 'rising affluence': the unprecedented pace of social change. Despite the various economic shocks of the time, the authors remarked that an increasing proportion of the population would channel their incomes 'into more diverse and unpredictable outlets' (Banham et al., 1969, p.442). It seems unlikely that large-scale investment schemes and public interventions defined the details and combinations of such processes. In this case, non-plan launchpads would accommodate without guiding them.

The third revolution was that of 'pop culture', which, unlike other cultural movements, replaced 'class barriers' with an 'age barrier' (without the impetus of a constant conflictual social mobilisation). The authors argued that the consumerism which accompanied this frenzying and immediate type of culture made products quickly obsolete, thereby not allowing a precise elitist culture much time to become grounded/established.

> 'All these characteristics could not be more opposed to the traditional judgments of the physical planner – which, in essence, are the values of the old bourgeois culture.' (Banham et al., 1969, p.442).

The criticism of 'design dogmas' and 'taste establishments' (Barker, 1999) of *Non-Plan* is particularly vivid.

> 'To impose rigid controls, in order to frustrate people in achieving the space standards they require, represents simply the received personal or class judgement of the people who are making the decision. Worst of all: they are judgements about how they think other people – not of their acquaintance or class – should live.' (Banham et al., 1969, p.442).

10 Missing this point further evidences the biased interpretation of the article. Some scholars see proximities between the Non-Plan and certain works particularly critical of interventionist ideology, especially Hayek (1944) – see Sager (1999), Allmendinger (2001), Easterling (2013). More rarely, scholars notice similarities with other works, again by Hayek (1948, 1960, 1982) – see Sorensen & Day (1981), Thornley (1991), Franks (2000). According to Fontenot (2021) also Rand (1957), Jacobs (1969), Mises (1980) should be mentioned. Other less studied texts of those times could be brought more into the discussion, such as Polanyi (1951, 1958), and Popper (1945).

11 As already sketched by Banham (1960/1980). See also McLoughlin and Webster (1970), Pak (2016).

In the conclusions, the authors discussed what they outlined as the monuments of the 20th century; for example, Piccadilly Circus at night:

> '[I]s apparently so successful [that] it needs to be preserved, God help us. Why preserve it? Why not simply allow other efflorescence of fluoresces in other places?' (Banham et al., 1969, p.443).

Another example is the allure of Las Vegas, to which the authors admitted advancing a value judgement that, as such, could not be supported by facts. Given this, they stressed that

> 'physical planners have no right to set their value judgments up against your, nor indeed anyone else's. If the *Non-Plan* experiment works really well, people should be allowed to build what they like.' (Banham et al., 1969, p.443).

4. Discussion: The (still) radical idea of *Non-Plan*

Considering the historical and political debates surrounding *Non-Plan*, it is evident that the temporary cessation of military wars in Europe neither prevented nor stopped the affirmation of ideological battles. The (re)organisation of the built environment was a recurrent concern in fostering societal regeneration models (Hill, 2003).[12] Consider the words of Thomas Sharp (1940, p.143):

> 'It is no overstatement to say that the simple choice between planning and non-planning, between order and disorder, is a test-choice for English democracy. In the long run even the worst democratic muddle is preferable to a dictator's dream bought at the price of liberty and decency. *But* the English muddle is nevertheless a matter for shame. We shall never get rid of its shamefulness unless we plan our activities. And plan we must – not for the sake of our physical environment only, but to save and fulfil democracy itself.' (emphasis added).

The overly partisan and dichotomising political claims of the late 1960s (contrasting for example neo-left and neo-right coalitions, and more or less interventionist approaches) led many scholars to put *Non-Plan* in a hyper-capitalist and anti-collectivist box.[13] The widespread accusations of *Non-Plan* as conducive to a sort of 'tragedy of the commons' seem merely instrumental in preferring certain interpretations of *Non-Plan* while excluding others. The controversy around *Non-Plan* can also be seen to be a result of the (notoriously insufficient) theories used to explain, for example, the emergence of knowledge and market phenomena (Sorensen and Day, 1981; Easterling, 2013; Fontenot, 2021).

It is no coincidence that *Non-Plan* pays particular attention to the 'pop culture' and emerging consumerism. This curiosity testifies to the absolute novelty of societies that were increasingly capable of choosing for themselves what to have and what to do. The flashing neon lights of commercial areas, private cars, and petrol stations, as well as amusement areas to go to with family and friends were ridiculed by fellow academics (see Alison, 1971), but for non-planners, these elements were crucial evidence of social change. This argument does not focus much on the fact that market mechanisms are 'superior' to planning systems (as suggested by Allison, 1971; Lloyd, 1985; Cullingworth, 1993), but rather that planning interventions do not need to be activated 'by default' and be appropriately justified.

Even when posing the problem of 'deregulation' (Rowan Robinson and Lloyd, 1986; Hebbert, 1992; Moran, 2005; Kornberger, 2012), *Non-Plan* suggests downsizing certain spheres of competence of top-down planning. This is not advocating for the total elimination of statutory rules (e.g. in favour of contractual rules), but a call for reconsidering certain orthodoxies of planning rules and tools (Moroni, 2020, 2023; see also Cozzolino et al., 2017). This point is made clear by the image of a board game (Banham et al., 1969: 441), when the authors invite

12 Consider also how Le Corbusier became an influential technical advocate of Taylorism in the post-WWI era. Throughout history, and still today, various modern architects (and collectives) continue to revisit the idea of how to refound society from different perspectives. On this topic, see also Gorringe (2011), Mallgrave (2013, p. 1-18), and Castillo (2018, p. 316-317). See also Thornley (1991/2018), Curtis (2000), Moran (2007).

13 As more or less directly suggested by Allison (1971), Lloyd (1985), Anderson (1990), Allmendinger (2001), Schubert (2018).

'land users' to play and freely decide how to move and what to build. This can be seen as a direct parody of traditional maps of 'land uses' that directly set and decide how other people invest their resources. Consider, by contrast, this observation by Jack Meltzer (1984, p.25):

> 'The challenge in government is to affirm political jurisdiction and assert horizontal capacity; the challenge to professional and bureaucratic power is to affirm their functional supremacy and to assert vertical integration. In the case of governance, the question is citizenship; in the case of functional organisation, the question is consumerism. The tension between these forces captures the essential conflict posed by government and management control'

Non-Plan enables a less dramatic understanding of consumerism, as it can be a proxy for socio-material improvements (rather than their demise).[14] For Banham et al. (1969) the prerequisites for transforming built environments were perceived as imposed and usurping, but, differently from other ideas of their time, *Non-Plan* does not push for any 'total revolution' (Sadler, 2013). More simply, 'succumbing to the pressures' may be a form of respect for the expressions of citizens' *wills*, while also being an opportunity to better understand the epochal changes they were witnessing (Banham et al.,1969, p.437).

At this point, *Non-Plan* detractors may resort to the repetitive and stale slogan that use *Non-Plan* as the emblem – and explanation – of unappealing spatial outcomes (e.g. aesthetic dishomogeneity, physical fragmentation, and 'non-places'). Here, one may note that the authors did not support a de-territorialisation of values (a central concern of the political elite) nor an amorphisation of physical results (since consumption habits determine winning ideas).

Some critics may continue to view *Non-Plan* as a mere vision of 'awkward mavericks' (Barker, 2000), a rather unpolished defence of a 'second-order utopia' (or 'subtopia'), that suggests that true spontaneity cannot exist in the material transformation that occurs under (neo)liberal capitalistic logics.[15] This perspective regards any social agent as a 'homunculus': blind to her/his actual needs, devoid of genuine desires, genuine preferences or 'virtuous' aspirations. Such explanations stem – then as now – from the popular bias that market processes (rather than planning processes) are mastered by 'hidden persuaders'.[16] *Non-Plan* makes bold statements based on relatively simple aspirations: let us assume that people know firsthand what they need, let them express and pursue their desires and then evaluate what did or did not work. The underlying idea is that, without experimentation, new empirical possibilities cannot be disclosed.

The *Non-Plan* defence of spontaneity stresses how much global human knowledge also depends on the degree of freedom people have to intervene in the outside world, especially in their immediate physical settings – perhaps, it is not a case that there are more affinities with informal urbanism research.[17]

Nevertheless, it is true that Banham et al. (1969) could have presented in further detail how non-plan launchpads would have worked, for instance in cases of nuisances or land use compensations. On this issue, all they said was that:

> 'legally, it would not be too difficult to get up. It only requires the will to do it – and the desire to *know* instead of *impose*. […] At the very least, *Non-Plan* would provide accurate information to

14 Being the authors interested in the rising 'consumeristic society' was enough to suggest closeness between Non-Plan and 'free market' advocates critical of social planning. Even acknowledging such proximities, it is not always clear why market mechanisms are dangerous in themselves (De Franco, 2023). No supporter of capitalism would argue that the success of any enterprise does not also, if not primarily, stem from the responsibilities that producers owe to final users. Moreover, in every liberal approach to economies, the role of rights and 'the rule of law' remain central and constitutive.

15 See, among others, Moran (2005, 2007), Erten (2008), Taylor (1981), Stedman Jones (2014), Williams (2018), Gunder et al. (2023). See also Nairn (1955).

16 Hidden Persuaders is the title of a best-seller of their times (Packard, 1957), that Banham (1996, p.67) placed in his list of influential but 'alarmist" literature. Thoughts on pernicious and conformist effects of markets can also be traced in the influential works of Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/1972).

17 See for instance Stickells (2011), Loukaitou-Sideris & Mukhija (2016, 2018), Kaminer (2018), Finn and Douglas (2019), and Kelly (2022).

> fit into a "community investment plan". The balance of costs and benefits to the individual is not the same as to the community. If there are social costs, the people who are responsible pay them. If low density development is expensive to the community, the reaction should be to make it proportionately expensive to those who live in it; not to stop it.' (Banham et al., 1969, p.437).

While the epistemic argument is clear, the authors may have underestimated the normative challenges connected to their ideas. As already mentioned, the necessity to loosen social and economic planning was part of the natural transition from 'warfare' to a 'pacified' government, and was also cherished by the social-welfarist tradition of the time (Cullingworth et al., 2015). Simply, for Banham et al. (1969), traditional planning mechanisms mainly reflected what authorities (elected and not-elected ones) *believed* other people *needed*, but people were increasingly capable of choosing directly by themselves what they *wanted*.[18] Allowing people to shape their environments does not require determining either a precise consensus or goals, and this situation of uncertainty may give rise to problems for spatial planners. The more susceptible that processes are to individual experiences, personal preferences and ambitions, the more uncontrollable the outcomes (Cozzolino, 2020; De Franco and Moroni, 2023). It is unclear what norm should apply to the reading and mastering of the events taking place in a non-plan regime. Perhaps, this was also the fortune of the *Non-Plan* article: 'thought-provoking' and 'light-hearted' enough to stay relevant and fresh many decades after its publication.

5. Conclusions

Non-Plan points out how planning, as any expression of designed order, includes some *possibilities* while excluding others. In this play, the authors contended that many uses of planning reflect flawed ideas of social realities. On the one hand, proponents of 'designed orders' believe that formal institutions (e.g. governmental agencies) should direct socio-economic processes to solve problems better and achieve common desirable goals. On the other, proponents of 'undesigned orders' assert that socio-economic processes are already implementable via social institutions (e.g. culture, market), needing no particular top-down direction. Planning is central in the former case, whereas in the second, planning is simply one – and not necessarily the best – of the many alternative approaches that can be used to make certain things happen. By revealing the shortcomings of conventional approaches, *Non-Plan* advocates for changing the way we think about plans formulated in response to emerging societal pressures. It is not merely about embracing the self-assertion of community *needs* but fully and radically accepting individuals' *wills*. The harsh criticisms of *Non-Plan* have exploited the deliberately light tone of the article, which puts forward arguments perhaps more profound than the authors envisaged. For this reason, *Non-Plan* remains a tremendously necessary read for studying and practising spatial planning – and much more.

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18 This topic, which some might refer to as a matter of 'spatial justice,' raises deeper questions: how do we want institutions to view and treat people? (Moroni & De Franco, 2024). Some authors have judged the position of Banham et al. (1969) as a form of egalitarianism (Franks, 2000), but it all depends on how one understands this term (Sen, 1992).

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DEAL-MAKING CITIES IN LATIN AMERICA: WHY SHOULD WE PAY LESS ATTENTION TO MASTER PLANS?

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Abstract

This paper challenges traditional planning paradigms by examining the tensions that exist between planning as a public process and the plan as an instrument. We explore the concept of conformorality, whereby individuals adhere to specific moral values to gain social acceptance within their groups, and influence urban conflicts and policy outcomes. Through this framework, we analyse the complex interactions that exist between planning, public interest, and moral considerations. By using the Urban Intervention Projects (UIPs) case in São Paulo, we demonstrate how moral factors influence negotiations and policy implementation in urban governance. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the moral dimension within planning studies, and advocates for interdisciplinary approaches to the field, as well as new attitudes toward necessary changes.

Keywords

Conformorality, Planning, Governance, Master Plan, Brazilian cities

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1. Introduction

The distinction between planning as a public process and the plan as an instrument has been historically blurred, and has often treated physical infrastructure planning and regulatory action as inseparable entities. The prevailing notion suggests that a skilled-planner crafts plans and translates intentions into legal instruments; a process that results in hard-to-understand planning codes. This prevailing notion within the planning domain, largely unchallenged, has assumed a quasi-dogmatic status, and has received minimal critical scrutiny (Moroni, 2023, Moroni, 2019b, Totry-Fakhoury and Alfasi, 2017).

The conventional technical-rational approach to planning, often synonymous with the plan itself, presupposes a linear and straightforward process which commences with data collection (frequently descriptive), and concludes with the creation of a blueprint (Davoudi, 2015). Public interest emerges as the primary criterion for justification and is its legitimising basis; implying that the planner can identify public interest and formulate proposals on its behalf (Moroni, 2017, Moroni, 2019a, Alexander, 2002). This planning tradition, entrenched across various paradigms (Alexander, 2022), tends to shape an inert or dormant field of forces towards conformity to standards and narrow conceptual interpretations under new forms of technocracy (Raco and Savini, 2019).

In Latin America – a continent that has historically adhered to idealised urban plans – this discussion intersects with the evolving dynamics of political conflicts, which are currently shifting from traditional arenas to the judicial realm. Against a backdrop of uneven urbanisation characterised by informality (Roy, 2005, Roy, 2009, Roy, 2011), and blurred boundaries between the state and real estate stakeholders (Abers, 2000, Marques, 2016), courts are increasingly relied upon to safeguard the fundamental rights of vulnerable populations (Pimentel Walker et al., 2024), and especially with regards to promoting the social function of property (Svoboda, 2021). Judicialisation, has appeared to assume an increasingly defining role in contemporary urban planning in the region (Rios-Figueroa and Taylor, 2006, Sieder et al., 2005, Sotomayor et al., 2023).

The democratic transition experienced across the continent in the 1980s and 1990s accompanied normative advancements in national urban policies. These policies have established legal mandates for plans with binding roles which have ranged from city development guidelines to urban codes and operational parameters (Fernandes, 2010, Ortiz, 2023). However, this transition coincided with the neoliberalisation and financialisation processes of the 1990s, which introduced market-oriented logics, instruments, and lexicons into urban policy frameworks, and exerted significant influence on planning practices (Nascimento Neto and Salinas Arreortua, 2020, Phelps and Miao, 2020, Aalbers, 2019, Ward, 2021, Nascimento Neto et al., 2023, Aalbers, 2017).

Planning systems have embraced more flexible forms of regulation to accommodate the imperatives of capital reproduction necessary for urban transformation. These systems are characterised by negotiation and project-oriented approaches. In this context, the distinction between deal-making and plan-making cities illuminates tensions by differentiating the prevalence of the rule of law and zoning in the former, while the latter is characterised by state discretion for land use decisions, and establishes land use regulations after rounds of negotiation and agreements with developers (Friendly, 2020, Gielen and Tasan-Kok, 2010). These power relations between design, regulation and negotiation confirm their non-harmonious coexistence, and thus reject "the idea that they can ideally interact in perfect balance with no negative impact on each other" (Ultramari et al., 2023).

In Brazil, the regulatory framework – as stated by the federal law known as the City Statute - stands out for its emphasis on participatory planning rooted in conflicts (Holston, 1998) as in the Lefebvrian conception of the right to the city (Svoboda, 2021). However, emerging instruments developed by local governments have challenged this paradigm by introducing the possibility of negotiating urban codes favouring entrepreneurs in exchange for urban amenities and infrastructure works. One such instrument is the Urban Intervention Project (UIP) in São Paulo. It has sparked debates regarding its impact on urban development and the relationship between the Stat and the real estate market.

The prominence of UIPs in São Paulo underscores the distinction between the planning process and the instrumental plan, and presents new avenues for addressing the historical challenge of social housing in well-located urban areas while also raising questions about state-market collusion. This paper analyses one ongoing UIP in São Paulo, and examines the advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1999) created to tailor its proposal and guarantee subsequent approval. By mapping these conflicts, we elucidate patterns of conformorality (Lisciandra et al., 2013), explore how social groups coalesced around specific moral positions, and through so doing also reflect on the epistemological implications of analysing urban conflicts through this lens.

2. Learning from conformorality

The concept of conformorality, introduced by Lisciandra et al. (2013), originates from psychological studies and extends the well-known Asch paradigm (1955). It delves into how groups and communities tend to conform to normative judgments under peer pressure, and particularly when it comes to moral norms. As demonstrated by these authors, individuals tend to conform to the common behaviours and shared opinions within a group, and emphasise the perception that violations of moral norms are typically considered to be non-negotiable. Bourdieu´s concept of social fields (1984) may offer further insights into this intricate process. Once an individual becomes part of a field, they desire to maintain the position and status acquired, and are predisposed to act according to its patterns and rules without question.

In social sciences, morality is a concept employed by scholars such as Durkheim (1929/1961) and Weber (1975) to elucidate upon social order concerning individual behaviour, that is grounded in shared values and cultural codes that delineate socially accepted or rejected conduct (Stets and Turner, 2006, Herman and Pogarsky, 2022). While traditionally discussed in psychology, criminology, and behavioural economics, the debate on morality has increasingly influenced public policy and planning. Various theoretical frameworks, from the concept of advocacy coalitions within public policy subsystems (Sabatier, 1986, Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018, Weible et al., 2009) to the role of beliefs and ideas from an institutionalist perspective (Béland, 2010, Carstensen and Schmidt, 2015, Lowndes and Roberts, 2013), have explored the individual value spectrum and its correlation with subjective social norms, as Cialdini et al. (1990) argues. In practical terms, there is a belief that such a correlation would justify and explain the contemporary ideal of a 'city for all', which exists in naive urban proposals and is strategically defended in political discourses. In the 2000s, urban plans heavily promoted and supported by the Brazilian government under inclusiveness guidelines serve as an example of these efforts. The expectation was that a master plan, developed through democratic processes, would ensure the collective well-being and satisfaction of the entire population.

This debate on morality holds significance for planning; a field often perceived to prioritise technical expertise (Hoch, 2017, Raco and Savini, 2019, Davoudi, 2015), even though "planners do not uncover facts like geologists do, but rather, like lawyers, they organise facts as evidence within different arguments" (Hoch, 1994). Narratives play a central role in planning (Ortiz, 2022), and mobilise values and ideas to establish the legitimacy of public actions at the local level (Campbell, 2002, Taylor, 2013). Often, they do so more effectively than rational arguments.

In contexts where urban governance arrangements entail a limited degree of autonomy for the State and require political acumen due to the diverse number of social agents and activities involved in collective action (Healey, 2006), combining analytical knowledge and moral considerations becomes imperative (Healey, 2009). It is not about ignoring the technical-rational foundation of planning, but understanding it for what it is – just one facet of planning.

Despite its significance, many planners overlook the role of emotions in planning as well as the persuasive power of rhetoric in legitimising plans and decisions (Baum, 2015, Davoudi et al., 2020), often influenced by their ideological legacies of planning (Shepherd, 2018). Therefore, the concept of conformorality directly

engages with debates concerning the less 'rational' aspects of planning objectives. Shifting the focus from viewing the plan as a supposed solution to wicked problems to understanding advocacy coalitions and their role in planning emphasises the relational dimension and underscores the importance of cooperation and coordination.

3. Framing the case: Urban Intervention Projects in São Paulo

In Brazil, Master Plans are the cornerstone of local policies. They guide urban development and prescribe the planning instruments to be employed (Cunha et al., 2019, Samora, 2012). Their national regulation in 2001, under the City Statute, arose within a particular political-democratic context characterized by the principles of the right to the city and participatory planning. This normative framework addressed longstanding challenges inherent in an opaque and classist planning system, historically perpetuating socio-spatial inequalities (Friendly, 2013, Fernandes, 2010).

Formally institutionalised, this framework reinforced a long-engendered and specific culture of spatial planning in Brazil (Rocco et al., 2019). It was expected that the normative dimension would be sufficiently robust to curb discretion by local governments and reduce favouritism towards an agenda driven by the reproduction of real estate capital. However, the results suggest limited efficacy (Santos Jr. and Montandon, 2011, Bueno and Lima, 2020) and point to tensions between "the normative and practical dimensions of planning in Brazil. [...] Although ideals like justice and equality are in the letter of the law, their application and ensuing effects often conflict with those values" (Rocco et al., 2019). Despite many interpretations, common sense generally finds the explanation for the meagre results achieved by this national legislation either in the historical dualism of Brazilian cities which resist forcefully, or in the resistance of capital to undergo necessary changes. Less attention is given to the underlying beliefs, practices, and historical technical references that shape urban plans.

This discrepancy between normative intent and practical outcomes underscores a prevailing assumption that the plan itself is equated with the planning process, and its implementation is viewed merely as an independent and executive phase. Additionally, spatial planning is imbued with an underlying moral imperative to foster socio-spatial justice; burdening planning instruments with lofty expectations. As Shepherd (2018) argued, "while planning is not a political ideology per se, it gains its form and structure by virtue of the fact that it is structured by concepts which are of key concern to political ideologies. […] political ideologies struggle to impose control over the terms by which these concepts are understood and, therefore, control the limits of what is thinkable in planning practice".

In this context, São Paulo has historically pioneered urban transformations within Brazil's planning frameworks. Innovative initiatives such as the introduction of development charges for projects exceeding land use limits in the 1980s (Rezende et al., 2009, Martins and Magami, 2023) and the establishment of urban operations coupled with a financialised instrument for trading development rights in the 1990s (Nascimento Neto and Moreira, 2013, Nobre, 2023) have left indelible marks on urban policy nationwide (Bernardini and Sato, 2021). However, this prominence is not devoid of contradictions, as evidenced by the continued existence of an elitist model that perpetuates inequality and marginalises poverty (Holston, 2009, Kowarick, 2000).

This paper focuses on the Urban Intervention Project (UIP), an instrument that was introduced in the 2014 São Paulo´s Master Plan. Under this provision, private developers can propose urban projects in designated city zones. This, in turn, allows them to propose alterations to planning regulations and the urban fabric, including displacing informal settlements. Diverging from conventionally regulated instruments in Brazil, the UIP represents a critical juncture in the institutionalisation of city planning; and demands a recalibration of advocacy coalitions as well as a reconfiguration of interests, agendas, and concerns. Our subsequent analysis will delve into this political juncture in the next section.

4. UIP Vila Leopoldina: conformorality in conflictual planning

Among the ongoing UIPs in São Paulo, the Vila Leopoldina is a focal point in our discussion. Launched in 2016 by a consortium of private developers, this proposal aims to transform a 300,000-square-metre area formerly occupied by industrial activities into a new hub for real estate development. Situated in São Paulo´s prime Real Estate location, with high land value and access to urban amenities, the site is partially home to two long-established informal settlements and also exhibits various contingent issues that have hindered its development priority over the years (Figure 1).

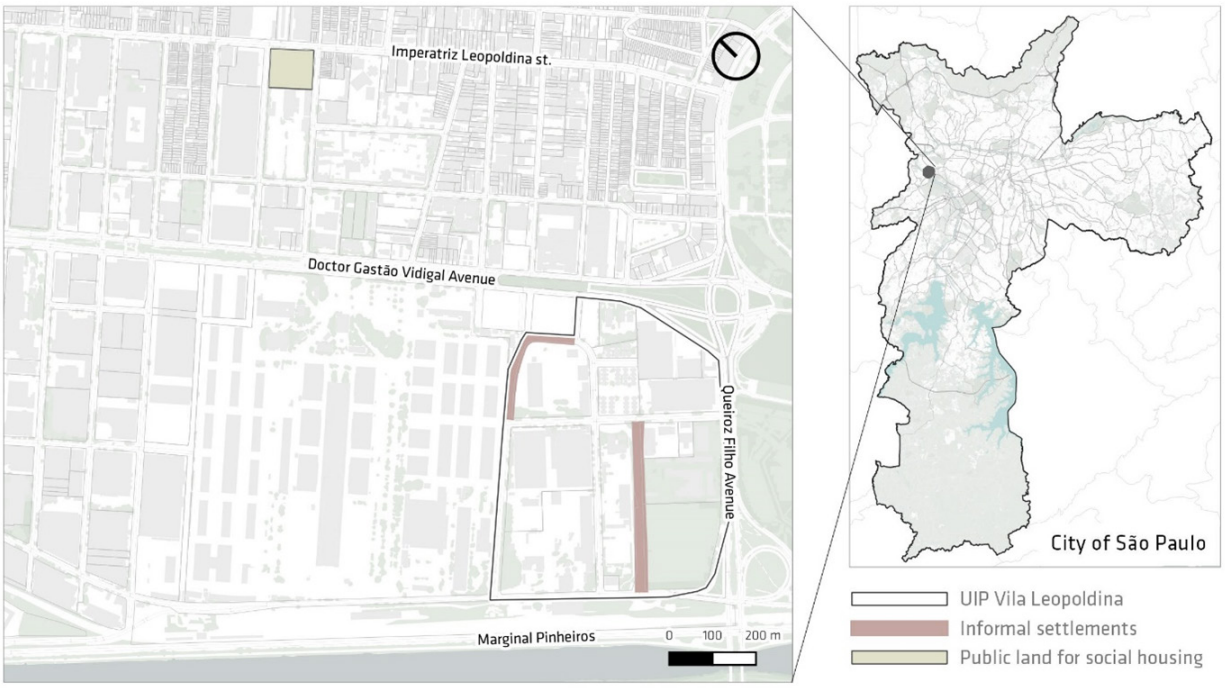

Figure 1. UIP Vila Leopoldina, São Paulo
Source: the authors.

In essence, the area holds significant potential for construction which makes it an attractive prospect for the newly regulated planning instrument. The original proposal, unveiled in 2016, sought to increase building rights in exchange for infrastructure investments and social housing development. According to the initial plan, a portion of the social housing would be constructed on-site, with additional demand being addressed via provision in a public area approximately 1 km away.

The pivotal question concerns the viability of the solution proposed by the private developers. The designated public area identified in the original proposal was intended to accommodate approximately 75% of the informal settlement dwellers and had already been earmarked for social housing in the 2014 Master Plan; thereby aligning with established spatial directives. However, the surrounding areas, characterised by high-income neighbourhoods, launched vehement opposition to the proposal.

Manifesting a NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) sentiment, a coalition of residents from the adjacent luxury condominiums mobilised, utilising online platforms, petitions, and legal consultation to voice their dissent. As succinctly summarised by a local newspaper, “on Imperatriz Leopoldina Avenue, 4-bedroom apartments with gourmet balcony are advertised for prices starting at US$ 505,000. On the other side of the street, less than 100 meters away, a plot of land owned by the City of São Paulo could offer homes to more than 500 families living in the neighbouring favelas” (Paulo, 2018, author’s translation).

This specific controversy serves as a focal point for examining pivotal aspects that encapsulates the empirical implications of conformorality. Our analysis relies on official proposal documents, meeting transcripts, public hearing recordings, and media interviews with key stakeholders (São Paulo City Hall, 2018, São Paulo City Hall, 2024, IUSM, 2024, Paulo, 2018, among other sources, Hall, 2023). By juxtaposing narratives from the three main interest groups, we elucidate the potential of conformorality as an analytical framework for planning studies.

Scrutiny of meeting reports and public hearing recordings reveals a concerted resistance from luxury condominium residents which was counterbalanced by an equally robust countermovement from informal settlement residents. Concurrently, private developers sought to garner support for their proposal, aligning with the local government interest in promoting urban development. These advocacy coalitions are delineated into the Luxury Condominiums Group (LC-G), the Informal Settlements Group (IS-G), and the Private Developers Group (PD-G).

The primary legitimising argument of the LC-G revolves around the disclosed contamination discovered on the social housing public plot, which lies outside the UIP's area and is directly in front of their buildings, as reported by Paulo (2018). This contamination, theoretically, poses an obstacle to urban occupation in the vicinity. Criticisms have also focused on the project's impact, as well as the maintenance costs for low-income residents and the insufficient parking provisions contained within the plan. Further discussions also addressed the need for additional green spaces nearby, notwithstanding a park approximately 2 km away.

In turn, the IS-G argued that the LC-G's arguments merely demonstrated their prejudice and desire to distance themselves from poor people. The IS-G advocated for the right to housing and stressed the importance of persons being allowed to reside close to their current dwellings. While concerns about contamination were acknowledged, they were downplayed, with the IS-G suggesting that a solution could eventually be reached. However, the strength of the PD-G's position became evident, as the IS-G appeared to concede to the developers' proposal of relocation 1.5 km away, primarily due to concerns over their own financial sustainability.

The public consultation process for the Vila Leopoldina UIP spanned r three years, and entailed more than twenty meetings across various councils and forums as well as three public hearings. One such public hearing involved over 450 people. Within this antagonistic environment, dwellers from the informal settlements and the high-end condominiums engaged in heated debates. The quotations presented demonstrate the multifaceted dynamics and contentious nature of the process.

> Individual 1, from the Luxury Condominiums group (LC-G):
>
> I don't understand why they are granting additional building rights to the developer. They are already obligated by the Master Plan to meet the so-called solidarity quota. They are requesting a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 4.0 instead of 2.0. Let's tear up the Master Plan since it's easy to come and say, "I want to increase the building rights on my property." The UIP regulation stipulates that social housing construction should be within the intervention perimeter and not in a nearby area. Yet you are trying to relocate this population 1.5 km away from where they live. You're saying it's in their interest to build the development. [...] Instead of building on their own land, next to where you are, they are turning that area into a square. Why not put more social housing on their own land? [...]
>
> Individual 2, Informal Settlements group (IS-G):
>
> The project is in our best interest; it's not the Viva Leopoldina association or any dweller of Vila Leopoldina being displaced. It's our communities themselves that will be relocated. [...] The project looks promising. If executed transparently and meets our needs, [...] we don't want another area. [...] They said they want parks; there are already two. But they don't want to give us housing. They only want parks for their children to play in; they want two, three, or four of those. [...] Leopoldina people, bourgeois, rich, first knock on our door and ask if we need anything before saying pretty words, trying to buy us.
>
> (São Paulo City Hall, 2018, our transcription and translation)

The discussions revolved around a particular morality summarised in the social conflict between the poor and the rich. The proposal to relocate residents of informal settlements to an area outside the project zone - a suggestion that, of itself, conflicted with the guidelines of the planning instrument itself – was advocated for the beneficiaries, who perceived it as a chance to enhance their living conditions. For private developers (PD-G), this would mean increasing building rights and transferring social housing responsibility onto public land; a favourable factor to their economic modelling. Holding sway in these negotiations was the implicit threat of withdrawing the proposal should conditions prove unfavourable; an approach that intertwined public interest with the success of the private developers.

Table 1 systematises the manifestation of conformorality across different dimensions of the conflict in Vila Leopoldina. It reveals the dynamics that existed between the groups and how each one, through their respective struggles and negotiations, conformed to challenged established norms. The LC-G emphasised arguments to maintain social distances and preserve the status quo, while the IS-G advocated for adapting norms that ensure social justice and fundamental rights. The PD-G aimed to reconcile economic development with social responsibility. Furthermore, negotiations between the State and developers illustrate how land use decisions often prioritise corporation interests, potentially compromising social housing and justice in land use.

Table 1 - Analysis of Conformorality in the Urban Conflict of Vila Leopoldina

Focus	Group	Description	Application of Conformorality
Normative Conformity	LC-G	Utilises arguments emphasising contamination and costs to maintain distance from low-income populations and seeks to support existing norms.	Practices of social exclusion and maintenance of the status quo.
	IS-G	Fights for compliance with norms of social justice and the right to the city and seeks to adopt new norms.	Defence of fundamental rights and access to urban services.
	PD-G	Seeks to align economic development with compliance with regulatory and social expectations.	Alignment of economic development with social responsibility.
Impacts on Land Use Decisions	State and PD-G	Ongoing negotiations with developers under the relaxation of norms to favour business interests in exchange for urban amenities and infrastructure.	Negotiations that define urban codes in favour of corporate interests.
	State and LC-G	Discussions on how the proposed development impacts existing urban norms, with LC-G emphasising environmental and aesthetic concerns of the city.	Resistance to integrating informal settlements to preserve a particular image of the city and its intrinsic land value
	State and IS-G	Involvement in negotiations about relocation and housing provision, with IS-G advocating for the right to nearby and affordable housing within the city.	Struggle for housing equity and spatial justice in the allocation of urban resources.
Urban Policies	Urban Governance	Questions about the collusion between the State and the market with UIPs raise concerns about the transparency and equity of urban policy decisions.	Analysis of power dynamics affecting transparency and equity in urban planning policies.
Theoretical Implications	Urban Studies	Future review and analysis of how norms are applied or challenged are needed, highlighting the importance of normative compliance in urban policy.	Continuous reflection on the application and impact of urban norms on planning practices is needed.

With regards urban governance, Table 1 demonstrates how the urban intervention projects (UIPs) are critical junctures in which conformorality faces challenges as a consequence of the interplay between public interest and market forces. The negotiations reveal the existence of potential collusion between the State and the private developers, which raises concerns about the transparency of planning decisions. This collusion frequently manifested as covert manoeuvres which sought to circumvent legal regulations. Such a scenario reflects more of a "managerialisation of law than a legalisation of organisations," as Edelman (2016) discussed. The epistemological implications of these conflicts pose a challenge to identifying the limits of practices under

conformality, as they constantly constitute and reconstitute new planning paradigms. A plausible hypothesis is that as these processes evolve, they gradually blur the lines between established norms and principles of legality. Consequently, the solutions to these conflicts shift away from political relations between social groups and lean towards the judicialisation of urban policies.

4.1 Practical Implications of Conformorality in the Vila Leopoldina Case

The dilemma appears to pivot on the dichotomy of wealth (rich versus poor), and engenders corresponding advocacy coalitions rooted in this narrative. Both groups' voices played decisive roles in galvanising support for their respective causes. Notably, the project underwent a rigorous three-year analysis and consultation process overseen by local authorities (2016 - 2019). Subsequently, planners from the local government authority had to translate the negotiated agreements into normative guidelines, subjected to the City Council's analysis; a process which extended the advocacy arena between LC and IS groups for another five years (2019–2023). Throughout this process, the PD-G safeguarded its interests by emphasising the imperative of attaining a minimum level of profitability if it was to maintain its involvement in the project.

A critical juncture arose with the entry of local councillors into the fray. This, in turn, reshuffled the dynamics of influence between the stakeholders, with the IS-G agenda becoming increasingly prominent. A cohort of political actors emerged, who positioned themselves as defenders of "social demands" and also exerted influence over the private developers. Additionally, the intervention of the public prosecutor's office, in seeking to halt the project's analysis due to its overlap with the master plan revision timeline (MPSP, 2022), underscored the role of judicialisation in enforcing the normative mandates outlined in the City Statute onto local urban policies (Coslovsky, 2015).

While conducting an exhaustive analysis of underlying motivations fell beyond the scope of this paper, it is plausible to consider the moral appeal of aligning with the concerns of IS-G as a strategic manoeuvre for local councillors seeking to garner popular support for their re-election endeavours. Concurrently, the PD-G, confronted with mounting resistance in the legislative arena, proposed revisions (previously deemed unfeasible to the project's economic viability) under the guise of moral righteousness (benevolence). This power rebalance culminated in project approval, and established the construction of social housing exclusively within the project area, a concession that had not been entertained in the prior negotiations. As stated by a member of the PD-G,

> The process was long, laborious, and tortuous. It involved intense discussions with municipal technicians, countless hearings, workshops with neighbourhood residents, and clashes with condominiums that, opposed to a new spatial order, fought against the construction of apartments for residents of the nearby favelas. The halting situation was resolved with a generous gesture from Votorantim [a private group], which - in addition to pay in advance the funds for the construction of more than 800 units of social housing intended for the resettlement of families from the two favelas, decided to accommodate 100% of these dwellings on its own land. It is important to note that the project results from the convergence of three factors: good regulation, a beautiful location, and a benevolent owner. [...] It is not every day that such an alignment of factors occurs. At a time when resentment is growing in cities and liberal democracies are being questioned for their poor performance, the example of UIPs and PPPs in general, and UIP Vila Leopoldina in particular, should be sought as a formula for the generation and distribution of collective goods (IUSM, 2024, our translation).

Table 2 elucidates how the agents involved in the Vila Leopoldina case employed conformorality to navigate the complex landscape of urban policy negotiations concerning land use. Each group, driven by their own distinct interests and objectives, strategically manipulated social, moral, and decency norms to shape public policies and community responses. For instance, local councillors appeared to leverage their legislative authority to align with pressure groups, while the Public Prosecutor's Office discursively upheld normative standards to bolster its social legitimacy by advocating for strict adherence to legally established norms and guidelines.

Simultaneously, the PD-G utilised its influence to cultivate an image of benevolence, and employed this strategy to improve its market position and influence political decisions impacting urban development. These elements underscore the intricate interplay that can exist between normative conformity and strategic interests, with economic resources and time serving as pressures on the weaker group (maintaining a constant need). Time, in this context, functions as a form of capital, as described by Pierre Bourdieu, providing different types of advantageous returns for those seeking political gains (councillors), social legitimacy (Public Prosecutor's Office), and contemporary urban aesthetics (the wealthier classes) in the city.

Table 2: Analysis of Conformorality on Urban Development in Vila Leopoldina

Stakeholders	Actions and Influence	Implications and Outcomes	Social, Moral, and Decency Norms Applied
Local Councillors	Engagement in drafting and approving laws that impact urban development, aiming to align with influential pressure groups to ensure electoral support.	Decisions often reflect pressure groups' interests more than the community's general welfare.	Use governance and political ethics norms to maintain or gain power and influence.
Interest Groups (LC-G, IS-G, PD-G)	**LC-G**: Resists the integration of social housing to protect property values. **IS-G**: Fights for housing rights and social justice. **PD-G**: Maximises profits under the guise of social responsibility.	**LC-G**: Maintains high socioeconomic status quo. **IS-G**: Faces ongoing challenges in voice and negotiations. **PD-G**: Secures public concessions contracts and projects.	**LC-G**: Preservation of social and economic status. **IS-G**: Advocacy for equity and justice. **PD-G**: Strategic compliance with norms for self-benefit.
Public Prosecutor's Office	Acts as a defender of community rights, questioning adherence to normative instruments and the ethical values of urban planning decisions.	Serves as a bulwark against unfair or illegal practices, often holding merely veto power and limited by the complexity of negotiations.	Defence of normative foundations and institutionalised social rights as bases for justice and equity.
Private developer	It positions itself as a benefactor through funding social housing, which it uses to influence policies and public perceptions.	Improves corporate image while subtly favouring its commercial interests through political concessions.	Use of corporate philanthropy as a moral norm for manipulating policies and public opinion.

This case demonstrates the analytical potential of conformorality. It illustrates the sway wielded by social groups over political actors who swiftly aligned themselves with 'the cause of the underprivileged'. Despite grappling with the weighty burdens of technical and financial modelling, the PD group adeptly navigated the moral dimension to bolster its legitimacy. While addressing procedural requisites, this process paradoxically exerted minimal influence on the intricate legitimacies that were expected to be achieved. Ultimately, the Master Plan exerted scant influence, and mainly portrayed rites that needed to be respected.

An examination of the PD-G's role within the Vila Leopoldina context reveals that it exercised considerable influence through a complex, temporally-dependent relational strategy. While the PD-G set initial parameters for the project, the process involved substantial revision to these parameters which suggests that the group's involvement was neither passive nor superficial. Indeed, the strategy of the PD-G appears to have been calculated on two fronts: they proposed guidelines that favoured their economic interests under the guise of social responsibility; they adjusted flexibly to the demands of the negotiation process, and in so doing ensured that their proposals remained aligned with changes in legal requirements and community expectations at the time. This behaviour indicates that, although it might seem that the project used the PD-G's name merely as a strategic facilitator, their actual influence was intricately interwoven with the project's development and approval. It follows, that the PD-G's contribution extended beyond mere instrumentalization; illustrating their capacity to subtly influence and adapt urban policies so that they concurrently satisfied their corporation interests as well as emerging normative and social pressures.

The managerialisation of law and the legalisation of organisations also emerge as significant processes within conformorality. While adhering to social norms under the guise of corporate responsibility, the PD-G may have contributed to this managerialisation by altering the law's interpretation and application to align with particular interests rather than promoting social rights. The subtle erosion of state apparatuses through conformorality-

driven mechanisms blurred the lines between social, moral, and decency norms. It suggests that, despite the existence of norms and statutes designed to protect vulnerable groups, organisations permeated by private interests, whether within the State or in the market itself, possess sophisticated instruments to decouple this statutory base from their initial purposes. This detachment allows such organisations to make laws more instrumental to prevailing power structures. In the case of Vila Leopoldina, this dynamic favoured entities and groups with greater resources and influence.

The roles of councillors and the Public Prosecutor's Office in the Brazilian state reveal a complex and problematic scenario. Councillors hold elective positions, representing society in the municipal legislative power, while members of the Public Prosecutor's Office, though lifelong appointees within the state structure, are paradoxically tasked with representing collective social interests before the judiciary. This institutional framework, which is meant to ensure the legalisation of organisations, appears weakened in fulfilling its mission. The dynamic reflects a broader tension between adherence to the law and its manipulation to serve managerial, class-based, and corporate interests. As Edelman (2016) argues, this delicate balance is central to the interactions between law and organisations, shaping legal consciousness

5. Conclusion

This paper examined an ongoing Urban Intervention Project (UIP) in São Paulo, and delved into the advocacy coalitions that were formed to shape the proposal and promote its approval. By mapping these conflicts, we delineated patterns of conformorality, and explored how social groups united around specific moral stances. This process revealed the epistemological implications of analysing urban conflicts through this lens, and the paper elucidated upon how the dynamics of moral conformity influence planning decisions and underpin the foundations of urban policies. Notably, the study of advocacy coalitions provided a deep understanding of how interactions between different agents – from planners to ordinary citizens – are permeated by moral and social norms that define the courses of urban interventions. This underscores the importance of the intricate interplay that exists between morality, power, and politics in urban development.

More specifically, the case confirms that conformorality provides novel avenues to unveil the dynamics of collective behaviour and decision-making processes within the planning realm. The UIP Vila Leopoldina offered an opportunity to explore this conceptual framework and better understand the nuances of planning practices which have diverged from the statutory ideals contained in the plans and the letter of the law. This expanded approach holds promise for deepening the comprehension of how such mechanisms shape legal consciousness across different societies. Despite the conventional emphasis on technical aspects, planning grapples with intricate challenges stemming from cognitive constraints, resource limitations, and impassioned engagements. These advancements point to a more comprehensive approach which stresses the dynamic interactions that occur between moral conformity, the legalisation of organisations, and the managerialisation of law in urban policies and planning processes; all possess implications for their manifestation in master plans.

Integrating conformorality into planning studies appears to significantly broaden epistemological perspectives, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the evolutionary trajectories in plan development and their interface with instruments influenced by a financialised agenda. This study has shown the importance of values and beliefs over purely rational decision-making criteria, accentuating the role of the moral domain in legitimising public actions in urban policies. As Baum (2015) and Forester (2013) argued, emotions can be understood as specific actions and modes of acting, including ways of thinking, underscoring the critical role of conformorality. It serves as a decisive factor in shaping the design and implementation of urban policies that are more (un)just and (in)effective, depending on their alignment with the economic demands or the social and moral expectations of the affected communities. This approach engenders a critical analysis of existing practices and encourages the search for methods that integrate human and emotional aspects into urban management.

Furthermore, conformorality contributes to neo-institutionalist perspectives on urban studies by recognising that institutional structures and norms are influenced by social, moral, and decency norms. These norms influence the institutionalisation of strategic human actions and interactions over time, through a continuous process of adaptation and reconfiguration. This approach broadens the understanding of how planning policies and practices can be oriented to influence urban policies which seek to foster social inclusion and spatial justice. The implementation of these policies, however, demands a thorough analysis of the forces that perpetuate power structures and inequalities. This challenge will not be overcome without understanding the institutional mechanisms that govern cities' socio-political relationships. In conclusion, our study underscores the need for planning perspectives to acknowledge and integrate the complexity of moral and institutional dynamics, and positions urban transformation as both a technical challenge and a deeply entrenched issue within social and moral contexts.

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PLANNERS' IDEALS AND REALITIES: NORMATIVE BEHAVIOUR AND CONFORMORALITY

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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

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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.

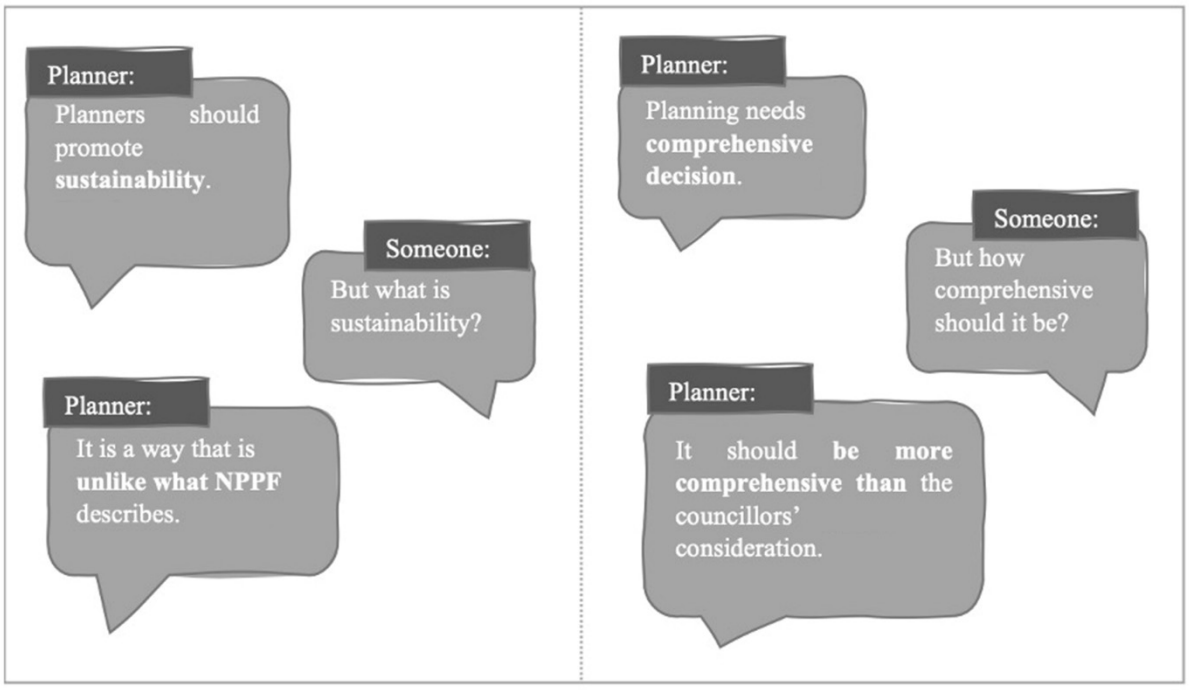

Figure 1: Illustrative dialogue (author's own).

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)*

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THE 'CONFORMORALITY' OF RESIDENTIAL DISPLACEMENT DEBATES

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Abstract

Much scholarly discourse about the problems of and solutions to urban residential displacement has tended towards 'conformorality' and, in so doing, has overlooked certain key aspects for study. First, there has been a lack of interest in explaining the complex motives of displacers. Second, certain solutions to displacement have become so commonly espoused that their negative aspects have been obscured. Third, addressing these issues, this paper suggests new ways to confront 'conformorality' by encouraging scholars to engage with the deeper ethical and normative questions about displacement solutions that have, hitherto, not often been addressed. Through exploring these rarely discussed topics, scholars may be able create new or improved responses to displacement that target inherent issues.

Keywords

Displacement; solutions; private property; housing; conformorality

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1. Introduction

Scholarship that seeks to understand and prevent urban residential displacement[1] seems to have shied away from addressing certain aspects of the phenomenon. While a number of authors continue to research and contribute to a lively debate about the best responses to displacement, these discussions revolve around an apparently set list of possible solutions. Some of this stasis can be attributed to a lack of interest in investigating the perspectives of certain actors involved in urban displacement. Authors also seem to generally overlook some key conflicts inherent within the *context* of anti-displacement policies as well. What has constrained scholars in this cohort?

One hypothesis, building on work by Lisciandra, Postma-Nilsenová and Colombo (2013), is that this tendency evinces a type of 'conformorality' operating between these researchers. Lisciandra, Postma-Nilsenová and Colombo (2013) propose a taxonomy of different norms in society, highlighting 'moral' norms as the most normatively powerful. To the authors, this power exists because 'justification of such norms would refer to the harm or injustice suffered by the victim' (Lisciandra, Postma-Nilsenová and Colombo, 2013, p. 752). This often evokes an 'emotional response' that makes the norm feel correct at its core instead of being socially dependent.

Clearly, urban residential displacement can be an extremely harmful experience to those who it befalls. This is for multiple reasons, but especially because it may create barriers that make it harder to increase individual welfare (Kingsley, Smith and Price, 2009; Atkinson, 2015; Robinson and Steil, 2021). It is fair to say that many scholars writing about how to prevent displacement would probably subscribe to a moral norm that displacement is wrong.

However, when 'moral indignation,' as Woods (2015, p. 98) calls it, is employed, it tends to diminish 'deliberative, consequentialist thinking.' Though his primary focus is human rights policies, Woods (2015) asserts that the strategies that come out of appeals to moral intuitions may result in either strategic omissions or oversimplified characterizations of events, individuals, and situations. These, in turn, may lead to 'suboptimal' human rights policies (Woods, 2015, p. 106).

It follows that it is possible that 'conformorality' together with 'moral indignation' are preventing a deeper probing into topics that could guide anti-displacement policies in a more effective direction. This article points out some of those areas where conformorality can lead to a discrepancy in research, hoping to provide fresh avenues of thought for current scholarship. The next section probes the perspectives of those who displace others, viewpoints which are not often the subject of in-depth study. Thereafter, the paper highlights the negatives and complexities of certain commonly studied solutions to displacement before exploring some important ethical and normative questions about the context of displacement responses that have, to date, not been often interrogated.

2. The rationale of displacers

Recent scholars writing about urban residential displacement have produced relatively few studies probing the character or motivations of those who initiate the displacement of others (Shiffer-Sebba, 2020). This may be due to the fact that researchers have less interest in the ostensible perpetrators of displacement due to 'conformorality' around the anti-displacement norm. Additionally, others have suggested that limited attention to the perspectives of displacers is because of how overwhelmingly disparate their profiles and desires can be (Decker, 2023). However, the viewpoints of displacers are critical to understanding why displacers displace in the first place. Furthermore, they are crucial to understanding how to come to an acceptable solution for both

1 Here, urban residential displacement refers to displacement which occurs due to social factors (such as displacement from gentrification, eviction, foreclosure, maltreatment, neglect, etc.). It follows, that displacement from natural disasters, war, famine, and other more extreme factors are beyond the scope of the present discussion.

displacers and those displaced. The following explores some of these experiences as well as the motivations that are often overlooked for three categories of displacers; this is not an exhaustive list.

2.1 Landlords

Different types of landlords often have different reasons for evicting their tenants. Desilver (2021), a scholar at the Pew Research Center, writes that in the US '[l]andlords aren't a homogenous group of faceless corporations. In fact, fewer than one-fifth of rental properties are owned by for-profit businesses of any kind.' Desilver emphasises that 2018 US Census data shows that roughly 70 percent of landlords are 'Mom and Pop' operations, which usually own only one or two rentals. Data from Eurostat (2023) shows a similar situation in EU Member States and demonstrates that well over 50 percent of real estate activities were operated by 'micro enterprises' in 2020 – i.e. those that employ fewer than 10 people. However, the proportion of micro enterprise real estate actors varies enormously between different states. In countries like Italy and Portugal the percentage of micro enterprises in the real estate sector was as much as 93.2 percent and 87.1 percent respectively in 2020.

Small-scale landlords may see eviction as a key mechanism by which to protect their financial wellbeing. Larger rental companies might be able to absorb small losses more easily from damage to properties, late rental payments, and so on, due to their access to greater financial capital and size via economies of scale (Decker, 2023). In contrast, smaller operations, by virtue of *their* size, may rely more heavily on each of their properties as stable sources of income. This income might be used to pay for employees' or owners' living expenses, taxes, or even repairs to the homes they rent out. For smaller landlords especially, it can feel important to have the tool of displacement to maintain control over what may be an invaluable investment. After all, landlords are in a precarious position in that they must trust tenants – many times virtual strangers – to take responsible care of valuable properties. This includes trusting them to conform to reasonable rules regarding pets, late payments, tenant-initiated renovations, and so on (Clark, 2007). Differentiating between the needs and desires of larger rental companies and small-scale landlords is a necessary step to craft more equitable policies that recognise the differing capabilities of each.

2.2 Lenders

Some authors have pointed out that lenders do not always gain from initiating foreclosures. Foote et al (2010, p. 116), citing a study by White (2009), suggest that there may be a major built-in flaw within the mortgage industry that leads to thousands of unnecessary foreclosures. When White analysed 21,000 liquidated first mortgages during the US subprime mortgage crisis of 2008, he found that the average loss was a staggering 55 percent of the principal owed – on average $145,000. In contrast, the average loss on another set of mortgages where the lenders chose to modify the original terms was $26,610 – seven times less than the loss incurred by the liquidators. Foote et al ponder an obvious question: why would lenders *not* modify the conditions of a mortgage rather than incur a greater loss by forcing foreclosure? White (2009, p.1119) offered a likely explanation: the decision to foreclose was not made by the investors who funded the loans but by the companies hired to service the mortgages (i.e. to collect the monthly payments).

Foote et al (2010) also speculate that lenders still apparently operate on the somewhat substantiated rationale that modifying loans may lead to less preferable outcomes. Lenders may fear that borrowers will string them along and cause greater losses down the line. They may also be afraid that by modifying the terms of a loan, they are in essence capitulating to the threat of non-payment by borrowers who will choose to continue making their mortgage payments rather than face displacement. In addition, when a borrower is defaulting because, for example, the borrower has lost their job, lenders do not always see that changing the terms of a loan will help the borrower pay (Foote et al., 2010).[2]

2 Note that both lenders and borrowers can be greatly damaged by foreclosure. From this understanding, perhaps new solutions (e.g. mandatory mediation or allowing a borrower the time to seek funds from another lender) should be created to allow for a mutually beneficial outcome.

2.3 Gentrifiers

The issue of gentrification is complex, divisive, and fraught with debate about who is responsible for its consequences. In the case where gentrification leads to displacement, there is uncertainty about who is the 'real' displacer. Different culprits can be identified: the city government that promotes neighbourhood rehabilitation; individuals or companies that 'flip' properties or raise rents dramatically; the individuals who desire and subsequently move into gentrified homes; or community activists with Not-in-my-Backyard (NIMBY) initiatives. It is clear that, sometimes, gentrifiers gentrify purely to seek an increase in profits, at whatever cost to renters or the community. This is the case for 'flippers' and those landlords who, seemingly overnight, drastically increase rents.

At times, however, the motives of a gentrifier may be more complex than simple profit extraction. City governments may rehabilitate run-down neighbourhoods to provide original residents much needed amenities. Those who could be called *individual gentrifiers* – middle to upper class residents and shops that move into gentrifying areas – have been the subject of numerous protests in recent years (Rogers, 2015; The Times Editorial Board, 2017; Breijo, 2022). However, in their case, it is not any individual's decision that causes gentrification. It is rather the decisions of numerous individuals *en masse*. Thus, it must be understood that those people may have a genuine desire to improve their quality of life by moving to a less-expensive neighbourhood, possibly closer to their work or family. Additionally, consider that businesses accused of aiding gentrification would not be viable were there not a ready clientele for them to serve.

In contrast, NIMBY activists, even though they come from within gentrifying neighbourhoods, are portrayed as gentrifiers themselves because they oppose new construction that planners and others believe will prevent gentrification. In these cases, many times planners will 'privilege' their own 'centralized expertise' about what is best for communities over local activist (e.g. NIMBYs) opinions (Gibson, 2005, p. 383). In some ways, planners' reluctance to consider NIMBYs concerns could be seen as an example of 'conformorality' at work. Furthermore, planners are often the ones blamed for the failures of these projects, and they may be bitter towards those who they perceive as the real culprits. There are a number of scholars, though, that believe that NIMBYs have sometimes been painted in an unnecessarily negative light.[3] Neighbourhood activists opposing new construction may be a more diverse group than often assumed (Aramayona and Batel, 2022, p. 51). NIMBYs may sometimes have genuine civic concerns such as protecting the character of neighbourhoods (Aramayona and Batel, 2022), a goal which ironically often motivates anti-gentrification efforts. Authors McElroy and Szeto (2017) and Wyly (2022) have also written critiques of yes-in-my-backyard (YIMBY) movements, which may have the perverse effect of inflating property prices even more than if there were no new construction.

2.4 Discussion

The suffering of displaced people is real and one of the largest reasons why we should be concerned about displacement in today's society. However, ignoring or completely vilifying displacers in the process of trying to find solutions to displacement is counterproductive. Potential displacers, like landlords, do not always cooperate with policies they see as detrimental to their livelihood. For instance, surveys by the National Apartment Association (Donovan and Pham, 2023) in the US show that a sizeable portion of landlords and investors say they would choose to leave the market if certain types of rent control were enacted. Neglecting to investigate the circumstances that lead people to displace others and ignoring displacers' opinions could spell trouble for the effectiveness of anti-displacement policies.

3. The negatives associated with standard solutions to displacement

Within existent literature on urban residential displacement, the set of possible responses to displacement seem to be a fixed list that are cycled through by many scholars. Articles mainly focus on solutions like rent control, public housing, eminent domain, inclusionary zoning, and legal/financial assistance to stop displacement for

3 See, for instance, Burningham (2000), Batel and Devine-Wright (2020), and Aramayona and Batel (2022).

various reasons.[4] This pattern could lead a reader to regard such solutions as obvious, uncontested, empirically proven, or the only options available. However, this is not true. There is still vigorous debate about the efficacy and justice of using certain 'standard solutions' in various urban contexts to prevent displacement. This article shines a light on some of the negatives of those solutions. It also suggests that more specific empirical research needs to be undertaken to understand when certain solutions work, and when they do not.

3.1 Rent control

One of the most cited solutions to displacement is also one of its most hotly debated: rent control. While rent controls are meant to limit increases in rents, there are some justifiable arguments about their negative effects. Kholodilin and Kohl (2023a) document how rent controls have been shown to depress new construction, increasing housing shortages. The same researchers also note that rent controls have the potential to drive out renters in favour of homeowners (Kholodilin and Kohl, 2023b). Finally, in their analysis of the studies conducted about the historic efficacy of rent controls, Marsh, Gibb, and Soaita (2022) maintain that there is simply not enough evidence to come to a clear conclusion about their long-term effects.

One problem is that different kinds of rent control evoke different responses. The latter set of authors agree that 'crude first-generation rent controls' (Marsh, Gibb and Soaita, 2022, p. 743) can generally be relied upon to produce negative repercussions. However, they also insist that this kind of generalisable conclusion is an extreme outlier in the context of the research. Marsh, Gibb, and Soaita (2022, p. 740) also assert that current policy decisions about using rent control are often more a result of 'contextual factors and political struggle' than analysis of any conclusive data that demonstrates its effectiveness.

3.2 Public housing

Another common response to displacement is advocating for the construction of more public housing. It is widely conceded in planning circles that some public housing projects have been infamous failures – for example, the Pruitt Igoe complex in St. Louis (Bristol, 1991). However, advocates of public housing generally overlook the broadly reported problems with its administration. Based on interviews with public housing tenants in the Czech Republic, scholars Urban and Kajanovà (2021) reported that the majority of negative complaints about housing concerned issues with the system and administration. Residents took issue with the length of tenure; mandated to be a maximum of one year. One interviewee said that, though they were grateful to have received the housing, 'I have been here for almost three months and should probably start looking for something else' (Urban and Kajanovà 2021, p. 20). This resident's testimony suggests that, sometimes, public housing's implementation ends up being geared more towards providing temporary shelter. Temporary shelter is also useful, but it does not serve as a remedy to displacement long-term.

Residents also raised issues over the tedious and convoluted maze of documents that they had to complete and the long wait times they experienced before being offered apartments (Urban and Kajanovà 2021). Long wait times are a theme globally, with prospective tenants waiting a median of 18 months in the US – with 25 percent having to wait over three years before being offered an apartment (National Low-Income Housing Coalition 2016). This is, nonetheless, a relatively short period compared with Hong Kong's average wait-time of six years (Hong Kong Housing Authority, 2022). Where public housing is positioned as short-term, urgently needed shelter, wait times such as this entirely undermine the argument for public housing as an effective tool by which to reduce the harms of displacement.

The reason for wait times is, of course, to do with an inadequate quantity of housing (and/or a lack of maintenance on what is already constructed). It is worth recognising that public housing is expensive to implement and local or state governments simply may not be able to keep up with its construction or upkeep.

4 For rent control: see Slater (2021) and Marsh, Gibb and Soaita (2022). For public housing: see Madden and Marcuse (2016) and Ye et al (2024). For eminent domain: see Blumenfeld (2023) and Baiocchi et al (2020). For inclusionary zoning: see Stabrowski (2015) and King (2018). For legal/financial assistance: see Braakmann and McDonald (2020) and Cassidy and Currie (2023).

3.3 Eminent domain

A growing number of activists have begun to champion the idea of using the instrument of eminent domain – meaning the ability of a government to take private assets and put them to public use – as a way to socialise and reduce rents in private housing developments.[5] As suggested by Philipp Stehr (2023), study of eminent domain needs to be renewed by political philosophy. As recently as 2021, a majority of citizens in Berlin voted in favour in a (non-binding) referendum that advocated that the city use its power to expropriate 240,000 properties. Those properties came from some of the largest rental companies in the city and the proposal of the referendum suggested that the city rent them out at more affordable prices. While the referendum contained very specific potential plans for the project of expropriation in Berlin (Stehr, 2023), such plans should be considered precarious for a couple of reasons.

First, historical records provide us with examples (Hubbard and Lees, 2018; Pritchett, 2003) of governmental entities using eminent domain in ways that ostensibly attempted to create more affordable housing, but did not truly work. Second, there is little guarantee that governments will stick to the promises they make about expropriation projects. Matthew Parlow (2006) details a particularly egregious instance. In the early 1950s, residents of Chavez Ravine, a majority low-income and Mexican-American neighbourhood in Los Angeles, were displaced and their homes demolished to make way for a new public housing development backed by federal funds. However, newly elected officials in 1953 decided that the project did not fit *their* agenda. Instead, they set their sights on a baseball stadium – now the famous Dodger stadium. Parlow argues that the fraught history behind the use of eminent domain in Chavez Ravine is not unusual. He writes that 'cities have long used their eminent domain powers in such a way as to benefit private interests' (Parlow, 2006, p. 846).

The construction of Dodger Stadium demonstrates how the best of intentions can be upended by any number of unexpected developments. In that particular instance, it was by the election of new members of government with different ideas – or perhaps different allegiances. It is hard to excuse such injustices, but if eminent domain is going to be wielded as a tool to mitigate displacement, harsh political realities must be factored into decision making.

4. New ways to approach displacement solutions

There are many deeper, ethical and normative questions that have not been engaged with by scholars who study residential displacement. These include: questions about how displacement solutions interact with and fit into housing systems in the locales where they are intended to be implemented; questions about how displacement solutions affect the right to private property; and the ways in which governments can create environments where stakeholders in a displacement dispute can resolve the problem at the grass-roots level. By directly confronting the underlying premises of displacement responses, scholars can open the door for more 'deliberative' and 'consequential' thinking (Woods, 2015).

4.1 Approach to housing systems

When scholars develop displacement solutions, they too often fail to consider how their solution might fit into the basic philosophy of the housing system in a (given) place. Table 1 illustrates three possible approaches to housing for a society (be it a city, country, small enclave, or other).

5 For instance, see Baiocchi et al (2020), Gustavussen (2022), Glesby (2023), and Dethlefsen (2023).

Approach to housing	Main authors/ sources	Description	Current policy approaches
Special Entitlement	Bejrum and Jaffee (1989), Jaffe (1989)	Housing is considered an entitlement. Entitlements are heavier than property rights and denote 'collective pronouncements for the societal good' (Jaffe, 1989, p. 317)	One example of a country with such policies is Sweden, which has: • Greater state involvement in housing process • Indefinite leases (unless otherwise specified) • Rent decided on sq m basis and rental court settles rent disputes
User-owned	Lefebvre (1968)	A new social contract should be developed where citizens decide that the people who utilise the space of the city should be the ones with control over it, eliminating any need for formal property rights.	Lefebvre's idea was utopian from its outset and has remained so on the city scale. However, some small enclaves or off-the-grid societies do operate in this way (ex. Slab City in California, USA).
Private Property	Jaffe (1989), Snare (1972)	This system treats housing as a financial asset. Snare (1972) describes private property owners as having the 'right of use,' 'right of exclusion,' and 'right of transfer' of a property.	Private property has been the primary approach to housing in Anglo-American countries especially (i.e. the US, England, Australia, etc.).

Table 1 Policy approaches to housing

Rather than being an exhaustive list, the three approaches show divergent philosophies and approaches to housing. In the first case, the idea of housing as a 'social entitlement' grants governments more regulatory power (e.g. to introduce rent controls or provide public housing). In such contexts landlords and lenders may have lower expectations of property control. This approach embodies what some have called the 'decommodification' of housing (Hoekstra, 2003; Murie, 2013); the proposition that housing should not be treated as a good to be bought and sold as in the housing as private property system. Advocates criticize the system which views housing as private property for creating residential alienation, inequality, and a less 'humane' housing system (Madden and Marcuse, 2016, p. 56, 79-80).

Others, though, contend that the private property system is the one that could truly prevent displacement. Among them is Casey Dawkins (2020, p. 16), who draws on Christopher Essert's (2016) ideas in warning that, if a right to housing is put in the hands of the state, then individuals will be 'subject to the will of a collective authority' which past history suggests has not done a good job of protecting them from displacement. Dawkins proposes that policies such as enforced, open-ended leases or a requirement that landlords prove 'just cause' when not renewing leases could improve tenants' ability to avoid displacement in a private property system. Others, such as Przybylinski (2022, p. 1722) advocate for the institution of some kind of right not to be excluded, 'allowing for an individual to access propertied-space broadly, given that it applies to no particular property, but simply properties in the abstract.'

In a more utopian user-owned society, there may be no need for anti-displacement policies since the users of a space are explicitly entitled to occupy the space. This situation is also interesting because, unlike with social entitlements, a user-owned system guarantees housing without government involvement. Such a system comes with its own, different problems, of course, including multiple residents attempting to assert rights over the same space.

4.2 Rights

The impression is that many articles that treat gentrification, eviction, and foreclosure or advocate for solutions to displacement like rent control and eminent domain never engage directly with normative questions about the right to private property. Yet, many policies – especially rent control, since 'control' is in the name – directly affect the amount of power which owners have upon their land in a private property system.

If we do not believe that owners should have absolute control over their properties, where should private property rights start and end? That requires not only consideration of what is effective for the prevention of displacement, but also raises ethical questions about how much control an owner deserves. Even further, we need to decide what the purpose of private property is in the context of displacement prevention.

On a similar note, various iterations of theoretical rights to space in the city have been used for decades to argue that the individuals who utilise the space of the city for their own livelihoods should be better protected from displacement.[6] However, as Hubbard and Lees (2018, p. 9) assert, 'what is often forgotten' in debates about rights to space in the city 'is that, strictly speaking, rights to the city are legal in character.' In short, without codification, claims of rights have no legal power and cannot be upheld by state authorities. At the same time, other scholars have rejected the idea that codifying rights is important. They claim that, since a sovereign state can choose at will whether or not to uphold any such so-called rights, fighting for superficial declarations impedes the real work of resolving issues at the ground level (Mitchell, 2003; Tushnet 1984; Rorty 1996).

If a scholar does decide that rights are important, their lack of implementation has left various key questions unanswered. How would they interact with current housing systems? Once again, how can such broad rights be integrated into systems of private property rights? If we believe in a 'Right to Stay Put' as Chester Hartman (1984) does, or a 'Right to Place' as Imbroscio (2004) does, what must we change about property rights to ensure that they are accepted? How would that affect landlords, lenders, or other property owners/managers? Might certain rights to space in the city inadvertently engender new and different types of displacement? All these issues engender ethical and normative decisions about the role of landlords, tenants, lenders, owners, and government in society.

4.3 Anti-displacement through voice

Most of the anti-displacement solutions that are promoted by scholars, including those discussed previously, call on governments to implement programs or policies. However, it might also be worthwhile to explore ways in which governments can create environments in which different parties can more effectively and efficiently negotiate amongst themselves to reduce displacement. This could involve empowering those who might potentially be displaced by giving them more bargaining chips in the housing process.

This paper utilises the theory espoused by Albert Hirschman (1970) in his landmark book, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, to guide suggestions advanced. Hirschman's basic economic premise is that, when a firm fails to satisfy its customers with the quality of its product, those same customers have three options: they may abandon the firm's product by using the *exit* function; they may use their *voice* to encourage the firm to change; or they may stay *loyal* to the firm. Hirschman believes that, too often, economists see exit as the only option that creates efficiency within a market. They fail to recognise the power of voice to provide an important remedy to inefficiencies. The insights of *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* have already been utilised by scholars in housing studies in numerous ways – from discussing citizens' responses to dissatisfaction with their neighbourhood to explaining how policies about homeownership have developed over time (Chisholm, Howden-Chapman and Fougere, 2016).

6 See, for instance, Lefebvre (1968), Mitchell (2003), Hartman (1984), Imbroscio (2004), Harvey (2008), Marcuse (2009), Newman and Wyly (2006), Miura (2021), and Soaita (2022).

This article suggests that the theories of *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* can be aptly applied to understand landlord and lender attitudes towards the use of displacement. Currently, when a resident violates the terms of a housing contract and landlords or lenders are dissatisfied with a resident's behaviour, typically the sole remedy that the contract offers is an 'exit' option. This means the go-to response of landlords and lenders is eviction or foreclosure. However, as Hirschman (1970, p. 37) asserts, 'the decision whether to exit will often be taken in the light of the prospects for the effective use of voice.' If customers are persuaded that their use of voice will not be wasted, 'then they may well postpone exit' (Hirschman, 1970, p. 37).

Eviction and foreclosure are often lengthy and costly processes. In addition, landlords and lenders have to go through the extra strain of finding either a new tenant (and losing money as they wait to do so) or re-selling a foreclosed property. Perhaps authorities could mandate the use of mediation and negotiation processes as a first response to contractual disputes.[7] This way voice could be used to find context-dependent solutions between the two parties that benefit both and avoid displacement. After all, landlords and lenders (and especially ones with large portfolios) are only after financial gain in the process of lending money or renting out their properties (Miller, 2021, p. 818). Settlements that include payment plans of overdue rent, or possible bartering for labour, could prevent displacement via voice.

5. Conclusion

The tendency towards 'conformorality' in the ways in which scholars study and propose solutions to issues of urban residential displacement continues to stifle the exploration of new and different approaches to problems. Major aspects of the displacement phenomenon deserve further study in order to create more imaginative and practical policy options. This article has demonstrated that those who are responsible for displacement *can* have sound reasons for acting. Any attempt to create policies that reduce unnecessary displacement must address the reasonable concerns of landlords, lenders, possible gentrifiers, and government officials. The article has also shown that many of the most supported and touted proposals to 'solve' unwanted displacement are highly fallible. They should not be considered to be either the only or most automatically valuable solutions. There is a need for additional study to provide concrete answers about their utility in context. Finally, this article has brought some key ethical and normative questions to the table about how displacement solutions are supposed to interact with the legal and societal environments they operate within. In addition, it has suggested a new way that scholars might attempt to formulate responses by empowering the parties involved in housing to negotiate solutions themselves. By continuing to push against the tendency to conform with other scholars' opinions and ideas of what is important in research and instead finding uncharted aspects of displacement to study, scholars might be able to unlock new discoveries that could help to make displacement prevention fairer and more effective.

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7 This could be achieved especially by making it easier to access courts or legal knowledge – see Golio et al (2022) and Cassidy and Currie (2023).

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CONFORMORALITY AND THE ECONOMIC URBANISM OF JANE JACOBS

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Abstract

The renowned urbanist Jane Jacobs made radical and important criticisms of and contributions to both economics and urban planning. Yet, while her contributions to planning have been embraced and admired, her contributions to economics have been mostly overlooked by the economics profession as well as by most of her ardent supporters. Contrasting the strength of conformorality in each of these disciplines may provide part of the explanation, and comparing the experience of Jacobsian economics with market-process economics can shed additional light.

Keywords

Jane Jacobs, conformorality, market-process economics, Jacobsian economics

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1. Introduction

What urbanist hasn't heard of Jane Jacobs? And when we hear that name, what comes to mind? Probably, for most of us, are her battles in New York, in the press and on the streets, to keep Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village car free, to prevent the widening of streets in the West Village from undermining the liveliness of its sidewalks, or to argue that cutting the Lower Manhattan Expressway through Chinatown and the Cast-Iron District (later SoHo) would destroy those communities. Books, documentaries, and plays about Jacobs focus almost exclusively on these and similar struggles, especially those against her principal nemesis Robert Moses, the "Power Broker" of Robert Caro's Pulitzer Prize winning biography (Caro 1975). Jacobs was an effective advocate and activist for the life of public spaces. But she also published books, most famously in 1961 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, in which she did a great deal more than preach what she practiced.

From that widely cited masterpiece many readers have drawn some catchy and important phrases such as "eyes on the street" and "the street ballet" that capture a part of what it is that makes a city work and indeed thrive. Some may delve further and talk about "diversity" or "mixed uses" or "landmarks" without however always fully understanding, or often mis-understanding, what Jacobs means by these terms; or they may reference Jacobs's discussion of "organized complexity," again without always getting the full significance and implications of that concept. Very few go on to seriously study her next major book *The Economy of Cities* (1969) with its careful discussion of how cities and the creativity within them emerge without central direction, or how "import replacement" and "import shifting" operate as reciprocating systems to form part of a complex process of economic development through innovative changes in the division of labour. And then there are her later works, also widely overlooked, that also focus primarily on economics, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (1985) and *The Nature of Economies* (2000), and contain important concepts and fine-grained analyses than typically found in standard courses in economics.

And far fewer still appreciate how these insights fit into a coherent economic framework or how that framework in turn rests on a theory of society that traces the emergence of largely self-regulating social systems from the actions of myriad independent strangers, who follow their own plans within a framework of evolving rules, formal and informal, explicit and tacit. With some notable exceptions, whom I will later discuss, this lack of appreciation for Jacobs's economics is also true for the vast majority of the economics profession.

Why is that?

2. A note on conformorality

Before proceeding to address that question, I should confess that the term "conformorality," the theme of this special issue, is new to me. But the underlying concept seems to be familiar one. As the editors of this volume have explained,

> this concept expresses the tendency of groups and communities to conform to certain normative judgments due to peer pressure. It speaks to the tendency of individuals to align with particular values to secure acceptance within a specific group.

One of the few articles I came across that specifically deals with conformorality is Lisciandra et al. (2013) who, if I'm understanding them correctly, distinguish between "moral norms" (e.g. against stealing) and "social conventions" (e.g. against tipping in Japan) as its two primary aspects. And while these authors wisely caution against making too-hard a distinction between them, it seems convenient for my purposes to think of the "morality" to which planners and economists might feel pressured to "conform" as closer to a social convention than a moral imperative, with the understanding that violating certain social conventions can provoke reactions ranging from an eye roll to mockery or worse. Moreover, "peer pressure" implies that those conventions tend to be followed and enforced uncritically.[1]

1 At the same time an unquestioning acceptance of certain norms is probably unavoidable. Moreover, as Hayek (1945: 17) argues, for a free society to flourish may require the greater part of its citizens to accept such principles as the sanctity of private property without spending much time thinking about them.

3. Jacobsian economics

Now that's out of the way, I should briefly describe the gist of what I see as Jacobs's approach to economics, for it is probably unfamiliar to most readers. This approach, as I mentioned, in turn stems from an underlying social theory that is, however, largely behind the scenes in her writings (Ikeda 2024). The most explicit statement of her social theory appears in the final chapter of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* ("The kind of problem a city is") and the first chapter of *The Economy of Cities* ("Cities first – rural development later"). In the former, Jacobs reveals how the previous 21 chapters of *Death and Life* rest on an understanding of a "living city" (Gratz 2008) – a city of innovation – as a phenomenon of "organized complexity," i.e. a social order of a "sizable number of factors which are interrelated into an organic whole" (Jacobs 1961: 432). In the latter book, Jacobs explains how complex, dynamic cities likely evolved as an unintended consequence of self-interested traders, from diverse backgrounds, who were willing to tolerate their differences in the pursuit of gains from trade and other peaceful interactions. This reflects the way in which economics plays a central role in Jacobs's thought. Indeed, she defines a city as 'A settlement that consistently generates its economic growth from its own local economy' (Jacobs 1969: 262). That is, a city is characterized by economic development from innovations generated by the individual actions and decisions that take place within that city.[2] This kind of city and the innovations taking place in it are emergent, unplanned orders.

Jacobs's concern is obviously not with the conditions necessary for static equilibrium (i.e. a state of affairs in which all opportunities for net gain have been exploited), or with economic efficiency (i.e. producing or consuming something at least possible cost). Her primary aim is to show that a living city has the physical environment – i.e. short blocks, mixed primary uses, high concentrations of people, and older, cheaper space (Jacobs 1961: 152-221) – and social infrastructure – i.e. social networks and social capital – that make it a locus of innovation, an incubator of ideas and change, and a congenial venue for experiment and trial-and-error. Some present-day economists (see below) would describe this process as an "entrepreneurial competitive" one, driven by the search for profitable opportunities of one sort or another when knowledge is imperfect (Kirzner 1973). When an economic system is essentially an experimental process, where opportunities and outcomes are uncertain, equilibrium and efficiency in the sense of standard economics, including urban economics, play a secondary role at best. Like the hunter-gatherers Jacobs describes in her theory of urban genesis in *The Economy of Cities*, urban dwellers are still driven by self-interest to realize their dreams, and thereby incrementally change their physical and social environments in ways neither they nor anyone else can foresee.

The mechanics of economic development that Jacobs describes are correspondingly heterodox compared to conventional economics. For instance, while she adopts Adam Smith's concept of the "division of labour" (DOL), in which different individuals or firms specialize in only a part of an overall production process, she is mainly interested in the ways in which the DOL changes over time, in accordance with whether the local economy is expanding or contracting, by creating, modifying, or dissolving branches of the DOL network. That expansion or contraction, in turn, involves a process in which locals sell exports to other cities in order to buy imports from producers in other cities, but it is more complex than this. Domestically, importing goods unavailable locally stimulates local entrepreneurs to try to replace some of those imports with cheaper ones or with goods more suitable to local demand, thus increasing the complexity of the local DOL in so doing. This allows locals to shift their demand to new kinds of imports. In turn, some of the now locally produced, import-replacing goods might then be sold abroad, adding to overall exports and local revenue, which could then be spent domestically, or upon ever more imports. This is why Jacobs defines a city the way she does. That is, when Jacobs says a city grows based on its own local economy, she is not saying that it must cut itself off from regional or global trade to prosper. Quite the opposite! People export in order to import, just as we each sell services or goods in order to buy services and goods from others. Exportation on the one hand and import-replacement and import-shifting on the other are reciprocating processes. Again, you do not learn this in mainstream economics (or urban economics) courses on economic growth, which tend to use aggregate production functions (see below) rather than the DOL or the complex processes Jacobs employs.

2 Jacobs is sometimes misunderstood to be arguing against global, inter-city trade when in fact the very opposite is true. See Ikeda (2024) chapter 6.

4. Jacobsian planning

For Jacobs, of course, neither economic nor cultural development in a city takes place without municipal planning of some kind. But the thrust of *Death and Life* is the need for urban planning and design based on an understanding of how we actually use public space, and to explain why central planning of the sort practiced by Moses (and today in China's "Ghost Cities" and the Saudi Arabia's "NEOM the Line") has its limits – think "border vacuums," "visual homogeneity," and "cataclysmic money" – is likely to fail (Jacobs 1961). In addition, and crucially, planners should appreciate that successful cities are essentially economic entities, and that they should therefore, at a minimum, be aware of just how their policies impact urban markets, land and labour markets in particular. Regrettably, few do. (I will later mention a planner who is an outstanding exception to this.)

The interesting thing to me is that Jacobs's radical arguments and ideas about appropriate planning appear to have had a very dramatic impact on the profession not very long after *Death and Life* was published, and her name is invoked frequently today in public discussions of urban policy. While much of this may be lip service – writers typically use catchwords such as "diversity," "mixed use," "walkability," "density," and "landmark" out of their Jacobsian contexts – much of it also seems to have a real and lasting influence on planning practice (Campanella 2011). A lot of it, in turn, has focused on the more sociological aspects of Death and Life. For example, Jacobs clearly articulated the dangers highways and huge civic centres pose to public safety and street life because of the obstacles they create for crucial informal contacts and their tendency to erode the social networks that promote and sustain such contacts. In this way, Jacobs's ideas have profoundly changed attitudes in urban planning and design and, to some extent, even architecture.

Not all of this, of course, was the result of that book or the activism of Jacobs alone. She was at the vanguard of a much larger movement. There was also the growing awareness in the 1960s of the pathology of poverty and crime spawned by massive government-sponsored housing projects such as Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, Cabrini-Green in Chicago, and elsewhere in the United States at that time. There were also strong undercurrents for social change in that decade (e.g. the Viet Nam War, the Watts riots, and Woodstock), much of it a reaction against the machine-inspired, modernist milieu that dominated the politico-economic policy which begin early in the 20th century. The time may have simply been ripe for a dramatic shift in thinking and policy that urban planners in cities across America were willing to tolerate or even embrace. A post-modernist planning approach more wary of large-scale projects emerged in the 1990s, exemplified by Léon Krier and design movements such as the New Urbanism (which, however, has not entirely escaped a modernist outlook (Grant 2011). Despite this, there is no gainsaying Jacobs's words and ideas on planning and urbanism that are today more frequently cited in this context than any other urbanist, and elicit almost universal respect if not reverence.

The reception of her economics, however, is quite another story.

5. Economics in urban planning

As I have mentioned, most of her urbanist followers are, and have been, largely unaware of or do not fully appreciate the nature and significance of Jacobs's important contributions in economics or the social theory behind them. This is evidently true of the planning profession in general (urban planning, design, architecture), which seems to eschew the economic way of thinking altogether, whether Jacobsian or mainstream.[3] How many major professional conferences of urban planners and designers today include sessions that relate to cities as economic entities? I would wager not many. Engineering and architecture appear to be recognized as sister disciplines to urban planning, but not economics. This is very odd when you consider 1) the apparent influence that Jacobs has had on planning, 2) the centrality of economic analysis in the entire body of her work,

3 I have only attended one professional conference for urban planners so far in my career. In my presentation at that conference I noted the near absence in the program of papers with economic themes. The connections among planning, engineering, and architecture were highly evident, but my own on the role of Jacobs's insights into economic development appeared to be the exception. Now, this may very well be the result of small-sample bias, but it is an impression confirmed by Bertaud (2018). I mention it here because it supports, however informally, my contention about the neglect of Jacobsian economics in the profession in which Jacobs has had such an impact. It may also reveal a strain of conformality against economic analysis there, as well.

and 3) how closely bound her economics is with her urbanism. Again, the titles of most of her books written after *Death and Life* tell it all: *The Economy of Cities*, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations, The Nature of Economies*. Half of her book on ethics, *Systems of Survival* (1992), is devoted to the moral principles that guide commerce. And in the introduction to *Death and Life*, her best-known work, Jacobs states:

> While Part I is principally about the social behavior of people in cities, and is necessary for understanding what follows, *Part II is principally about the economic behavior of cities and is the most important part of this book* (Jacobs 1961: 14: emphasis added).

Jacobs is thus unequivocal that "the most important part" of *Death and Life* is about economics, not Part I with its frequently quoted "sidewalk ballet" or "eyes on the street," as important as they are. For planners today, explicitly incorporating economic theory into their masterplans and policies does not appear to be standard practice. It is true that urban planners cannot avoid confronting certain land-use problems that involve economic values, such as the cost of infrastructure and, lately, environmental sustainability. But in doing so they usually fail to focus on the city as an economic entity or to address these problems from an economic point of view. For example, how much effort goes into tracing the impact on land values of particular restrictions on land use and floor-area ratios, or on employment opportunities as a consequence of the higher costs of housing? Building a sports arena may "create jobs" in construction or for vendors in and around it who cater to spectators; but what about the consequences for employment and housing over time that are lost from such a project or, from a more Jacobsian perspective, for the land-use diversity and "effective pools of economic use" (Jacobs 1960: 149) needed for residents and businesses to flourish?

An exception to this attitude is the highly respected urban planner Alain Bertaud. Bertaud chooses as one of the epigrams for his 2018 book *Order Without Design* a quote from the Nobel Laureate in economics Friedrich Hayek: 'Order generated without design can far outstrip plans men consciously contrive,' which reflects a Jacobsian appreciation for the emergent nature of successful cities. Bertaud takes an explicitly economic viewpoint and argues that urban planners should approach a city as labour and land markets. He asserts explicitly, for example, that 'cities are labor markets' and that 'traffic is a real estate problem' (Bertaud 2018: 19 & 143). From that starting point flows his extensive and sophisticated analysis of planning practices, including re-examining zoning for flexible land uses. Municipal planning departments should monitor economic data and be quick to adjust regulations to changes in the market prices of floor space and mobility, even if that sometimes means jettisoning long-cherished practices. He is fond of saying that mayors should be like "janitors."

> The role of mayors and their municipal staff, including urban planners and economists, is therefore rather like the role of a well-coordinated team of competent managers and janitors. The mayor, with his team of municipal managers, is not the city's ruler, nor is he the city's designer. A city is entirely created by its citizens' initiatives. These citizens are required to act within a set of "good neighbor" rules, and to be supported in their endeavors by a network of physical and social infrastructure managed by a mayor and a city council (Bertaud 2018: 349).

Although not purely Jacobsian in his economics, having reached his conclusions from his own planning experience, what Bertaud advocates is for planners to make effective use in their plans and policies of the basic conceptual tools that competent economists, Jacobs included, should have in their analytical toolbox: e.g. demand-supply analysis, an understanding of the role of market prices, and a healthy respect for opportunity costs. Unlike the profession at large, Bertaud like Jacobs sees density and land-uses, not as instruments to be controlled by planners, but as outcomes of market forces that should be accommodated within the norms of "good neighbour" policies that address safety and spill-over effects.[4]

4 There are also differences between Jacobs and Bertaud's approach. Broadly speaking, while Jacobs sees a successful city as an incubator of economic innovation, Bertaud treats it as dynamic labour and land markets. But these approaches are complementary in the sense that skilled labour and human capital are prime resources – part of what Jacobs refers to "effective pools of economic use" (Jacobs 1960: 149) – that innovators and entrepreneurs must have readily available to conduct commercial experiments. But more than that, while Bertaud seemingly emphasizes efficiency over innovation (i.e. minimizing costs of housing and mobility), what I believe he is really getting at is that planning has, in particular, to maximize flexibility in housing and mobility so that workers may choose for themselves the best places to live and work, by following market prices for land and labour. Employers might then have a highly diverse and accessible pool of local labour, with the understanding that workers are likely to change their jobs and dwellings multiple times over the course of their working lives, and businesses may fail or relocate, depending on demand and supply in their relevant markets. Owing to imperfect knowledge, opportunities must be discovered and, as a result, consequences are not fully predictable. This is a dynamic view of cities very much in the spirit of Jacobs.

While many in the planning profession today would claim to be influenced by Jacobs, it is unfortunate that only a handful to my knowledge have taken her economic lessons seriously enough to incorporate any of the them into their professional research. In addition to Bertaud, I should mention in this regard the work of Stefano Moroni of the Politecnico di Milano and Stefano Cozzolino of RWTH Aachen University. Both publish prolifically and insightfully on themes ranging from planning to social theory more broadly.

6. Jacobsian economics and the economics profession

When it comes to the economics profession itself, the crickets chirp just as loudly as they do for planners.

It is a curious fact that while Jacobs uses Adam Smith's concept of the division of labour as an essential conceptual tool for her analysis of economic development, the DOL plays almost no part in economic analysis today beyond the first chapters of introductory textbooks in economics, or in the history of economic thought. I maintain that this is because mainstream economics has replaced the complex structure of the DOL in explaining how goods are produced with the much simplified and mathematical "production function" – a modernist legacy – where inputs enter at one end, usually labour and capital, and are then instantaneously and perfectly predictably transformed into an output at the other end. In typical notation:

$$Q = f(L, K),$$

Where Q stands for a single, homogenous output like electricity, L and K represent homogeneous, perfectly substitutable units of labour and capital, and f stands for a mathematical recipe that transforms L and K into the output. In his famous illustration of the "pin factory" (Smith 1976[1776]: Bk1, ch1), Adam Smith explains how dividing a production process into different tasks and having a worker specialize in each task exponentially increases output per worker. Smith also points out that the DOL changes over time as specialists have an incentive to find innovative ways to save on their labour time. However, the modern production function collapses this complex process into a single stage in which there is no space for discoveries of this kind. Production now happens instantaneously with no time needing to pass between inputs and output.

I raise this point because I believe it is indicative of what separates Jacobsian economics from today's mainstream economics conceptually, and why economists tend to ignore Jacobs's economics, even if they are aware of it. In part that may be because in mainstream economics, even when the models of economic development are highly sophisticated in a mathematical sense, the goal is always to find the simplest way to mathematically model a complex social phenomenon, whether a business firm or an entire economy, and that tends to exclude a great deal of Jacobsian complexity. In addition, whereas time and experiment are essential characteristics of economic development for Jacobs, owing to our imperfect knowledge, in mainstream economics unpredictable changes in our social environment are ruled out (O'Driscoll & Rizzo 1985). That is because allowing the agents in their models to make genuine errors, owing to their ignorance of relevant information (e.g. where the costs are actually the lowest or the willingness to pay is actually the highest) would make it very hard or impossible to construct the kinds of deterministic models economists generally like. Don't get me wrong. Some economists and social scientists, e.g. at the Sante Fe Institute, are steeped in what is called "complexity theory," and some have made significant contributions specifically to our understanding of urban processes. But their concept of complexity, while useful for some purposes, seems to downplay many of the phenomena I have described that are of interest to Jacobs, such as the reciprocating-systems approach described earlier. Moreover, complexity theory is itself not yet part of the economic mainstream, and thus perhaps an aspect of the problem addressed herein.

In addition to issues of complexity, time, and ignorance, mainstream economics differs from Jacobsian economics in not being urban-based, and outside of applied fields it is usually free of much institutional context. By "institutions" I mean the rules and relationships within which we perceive opportunities and make decisions in an uncertain social environment. These sometimes take the form of relationships that are the basis for social networks. Jacobs is actually the first to use the term "social capital" in the sense social theorists

use it today, namely, as network relations that enhance the value or human capital of its members (Jacobs 1961: 138).[5] Social capital and social networks in general serve as the conduits through which people discover and diffuse new knowledge (Burt 1995), and as we've seen it is in cities with dense and diverse land-uses that the processes of discovery and diffusion principally operate. Mainstream economics abstracts from such institutions (non-mainstream economics, such as the New Institutionalists, aside), whereas these constitute the social infrastructure that complements the physical infrastructure (e.g. public and private spaces) that can profoundly influence social interactions.

However, some highly regarded economists within the mainstream have acknowledged gaining important understanding from Jacobs's work. Robert Lucas, 1995 Nobel Laureate in economics, credits Jacobs for insights on what he terms the "external effects of human capital," with which he sees Jacobs's *The Economy of Cities* as being primarily concerned. Lucas seems to see cities as a potential key in this regard.

> Her [Jacobs's] emphasis on the role of cities in economic growth stems from the observation that a city, economically, is like the nucleus of an atom: If we postulate only the usual list of economic forces, cities should fly apart. The theory of production contains nothing to hold a city together. A city is simply a collection of factors of production – capital, people and land – and land is always far cheaper outside cities than inside. Why don't capital and people move outside, combining themselves with cheaper land and thereby increasing profits (Lucas 1988)?

The answer according to Jacobs, though not addressed by Lucas directly, is the population density and land-use diversity that, in an innovative city, give rise to those institutions and the social infrastructure that foster opportunities, discoveries, and development. Such considerations, Lucas observes, "do not easily lend themselves to quantification."

In an important article (Glaeser et al. 1992), Harvard urban economist Edward Glaeser and his research team examine the impact of what they term "Jacobs externalities," similar to Lucas's "external effects of human capital," that might arise when diverse industries cluster. When compared to regions in which less-diverse industries cluster, the diversified regions generate significantly higher labour productivity. And in his 2011 book *Triumph of the city*, Glaeser mentions Jacobs dozens of times, and explicitly pays tribute to Jacobs's influence.

> It would take a long and tedious bibliographic essay to mention all the distinguished urbanists who have moved my thinking, but it should be obvious that much of the book bears the imprint of Jane Jacobs, who bestrides the world of cities like a colossus (Glaeser 2011: 272).

Glaeser draws on Jacobs's insights into "mixed uses" in the context of diversifying industries and shares her suspicion of large-scale, public-private projects.[6]

Despite numerous references to Jacobs's ideas in his work, however, Glaeser does not adopt Jacobs's framework of urban-based, dynamically complex economic development based on innovation, at least not explicitly. Nor does Lucas, about whom I feel on much safer ground in saying this. As far as I am aware, no mainstream economist – i.e. a professional economist who is recognized as such by a majority of the profession – has done so. Jacobs's influence has been limited to specific insights, e.g. the importance of mixed uses, of population density, and of cities in economic development, without adoption of any significant portion of her theoretical framework.

Again, the question is why.

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5 See also Glenn Loury {2005} on Jacobs being the first to use this phrase in this way.

6 On the other hand, I believe Glaeser (2011) misinterprets Jacobs on limits to building heights – her main complaint in *Death and Life* is against the super high-rise visions of Le Corbusier and not against height *per se* – and on preserving landmarks – at least in her writings (with one exception that I have been able to find) she didn't support the designation of entire districts as landmarks.

7. Conformorality in the urban planning and economics professions

It may simply be that the consequences of urban planning and design are (no pun intended) more concrete and practical in their outcomes than that of economics; their successes and failures more easily traceable to their main causes. Although economists work in business and government, economics remains predominantly a university-based academic profession, which means their outputs are formal, highly abstract, and appears mostly in peer-reviewed journals that few economists read outside their narrow sub-fields. And when economists do consult on public policy, their recommendations, when they are taken seriously (which they typically are not), are perhaps even more diluted by narrow political influences than in city planning. Finally, while economic policy and urban policy both interact with a social order that is highly complex and dynamic, the social environment in which economic policy plays out may be much more dynamically complex, which means that tracing outcomes, good or bad, to specific policies may be more difficult as well. This probably makes economists overall more immune to demonstrable successes or failures than urban planning and design, and consequently better able than planners to ignore incisive criticisms, such as those Jacobs aimed at urban planners. As a result, they may also be more resistant to change.

It could also be that the conventions of modern mainstream economics, with respect to the legitimate methods of scientific analysis, are more rigid than those of urban planning and design, which may regard itself as more craft than science. (I seem to recall reading that in the early 20th century, architects could successfully sue critics for saying bad things about their buildings.) Though certainly theoretical and reliant on technical and quantitative expertise, the fields of planning and design may in general be more open to radical approaches than economics is today.

Another possible explanation for the neglect among economists of Jacobs's work is that Jacobs did not engage with the economics profession in the same way that she did with the planning profession, where she met the planners on their own terms and conventions, drawing on specific examples of failures and successes, and identifying their underlying causes. The battlefields were not planning departments of universities but the Board of Estimate of the City of New York and rallies in Washington Square Park; whereas the accepted venues for economic dispute were and still are in departmental seminars, economic journals, and professional conferences.

To my knowledge, Jacobs rarely attended such conferences or presented her work formally in academic seminars. She did, very notably, author an article published in 1969 in *The American Economic Review*, one of the premier journals in economics, then and now. And to a limited extent, her writings did directly confront the work of certain economists. In *The Economy of Cities* she takes on Adam Smith's conventional history of economics development and in *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* she severely criticizes aspects of the macroeconomic theory and policy of her day. But these were not the sort of conventional articles and technical arguments common among academic economists or well-known enough to draw serious professional attention to her work. Her personal contacts with such economists were few.

Conformorality could supply part of the answer then, in the sense that the social conventions of mainstream economics, and the methods and practices of a professional economist, could have posed formidable barriers to Jacobs's acceptance into the profession. I suspect, however, that there are other reasons in the case of Jacobs, and I am not sure whether these strengthen or weaken the explanatory power of conformorality. Specifically, other schools of economic thought today that are closer to the mainstreamm in the sense that they follow many of the mainstream social conventions of professional economics, whose members do publish in mainstream journals, present papers at conferences, and attempt to directly engage the mainstream, have also not been terribly successful when it comes to influencing professional opinion.

We might draw a parallel here to the way "market-process economics" (MPE), a.k.a. "Austrian economics," has historically met with resistance in the economics profession. I choose MPE because I associate myself with

this particular school of thought, but even more because of all the current schools of economic thought, MPE comes the closest, indeed very close, to the Jacobsian economic framework and its underlying social theory. I don't have the space here to give an extensive and detailed discussion of the degree of overlap between Jacobsian economics and MPE, so the interested reader should consult Ikeda (2024), especially Chapter 2, which also offers arguments for why the profession should take Jacobs's economic contributions seriously. But like Jacobsian economics, MPE largely eschews the equilibrium-cum-efficiency approach at the core of mainstream economics and views the market economy, as the name suggests, as a dynamic process driven by entrepreneurial discovery, much as Jacobs does. And despite its attempts to follow the academic conventions I have described, MPE has had very modest success in gaining recognition within the profession. This is likely owing to the very nature of the MPE approach and framework itself. This suggests to me that, to the extent there is overlap between Jacobsaian economics and MPE had Jacobs followed the conventions of mainstream economics in her economic work, her ideas would likely have met with no greater acceptance than those of MPE; perhaps less so given her lack of academic credentials, and far less acceptance than have her ideas on planning.

8. Concluding thoughts

Jacobs's planning ideas may have arrived at a time when the obvious problems created by urban policy in mid-twentieth-century America set the stage for fundamental changes in the planning mindset, which was then ready to move away from the "high modernism" of Le Corbusier, CIAM, et al. – a time of weaker conformorality in the profession.

What about her economics?

While the neglect of Jacobsian economics among urbanist is puzzling, perhaps it is part and parcel of their general resistance to economics, in the economics profession the reason for the neglect may be a clearer.

In 1980 a special issue of the journal *The Public Interest* announced "The Crisis in Economic Theory." It was a period when the Keynesian orthodoxy was quickly losing its credibility in macroeconomics, owing empirically to so-called "stagflation" (i.e. simultaneous high inflation and high unemployment) and theoretically to a perceived lack of rigorous grounding in microeconomic modelling, especially in the way economic agents form their expectations. This was around the time when Jacobs published *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (1984), which, as noted, contains a harsh critique of mainstream macroeconomics. So in that setting why weren't the ideas of Jacobs, MPE, and other heterodox economic approaches more welcomed?

I think part of the answer is that despite the serious questioning taking place, mainstream economics didn't really experience a "post-modern moment" in the way perhaps the planning profession did. That is because macroeconomics – which focuses on the behaviour of aggregates such as gross domestic product or the rate of unemployment or inflation – regained its balance by grounding itself in a more stable but even more orthodox microeconomic foundation of constrained optimization, based on the choices of highly rational agents. And because microeconomics, with its highly formal methods and conventions of which both Jacobs and MPE are highly skeptical, was then very much in the grip of 20th century modernism, as it still is today. Neither Jacobsian economics nor MPE could find much purchase in such an environment.

So, we might posit the existence of relatively weak conformality at the time to help explain the relative success of Jacobsian planning theory in the planning profession (especially compared to its effective resistance to economic analysis in general), and of relatively strong conformality to help explain the almost complete lack of success of Jacobsian economics in the economics profession.

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